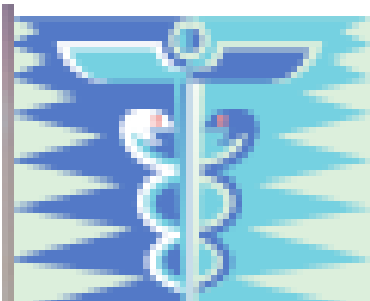


Will my life change with a MHAD?

*YES! You will receive love and support from your **MHAD**, but you also will become more visible to the public. Some will question your need for an assistance dog. Some will attempt to deny your access to public spaces. Dealing with public scrutiny is a skill that is developed over time. Having a support network (e.g., physician, therapist, dog trainer, peer mentors) in place before you get your **MHAD** will alleviate some of the initial stress. **MHAD**'s are not for everyone. If your interest is serious, then be sure to connect with other **MHAD** users in your community or online, **BEFORE** obtaining a dog. Learn about the demands of a working a dog in public, **BEFORE** taking on the responsibility of a dog's life.*



A.W.A.R.E



<http://www.awaredogs.org.au>

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Mental Health Assistance Dogs

**A.W.A.R.E DOGS
AUSTRALIA INC**

FOR CONSUMERS



A.W.A.R.E

DOGS

*Dedicated to Responsible
Mental Health Assistance Dog
Advocacy, Education, Training and
Placement*

Mental Health Assistance Dogs



What is a Mental Health Assistance Dog (MHAD)?

A dog individually trained to work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual disabled by mental illness.

What is a disability?

A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Having a psychiatric diagnosis does not necessarily mean that you are disabled under the law. What matters is that the degree of impairment is 'substantial'. Consequently, it is in your best interest to document your disability. Working with your doctor is a good first step. Ask your doctor to write a letter stating that you are disabled and that he/she supports your use of a **MHAD**. Keep such a letter on file.

What types of mental health impairments can be assisted by a MHAD?

Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, Panic Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Agoraphobia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Personality Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and others.

What tasks can MHAD's be trained to do?

- ◆ Remind handler to take medication at a specified time
- ◆ Turn on lights and search a room for intruders
- ◆ Warm handler's body during a panic attack
- ◆ Interrupt checking and other repetitive behaviors
- ◆ Stay with handler during acute emotional stress
- ◆ Accompany handler outside the home
- ◆ Alert to mania, panic attacks or dissociative episodes
- ◆ Interrupt dissociative episodes or flashbacks
- ◆ Assist handler in discerning 'reality' from auditory or visual hallucinations
- ◆ Mediate hyper vigilance, assist with threat assessment secondary to PTSD
- ◆ Provide a constant, safe grounding presence
- ◆ Be trustworthy companion when handler is negotiating paranoia
- ◆ Homeostasis stabilization

How are MHAD's trained; where can I get one?

The law allows disabled persons to train their own MHAD. We recommend that you do so under the guidance of a professional dog trainer in private sessions. Your trainer may also assist in selecting a dog whose temperament is compatible with yours. Alternately, you can contact us at **A.W.A.R.E.** and will help select and train a MHAD with you. Be aware that MHAD's are a new kind of assistance dog and few organizations have specialized in this area.

Does the MHAD have to be certified?

No. An assistance dog's training is specifically tailored to the individual needs of the disabled handler. Consequently, the application of a 'one size fits all' training standard does not even make sense.

Where are MHAD's allowed to go?

Assistance Dogs, also known as Service Dogs are allowed access to spaces open to the public, including but not limited to: restaurants, hospitals, airplanes, doctor's offices, cabs, zoos, stores etc.

Where may MHAD's be lawfully excluded?

MHAD's may be lawfully excluded from private spaces including but not limited to private homes, private clubs, etc. They may also be excluded from spaces where their presence constitutes a safety risk, (e.g., operating rooms, radioactive laboratories, heavy construction sites) or an imminent threat.



The common experience of those choosing partnerships with *assistance dogs* is that they increase independence and wellbeing, as well as providing invaluable companionship; generally improving the quality of life of their impaired partners.