

MEMORANDUM of AGREEMENT

BETWEEN

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

AND

PET PARTNERS

I. PURPOSE

This Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) is entered into between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA or Department) Veterans Health Administration (VHA), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, and Pet Partners, 345 118th Avenue SE, Suite 200, Bellevue, WA 98005, collectively referred to as the "Parties." This MoA sets forth a structure in which both entities will work in a mutually beneficial manner to advance and improve the quality of life for our Nation's Veterans. Pet Partners and VA share the goal of supporting and improving the health and well-being of Veterans. This MoA sets forth a framework for the Parties to work together to support Veterans and their well-being and social integration through Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) within the context of VHA Directive 1178. To that end, the Parties seek to support Veteran health and well-being through employing AAA, AAT, and the associated health benefits of the human-animal bond.

II. AUTHORITY

1. The Secretary or his delegate has the authority to accept gifts, bequests, or devises of all kinds that would benefit Veterans, agency medical/domiciliary facilities, the Secretary's authority to administer the laws under his jurisdiction, or that would enhance his ability to provide services or benefits, codified under 38 U.S.C. § 8301.
2. The Secretary can and has delegated that authority to subordinate agency officials and employees under 38 U.S.C. § 512.
3. The Secretary may coordinate programs and efforts to provide and to enhance benefits with state, local, and private entities, codified under 38 U.S.C. § 523.
4. The Department has statutory charges to conduct outreach regarding Veterans and eligible beneficiaries under 38 U.S.C. § 6301 et seq et inter alia.

III. BACKGROUND

Veterans Health Administration

VHA is America's largest integrated health care system, providing care at more than one thousand health care facilities, and is a recognized leader in medical research and education.

VHA is committed to pursuing public-private partnerships to identify new and innovative ways to support VA's mission to fulfill President Lincoln's promise, "[t]o care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans in accordance with Federal law. The VA Strategic Plan emphasizes advocacy for Veterans by exploring and establishing partnerships to address Veterans' needs, enrich their experience, augment options for Veterans, drive innovative practices, and enhance Veteran outcomes. The Secretary of VA has identified four priorities to advance this mission: 1) Customer service, 2) Business transformation, 3) Electronic health record management, and 4) MISSION act implementation. VA has identified these priorities throughout the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, National Cemetery Administration, Staff Offices, and constituent-specific offices. Partnerships with non-governmental organizations, both public and private, is consistent in supporting VA's FY 2018 – 2024 Strategic Plan.

Such partnerships facilitate solutions to provide services and support that reach more Veterans and their family members. VHA engages in partnerships that leverage the full range of our Nation's talent, ingenuity, and commitment to action. It is VA's policy to develop and maintain responsible and productive partnerships with non-governmental organizations including community organizations and partners, academic affiliates, and other public-private entities. These partnerships not only further the Department's mission and priorities, but also build capacity and create opportunities for sharing resources to better serve Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, and other beneficiaries. Enhancing strategic partnerships is an important component of the VHA strategic direction.

VHA Office of Community Engagement (OCE) serves as a trusted resource and a catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community level, and as a facilitator/access point for public and private entities interested in partnering with VHA to benefit Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Partnerships coordinated by OCE support VHA's commitment to delivering personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care.

VHA measures the success of such partnerships in terms of outcomes that are relevant to Veterans' VA benefits and services such as connecting Veterans to opportunities that empower, equip, and encourage Veterans to take charge of their health, well-being, and to adopt healthy living practices that deter or defer preventable health conditions. Strengthening collaborations within communities and service-oriented organizations

such as Pet Partners can help VHA achieve the goal of improving the lives of Veterans, Service Members, their families, and their survivors.

Pet Partners

The mission of Pet Partners is to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. Pet Partners is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation, founded in 1977. Pet Partners has therapy animal teams and supporters in nearly every state and through its recent international expansion efforts works in eight countries worldwide. Pet Partners is self-identified as the leading organization for animal assisted activity, education and therapy and an advocacy organization as it relates to human health, well-being and the human-animal bond.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

VHA commits to:

1. Onboard Pet Partners Volunteers, who will provide AAA and AAT, through local VA Voluntary Service offices per VHA Handbook 1620.01, VA Voluntary Service Procedures, to ensure volunteers are accepted in accordance with the authority under 38 U.S.C 513, and to provide Voluntary Service Orientation programs and ensure volunteers participate in unit/service orientation as assigned;
2. Distribute this Pet Partners/VHA MoA to leadership and appropriate staff throughout VA;
3. Support and encourage VHA medical facilities to establish or grow an existing animal visitation and scheduled clinical intervention programs utilizing either Pet Partners teams or therapy animal teams registered with another organization, providing they meet the standards for client safety and animal welfare set forth in VHA Directive 1178(1), VHA Directive 1188, and Pet Partners Standards of Practice;
4. Support and encourage VHA medical facilities to collaborate with Pet Partners to advance the shared objectives of this MoA for the therapeutic benefit of Veterans;
5. Support and encourage VHA medical facilities to enter into agreements to provide partnership opportunities targeting the Veteran population. In entering into these agreements, VHA facilities must comply with VA Directive 0008, VHA Directive 1098, and VHA Handbook 1620.01, VA Voluntary Service Procedures;
6. For interested VHA facilities, identify the offices or points of contact (POC) to facilitate such local agreements;
7. Proactively share best practices and success stories within VHA and between VHA and Pet Partners networks and those community organizations partnering

with VHA while ensuring Veterans' privacy and personal information are protected;

8. Disseminate information to Veterans (where appropriate) about volunteering as an animal visitation or therapy animal team handler should they have an appropriate animal;
9. Provide opportunities for Pet Partners volunteers and, when appropriate, Voluntary Service personnel escorts that support Pet Partners volunteers engaged in animal-assisted interventions, to serve within VA facilities, in accordance with VA Voluntary Service policies and procedures;
10. Provide current and relevant information about Veterans' health, well-being, and culture for Pet Partners to incorporate into training for their existing and prospective handlers; and
11. Share publicly available VHA-developed educational resources and other health-related information and training (e.g., PsychArmor Institute S.A.V.E. training, communicating with Veterans, Veterans Crisis Line, etc.) with Pet Partners to broaden dissemination of resources about Veterans.

Pet Partners commits to:

1. Encourage qualified animal visitation and therapy animal teams to register with Voluntary Service offices at VA medical centers and attend Voluntary Service Orientation program and unit/service orientation as assigned;
2. Share and disseminate this Pet Partners-VHA MoA as appropriate with community organizations and through public relations and social media channels;
3. Engage interested VHA medical facilities to establish or grow existing animal visitation and therapy animal programs and to communicate visitation opportunities to Pet Partners handlers;
4. Integrate Veterans and their families into Pet Partners activities and events to promote the human-animal bond while ensuring Veterans' privacy and personal information are protected;
5. Proactively share best practices and success stories within their networks and among organizations to promote collaboration and encourage more partnerships while ensuring Veterans' privacy and personal information are protected;
6. Utilize Pet Partners publications to disseminate information about Veterans' health and well-being as a result of the human-animal bond and animal-assisted interventions;

7. Provide content for VHA communications about therapy animal visitation, Standards of Practice, and the health and well-being benefits of animal assisted interventions;
8. Create and offer webinars to VHA constituents about AAA, AAT, and therapy animal scheduled clinical intervention, and Standards of Practice; and
9. Encourage Pet Partners staff and affiliates to complete VHA-provided suicide awareness and prevention training to reduce Veteran deaths by suicide.

V. OBJECTIVES

VHA and Pet Partners have a shared goal to enhance the quality of life for Veterans through promoting the human-animal bond and increasing social interactions using animal and therapy animal visitation. This partnership will be mutually beneficial as the Parties work together through a set of objectives to achieve this goal. This MoA sets forth a framework for the Parties to work together to support Veterans and their well-being and social integration through interaction with animals and their human handlers. VHA seeks to collaborate with Pet Partners to facilitate and increase the health, well-being, and social engagement of Veterans through AAA and AAT and the human-animal bond.

1. Develop and grow programs at VA facilities for animal visitation and therapy-animal scheduled clinical interventions for Veterans.
2. Educate Veterans and VA staff about the potential human health and social integration benefits of AAA and AAT which include, but is not limited to, lowering blood pressure and resting heart rate, reducing stress and anxiety, increasing feelings of safety and trust, and reducing feelings of loneliness, using animal and therapy-animal team interventions.

VI. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

VHA and Pet Partners share a mutual goal, through this partnership, of enhancing the quality of life for Veterans through AAA and AAT. The ability to quantitatively and qualitatively capture objective performance through metrics that demonstrate the impact of this partnership is critical. The Parties agree to use the following metrics to capture and record objective performance through related outcomes, outputs, measurable, and/or impacts, as appropriate:

1. The number of partnerships developed between local Pet Partners entities and VA medical centers;
2. The number of Pet Partners reporting visits at local VA medical centers; and

3. The number of VHA medical facilities provided with educational materials and information about the potential health and social integration benefits of AAA and AAT.

VII. POINTS OF CONTACT

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION PET PARTNERS

Tracy Weistreich, PhD, RN
Acting Director, Office of Community
Engagement
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VIII. LIMITATIONS

1. For the purposes of this MoA, a partnership is a voluntary, collaborative, working relationship between VHA and Pet Partners. The term partnership shall not imply that VHA and Pet Partners are jointly liable for either Party's obligations. This is a non-binding agreement. Neither Party is responsible for debts, contractual obligations, or conduct, tortious or otherwise, of the other Party. This MoA shall not be interpreted to limit, supersede, or to otherwise affect either Parties' normal operations or decisions in carrying out its missions, or its statutory or regulatory duties, nor to encourage or permit activities not authorized by law.
2. Pet Partners will not use this MoA to sell or promote any products or services. No payment shall be due to either Party for services provided under this MoA.
3. Pet Partners will not use the name of VA or any of its components, except in factual publicity and with prior written approval of VA. Factual publicity includes announcements of dates, times, locations, purposes, agendas, speakers, and fees, if any, involved with activities or events. Such factual publicity shall not imply that the involvement of VA serves as an endorsement of the general policies, activities, or products of Pet Partners and/or its affiliates. A disclaimer will accompany where the publicity references VA, publicity to the effect that no VA endorsement is intended. Pet Partners and its partners will clear all publicity materials with VA to ensure compliance with this paragraph. Pet Partners will not use VA logos, seals, flags, and other VA symbols without prior written approval from VA's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (who will obtain VA Office of Secretary approval). Approval is not guaranteed.

4. VHA will not use and has obtained no ownership interests in: Pet Partners or other Pet Partners names, logos, and/or trademarks (the Marks). VHA will obtain Pet Partners prior written approval to use the Marks.
5. This MoA is not intended to be an exclusive arrangement. The relationship established in this MoA in no way limits VHA or Pet Partners from establishing similar relationships with any other entity. Nothing in this MoA shall make Pet Partners and the VHA principal and agent or joint ventures. The Parties are independent with respect to one another and neither shall have any authority to represent or bind the other in any manner or to any extent whatsoever.
6. This MoA does not represent any endorsement by VHA of the general policies, activities, or products of Pet Partners.
7. Any publicity released by either Party concerning this MoA, the services or supports providing within, or any resulting outcomes, will be subject to prior written approval of the other Party.
8. Each Party shall bear its own costs, risks, and liabilities incurred by it arising out of its obligations and efforts under this MoA. Neither Party can commit the other to any cost, expense, or obligation without the prior written consent of that other Party.
9. The liability, if any, of the United States for injury or loss of property, or personal injury or death shall be governed exclusively by the provisions of the Federal Tort Claims Act.
10. Should this MoA lead to a formal contractual-type of agreement, the Parties will negotiate and memorialize such General Terms & Conditions in a formal document, including, but not limited to, a period of performance, funding issues, and liability matters. Neither Party may commit the other to any transfer of funds under this MoA absent a formally negotiated agreement.
11. This MoA may not be assigned or otherwise transferred by any Party, in whole or in part, without the expressed prior written consent of the other Party.

IX. AMENDMENT, DURATION, REVIEW, AND TERMINATION


1. The duration of this Agreement shall be 1 base year plus 2 option years running consecutively, subject to the availability of appropriated funds and is effective when signed by both Parties.
2. Amendments must be bilaterally executed in writing, signed by authorized representatives of both Parties. No oral or unilateral amendments will be effective.

3. This agreement may only be terminated in writing with 30 days' notice sent from the authorized representative of the terminating party. In the event this agreement is terminated, VA will not be liable for any costs, direct or indirect. In no case will any oral termination be effective, nor will any termination be attempted outside these stated requirements.
4. Only terminations done in accordance with the terms of this agreement may be done unilaterally.
5. Should disagreement arise as to the interpretation of the provisions of this agreement that cannot be resolved between the Parties' POCs, the area(s) of disagreement will be reduced to writing by each Party and presented to the authorized officials on both sides for resolution. If resolution cannot be reached at this level, the disagreement will be raised to the next level in accordance with the Parties' procedures for final resolution.

X. APPROVALS

Veterans Health Administration

Pet Partners

By: 
Richard A. Stone, M.D.
Executive in Charge
Office of the Under Secretary for Health

By: 
C. Annie Peters
President and CEO
Pet Partners

Date: 9/30/19

Date: 10/1/19