



# ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP

The company of animals – whether as pets or service animals – can have a profound impact on a person’s quality of life and ability to recover from illnesses.

## NEARLY 70% OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS (84.6 MILLION) OWN A PET.<sup>1</sup>

### Of households with pets:<sup>2</sup>

- 80% believe their pets bring them happiness and emotional support;
- 55% believe their pets reduce anxiety and depression; and
- 66% believe their pets relieve stress.



## PET-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES ARE GOOD FOR BUSINESS



### Workplaces that adopt pet-friendly policies can experience benefits like:<sup>3</sup>

- Attracting more job candidates;
- Keeping their employees longer;
- Better employee health; and
- Increased productivity among workers.

## WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY ABOUT PETS AND HEALTH?

### Pet ownership can help:

- Improve cardiovascular health and physical activity;<sup>4</sup>
- Decrease stress and lower blood pressure;<sup>5</sup> and
- Reduce loneliness, which increases the risk of developing many chronic health conditions.<sup>6</sup>



## ANIMALS HELP PEOPLE WITH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

In people with cancer, animal-assisted interventions (i.e. therapy, education, activities) play a role in reducing anxiety, depression and aggression during treatment.<sup>7,8</sup>



For people receiving treatment for mental illnesses, animal-assisted interventions reduce anger, anxiety, depression, and general distress, while improving the ability to socialize.<sup>9</sup>

Animal interactions have the ability to help people who are critically ill by reducing stress, anxiety, and boredom; improving mood; and reducing heart rate and blood pressure.<sup>10</sup>



For people being treated for HIV, those who own dogs show fewer symptoms of depression and are better at taking medications —likely because of the routines that come with dog ownership.<sup>11</sup>

## SERVICE DOGS CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE



The majority of people with diabetes who own Diabetic Alert Dogs are less worried about extreme changes in insulin levels, and experience improved quality of life and the ability to participate in physical activities.<sup>12</sup>



People who are hearing impaired showed long-term reductions in depression after getting a service dog.<sup>13</sup>



Veterans with PTSD reported decreases in depression, social isolation, anxiety, and alcohol abuse, while also reporting improved sleep and better coping with flashbacks after being paired with service dogs.<sup>14,15</sup>



Additionally, service dogs may help lighten the responsibilities of caregivers by assisting those with disabilities to accomplish everyday tasks and alerting to symptoms of chronic health conditions.

## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

Share pics of your pets or other animals in your life and tell us how they impact your health by posting with #4mind4body.

We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body). You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

## ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

If you are taking steps to care for your mind, body, and soul but still feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org) to check your symptoms. It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and help you find tools and resources to feel better.

For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodyAnimals](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodyAnimals).



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## END NOTES:

### ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP

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