



Title **Mobility Assistance Dogs for Mobility-Impaired People**

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Aim

To gather evidence on the clinical efficacy, safety, and cost of mobility assistance dogs (MADs); give an opinion on the definition of the target clientele and on the advisability of instituting a government MAD placement program; define the procedures for implementing such a program, if applicable.

Conclusions and results

Using a mobility assistance dog can enhance, on a daily basis, the functional independence of a mobility-impaired individual and appears to be safe, both for the users and those around them. In addition, the interest in this specific assistive modality can only increase, since it can replace several technical aids, thus resulting in cost savings for the healthcare system and user. No technical mobility aid can be used to perform as many daily activities and social roles (life habits) as an assistance dog, and at the same time reduce the burden on helpers. The cost of purchasing and maintaining a dog may be an obstacle for mobility-impaired people who might otherwise benefit from canine technical mobility assistance. Coverage of the purchase and annual maintenance costs by the public health insurance plan will improve access to this assistive modality in accordance with the principles of universality, access, and equity, on which the healthcare system is founded. The definition of the eligible clientele could be modeled after that used in the Ministerial Program for Assistance for Daily and Domestic Living and be rounded out with criteria similar to those used by the MIRA Foundation. Clinical placement criteria could be established to improve the rigor and standardization of evaluations of mobility assistance dogs and their users. There does not seem to be any major contraindication to using mobility assistance dogs, and their presence in public places (restaurants, schools, etc) seems to be given in our society. However, it will be necessary to examine the definition of "public place" given in Section 15 of the Québec Charter

of Rights and Freedoms, which seeks to eliminate any restriction on access to public places, and outline the exceptions that could create problematic situations.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, AETMIS recommends that mobility assistance dogs be added to the list of technical aids covered by the program administered by the RAMQ (*Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec*) under the Health Insurance Act, and that the Regulation respecting devices which compensate for a physical deficiency be amended accordingly.

Methods

Literature search focused on scientific, legal, regulatory, and normative information carried by querying general (ie, MEDLINE) and specialized (ie, ABLEDATA) databases and targeted papers published between January 2000 and December 2006. The references in the publications retrieved were manually searched, which yielded papers dating from 1988 to 1999.