

Reasons for Decision:

Order # AP1920-0163

On <date removed>, <name removed> appealed the decision of the Director, River Heights/Fort Garry with respect to the funding level and funding period for a service dog. The decision letter was dated <date removed>.

The Department provided funding of \$70 per month for a service dog, effective <date removed>. On <date removed>, the Department provided one month retroactive for <date removed>.

<name removed> told the Board that, subsequent to filing the appeal, the Department approved funding of <amount removed> per month retroactive to <date removed>. <name removed> indicated they wished to continue their appeal on both the monthly amount and the denial of funding for <months removed>.

The Department stated its case notes showed that <name removed> advised it verbally in <date removed> that they were waiting for a service dog. <name removed> provided a doctor's note in <date removed> stating that <name removed> would benefit from a service dog.

A <date removed> case note confirmed that <name removed> had received their dog. Their application for funding was sent to the Department's program specialist, as the Department did not have a policy on service dogs.

The Department stated <name removed> submitted certification of training for a service dog in <date removed>. The Department originally approved funding effective <date removed>, when the certification was provided. Subsequently, the Department made funding retroactive to <date removed>, because that was when <name removed> provided written confirmation they had a service dog and requested funding.

The Department referenced its written report, outlining a series of contacts with <name removed> about the documentation required to consider their application for funding. The Department asserted it did not receive the documentation until <year removed>.

The monthly amount of \$70 was reviewed by the Department's program specialist, who determined that amount was sufficient to fund basic and essential needs. The Department will also cover emergency veterinarian treatment as required.

The Department told the Board it reviewed veterinary expenses submitted by <name removed>. Some of the expenses were not considered to be basic and essential.

<name removed> asserted that they called their worker in <date removed>, and was told that there was no funding for service dog. The appellant disputed the Department's assertion that it requested documentation, and questioned why the Department would ask for documentation if funding was not available.

<name removed> told the Board they contacted the Department every three to four months to enquire about funding, after receiving the dog in <date removed>. The appellant asserted that they would have provided the original doctor note, the training certificate and a letter from the service dog provider in <date removed> if the Department asked.

<name removed> stated it costs <amount removed> per month to maintain their dog. Their dog requires a high protein diet, constant treats to reinforce trained behaviour, and service vests. Their dog is also overweight, so their veterinarian has prescribed a special dog food. The food, which is sold by the veterinarian, costs <amount removed> for 12 kg, and lasts 38 days.

<name removed> noted their dog will not eat dry dog food, so they add ground beef, chicken, brown rice and beef stock to get them to eat. The treats they use are also expensive. The add-in food costs approximately <amount removed> every two weeks.

In response to a question from the Board, <name removed> stated there is no reasonably priced alternative to the prescribed food, as that is the only food the veterinarian sells. <name removed> stated the veterinarian does not approve of dog food sold in grocery stores.

<name removed> expressed frustration that the Department requested a veterinarian-approved diet plan, and then denied funding for the plan.

The Board is concerned that <name removed> has not explored less expensive alternatives to the caring for their dog, including less expensive treats, purchasing the prescribed food at a pet store and trimming the dog's nails themselves.

The Board understands the Department's requirement for documented evidence that a companion dog is a bona fide service animal. <name removed> did not provide the evidence until <year removed>, but the evidence supports <name removed>'s assertion that they received the dog in late <date removed>.

After carefully reviewing the verbal and written evidence presented to it, the Board determines that the Department assessed <name removed>' eligibility for a monthly funding allowance according to the legislation, regulations, and policy, and confirms the Director's decision to provide \$70 per month. The Board varies the Director's decision to provide funding retroactive to <date removed>, and orders the Department to provide funding from <dates removed>.

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