

<b>Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Policy and Procedure</b>		
<b>Certified Therapy Dog Policy</b>		
Effective: June 2024	Revised:	Due to Review: June 2026

## **POLICY**

The Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) recognizes that having a safe, compassionate, and therapeutic certified therapy dog visitation program promotes recovery, connection, and can reduce stress in hospitalized individuals. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that therapy dogs, with their volunteer handlers, can safely enter and provide services at VPCH.

VPCH will consider any allergy or aversion concerns present in the current hospital cohort when planning certified therapy dog services. Depending on the severity of an allergy or aversion, or other unforeseen concern, the provision of therapy dog services at VPCH may be temporarily suspended.

## **DEFINITIONS**

Volunteer: An individual who has been successfully screened through the VPCH volunteer policy. This can include individuals who are not employees of VPCH as well as those who are current employees, who enter the hospital during their unpaid time to perform a service or function on a volunteer basis.

Handler: Individual bringing, and responsible for, a certified therapy dog to VPCH.

## **PROCEDURE**

### **Staff Expectations:**

Staff who are facilitating a pet therapy visit shall adhere to the VPCH Visitor Policy and:

- Verify with Reception/Admissions that the handler is currently an approved volunteer.
- Escort the therapy dog and handler to the designated visitation area. The default area is the Courtyard. In inclement weather, off-unit space may serve as an alternate location at the discretion of the on-duty Nurse Supervisor.
  - NOTE: Allergies and aversions should be considered when selecting an appropriate visiting space.
- Ensure that therapy dogs do not enter the units for any reason.
- Ensure that all hospitalized individuals planning to attend a pet therapy visit have signed a waiver before doing so.
- Escort the handler and animal out of the building at the end of the visit.

Staff who have an allergy or other aversions to facilitating therapy dog visits should communicate this with their direct supervisor so that appropriate accommodations can be explored.

**Handler Expectations:**

All handlers facilitating therapy dog visits must complete the volunteer application and background procedures outlined in the VPCH volunteer policy. They must also be operating under the direction of an organization that: (a) certifies animals to be therapy dogs, and (b) has an active affiliation agreement with VPCH (NOTE: individual handlers may have active affiliation agreements with VPCH instead of their organization).

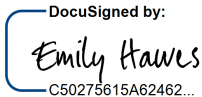
In addition to the standard volunteer paperwork and the designated waiver, pet therapy handlers must:

- Adhere to applicable VPCH policies pertaining to visitation.
- Provide proof of successful completion of their dog's certification through a therapy dog program.
- If annual membership is required by the certifying agency (for the dog and/or handler), provide VPCH with updated membership/certification annually.
- Provide proof of current rabies vaccination for the dog and provide updates.
- Maintain control of their dog at all times and be solely responsible for their dog's behavior.
- Ensure that their dog is in good health and free from disease, illness, or parasites. There must be no visible parasites or open wounds of any kind on the dog.
  - Dogs on antibiotic therapy for an infection, in heat, with skin or ear infections, wearing a bandage, or experiencing gastrointestinal upset will be excluded from visiting and will not visit for at least one week following resolution of these symptoms.
  - Dogs that have tested positive for any of the following organisms will be excluded until one negative culture has been obtained and provided to VPCH after treatment: Giardia, group A streptococcus, Shigella, Salmonella, and Campylobacter.
- Notify the VPCH volunteer coordinator of any health concerns that would impact therapy dog visits as soon as feasible.
- Assure that the dog does not void in designated care areas. The handler will be responsible for cleanup.

**References:**

VPCH Visitor Policy, found [here](#).

VPCH Certified Therapy Dog Waiver

Approved by	Signature	Date
Emily Hawes, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Mental Health	 <p>DocuSigned by: Emily Hawes C50275615A62462...</p>	6/3/2024