
TITLE: SERVICE ANIMAL POLICY

CATEGORY: COMPLIANCE

EFFECTIVE DATE: DECEMBER 15, 2025

PURPOSE: To provide clear guidelines for the presence of service animals in Carolina Health Centers facilities, ensuring compliance with:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act

POLICY: Carolina Health Centers, Inc. permits individuals with disabilities to be accompanied by service animals in all areas where patients, visitors, or members of the public are normally allowed to go.

DEFINITION OF A SERVICE ANIMAL

Under the ADA, a **service animal** is defined as:

A dog (or in some cases, a miniature horse) that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Guiding individuals who are blind or have low vision.
- Alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Pulling a wheelchair
- Assisting during a seizure
- Providing mobility support
- Retrieving items or performing safety checks for psychiatric disabilities

Note: Emotional support animals, therapy animals, or pets **ARE NOT** considered service animals under this policy.

SCOPE: This policy applies to all Carolina Health Centers sites employees, contractors, volunteers, and visitors.

PROCEDURE:

1. STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES & PERMISSIBLE QUESTIONS

Staff may **only ask** two questions **if it is not obvious** that the dog is a service animal:

- Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

2. Staff **may not**:

- Ask for documentation or proof of disability.
- Require the service animal to demonstrate its task.
- Ask about the person's medical condition.

3. **Staff Accommodation for Service Animal Related Fear or Discomfort:**

CHC is committed to maintaining a safe and supportive environment for all staff. If a staff member experiences fear, anxiety, or discomfort related to the presence of an S Service Animal, the following protocol applies:

- The staff member should promptly notify their supervisor or team lead of their concern.
- Supervisors will make reasonable efforts to reassign duties or facilitate a switch with another qualified staff member so that patient care and clinic operations are not disrupted.
- Staff are encouraged to communicate openly and respectfully about their needs. No staff member will be required to interact with an ESA if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Supervisors should document the accommodation and ensure that all staff are aware of the process for requesting a switch.
- If needed, staff may seek support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for additional guidance or stress management resources.

4. **CONTROL OF THE ANIMAL**

- The service animal must always be under control of the owner/handler (e.g., leash, harness, or voice control).
- The owner/handler is responsible for **cleaning up after the animal**.
- CHC staff are **not responsible** for the care or supervision of the service animal.

5. **EXCLUSION OF A SERVICE ANIMAL**

A service animal **may be asked to leave** only if:

- It is **out of control**, and the owner/handler does not take effective action to control it.
- It is **not housebroken**.
- It poses a **direct threat** to the health or safety of others (e.g., aggression, disruptive barking, infections)
- **If the animal is excluded**, the person with a disability must still be given the opportunity to receive services **without the animal**.

Allergies and fear of such animals are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals. Nor can service animals be excluded based solely on their breed. IF the actual behavior of a particular service animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others or the animal has a history of such behavior, it may be excluded.

6. MINIATURE HORSES

CHC will allow a **miniature horse** trained to perform tasks for a person with a disability if:

- The horse is housebroken.
- Under the owner/handler's control
- The facility can accommodate its size/type safely.
- The presence does not compromise safety.

7. HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

Service animals may accompany patients:

- Into exam rooms
- Through lobbies and public spaces
- In inpatient areas unless infection control or medical necessity restricts access (e.g., operating rooms, sterile environments)

*Decisions to restrict access must be **based on individual risk**, not assumptions about the animal or disability.

COMPLAINTS OR GRIEVANCES

Any concerns or grievances related to service animal access may be directed to:

Compliance Officer/Section 1557 Coordinator

Carolina Health Centers, Inc.

313 Main Street, Greenwood, SC 29646

Phone: 864-388-0301

Email: compliance@carolinahealthcenters.org

Patients may also file a complaint with the **Office for Civil Rights (OCR)** at www.hhs.gov/ocr.