



SERVICE DOGS FOR PEOPLE WITH SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY (SMA)

Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) is a condition that affects the nerve cells that control how you move your body. This can cause someone with SMA to have weakness and/or difficulty moving and doing day to day activities. Service dogs can be helpful to someone with SMA in helping them remain as independent as possible. The purpose of this guide is to provide information about service dogs, how they can help someone with SMA, and organizations that can help provide one along with government support.

Acknowledgement:

This resource was created in partnership with the SMA community. We are grateful for their valuable contributions in creating a beneficial tool for individuals seeking information about service dogs in Canada.

CONTENTS

WHAT IS A SERVICE DOG?.....	1
HOW CAN A SERVICE DOG HELP SOMEONE WITH SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY (SMA).....	2
HOW DO I GET A SERVICE DOG?.....	4
HOW DOES THE LAW PROTECT ME AND MY SERVICE DOG?	9
HOW CAN I GET SUPPORT FOR MY SERVICE DOG THROUGH GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS?	10

KEY DEFINITIONS

Below are some common terms used throughout this guide – please take a moment to familiarize yourself with them.

- **Task trained:** a Service Dog trained to do tasks or activities to support its owner or handler.
- **Handler:** the individual that handles, owns, or works the Service Dog.
- **Owner trained:** a Service Dog that is trained by its owner or handler.
- **Assistance Dogs International Organization (ADI) Accreditation:** the approval/ accreditation of a not-for-profit organization that provides assistance dogs. This ensures that these programs meet the highest standards, by the ADI Organization.
- For more information on ADI Accreditation and their standards visit this [link](#).

WHAT IS A SERVICE DOG?

A Service Dog is trained to perform tasks for a person with a disability to help support their independence.

What you need to know about Service Dogs:

- Service Dogs may also be called assistance dogs or mobility dogs.
- Service Dogs work until 10-12 years old depending on their breed and health.



- For example a bigger breed would be ideal if a person needs support when walking or needs to have their wheelchair pulled. Examples of bigger breeds include labrador retrievers or bernese mountain dogs.
- Service Dogs use jumping or barking as a signal to their handler to alert them to a condition.
- Service Dogs are allowed by law to be in public spaces including businesses, hotels and hospitals. There are exceptions to this if the Service Dog is not behaving.
- The law does not allow Service Dogs to go into places where food is made or prepared such as kitchens or food processing plants. In these cases, the business must offer other ways to support the person with the Service Dog.
- Service Dogs are not paid for by the government, therefore personal funds need to be arranged or there are organizations that provide Service Dogs free of charge to disabled individuals.

- A Service Dog can retire at any age if they no longer wish to work, or if they become aggressive, fearful, or develop health issues that could result in harm.
- Every breed can be a Service Dog, but not every dog can be one.
- To be a Service Dog, the animal must be calm, smart and easy to train.
- There are certain breeds that are more suitable for certain tasks.



HOW CAN A SERVICE DOG HELP SOMEONE WITH SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY? (SMA)

If you are living with SMA, a Service Dog may help you with tasks throughout your day.



Here are some things a Service Dog can help you with:

- Pick up things that are dropped or pointed at:
 - » For example: coins, credit cards, drinks, shoes, tv remote, medication, cell phone, or leash.
 - » Service Dogs may also be able to help take things in and out of laundry baskets, washing machines and drying machines.
- Carry Items.
- Give or get items to or from someone.
- Open and close doors, drawers, and cabinets.
- Push automatic door buttons.
- Operate a (dog -) Emergency Call System, or dog-friendly phone to dial a pre-programmed number.
- Bark for help, go get help or alert someone to help.
- Assist with undressing (pulling the sleeves of sweaters, pulling off socks, etc.).
- Steadying (placing hand on the dog's back to assist with moving, light balance, etc.).
- Help reposition.
 - » Move feet/arms back onto footplate/armrest.
 - » Move hand to remote.
 - » Help move to a more comfortable position.
 - » Rolling over.
- Pull manual wheelchair.
- Turn lights on/off.
- Provide pressure on chest/stomach to help cough.



Service Dogs may also be able to help with other tasks that are not included in this list. It is important to check with your Service Dog provider to understand what tasks the Service Dog can help with.

Service Dogs can also help support your mental health in different ways:

- Grounding techniques are used if you are feeling anxious or having a panic attack by trying to help you focus on the present moment. Service Dogs can paw, lay on or bark at you in whatever way is best for you to help interrupt anxious thoughts.
- Pressure therapy is when a Service Dog lays on a specific part of your body (e.g chest) or fully on top of you. This works as a grounding technique helps calm the individual, lower blood pressure and heart rate and can be soothing.
- Interrupt specific behaviours:
 - » Can include harmful, dissociating, scratching, skin picking, freezing, panic, anxiety, and negative repetitive behaviors.

- Find friends/family.
- Interrupt nightmares, flashbacks, and help dissociate with these negative experiences. A Service Dog can nudge, paw or bark at you to help interrupt these thoughts or even get help.
- Crowd control by circling around you to make sure people don't get too close.
- Block (dog stands behind or in front of you) to stop people from getting too close.

Service Dogs can also be trained to help you if you have other health conditions like diabetes, seizures or problems with your hearing or vision.

Although Service Dogs are trained to help in many ways, they also provide companionship, love and peace of mind for you and your loved ones.



HOW DO I GET A SERVICE DOG?

There are a number of organizations to aid you in getting a Service Dog.

Do your research into these different organizations and the programs they offer so you can find the right Service Dog for you.

SERVICE DOG ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVICE ALL OF CANADA

Canine Companions

Canine Companions offers two programs particularly for individuals with SMA – the Service Dog program and the Skilled Companions program. The Service Dog program is geared towards adults with a physical disability. The Skilled Companions program is geared towards children and adults with physical disabilities in which an adult in their life is the facilitator/handler of the animal. Canine Companions' Skilled Companion dogs and Service Dogs are provided free of charge. Although located in the US, Canine Companions serves individuals from Canada (small additional fees may apply).

Location: Various locations in the United States

Website: www.canine.org/

Phone: 1-800-572-BARK (2275)

Email: info@canine.org

Eligibility criteria for the Service Dog program:

- Have a disability.
- Be 18+ years of age.
- Be independent in mobility (with or without mobility device).
- Be able to safely and effectively control, manage and care for a dog.
- Have adequate vision.
- Be willing to attend a 2 week training class at Canine Companions training center.
- Be willing to participate in ongoing training and graduate support program.

Eligibility Criteria for the Skilled Companions program:

- **The recipient must:**
 - » Be 5+ years of age.
 - » Have a physical or developmental disability.
 - » Have a need for the task(s) that a Canine Companion dog could provide.
 - » Live with the facilitator.
- **The facilitator must:**
 - » Be 18+ years of age.
 - » Be independent in mobility (with or without mobility device).
 - » Be able to safely and effectively control, manage and care for a dog.
 - » Have adequate vision.
 - » Be willing to attend a 2-week training class at Canine Companions training center.

Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind - Assistance Dogs Division

*Must live in or within a 200 km radius of Ottawa

For further information visit: www.guidedogs.ca/assistance-dogs-division/

Duo Dogs, Inc.

Located in the USA but services Canada

For further information visit: www.duodogs.org/resources/forms/prospective-client-inquiry-form/

Joys of Living Assistance Dogs

Located in the USA but services Canada

ADI Accredited

For further information visit: www.joydogs.org/

Little Angels Service Dogs

Located in the USA but services Canada

For further information visit: www.littleangels servicedogs.org/our-services/mobility-assistance/

Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides

Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides (LFCDG) is dedicated to empowering Canadians by providing Dog Guides to people through seven different programs. Applicants to the Service Dog Guide Program must be 10+ years of age and have a physical disability that would benefit from a Service Dog Guide. A LFCDG is valued at approximately \$35,000, but all dogs are provided at no cost to the client, thanks to donors.

- Once the client takes ownership of their Service Dog Guide they are responsible for all fees or bills to maintain the dog (e.g. dog food, veterinarian bills).
- The training facility is located in Oakville, Ontario, transportation to the training facility to receive your Service Dog Guide is covered by the organization.
- Dog breeds that are available include labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, poodles, and mixes of the three. Poodles are prioritized for individuals who are allergic to dogs.

Contact Information:

Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides

152 Wilson Street

Oakville, ON, L6K 0G6

Website: www.dogguides.com/

Phone: 1-905-842-2891

Email: info@dogguides.com

Fees: N/A

Accreditations:

- » Canadian Association of Guide & Assistance Dog Schools (founding members)
- » International Guide Dog Federation
- » Assistance Dogs International (ADI)
- » Imagine Canada's Standards of Excellence

Mira Foundation of Canada

The Mira Foundation of Canada provides guide dogs for people with vision loss, for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and a Service Dog for people with difficulty moving or walking.

Contact Information:

Mira Foundation Inc.

1820 Rang Nord-Ouest

Sainte-Madeleine, QC, J0H 1S0

Website: www.mira.ca/en/

Telephone: 450-795-3725

Email: info@mira.ca

Fees: N/A

Eligibility Criteria:

- Have permanent impaired mobility.
- Have a significant and persistent movement impairment.
- Have an up-to-date medical record (must have a doctor fill out their medical report in order to apply for their Service Dog Program).
- Be able to care for your dog.
- Be willing to participate in on-going training and graduate support program.

Accreditations:

Anima Quebec

International Guide Dog Federation

Ministration of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Feed of Quebec

Paws4People

Located in the USA but services Canada

ADI Accredited

Website: www.paws4people.org/

SERVICE DOG ORGANIZATIONS FOR RESIDENTS OF ONTARIO

Kingston 4 Paws Service Dogs (K4PSD)

Services only those in the counties of Prescott and Russell, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, Lanark, Renfrew, Leeds and Grenville, Hastings, Prince Edward, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington; and the municipality of Ottawa.

Must be 5 years of age or older.

Fees:

K4PSD Mobility Service Dogs are free of charge but individuals must assist in fundraising with the organization

Application fee: \$75

Equipment fee: \$100

The cost of travel to training (in the Kingston area) is the responsibility of the individual

After the dog has been placed with the individual, they are responsible for all food and veterinary costs

Contact Information:

Email: info@k4paws.ca

Phone: 613-766-4441

K9 Lifelines

K9 Lifelines aims to help individuals that could benefit from a Service Dog, and can train a Service Dog to a degree that the handler feels comfortable with. The handler can choose how involved in training that they feel comfortable with.

Services: Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, Hamilton, Milton, and the Greater Toronto Area

Contact Information:

Email: info@k9lifelines.ca

SERVICE DOG ORGANIZATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Pacific Assistance Dogs Society (PADS)

Website: www.pads.ca/application-process/

Phone +1 604-527-0556

SERVICE DOG ORGANIZATIONS IN ALBERTA

Aspen Service Dogs

Edmonton – Calgary – Medicine Hat

Contact Information:

17212 106a Ave NW

Edmonton, AB T5S 1E6

Phone: Edmonton: (780) 455-8137

Phone Calgary: (403) 703-6773

Website: www.aspenservicedogs.com/contact/

Dogs with Wings

Fees:

- Responsible for food and accommodations during team training
- \$250 Team Training kit
- Pet insurance is required
- Fundraising is encouraged but not mandatory

Eligibility Criteria for Service Dog program:

- Be a permanent resident of Alberta.
- Individual has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair.
- 15+ years old at application time and 16+ years old at placement.
- Demonstrate an active lifestyle.
- Has the mental awareness to be the sole handler.
- Can meet the emotional, physical, and financial needs of the Service Dog, with a stable home environment.

Contact Information:

Phone: 780-944-8011

Email: client@dogswithwings.ca

HOW DOES THE LAW PROTECT ME AND MY SERVICE DOG?

Service Dog Laws in Canada

Traveling

• Traveling in Canada

- » National regulations require most major air, rail, marine and bus carriers to accept a Service Dog for on board transportation, free of charge.
- » In some circumstances, Canadian carriers must also provide adjacent seating without charging additional fares or any other fees.
- » The Canadian Transportation Agency's Guide to traveling with a service animal - www.otc-cta.gc.ca/eng/service-animals.

• Traveling outside of Canada

- » The laws around traveling outside of Canada will vary depending on the country, so always check the country's laws.
- » Additional fees may be required to accommodate a Service Dog depending on the airline/carriers and size of the animal.
- As a general rule, always travel with proof of the animal's rabies vaccination.
- Canada does NOT have a national Service Dog identification card program but some provinces have them. Do NOT purchase an identification card unless it is through your province's government.
- Hotels are NOT to charge a 'pet cleaning' fee within Canada to Service Dogs.



Air Travel with a Service Dog

If traveling by air, always ensure to make the carrier aware of a service animal at least 48 hours before your flight. Always do your research to understand the rules and regulations.

Always have the animals paperwork handy while traveling (ie. a doctor's note noting your requirement for a service animal, an ID card if applicable, vaccination records).

For more information [visit](#)

Discrimination

The Human Rights Act of Canada states that individuals who require a Service Dog must not be discriminated against or denied access to any space that the public has access to. This includes the rights of tenants, meaning that 'no pets' rentals does not apply to Service Dogs.

*Service Dog laws are NOT general across Canada, and can be different province to province. However, everyone is protected under the Human Right Act of Canada.

While provinces may have additional laws and may have identification cards, one is still protected under the Human Right Act of Canada.

Although bylaws indicate that a dog's owner must immediately remove and dispose of feces left by their animal, these bylaws often exempt the owners of Service Animals.



HOW CAN I GET SUPPORT FOR MY SERVICE DOG THROUGH GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS OR TAXES?

There are a number of ways you can get support to help with the costs to buy and care for your Service Dog. Below is a list of some of the tax and disability benefits that may be able to help.

Canadian Medical Expense Tax Credit for Service Animals

Eligible expenses include:

- the cost of the service animal;
- the cost for its care and maintenance, including food and veterinary care;
- reasonable travel expenses incurred for a patient to attend a facility that trains patients in the handling of such animals; and
- reasonable board and lodging expenses for a patient's full-time attendance at such a facility.
- If the Service Animal uses toys and/or treats as a reward for working, they may also be an eligible expense.

Learn more [here](#)

- Ensure that the individual is registered for the disability tax credit, can find the form [here](#)
- Eligible expenses should be filed under:
 - » Line 33099 – Medical expenses for self, spouse or common-law partner, and your dependant children under 18.
 - » Line 33199 – Allowable amount of medical expenses for other dependants.

Ontario Disability Support Program /other monthly benefits

Ontario - Each member of the benefit unit who has a specially trained dog certified for use as a guide, hearing or Service Dog by an accredited training facility is eligible for an amount of \$84 per month to assist with the costs for the routine care of the dog.

Learn more [here](#)



British Columbia - A guide dog or Service Dog supplement is provided to assist with the monthly maintenance of a certified guide dog team, Service Dog team and/or a retired guide or Service Dog team used by recipients (or their dependants) of income assistance, hardship assistance or disability assistance under the Employment and Assistance Regulation or Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Regulation.

Learn more [here](#)

Nova Scotia - Guide Dog Allowance. A participant may be eligible for a monthly allowance for a guide dog, and an annual allowance for food and routine veterinary costs, when all other available resources have been exhausted.

Learn more [here](#)

Quebec's Mobility Assistance Dog Reimbursement Program

\$210 to prepare for getting an assistance dog and \$2,240 a year for maintenance of the assistance dog.

Only eligible for this program if the dog is obtained from an ADI or IGDF certified training facility.

Learn more [here](#)

Organization that help fund unexpected vet bills:
Busy Busy www.mbbbc.org/

