



Service Dogs for People with Epilepsy

What is a service dog?

Service dogs are trained to help people living with a disability. They are considered working animals – they are not pets. They are trained to perform certain tasks to help their handler. Some service dogs are specifically trained to help people with epilepsy.

What kinds of service dogs help people with epilepsy?

A **“seizure-predicting” service dog** is trained to act before a seizure occurs. They detect pre-seizure warning signs and alert their handler. This gives their handler an early warning so they can take necessary precautions. The specific pre-seizure signs these dogs detect may vary. They may include changes in behavior, body language, or even particular smells.

A **“seizure-reacting” service dog** is trained to help their handler during an actual seizure event. They are trained to stay calm and position themselves to prevent injury to the person during the seizure (such as acting as a buffer between the person and surrounding objects). They may even alert others for help if needed. They can also be trained to perform specific tasks. These may include activating an emergency response system, retrieving medication, or providing comfort and emotional support after the seizure.

Will my insurance cover an epilepsy service dog?

Medicare does not typically cover the cost of acquiring a service dog or the training expenses. Coverage may vary, however, depending on the specific circumstances. Please contact Medicare directly or review their official guidelines to confirm if you are eligible for coverage.

Medicaid coverage varies from state to state. This means you will need to consult your state's Medicaid program or local Medicaid office to ask about their specific guidelines and requirements.

Private insurance and FSA plans vary depending on the plan. Please reach out to your insurance provider directly to learn more about your coverage.

FSA or HSA pre-tax dollars may be used to pay for any costs related to a service animal. This includes purchasing the dog, training the dog, paying for veterinary bills, purchasing a service dog harness, and possibly other expenses. Your doctor must write a “Letter of Medical Need” to certify that the costs are required for your health.

Tax deductions may be made for service dog expenses, as they are considered approved medical expenses. This may require certain documentation.

SSI and SSDI payments may be used to cover costs associated with a service animal.

What is the process like for obtaining a service dog?

Obtaining a service dog can be a complex and time- consuming process. You may be placed on a waiting list and need to undergo an evaluation. There may also be many other requirements before you are approved and/or receive your service dog. When going through this process, it is important to be both patient and persistent.



What rights do I and my service animal have?

Service Animals:

- do not have to be certified or wear a special vest or ID
- may generally go into places where other animals are not allowed, such as restaurants, stores, hospitals, schools, and hotels
- must be allowed in certain types of housing, including at universities, in government-run public housing, and in emergency shelters

Other people are allowed to ask:

- if your service animal is required for a disability
- what task(s) they are trained to perform

Other people are not allowed to ask:

- for documentation of any kind
- that the animal demonstrate the tasks it can perform
- the nature of the person's disability or condition

Learn More

- Seizure dogs: <https://www.epilepsy.com/recognition/seizure-dogs>
- Federal protections: <https://www.ada.gov/topics/service-animals/>
- New York State: <https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/publications/serviceanimals-english.pdf>

Organizations That May Be Able to Help

Some organizations may be able to help you obtain and/or train a service dog. Mount Sinai does not directly work with or endorse any of the following organizations.

- 4 Paws For Ability: <https://4pawsforability.org/seizure-assistance-dog>
- Canine Assistants: <http://canineassistants.org/our-service-dogs/>
- Canine Companions for Independence: <https://canine.org/>
- CPL Canine Partners for Life: <https://k94life.org/seizure-alert/>
- Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs: <https://www.medicalservicedogs.org/>
- Little Angels: <https://littleangelsservicedogs.org/our-services/seizure-alert-dogs/>
- Medical Mutts: <https://medicalmutts.org/our-service-dogs/seizure-alert-dogs/>
- Paws With A Cause: <https://www.pawswithacause.org/what-we-do/assistance-dogs/seizure-response-dogs/>
- Service Dogs for America: <https://www.servicedogsforamerica.org/emergency-medical-response/>
- Susquehanna Service Dogs: <https://www.khs.org/what-we-do/assistance-dogs/>
- US Service Animals: <https://usserviceanimals.org/blog/service-dog-grants-resources/>
- Veteran Affairs (the VA) offers a veterinary benefit for veterans: <https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp>