



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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29th December 2020

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: eoin.obroin@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Ó Broin,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ 43907/20

To ask the Minister for Health the criteria that determine whether or not a dog can be classified as an assistance dog; and the body responsible for setting such criteria.

HSE Response.

Animal Assisted Activities is a term used to describe programmes whereby pets make visits to service users and residents simply to make life a little more pleasant for those in various treatment or residential facilities. People visited may receive a therapeutic effect however, there is no treatment plan for an individual patient or service user. The pets may belong to the patient or family or they may belong to volunteers who use their pets for this activity. These activities bring warmth and love to people who aren't able to experience the joys of having a pet whilst in those facilities.

While contact with pet animals can enhance the quality of life for many people, the Disability sector makes a distinction between Therapy and Assistance Dogs. Therapy dogs don't require the same level of training and are only placed for companionship and have no access rights legally.

Assistance Dogs are essentially working dogs and have to be accredited with Assistance Dogs International. There are Standards and Guidelines in place, which form the basis for ADI Accreditation.

Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI) is a worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place Assistance Dogs. Founded in 1986 from a group of seven small programs, ADI has become the leading authority in the Assistance Dog industry.

The objectives of Assistance Dogs International are to:

- Establish and promote standards of excellence in all areas of assistance dog acquisition, training and partnership
- Facilitate communication and learning among member programs
- Educate the public to the benefits of Assistance Dogs and ADI membership.

Assistance Dogs organisations that pass ADI's accreditation process become ADI Accredited Member programs, and are regularly assessed to ensure they meet the highest standards in the industry.

The following link can be accessed to provide more information:

<https://assistancedogsinternational.org/>

In Ireland there are four organisations that have accreditation:

- Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland;
- Irish Dogs for the Disabled;
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
- My Canine Companion - Autism Service Dogs

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland (AADI) was founded on the 26th April 2010 and is based in Quattertown Mills in Mallow Co. Cork.

AADI provides trained assistance dogs for children with autism and their families. Funds are raised through donations, sponsorship, personal gifts and various fund raising events.

These Assistance Dogs help to control and improve the behaviour of a child with autism by promoting calmness and acting as a safety aid to the parents.

With the help of these dogs, family outings can become less stressful as the dogs allow families to enjoy greater freedom and mobility. Dogs are first trained as a safety aid to prevent a child bolting.

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland quote the following benefits which include:

- greater aptitude for learning;
- improved participation in social activities;
- improved communication skills; and
- a greater sense of responsibility and improved confidence.

The Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind

The Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB) was founded in 1976. The National Headquarters and Training Centre are located in the Model Farm Road, Cork. Training programmes provided by the IGDB include guide dog training, long cane training, independent living skills training, child mobility, and assistance dog programme to families of children with autism, orientation and mobility training.

The HSE provides funding to Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind under Section 39 of the Health Act 2004, amounting to €767,542 in 2020. Services are provided through a number of Service Arrangements which are reviewed on an annual basis.

The IGDB has also other incomes which are reflective of many factors including IGDB's commitment to the sector, the positive high national profile the organisation has earned & enjoys, the very effective capacity for fundraising and the level of responsibility both from a financial and service perspective the IGDB Board is willing to undertake.

Irish Dogs for the Disabled

Irish Dogs for the Disabled is a charity founded in 2007 to improve the lives of children and adults living with physical disabilities in Ireland. The organisation is comprised mainly of volunteers and relies on voluntary contributions and fund-raising activities.



My Canine Companion - Autism Service Dogs

My Canine Companion is a national charity founded in 2011, whose main purpose is to provide highly trained and skilled assistance dogs to people with disabilities, particularly autism. The organisation relies solely on community, individual and corporate funding to provide Assistance Dogs to children and families living with Autism.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**



Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

Building a
Better Health
Service