

Service Dogs May Reduce PTSD Symptoms

A study published in June aimed to understand how service dogs affect veterans with PTSD, depression and anxiety and found having a service dog may reduce those symptoms

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A June study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that service dogs may reduce symptoms of PTSD, as well as anxiety and depression. Researchers claim the study is the largest-ever national study about service dogs relating to veterans with PTSD.

The results of the research were published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and titled, “Service Dogs for Veterans and Military Members with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.” The study consisted of 156 veterans diagnosed with PTSD and was conducted between August 2017 and December 2019.

SERVICE DOGS ‘COMPLEMENT’ CARE

Participants, all being post-9/11 veterans, were recruited from a nonprofit service dog organization called K9s For Warriors, and then were divided into two groups: 81 veterans who received a service dog and 75 veterans who remained on a waiting list. After three months, the group of veterans with service dogs showed improvements with:

- PTSD symptoms
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychosocial functioning, such as social isolation

MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVED

According to the study, veterans with service dogs had a two-thirds (66 percent) less chance of a PTSD diagnosis when compared to veterans without a service dog.

“Findings of this trial suggest that trained psychiatric service dogs may be an effective

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complement to usual care for military service-related PTSD,” researchers noted in the study. They added that more research is needed to learn the long-term benefits of how service dogs may improve mental health.

VFW SUPPORTS SERVICE DOGS

VFW National Legislative Service Director Patrick Murray said that VFW has and will continue to support further research and programs that he said can “empower” veterans by making them more independent. Murray also added that service dogs can assist some veterans with several physical and auditory disabilities.

“Service dogs provide veterans with more than companionship — service dogs offer emotional support and can enhance the quality of life for many veterans,” Murray said. “VFW will continue to support legislation that helps ensure veterans have access to service dogs.”

This article is featured in the 2024 October issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.