

## **Emotional Support Animal**

An emotional support animal helps patients manage their symptoms, providing comfort and security, reducing stress by facilitating adequate coping skills, allowing them to live a more comfortable life. The emotional support animal is used to assist a person with a specific mental health condition, such as the ones below:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Behavior disorders
- Learning disabilities / behavioral disturbances
- Traumatic events / post-traumatic stress
- Grief/bereavement

A service animal is usually a dog trained to perform specific tasks to assist a person with a physical or mental disability (e.g., guiding a legally blind person, recognizing the warning signs of an upcoming seizure). Service dogs can also be trained for other tasks such as fetching medication, searching a vacant room for potential threats, providing tactile stimulation during a handler's anxiety attack, etc.

The Fair Housing Act protects individuals with emotional support animals and service animals against discrimination. Denying housing or not allowing a person to live with the emotional support animal or service animal in their residence, or incurring additional charges to the tenant, is prohibited by the Fair Housing Act. However, damages caused by the animal while living in the dwelling can be the tenant's responsibility to cover.

### **Requirements To Obtain A Letter For A Support Animal:**

1. A letter must be given by a mental health professional licensed in the state where the patient is physically located.
2. The mental health professional should evaluate the patient, find sufficient clinical information to meet all applicable state standards for establishing a clinical relationship and establish diagnosis. No diagnosis shall be based solely upon the mental health professional's reading and/or interpretation of an online form submitted by the purported patient. The mental health provider shall establish that the patient is under their professional care and that requires an ongoing relationship (routine follow-up appointments). An ongoing relationship consists of **three to six follow-up appointments**.