

UCSF Health – Service Animals
Patient Frequently Asked Questions

What is the definition of a service animal?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and UCSF Health define a service animal as a dog or miniature horse that are individually trained to do work or perform specific tasks for people with disabilities. Psychiatric service animals (PSA's) are included in this definition because they have also been trained to perform tasks to mitigate the psychiatric disabilities of their human partners.

Are service animals allowed in the hospital and clinics?

Yes, service animals (dogs) are welcome to accompany their handlers to clinical areas open to the public at UCSF.

Are service animals welcome in all areas in the hospital or clinic?

No, the general rule is that service animals are allowed in patient rooms and anywhere else in the hospital the public and patients are allowed. The specific areas excluded, for safety reasons, are operating rooms, pre- and post-operative areas, and we reserve the right to deny access to intensive care units, and any other areas that require a protected environment. In these areas, the final decision will be made by providers and nurses in these areas to verify that it is safe for the dog to visit.

Why are you asking me questions about my animal?

In order to distinguish between service dogs and non-service dogs, we are allowed under the ADA to ask you two questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? and (2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? Specific responses are required and help us in our documentation of the animal as your service dog.

What about therapy or emotional support/comfort animals?

The ADA does not include therapy or emotional support/comfort animals in its definition of service animals. We ask that patients leave all animals other than service animals at home. Please note that this rule extends only within UCSF Health patient areas and does not extend to other areas (academic, research, housing) of UCSF. For those areas, please consult <https://policies.ucsf.edu/policy/550-19> for more information. If accommodations are needed related to other areas of the University, please contact Disability Management Service at (415) 476-2621 for assistance with the interactive process.

What if I am too sick to take care of my dog, will staff help?

Staff are prohibited from caring for patient service dogs and the Americans with Disabilities Act states that a service dog must be cared for by their handler or a person assigned by the handler to do so. If you cannot care for your animal and are unable to identify a person to assist with the care of the animal, SF Animal Care & Control will be called to remove the animal to a safe environment for the term of the your admission.

I've seen people with dogs who wear identification that identifies them as a Facility Dog or Emotional Support Dog, why are they allowed?

UCSF Health, which includes UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals, have specific programs which include trained therapy dogs who visit with their handlers or UCSF staff to provide comfort to patients. These programs are administered separately by Child Life Services and Volunteer Services.

What other qualifications does a service dog have to have to accompany me to UCSF?

Your dog must always be well behaved and under your control, must not show any aggression toward staff or providers, and must be clean and housebroken.

I have to be admitted to the hospital, can my service dog visit me?

Yes, we recognize the bond between you and your service dog is important and once your providers make sure that you and other patients in your unit will not be harmed by a visit, that visit can be arranged. Your dog can even stay with you, but must have a caretaker who can feed, toilet, and walk the dog because you will not be able to leave the hospital while admitted.

Does my service dog have to be on a leash?

The service animal must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered while in public places unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or your disability prevents use of these devices. In that case, you must use voice, signal, or other effective means to maintain control of the animal.