

THE CASE FOR PET-FRIENDLY AGED CARE

Based on findings of the 2017 AWLA Pets in Aged Care Study and knowledge base of the Positive Ageing in the Company of Animals website at www.petfriendlyagedcare.com.au

Pet ownership

- At 63%, Australian households have one of highest rates of pet ownership in the world and the number is expected to grow. Only the US (65%) and NZ (64%) are higher.
- There are more than 27 million pets in Australia.
- Baby boomer pet owners are now beginning to access aged care services.

Pet friendliness of Australian aged care facilities & services

- Only 18% of residential aged care facilities allow pets to reside with their owners.
- Only 9% of in-home care services say they offer pet-friendly services.
- Factors which stop aged care service providers implementing pet-friendly policies/initiatives include (but are not limited to):
 - Inability to fund programs;
 - Shortage of personnel able or willing to deliver support;
 - OH&S, financial and legal concerns.
- Tasmania (35%) has the highest percentage of residential aged care facilities that consider allowing residents to keep their pets. Victoria and NSW have the lowest rate (14%).

Benefits of pet-friendly aged care services

Health benefits are widely researched

The health benefits of the human-animal bond are widely accepted. One study reports that pet owners visit a doctor 15% less than non-pet owners. Pet-friendly aged care services also improve the pet's quality of life. This is particularly true for in-home care, where pets benefit from programs such as dog walking, transport assistance for vet trips and yard maintenance.

Social benefits to the elderly

Owner-pet contact reduces feelings of loneliness and eases transition to aged care settings.

Increases the take up of aged care services

Some pet owners will not move to facilities because it means surrendering their pet.

Reduces animal surrender rates to shelters

About 7% of surrenders are directly related to the necessity of aged care but a far higher surrender figure is likely to involve elderly-related issues such as unsuitable pet accommodation and lack of financial means to care for a pet. Based on surrender rates in AWLA member settings, an estimated 9,600 surrenders to the RSPCA were elderly-related in 2016.

Encourages in-home care

Staying with a pet at home helps provide independence to the elderly until they require nursing care. Home care subsidised by government accounts for approximately \$38,000 per person per year, while residential care costs the government approximately \$54,000 a year.