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Tackling the Terms:
Baseline Definitions for Equine-Assisted Services

ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The number of programs using horses to benefit veterans has increased and expanded in recent decades. These programs vary in many ways, to include how they involve the horse, the problems or symptoms they address, expertise and professionalism, effectiveness, and evidence. Some of these programs are associated with prominent academic institutions, and others grew from a backyard stable and a personal commitment. As service provision expanded, so did a massive, ambiguous, imprecise, and often complicated and confusing vocabulary about providing programming incorporating equines. The terminology confuses recipients of services as well as advocates, providers, funders, policy makers, media, researchers, and regulators. As a result, program participants are often unable to identify and access the most appropriate service for their needs; providers inconsistently portray the services they provide and their efficacy; insurance companies lack useful payment codes and requirements; and researchers are unable to assess efficacy across programs.

To address this challenge, the Bob Woodruff Foundation funded a multi-disciplinary consortium of individuals to conduct a two-year consensus-building process. These individuals, all recognized as leaders in the fields committed to incorporating horses and other equines in services that benefit people, recently published *Optimal Terminology for Services that Incorporate Horses to Benefit People*. This document will guide all stakeholders to name and describe diverse services that incorporate horses to benefit people. This guide provides necessary clarity and structure to programs incorporating equines in services to people.

KEY FINDINGS

The final consensus document outlines specific terms and definitions for future use, and identifies terms not recommended for continued use.

Equine-assisted Services is the optimal unifying term for referencing multiple services across three main areas:

- *Therapy*, including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language pathology, and psychotherapy and counseling. Licensed therapy professionals who work within the scope of practice of their particular discipline provide these therapies.
- *Learning*, encompassing equine-assisted learning in education, equine-assisted learning in organizations, and equine-assisted learning in personal development
- *Horsemanship*, encompassing adaptive equestrian sports, adaptive riding or therapeutic riding, driving, and interactive vaulting

These terms should be discontinued: equine therapy, equestrian therapy, equine-assisted activities and therapies, equine-assisted therapy, hippotherapist, horseback riding therapy, and therapy riding.

IMPLICATIONS

- Providers should describe the equine-assisted services they provide with the optimal terminology so consumers can identify clearly the services and the provider's type and level of expertise.
- Consumers should carefully select the appropriate service provider based on the type of service they are looking for and the provider's expertise in that area.
- Insurance payers should revise their payment codes and requirements to reflect the specifications in the consensus document in order to offer appropriate compensation for services.
- Informed funders should understand terminology and program differences when making investment decisions.
- When publishing content about equine-assisted services, researchers and the media should identify clearly the specific equine activity.

RESEARCH CONDUCTED

PATH Intl. initiated the consensus-building process in early 2018. Participants included representatives of: American Hippotherapy Association, Inc. (AHA, Inc.), Certification Board for Equine Interaction Professionals (CBEIP), Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (Eagala), Equine Experiential Education Association (E3A), Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.), and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; academics and researchers who study services that incorporate horses to benefit people; providers and funders of services that incorporate horses to benefit people; and service recipients and their advocates. A working group compiled a comprehensive baseline list of terms used to name or describe relevant services over the past 40 years and surveyed over 1,700 service providers and stakeholders about the meaning and use of those terms. The survey results were the basis for an intensive summit, during which participants built the framework for the consensus document. Multiple stakeholder groups reviewed and endorsed the optimal terminology document.

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

- These recommendations enhance the professionalism, scientific advancement, and viability of diverse services that incorporate horses to benefit people.
- Those who provide, receive, fund, research, or reimburse services will understand the program distinctions and value.
- Researchers study the specific interventions further, so research accurately explores the scientific basis of different equine-assisted services and builds the evidence base.

REFERENCE

W Wood, K Alm, J Benjamin, L Thomas, D Anderson, L Pohl, and M Kane, "Optimal Terminology for Services in the United States That Incorporate Horses to Benefit People: A Consensus Document." *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 27, No. 1 (2021).

ABOUT PATH INTL.:

The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International® (PATH Intl.®) was formed in 1969 to promote safety and optimal outcomes in equine-assisted services (EAS) for individuals with special needs. At 881 member centers, more than 66,000 children and adults, including 6,200 veterans, may find improved health, wellness and a sense of pride, independence, and fun through involvement with horses. Through a wide variety of credentialing and educational resources, the association helps individuals start and maintain successful EAS programs. There are nearly 62,500 volunteers, 5,011 instructors, 7,800 equines and thousands of contributors from all over the world helping people at PATH Intl. Member Centers.

ABOUT STAND SMART FOR HEROES:

The Bob Woodruff Foundation is proud to partner with best-in-class organizations to provide important research findings to the community of organizations that represent and serve post-9/11 veterans, service members, families, and caregivers. For more information on the Bob Woodruff Foundation and Stand SMART For Heroes, please see bobwoodrufffoundation.org.

