



## THERAPY DOG SERVICES POLICY

<b>Policy Objective</b>	The purpose of this policy is twofold. Firstly, it is in place to ensure quality and safety to Therapy Dog service recipients. Secondly, it is in place to ensure safety and a quality experience for St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Services volunteers and dogs by outlining the general training and service standards as well as procedures and guidelines.
<b>Policy Statement</b>	St. John Ambulance is committed to providing Therapy Dog Services to Canadian communities based on jurisdictional need. This commitment includes training, certifying, and monitoring Therapy Dog Volunteers (Handlers) and their dogs.
<b>Effective Date</b>	April 2006
<b>Applies To</b>	All volunteers, evaluators, instructors and employees affiliated with St. John Ambulance's Therapy Dog Services.

### Policy Context

It has been demonstrated that the petting, affection, and regular visitation of a dog can be beneficial to institutionalized clients (i.e. patients). St. John Ambulance (SJA) Therapy Dog Services volunteers provide dog visitation to lonely, sick, or shut-in individuals of all ages. These services are provided in a variety of community-based institutional settings including, but not limited to, hospitals and extended care facilities. Extensions of the basic Therapy Dog Services may include but are not limited to visitation to children, visitation to private homes, participation in emergency response activities, and involvement of SJA Youth Program participants.

Therapy Dog Services and affiliated standards that are undertaken must be approved in advance by the National Office and the respective Provincial/Territorial Council based on jurisdictional need, legislation and capability.

### Policy Requirements

1. Enrolment Qualifications—SJA Therapy Dog Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age and be physically and mentally capable of performing the activities that are reasonable for the type of training they will be undertaking and the service that they will be providing.



- 1.1 Generally dogs one year of age and older are accepted in the program and while there is no nationally enforced restrictions on the breed of dog that may participate in the program, it is important to check jurisdictional legislation.
- 1.2 Prospective volunteer handler/dog teams must undergo an orientation and evaluation conducted by a SJA Therapy Dog Coordinator and certified Evaluator. The orientation and evaluation assess the dog's temperament and the team's overall ability to provide safe therapeutic care.
2. Establishing a Therapy Dog unit—to establish a Therapy Dog unit, an initial assessment should be conducted in the community in cooperation with the local Branch and/or Provincial/Territorial Council to determine:
  - program goals and objectives
  - expected outcomes (benefits and risks)
  - financial plan, including anticipated support
  - training and resource requirementsSee the Therapy Dog Services Manual and Facilitators Guide for complete details and guidelines on how to establish and maintain a Therapy Dog Unit.
3. Visitations—Therapy Dog Volunteers are required to follow the procedures for visiting as outlined in the Therapy Dog Services Manual.
4. Keeping a Healthy Program—threats posed by allergies, infectious disease, and zoonosis have been recognized as potential risks. Therapy Dog Volunteers must follow the health, safety and screening precautions and procedures outlined in the Therapy Dog Services Manual.

### **Responsibilities/Accountabilities**

The National Office is responsible for:

- developing Therapy Dog training and service-related standards.

The Provincial/Territorial Council CEO is responsible for:

- delivery and monitoring of Therapy Dog training and service-related standards and resources, including human resources.

Local supervisor, evaluator, volunteer, and employee responsibilities are outlined in the *Therapy Dog Services Manual* and the *Therapy Dog Services Facilitators Guide*.



**Procedures**

Complete procedures and guidelines for delivering Therapy Dog Services are provided in the *Therapy Dog Services Manual* and the *Therapy Dog Services Facilitators Guide*.

**Resources**

Therapy Dog Services Manual  
Therapy Dog Services Facilitators Guide

**Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed every three years or as required.