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300% rise in guide dogs planned

The Health and Welfare Ministry plans to increase by threefold the number of guide dogs for the blind by 2001, ministry officials said Monday.

The plan calls for 2,600 dogs to come into use.

That would mean 40 percent of the 7,000 people who meet the government's criteria as needing guide dogs will actually get one, officials said.

A representative of Tokyo-based Eye Mate Inc., a non-profit organization that trains dogs for the blind and teaches recipients how to use them, welcomed the plan as a significant progress.

But he noted that Japan remains far behind the United States and other advanced countries in the extent of the use of guide dogs.

It costs about ¥1.5 million a year for the upkeep of a single guide dog. The expenses are shouldered equally by the national and local governments.