

***THE THERAPY DOG PROGRAM
NATIONAL OPERATIONAL STANDARDS***

GENERAL

1. The St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program began in Peterborough, Ontario in 1992. The program provides dog visitation to comfort the lonely, sick and elderly. It has been proven that the petting, affection and regular visitation of a dog can be beneficial to hospitalized patients. The St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program is unique in that the same dog and handler visit the same place, at the same time each week.
2. Hospitals and nursing homes are comfortable accepting the program because it addresses a need and is safe. Dogs are checked for temperament, health and cleanliness.

STRUCTURE

3. The Therapy Dog Program, as a community care service, is an element of the existing Brigade organizational structure. All policies and procedures outlined in the StJCI for other Brigade members apply equally to members of the Therapy Dog Program, with the exception of StJCI 2-4 on Patient Care Training Systems.
4. Therapy Dog Units function as separate units, and Program Coordinators are appointed to each unit level. Generally, units are aligned with Branches which are responsible for providing support to the local Therapy Dog Unit in the same manner that they provide support to other Brigade units.
5. When a request for the program is made from a community (ie. dog clubs, hospitals), and factors such as geography or logistics limit the possibility of Branch alignment, then independent Therapy Dog Units may be established. These units should be self-supporting and deal directly with the local community and their respective Council on all financial support issues.
6. The following positions have specific roles and responsibilities (see Annex A) to ensure the efficient running of the Therapy Dog Program:
 - a. Provincial/Territorial/Area Therapy Dog Coordinators
 - b. Unit Therapy Dog Coordinators
 - c. Evaluators and Assistant Evaluators
 - d. Chief Evaluators
 - e. Dog and Member (Handler)
 - f. Auxiliary Member

ESTABLISHING A THERAPY DOG PROGRAM

7. Consultation must be made with the National Therapy Dog Coordinator before establishing a Therapy Dog Program provincially. The National Therapy Dog Coordinator will provide assistance through advice and the provision of materials.
8. Arrangements must be made for initial evaluations to be carried out by a national representative or identified consultant. This will be done at the expense of the Council.
9. Branches seeking to establish a Therapy Dog Program locally should follow the process as laid out in Annex B.
10. Once the program is established provincially, it is the responsibility of the Council to maintain the standards of the program through ongoing evaluations. This may be done internally or through the original evaluator, at the expense of the Council. Neighbouring Councils may choose to collaborate and share the costs.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

11. Membership requirements for members of the Therapy Dog Program are as stated in StJCI 2-3-1. Personnel administration for members of the Therapy Dog Program are as stated in StJCI 2-8-1. Personnel administration at the local or Council level may also include the name of each member's dog(s) to facilitate recognition of service for the dogs.

RECOGNITION

12. Members of the Therapy Dog Program are eligible for all the awards as listed in StJCI 2-6-1. Note that Councils may choose to use *Service Pins* for Therapy Dog Members as an alternative to *Service Bars*, as referred in StJCI 2-6-1, paragraph 6. If the Service Pin is used, it is to be worn on the left lapel of the blazer or jacket, or on the left breast of the work shirt, above the pocket if one exists.
13. Councils may choose to provide coloured tags or certificates as recognition to the dogs for their accumulated number of visits (eg. after 75, 150 and 250 visits). Records of dog visitations must be kept at the unit level. The Coordinator must then request the appropriate awards from their Council and arrange for their presentation.

STANDARDS

14. All testing of dogs for admittance to the Therapy Dog Program must be conducted using the national Therapy Dog Evaluation. To ensure the preservation of national standards, deviation from this evaluation may not occur. The responsibility for all national Therapy Dog standards rests with the National Therapy Dog Coordinator.
15. Initial evaluations for a Council will be under the guidance of the National Therapy Dog Coordinator. The Provincial Evaluator will in turn train others to the required standards. Evaluators are expected to complete all necessary forms, which are to be held at the Council Headquarters for reference. Actual tests will not be released to a Council wishing to set up an initial program until authorization by the National Therapy Dog Coordinator.
16. Handlers will provide St. John Ambulance with veterinarian-signed verification of current immunization and health status.

UNIFORM

17. Therapy Dog members wear approved shirts with the St. John Ambulance logo, and black or grey pants/skirt. This makes them easily identifiable by both the residents and staff and also gives the residents in health care settings confidence to know that the person belongs to a credible organization. Dogs wear a St. John Ambulance ID tag, and may also wear a Therapy Dog kerchief.

INSURANCE COVERAGE

18. All volunteer dog handlers are covered under St. John Ambulance's liability and accident insurance.
19. The dogs are covered under St. John Ambulance's liability insurance in case they cause an injury or damage while on duty. In the event the dog's owner is sued, this would first be applied to their personal homeowner's insurance, and then the national insurance carrier for St. John Ambulance. If the dog's owner does not have homeowner's insurance, the national insurance carrier will become the primary insurer.
20. If the dog is injured while on duty, the owner is wholly responsible for expenses (e.g. vet bills). Coverage for this is not available through our insurance carrier.