



Animal Assisted Interventions International Frequently Asked Questions

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About AAIL

Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAIL) grew out of many discussions within Assistance Dogs International (ADI) about how best to support the growing number of organizations working within the field of Animal Assisted Therapy, Education and Activities (together referred to as Animal Assisted Intervention or AAI). Many organizations that were training assistance dogs, were also seeing an increase in requests to place dogs with healthcare providers, human service providers (social work, education, etc.), and facilities. These organizations lacked an internal focus for creating international standards, developing professionalism, competencies, accreditation or certification, and offering networking opportunities in AAI.

After years of international meetings to create purpose, mission, terminology, types of membership, and standards, Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAIL) was formally registered in the Netherlands on the 7th of February, 2013, and an interim board was established.

AAIL's goal is to create an international community of practitioners and animal trainers who share interest in the human-animal bond and professional standards of training and practice. AAIL will provide conferences and facilitate member communications to meet this end.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Why should organizations and individual healthcare/human service/education providers join AAIL?

A: AAIL is a member driven organization that realized in 2010 that while there were many organizations that offered registration for volunteer visiting teams, there was nothing available for healthcare, human service, education providers and dog training organizations that train dogs specifically, for this kind of work. AAIL began meeting an unmet need for developing standards, competencies and accreditation for professionals. In addition, AAIL recognized that many of the volunteer visiting organizations did not accommodate teams to work with healthcare, human service and education professionals in formal work. The preparation, education, evaluation, practice and accreditation is very different than volunteer visiting.

Q: What is the difference between registration, certification and accreditation?

A: In the case of AAI's, many organizations use the following terminology as an industry standard. It may vary in some parts of the world.

- **Registration** implies that the handler, the dog, and the team working together has been screened for some set of organizational internal criteria.
- **Certification** typically implies evaluation of formal education/training. In the case of AAILs, a certification would require that one organization offered formal education to both human and dog in the category for which the human carries credentials. For example, in AAT, a therapist and dog would train together at a professional level – by someone who has knowledge/experience in both therapy and animal training/behavior/communication for that professional level of work. An actual certification is typically achieved by having an independent third party evaluate the education given by a separate organization. For example, an occupational therapist attends university for several years and then achieves certification by taking their board exam by the National Board of Certification of Occupational Therapy, NOT the university in which they received their training. In professional level healthcare, human service provider and education fields, it may be considered unethical for an organization to offer the education and then offer the final certification exam. The exception is university programs that have an internal structure for this kind of program.
- **Accreditation** is a process of validation of an applicant's (organization or individual) education, experience, and credibility to meet a set of standards, competencies and quality assurances set by an outside third party peer reviewed board (AAIL). Potentially, the accreditation process allows the accredited organization to offer education, evaluation and certification. For example, an organization that achieves accreditation from AAIL has proven that their practices are acceptable and ethical, and demonstrated quality assurance, and are competent to teach, test and offer certification to third parties. AAIL is currently reviewing this possibility in regions around the world to determine if allowing accredited parties to offer certification to others is in our best interest and scope. AAIL has no final decision at the time this Q & A was written.

Q: Who joins AAIL?

A: Organizations or individual degreed/licensed healthcare and human service providers who offer animal assisted therapy and education (AAE); organizations that offer volunteer visiting or animal assisted activities (AAA); and organizations who train and/or place dogs with volunteers (also AAA), healthcare and human services providers (AAT), and facility dogs.

Q: Why should my organization apply for AAll membership?

A: It is important that your organization is developed based on best practice. By joining AAll you will be able to influence the future direction of how practitioners develop AAls across the world and you will have access to like-minded people who want to work towards achieving high standards, ensuring they support their dogs and clients in the best possible way, thereby building a reputation for excellent work.

Q: Are there different kinds of membership?

A: AAll currently offers 6 fields of membership, four of which can be accredited:

- **Animal Assisted Activities (AAA)** members are human and dog teams who are active in social/recreation based animal assisted activities, or who work alongside AAE and AAT to support individual client/patient/student goals set forth by qualified professionals. AAA is eligible for accreditation.
- **Animal Assisted Education (AAE)** members are licensed/degreed or equivalent educational professionals who have dogs assist them in educational processes. AAE is eligible for accreditation.
- **Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)** members are licensed/degreed or equivalent healthcare and human service providers who have dogs in their practice. AAT is eligible for accreditation.
- **Animal Support (AS)** members are organizations that train dogs to work in facilities and/or alongside human healthcare and human service providers. In addition, any individual who 'handles' a dog for sessions assumes the role of AS. A therapist who handles their own dog in sessions would complete AAT and AS sections. A teacher who handles their own dog in the classroom would complete AAE and AS. Similarly, AAA handlers assume the role of AS. AS is eligible for accreditation.
- **Educational Institution (EI)** members teach coursework that supports AAls (AAA, AAT, AAE or AS). Educational Institutions are not eligible for AAll accreditation, but support teaching curriculum that supports the standards and practice of AAll.
- **Affiliate Organizations (AO)** support the AAll mission and standards, but the organization does not quite fit the membership fields or is not active in practicing AAA, AAE, AAT or AS. Affiliate organizations are not eligible for AAll accreditation.

Q: What is the difference between full membership, associate membership, affiliate membership and educational institution membership?

A: **Full members** have voting rights and may serve as members of the board of directors. These are organizations or individual healthcare and human service providers that actively practice or are planning to practice AAA, AAE, AAT or AS.

Associate members do not have voting rights and cannot serve as members of the board of directors.

Affiliate organizations support the AAll mission and standards, people may be in working groups to develop areas or support projects, but the organization does not quite fit the membership fields or is not active in practicing AAA, AAE, AAT or AS. Affiliate organizations are not eligible for AAll accreditation and have no voting rights. Assistance Dogs International is an example of an affiliate organization, however, ADI member organizations might actually fit into AAA, AAE, AAT and/or AS fields. **Affiliate membership is by initiation only.**

Educational Institutions (EI) that teach AAI course work (AAA, AAE, AAT, or AS) and are not organizations that train dogs or register handlers and dogs to participate in AAA, AAE, AAT or AS, would be eligible for affiliate membership. For example: A University that teaches AAI course work

on-line, in-class, via workshops/conferences, etc. may ensure that the AAll standards/competencies are included in curriculum as best practices. Educational institutions are not eligible for AAll accreditation.

Q: What is accreditation?

A: Accreditation is a process by which a professional association (e.g. AAll) sets standards/competencies and grants recognition to member organizations/individuals that have met predetermined criteria. The member demonstrates knowledge and fulfillment of predetermined standards and competencies for individual healthcare and human service providers, dog handler and dog training organizations that train dogs specifically for AAA, AAE, and AAT. Many times, this results in developing or modifying policies and procedures which ensure the quality of the member.

AAll is a member driven organization. Our members, along with our board of directors have developed a series of minimum standards of best practice to reflect the way we believe AAI should be operated to ensure the best outcomes for all involved.

The AAll accreditation process has been designed to enable programs to show that they are meeting these minimum standards in daily practice. We do not regard the accreditation assessment as merely a 'test' but rather an opportunity to check how your program is working with the support of, and in discussion with, peers who have been through a similar process. The accreditation process will give you a great opportunity to benchmark your work against the standards and the work of your peers. We aim for it to be a collaborative and educational experience for everyone taking part. The accreditation process is a way to demonstrate that you have professional level policies, procedures, and practice as foundations in your work.

Q: What is the difference between becoming a member and becoming accredited?

A: For the foreseeable future, you will be able to be a member of AAll if you meet the membership criteria. In the longer-term, we anticipate that membership will only be open to programs that have been accredited, ensuring that best practices are in place throughout your facility or organization.

Q: Who is eligible for becoming accredited?

A: The following lists eligibility for AAll accreditation:

- Active Full Members of AAll (Full member status must be continuously maintained for accreditation to be effective, with no more than a 3 month lapse).
- Individual licensed/degreed or equivalent healthcare/human service providers.
- Organizations with healthcare/human service providers (for example: hospitals, clinics, residential facilities, schools, etc.)
- Organizations that provide training and/or placement of dogs in the categories of AAA, AAE, or AAT.

AAll does not currently offer accreditation to the following:

- Individual dog trainers
- Affiliate members
- Educational organizations that teach Animal Assisted Interventions (AAA, AAE, AAT, and AS)

Q: Why aren't Affiliate Members and Educational Institutions that teach AAI's eligible for accreditation?

A: AAll has set standards for active practice in AAA, AAE, AAT and AS. Our standards are set for practitioners, dogs, participants and the people who handle, train, and place them for work in these areas.

They are the people and dogs 'in the field'. AAll standards and competencies may be adopted and included in Educational Institutions that have curriculum for AAI's and part of the final outcome of the students will be that they practice AAA, AAE, AAT or AS. Affiliate members are organizations that support our mission and AAI's, but are not directly involved in the active practice, or do not have members who are active in AAA, AAE, AAT or AS.

Q: What is involved in completing the accreditation process?

A: Accreditation involves a formal process of creating a portfolio of information and in-person interviews/observation to show that your work meets what our members and board have determined to be important educational preparation, standards of practice, competencies, policies, and procedures.

Q: How do I know which parts of the accreditation manual to complete?

A: The accreditation manual is filled out according to the services your organization provides. All individual practitioners and organizations fill out the following:

- A. Accreditation Application
- B. Acknowledgement of Adherence to Animal Health and Welfare Standards
- C. General Accreditation Documentation that is completed by ALL AAll accreditation candidates, regardless of field.
 - a. Preparation and Running AAI Sessions
 - b. Dog Health and Welfare
 - c. Dog Selection and Training
 - d. Professional Documents
- D. Field Specific Standards of Practice (AAA, AAE, AAT, & AS)
 - a. Standards of Practice for the Training, Health & Welfare of Dogs
 - b. Standards of Practice for the Dog Handler
 - c. Standards of Practice for the Dog

Then, depending upon which fields you are active in (AAA, AAE, AAT and AS), you will additionally complete the following sections:

- d. Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Therapy
- e. Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Activity
- f. Standards of Practice for Animal Assisted Education

If you are a healthcare provider or train dogs to work with healthcare providers, complete AAT. If you are an educator or train dogs to work with educators, complete AAE. If your organization has teams provide visitations or you train dogs for teams that visit, complete AAA. Animal Support organizations complete all general accreditation documentation and field specific (AAA, AAE and/or AAT) for the areas they train and place dogs.

Q: How long does it take to become accredited?

A: The length of time to complete the process depends upon the individual practitioner/educator or organization. AAll recognizes that every practice and facility is different, and this makes it critical

that we respect the range of skills of our members, to ensure that we maintain strong ethics, morals, and standards to ensure that our clients and animals are cared for and cared about, and that we are adhering to our individual discipline's scope of practice.

Q: What are the costs involved with becoming accredited?

A: There will be internal costs in preparation for the accreditation process (continuing education, staff development, administration time, etc.), and the accreditation fee which will cover AAll administration fee, AAll evaluator travel, hotel, and related expenses, etc. The Board of AAll has yet to assess the fee. It is anticipated that the fee will be in the region of \$1000-\$1500 USD. This fee is payable regardless of the outcome of the accreditation assessment. Your membership fee is included in the accreditation processing fees for the year of accreditation.

Q: How often do organizations renew accreditation?

A: The accreditation process is valid for a period of five (5) years. *Membership* is renewed each year and continuous membership is required to maintain accreditation status (with no more than a 3-month lapse). At the 5-year mark, re-accreditation takes place.

Q: Is there support available to go through the accreditation process?

A: AAll mentors are available to guide you through the process. The number of mentors available to each region will grow over time. Once accredited, members are eligible to become a mentor to others. Mentor sessions, discussions, or round tables will also take place at conferences.

Q: Is a mentor the same person as an assessor?

A: In some cases a mentor and assessor may be the same person. Any willing accredited member (individual healthcare/human service provider or educator; or a representative of an already accredited organization) can become a mentor for the accreditation process. However, there are only a limited number of assessors, so that we may ensure reliability in the process.

Q: How do I identify who our assessor is?

A: Currently, there are limited assessors available as it is a new process. We do expect it to grow at a reasonable rate as more and more people become accredited, we will have more mentors and more assessors. You may go to the website for a list of assessors and their country of origin to locate the closest assessor.