



What Emotional Support Animals Do:

People have reported that they have experienced:

- Decreased loneliness, depression, and anxiety when holding or petting an animal
- Normalized heart rate and blood pressure
- Sense of independence and importance while taking care of their pet
- Improved motivation to do things that are good for their mental health
- Sense of purpose and increased positivity

Research has shown that animals can:

- Increase neurotransmitters that boost happiness
- Help with specific phobias
- Relieve symptoms of anxiety on planes
- Help individuals stabilize intense emotions
- Increase opportunities for socialization and connection
- Add structure due to pets requiring feeding, exercise, attention throughout the day

What is an Emotional Support Animal?

Emotional Support Animal (ESA) is an animal that provides therapeutic benefit to a person with a diagnosed mental health condition/ psychiatric disability.

- An animal whose presence is required for your mental wellbeing.
- They bring comfort and relieve symptoms of a psychiatric disability.

The owner must be considered to have a qualifying psychiatric disability by a licensed mental health professional (therapist, licensed clinical social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist) that is documented by a properly formatted prescription letter.

ESA versus a Service Animal

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), service animal is defined as “a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The tasks performed by the dog must be directly related to the person’s disability.” Examples are

- A Guide dog for persons with severe visual impairments or are blind
- A Hearing Dog for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing
- A Seizure Response Dog assists a person with a seizure disorder
- A psychiatric Service Dog that assists people living with disabilities detect the onset of psychiatric episodes and lessen their effects

ESA Accommodations

- Hawaii does not require business owners to allow emotional support animals to enter but does require accommodation of service animals.
- Business owners may choose to accommodate emotional support animals if they choose
- In accordance with the Fair Housing Act, Hawaii does require the allowance of emotional support animals for those who truly have a disability and a disability-related need for the animal.



Qualifying Mental Diagnoses for ESA

In order to qualify for an ESA, a person must have a mental health condition/psychiatric disability that limits regular life activity as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5-TR.

Examples include ADHD, anxiety disorders, depression, PTSD, bipolar disorder/mood disorder, schizophrenia. The person must also need the animal’s help for their health and treatment of their qualifying diagnosis.

A provider then determines if the animal is necessary for person’s overall functioning and if an ESA can provide emotional support, as well as how they do so.