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Independent Living and Quality of LifeSubject
Guide Dogs and Service Dogs

Policy

Ownership of an animal is generally not necessary, appropriate or sufficient health care for most work-related injuries or illnesses due to the lack of strong and consistent evidence of therapeutic efficacy. However, in the limited circumstances that a worker has a serious injury or illness that is a designated condition, as defined in this policy, a guide dog or service dog may be considered necessary, appropriate and sufficient health care. The WSIB only considers entitlement to guide dogs and service dogs, and not to other types of animals.

The WSIB will pay for the purchase, training, care and maintenance of a guide dog or service dog where it is considered necessary, appropriate and sufficient health care for a serious injury or illness that is a designated condition.

Where health care treatment that includes animal-assisted intervention is recommended, aside from ownership, entitlement should be considered under 17-01-02, Entitlement to Health Care.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the designated conditions for which entitlement to a guide dog or service dog will be considered, and the criteria for entitlement to the purchase, training, care and maintenance of guide dogs and service dogs.

Guidelines

This policy applies in conjunction with 17-06-01, Independent Living and Quality of Life Measures - Overview and Definitions.

Definitions

Designated condition means one of the following serious injuries or illnesses for which there is strong and consistent evidence of the effectiveness of animal-assisted intervention involving ownership:

- vision loss resulting in legal blindness
- severe to profound bilateral hearing loss
- spinal cord injuries resulting in significant immobility necessitating the use of a wheelchair, or
- partial or full amputations resulting in significant immobility necessitating the use of a wheelchair, where a prosthetic device is not sufficient to facilitate independent living.

For definitions of **independent living**, **legal blindness**, **serious injury or illness** and **severe to profound bilateral hearing loss**, refer to 17-06-01, Independent Living and Quality of Life Measures - Overview and Definitions. For a definition of **health professional**, refer to 17-01-02, Entitlement to Health Care.

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Guide Dogs and Service Dogs**Entitlement criteria**

To be entitled to a guide dog or service dog, all of the following criteria must be met:

- The worker has a work-related designated condition that impacts their ability to live independently.
- The health professional treating the worker's designated condition recommends owning a guide dog or service dog to lessen the impact of the designated condition on the worker's ability to live independently.
- An appropriate clinical assessment of the worker has been conducted.
- There are no contraindications to owning the recommended guide dog or service dog. Contraindications include, but are not limited to, any worsening of symptoms.
- The worker is able to care for the guide dog or service dog on a daily basis, including feeding, bathing, toileting and exercising the dog, maintaining consistent training, providing a clean and safe environment and monitoring overall health to determine when veterinary care may be required.
- Working with the guide dog or service dog will not impede the worker's recovery or return-to-work (RTW) activities, where applicable.
- A guide dog or service dog is necessary to facilitate the worker's independent living, which may include helping in the worker's RTW activities.
- There are no other more appropriate measures to facilitate independent living for the worker's specific designated condition (e.g., assistive devices, prostheses, independent living devices, vehicle modifications, home modifications).

Guide dogs

Guide dogs for workers with vision loss resulting in legal blindness must be recommended either by the worker's treating health professional or by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. The guide dog must successfully complete a training program at an accredited training facility.

Service dogs

Service dogs for workers with severe to profound bilateral hearing loss or who have significant immobility must be recommended by the worker's treating health professional. The service dog must successfully complete a training program at an accredited training facility.

Payment**Initial costs**

The WSIB pays for the purchase and training of a guide dog or service dog from an accredited training facility, and for the related training for the worker. The purchase and training of the dog should take place in Ontario unless otherwise approved by the WSIB. The WSIB will not reimburse the worker for the cost of purchasing or training a dog that was not pre-approved by the WSIB or that was owned by the worker before a guide dog or service dog was recommended by the health professional treating the designated condition.

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Guide Dogs and Service Dogs**Routine veterinary care and maintenance**

The WSIB provides an allowance to cover routine veterinary care and maintenance costs (e.g., nutritional needs, annual examinations, inoculations). The allowance is paid annually as a lump sum. The amount of the initial payment may be prorated from the date of entitlement. No receipts are required. The WSIB will not cover routine veterinary care or maintenance costs for a dog that was not pre-approved by the WSIB or that was owned by the worker before a guide dog or service dog was recommended by the health professional treating the designated condition. For the current allowance for guide dogs and service dogs, refer to 18-01-05, Table of Rates.

The daily routine care of the guide dog or service dog will not be provided for under any other policies including, but not limited to, 17-06-02, Independent Living Allowances, 17-06-03, Independent Living Devices and 17-06-05, Personal Care Attendants and Allowance.

The guide dog and service dog allowance is paid for as long as the worker continues to meet the entitlement criteria. Where a worker receiving the allowance dies or no longer meets the criteria, payment is discontinued at the next annual payment date. A benefit-related debt is not created.

Extraordinary veterinary care

The WSIB also pays for extraordinary veterinary care and treatment of guide dogs and service dogs. This includes unforeseen health problems, accidents, illnesses and euthanasia. The actual cost of such care and treatment is payable upon submission of appropriate receipts or accounts.

Material change and reviews

A worker must advise the WSIB of any material change that may affect their entitlement to benefits and services under the insurance plan, such as entitlement to a guide dog or service dog, or ongoing entitlement to the guide dog and service dog allowance.

Material changes include, but are not limited to, a change in the worker's health care status that impacts their ability to work with or care for the guide dog or service dog, or a change in the dog's health care status such that the dog can no longer assist the worker to live independently.

Where there is a material change or a request to review entitlement, the WSIB determines if a review is required to assess ongoing entitlement to a guide dog or service dog. Entitlement to the guide dog and service dog allowance applies only where there is ongoing entitlement to a guide dog or service dog.

A worker may be entitled to a replacement guide dog or service dog in certain circumstances (e.g., the dog has retired or died). The WSIB will approve a replacement guide dog or service

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dog and the associated costs where appropriate documentation is provided and all of the other entitlement criteria in this policy continue to be met.

As part of a material change review, all independent living benefits and services the worker is receiving may be reviewed together to ensure that the worker is receiving the necessary, appropriate and sufficient complement of benefits and services to facilitate their independent living.

For more information about material changes, refer to 22-01-02, Material Change in Circumstances – Worker.

Transitional provisions

In claims with an accident prior to September 21, 2026, where the initial entitlement decision is made on or after September 21, 2026, this policy also applies to entitlement periods prior to September 21, 2026.

Application date

This policy applies to all decisions made on or after September 21, 2026, for entitlement periods on or after September 21, 2026, for all accidents. This policy also applies to entitlement periods prior to September 21, 2026, in the claims identified in the "Transitional provisions" section.

Document history

This document replaces 17-06-04 dated April 9, 2021.

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17-06-04 dated February 15, 2013

17-06-04 dated January 3, 2007

17-06-04 dated October 12, 2004

17-06-04 dated April 6, 2001

17-06-04 dated June 15, 1999

06-05-06 dated March 28, 1991.

References**Legislative authority**

Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997

Sections 32, 33

Workers' Compensation Act, Revised Statutes of Ontario 1990

Sections 50, 52

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Approval

Approved by the President and CEO on June 23, 2026.

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