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Service Dog Frequently Asked Questions

Veterans participated in the pilot study

Q1. What is a mental health service dog?

A1. Mental Health Service Dogs (service dogs) are extensively trained to respond precisely to specific disabilities of their owners including individuals with mental health diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Service Dogs are trained to detect and intervene when their handler is anxious; contribute to a feeling of safety for their handler; and promote a sense of relaxation and socialization.

Q2. Why did VAC fund a pilot study on service dogs?

A2. There is great interest in using service dogs to assist Veterans with mental health conditions. However, research in this area is limited and necessary to evaluate if service dogs can be used as a safe and effective support for Veterans with PTSD.

This pilot study responded to the commitment of the Veterans Affairs Canada Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan item 7.11, (part of the Canadian Armed Forces and VAC Joint Suicide Prevention Strategy) to increase knowledge of the role of service dogs in helping Veterans with a mental health condition.

Q3. What are the study's findings?

A3. Among the 18 Veterans with PTSD who had a service dog for 12 months and who completed the full 18-month study period showed:

- slightly increased their physical activity – logging more daily steps and spending less time in sedentary activity;
- reported fewer nightmares and improved sleep quality (participants felt they slept better, fell asleep more quickly and slept more hours per night);
- had a reduction in PTSD symptoms (e.g, cognitive intrusions and hyper-arousal) with the majority experiencing a very significant decrease;
- had a moderate, long-lasting reduction in depressive symptoms;
- did not reduce overall use of medication;
- reported increases in certain quality of life domains;
- experienced a significant increase in venturing into their communities and feeling more comfortable in public places (mostly starting after 6 months of having the service dog); and
- maintained their dependency on a family member or other caregiver (as reported by the caregiver).

Other:

As part of this study, the research team also interviewed a separate group of 10 Veterans who have had a service dog for 2-4 years to document their experiences. Their observations included:

- the 3 main roles of the service dog reported were: acting as a socialization agent; contributing to a feeling of safety; and detecting and intervening when the Veteran is anxious, depressed or aggressive;
- key tasks of their service dog included alerting a Veteran to identify when he/she is

experiencing intrusive symptoms (i.e. detecting and waking the veteran up before or during a nightmare); reminding Veteran of a task to be accomplished if he/she gets disoriented; identifying and informing the Veteran about the physical elements in his/her surroundings (incoming persons, perceived threats, etc.); and maintaining an appropriate free space around the Veteran;

- having a service dog increased the Veteran's outings to carry out daily living activities and also increased participation in family-oriented activities;
- all Veterans experienced at least one instance where they were asked to leave or had to avoid public spaces due to having the service dog;
- the Veterans noted that a qualified mental health practitioner should be involved to support the Veteran before, during and after the service dog's acquisition/training period; and
- educational efforts geared towards the general population and mental health practitioners on the use of service dog by Veterans with PTSD are required.

For more details:

- [Infographic](#)

To obtain a copy of the report, please contact the Research Directorate at vac.research-recherche.acc@canada.ca.

Q4. Who conducted the pilot study?

A4. A research team, led by Dr. Claude Vincent of Laval University, conducted the pilot study. The project was contracted through the Canadian Institute for Military and Veterans Health Research (CIMVHR).

Q5. How did the pilot study work?

A5. The pilot study examined the effects of acquiring a service dog on psychiatric symptoms, daily/social functioning and quality of life for Veterans with PTSD. Study participants were followed over the course of an 18-month period (i.e., 6 months prior to receiving the service dog to 12 months after acquisition) with regular check-in points throughout the duration of the study.

A second component of the study involved interviews with a separate group of 10 Veterans who have had a service dog for 2-4 years to document their experiences.

Q6. Why were there two study groups?

A6. The two groups allowed the researchers to examine both the impact of receiving a service dog for Veterans who did not previously have a service dog, as well gather information based on the experiences of having a service dog for a number of years.

Q7. How many Veterans participated in the pilot study?

A7. While 31 Veterans initially agreed to participate in the study, the final results are based on the 18 Veterans that completed the full 18-month study period. Seven opted out before the study began and 6 others did not complete the full study length for various reasons. This included a spouse's allergic reaction to the dog and changing their mind about wanting a service dog.

Q8. Why did the pilot project only involve Veterans with PTSD?

A8. To date, most of the interest expressed by Veterans, service dog organizations and the public has focused on using service dogs for assisting Veterans with PTSD. Also, focusing on one mental health condition helped ensure that the findings are useful.

Q9. What happened to the dogs after the pilot project ended?

A9. The dogs remain with the Veterans, if the dogs were suitable matches with the Veterans to whom they were assigned. Any Veteran who chose to keep the service dog at the completion of the study

became responsible for the ongoing care of the dog and related costs.

Q10. Given the positive outcomes observed in this study, will VAC start paying for service dogs for Veterans with PTSD?

A10. The study had promising results, but it had a very small sample size – started with 31 Veterans and finished with 18 – so we do need to review this data and fully understand it before making policy decisions. The pilot study report and its findings are being reviewed by Departmental officials and will be used to inform policy decisions related to service dogs. As a result of a Budget 2018 initiative, individuals who rely on a specially trained service animal to assist in coping with their mental health condition may qualify for Canada Revenue Agency's Medical Expense Tax Credit (METC), effective January 2018. For more information, please visit: [Canada Revenue Agency's Medical Expense Tax Credit](#).

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[National Monument for Canada's Mission in Afghanistan to be created in Ottawa](#)

Canadian Military Family Magazine

Last month, the National Capital Commission Board of Directors announced it had granted Federal Land Use Approval of the proposed LeBreton Flats, located across the street from the Canadian War Museum for a National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan. [READ MORE](#)

[Le gouvernement du Canada dévoile l'affiche de la Semaine des vétérans 2019 soulignant le 75e](#)

[anniversaire de la campagne d'Italie](#)

45e Nord

Récemment, le ministre des Anciens Combattants et ministre associé de la Défense nationale, Lawrence MacAulay, a dévoilé l'affiche officielle de la Semaine des vétérans 2019 commémorant la campagne d'Italie qui s'est déroulée pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, des Canadiens de tous les horizons ont accompli beaucoup de choses et ont fait de nombreux sacrifices dans la lutte pour les droits et libertés dont nous jouissons aujourd'hui. [LIRE PLUS](#)

[Supreme Court of Canada says military's no-juries justice system constitutional](#)

CTV News

Military members accused of serious offences under military law do not have a constitutional right to a jury trial, the Supreme Court ruled recently. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees a right to a jury trial, except in the case of "an offence under military law." In a 5-2 decision, the Supreme Court upheld a section of military law that allows Canadian Armed Forces members to be charged in the military system for civilian offences in the Criminal Code, such as sexual assault, or any other federal statute. [READ MORE](#)

[Mapping of Canadian coasts showing where climate change to hit hardest this century](#)

Ottawa Citizen

A federal government geoscientist has developed fresh maps of coastlines showing where flooding and erosion caused by climate change are likely to inflict maximum damage this century. The mapping effort led by Gavin Manson has taken into account factors like the disappearance of sea ice, rising waves and the makeup of the shoreline. The latest version of the CanCoast map has combined six key factors to create visual ratings of “coastal sensitivity” on the three oceans. [READ MORE](#)

[103rd annual Four Days Marches Nijmegen wrapped up in the Netherlands](#)

Canadian Military Family Magazine

The 103rd annual Four Days Marches Nijmegen concluded with 5-kilometre victory parade that was attended by thousands of spectators who cheered in commemoration of the Canadian Soldiers that liberate the Netherlands during the Second World War. [READ MORE](#)

[Le Régiment de la Chaudière revient marqué de la Marche de Nimègue](#)

Radio 103.5 fm

Le 23 juillet dernier 11 membres du Régiment de la Chaudière, soit dix fantassins et une technicienne médicale, sont revenus en sol canadien après avoir participé à la Marche de quatre jours de Nimègue aux Pays-Bas. L'épreuve de marche de 160 km en quatre jours s'est bien déroulée. Les militaires de la région ont d'ailleurs terminé premiers, devant les 13 autres équipes du contingent canadien à la fin de chaque jour de marche. [LIRE PLUS](#)

[France remembers: Normandy residents honour Canada's vets, Second World War dead](#)

The Chronicle Herald

One by one, with just the right solemnity, the names of 7,000 of Canada's Second World War dead were read aloud recently at the Canadian War Museum. For the most part, the speakers were not themselves Canadian, nor were they even born when the last Canadian soldier fell to that war. But they remember nonetheless. [READ MORE](#)

[Special light rail track connection in place on I-90 bridge](#)

KIRO 7

The first of eight specially designed track connections for light rail is now in place on the I-90 bridge. Sound Transit recently gave reporters a close-up look at work to install tracks on the floating bridge, the first such project in the world. Engineers had to design a special connection between the fixed section of the bridge and the floating section that goes up and down with the lake level. [READ MORE](#)

[45 ans après l'explosion d'une grenade à Valcartier, des cadets toujours dans l'attente](#)

Radio-Canada

Si les années se sont écoulées depuis le 30 juillet 1974, les images, elles, sont restées imprégnées dans

la mémoire des cadets qui ont perdu six de leurs confrères dans l'explosion accidentelle d'une grenade à Valcartier. Une quarantaine d'entre eux attendent toujours de recevoir une indemnité. Le 30 juillet 1974, près de 150 personnes, cadets, sous-officiers et officiers s'étaient rassemblés dans un dortoir pour suivre une formation sur la sécurité et les explosifs. L'exercice devait se dérouler avec des explosifs désamorçés et des morceaux d'explosif. Or, ce ne fut pas le cas. [LIRE PLUS](#)

[France to seek new engineer vehicle](#)

Jane's 360

The French Direction Generale de l'Armement (DGA) is expected to issue a request for proposals later this year for a new engineer combat support vehicle (ECSV) to replace its tracked Engin Blinde du Genie (EBG) combat engineer tractor, according to a DGA briefing viewed by *Jane's*. The French Army received 71 EBGs, with production undertaken at the now-Nexter facility at Roanne, with 54 subsequently upgraded to extend their operational lives and final deliveries in early 2014 under the designation EBG Valorise (EBG Val). [READ MORE](#)