

Status of pets in aged care

CANA 2023 survey findings

Take our online surveys

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The Australia CAN movement fights for a world that values the extraordinary bond between people and their pets.



**Companion
Animal Network**
Australia CAN

Objectives

Using data collected from our surveys, CANA hopes to provide an up-to-date snapshot of the community's views on keeping pets and their owners together for longer.

The data collected will have a valuable role informing submissions to government, encouraging facility owners to embrace pets and influencing community attitudes around lifelong pet ownership.

It is CANA's intention that the surveys will remain open to track evolving attitudes and provide interested parties with easily accessible data that remains current.

The surveys offer anyone who wants their voice heard an easy and effective way to share their opinions.

CANA thanks all participants for their contribution.



Companion
Animal Network
Australia CAN

Foreword

While we've always recognised the benefits of owning a pet—be that through companionship, staying active or teaching our children responsibility—we've been slow to understand the enduring value of the human–animal bond for elderly people.

Improving awareness and influencing policy in this space are core tasks of Companion Animal Network Australia (CANA). Our Pet Friendly Aged Care online resource is leading the way in starting the conversations we need to have around pet ownership into old age.

To complement expert opinion and international data, CANA established a framework to survey the views and experience of Australians. These surveys will continue to collect responses but are already offering statistically sound results.

It is our hope that the voices of our elderly, along with those of aged care staff and the wider public, will open hearts and minds to the mental and physical benefits of lifelong pet ownership.



**Melissa Penn, president, and Trish Ennis, CEO,
Companion Animal Network Australia**



**Companion
Animal Network
Australia CAN**

Who is CANA?

Through its division Pet Friendly Aged Care, **Companion Animal Network Australia** (CANA) is working to preserve the bond between older Australians and their furry, finned and feathered friends.



18%

Australia is a nation of animal lovers, yet just 18% of aged care facilities consider allowing residents to keep a pet.

Pet Friendly Aged Care was established to highlight the often-catastrophic emotional harm caused when older people are forced to give up their pets upon moving into an aged care home, and to provide a more practical way forward.

Our goals are to:

- Increase the number of pet-friendly aged care support services to prevent animals from being euthanised or surrendered to shelters
- Maximise the physical and emotional health of our animal-loving older people
- Promote the social benefits for communities who welcome pets.

CANA exists to support the human-animal bond

Results overview

It is always exciting to hear in people's own voices how their relationship with a pet impacts their lives, and how these relationships are being supported within the aged care support system, both community and residential based.

The survey data collected broadly reflects the geographical distribution of population across Australian states and territories, with a response bias from Queensland. This is not unexpected, as there is a pets and older persons project in place there.

Reports from older persons reflect the known positive impacts of pets including feeling loved, company, providing meaning and purpose to daily lives, exercise opportunities, positive mental health benefits (laughter, joy, socialisation, calming), tactile engagement and sense of security and safety.

While there were three times more dogs reported than cats, and a small number of birds and other species, the positive impacts of human animal relations were reported across all species.

Some negative factors were noted, such as the physical difficulties of older people caring for aging pets. Yet, even with these challenges, people saw the relationship with a pet as, on balance, being beneficial.

At times people expressed solidarity with ageing animals—they are considered family members who have shared family stories over many years and, hence, not to be discarded as though they were inanimate meaningless objects. This is important, as it indicates the potential to inflict moral injury on some older people is high when forcing them to relinquish loved animals.

I commend the enclosed findings as a powerful and meaningful contribution to our better understanding of the role pets play in the lives of older people.

Dr Janette Young,
University of South Australia

Methodology

The three surveys that have generated the data that follows were designed to capture opinions specific to the experiences of older people, aged care staff, aged care facility operators, in-home carers and the wider public.

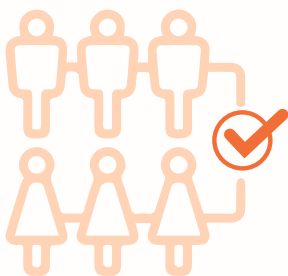
In designing the surveys, CANA asked people from the industry, home care, residential care and the broader aged care sector for the kind of information they'd like to gather.

The surveys can be completed online and are available at our Pet Friendly Aged Care website. Each survey takes around 2 minutes to complete.

Awareness of the surveys has been primarily built through the CANA network of companion animal member agencies across Australia.

Respondent details can be found in the appendix at the end of this booklet.

Our results were sourced from the following groups and locations:



- ☐ Aged care residents
- ☐ Aged care facility owners
- ☐ Family members of an aged care resident
- ☐ General Public
- ☐ Staff members at an aged care facility
- ☐ Participants receiving in Home Aged Care or
- ☐ My Aged Care support



“The gentle loving presence of a dog is simply irreplaceable”



68%*

of people believe residents
in aged care should be able
to own a pet

CANA General Aged Care Survey Results in detail



What did we find? Participants were invited to select their top 3 benefits of pet ownership for people in aged care settings, with physical and mental health topping the list.

In an aged care setting

What are the main benefits of allowing pets?



86%

Improved mental and physical health



75%

Companionship



56%

Maintaining an existing pet-owner bond



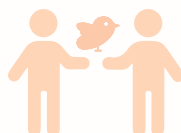
56%

Reducing the forced surrendering of pets



45%

Easing the transition to aged care



39%

Pets socialising with our residents

What does it mean? As our population ages, solutions to maintaining a high quality of life include finding ways to help ageing people retain their pets.

What did we find? Education among aged care providers and a lack of funding to facilitate design changes are believed to be the main barriers to pet ownership in aged care facilities.

In an aged care setting

What are the main barriers to pet ownership?



Lack of education for aged care facility owners on the benefits of pet ownership.

60%



Lack of funding for design changes to accommodate pets is a major challenge.

58%



56%

Shortage of employees or volunteers to deliver or support pet programs.



54%

Health and safety concerns for other residents and/or staff.



38%

Discontent from residents who prefer pet-free living.



34%

Vulnerability to legal action if something goes wrong.

To help allowing pets in aged care settings

What is the best model?



Direct pet ownership by residents



Shared access to re-homed pets adopted by the facility



Family members allowed to bring pets on visits



No pets allowed under any circumstances



Incursion program by a local provider

What does it mean? Much work is to be done to increase awareness of the physical and emotional benefits to residents derived from pet ownership, while supportive funding models will reduce the burden of design changes to accommodate pets.



**“Sometimes my
pet is only reason
for living.”**



86%*

of people believe pets
improve mental
and physical health

CANA Residential Aged Care Survey Results in detail



What did we find? The vast majority of aged care facilities do not permit pet ownership, with numbers that closely reflect those of previous reports.

Live in pets

Does this facility permit residents to keep their own pet? *

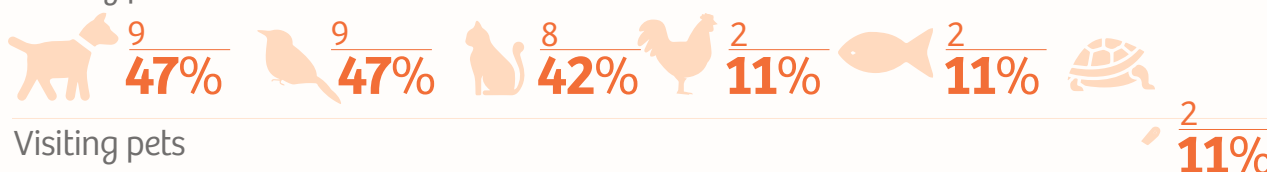


What species is / are the pets kept on site?

Residents pets Number of pets / percentage



Facility pets



Visiting pets



In-Facility pets

Does your facility keep one or more shared whole-of-facility pets on-site?



Does your facility permit residents to keep their own pet?



What does it mean? Limited progress is being made in maintaining the human-animal bond in aged care facilities, although visiting and shared pets are providing residents of some facilities with valuable pet contact.

Visiting pets

Does your facility have a visiting pets program?



Are family members or friends permitted to bring pets when visiting residents?








How would you rate the importance of access to pets in aged care?

0% Unimportant 1% Quite important
1% Some importance 14% Very important

Vitally important ✓



How pet friendly is your facility?

	30%	Somewhat pet friendly (residents have minimal access to pets, largely ad hoc)
	27%	Basically pet friendly (residents have access to shared pets on-site or as part of an official visiting pets program)
	21%	Very pet friendly (residents can have their own pets in this facility)
	19%	Not pet friendly (residents have no current or intended access to pets)
	4%	Highly pet friendly (residents have access to shared, visiting and owned pets and this facility has developed official policies and procedures on pets)

“Having animals that depend on me keeps me active”



1%*

Just 1% of people believe pets should not be allowed in aged care settings

CANA In-Home Aged Care Survey Results



What did we find? Companionship and reduced loneliness are the most highly valued benefits of pet ownership among those surveyed.

How many pets do you have?

1 40% 

2-3 39%  

4-8 21%     

1 Pet 40% **5 Pets 6%**
2 Pets 27% **6 Pets 4%**
3 Pets 12% **8 Pets 5%**
4 Pets 6%

What species is / are the pets kept on site?

 $\frac{147}{70.33\%}$  $\frac{40}{19.14\%}$

What are the benefits for you of having a pet companion?



74%

Companionship/
Reduced loneliness



44%

Happiness.
Improved mental
health



42%

Like family/
Love responsibility



31%

Exercise/Activity

16%

Security and
safety

11%

Increased social
connections

What does it mean? Building assistance with pets into aged care support packages is an obvious way to ensure older people continue to enjoy the many social and physical benefits of pet ownership.

Do you live alone?

61.06% Yes

"He provides sanity and a reason to rise each day"

"The gentle loving presence of a dog is simply irreplaceable"

Is there anyone now that helps you to care for your pet? *

55% No

45% Yes

"Age care packages will not help."

"I'm not confident asking for help."

What services would you like an in-home aged care service provider to find for you if you had difficulty caring for your pet?



64% Support with walking



62% Would like support taking a pet to the vet



44% Support with Grooming



30% Support with cleaning



54% Emergency foster care
Emergency boarding



44% Support with feeding

Are you getting any of the above services from your current aged care package provider?

91% No

9% Yes

Do you go to a vet that provides discounted fees?

66% No

34% Yes

Survey results from **213** staff members or residents across Australia

**“Security,
companionship
and exercise”**



74%*

of those surveyed
believe pets reduce
loneliness

The CANA network

Companion Animal Network Australia (CANA) is a registered charity representing the companion animal welfare work of member organisations across Australia.



Our members have more than 300 years of combined experience caring for companion animals.



Acknowledgments

Dr Janette Young, Lecturer in Health Sciences (Health Promotion & Health Services) UniSA Allied Health & Human Performance University of South Australia, **for her results analysis.**
<https://people.unisa.edu.au/janette.young>

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AWLQ Golden Hearts team for their support in the development and distribution of the surveys.
<https://www.awlqld.com.au/pet-owner-help/seniors-pet-support/golden-hearts/>

Dr Alicia Kennedy BSc BVMS, Veterinarian, Founder and CEO Cherished Pets **for their support in the development and distribution of the surveys.**
www.cherishedpetcare.com.au

Di Johnston AM
President, Pets and Positive Ageing Inc **for their support in the development and distribution of the surveys.**
<http://petsandpositiveageing.com/>

Useful links

A great body of work exists that explores the benefits to older people when they are able to retain a bond with their pet, especially when moving into new and unfamiliar living arrangements.

Animals, themselves, also enjoy the continuation of that bond. Linked here are several resources that underline the value of the movement to create a pet-friendly aged care sector.

- Help us build our knowledge base: take our survey
- Stay connected with CANA: Facebook | Instagram | LinkedIn
- Animal Medicines Australia U008-Pet-Ownership22 - Report
- CANA letter of support - Cherished Pets
- UniSA-Pets and Older People - 2021
- Human - animal interaction and the benefits to mental health
- Pet support in packages - why this is important
- Non-Drug Prescribing for Healthy Ageing
- Pets in Aged Care Study - 2017

References – PIAC

<https://www.waltham.com/news-events/human-animal-interaction/pets-against-loneliness>

<https://habri.org/research/healthy-aging/mental-health/>

<https://habri.org/research/mental-health/conditions/>

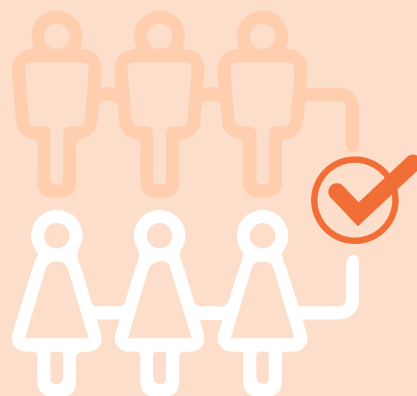
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10000229/>

- Michael please add links from this folder
CANA Survey Links/ References_Dropbox link in email

Appendix_Survey audience Respondent Details

Respondent Details

Respondent Details	Number
Family & Friends	404
Seniors	276
Public	148
Staff	102
Volunteers	72
Animal Industry	55
Receiving In-Home Care	39
Aged Care Residents	25
Researchers	9
Grand Total	1130



Count of Model Numbers	Residents' Pets	Facility Pet	Visiting Pets	Incursion Programme	Pet free	Grand total
Family & Friends	276	64	54	9	1	404
Seniors	203	30	35	6	2	276
Public	104	24	16	3	1	148
Staff	62	23	10	5	2	102
Volunteers	46	10	9	6	1	72
Animal Industry	37	10	5	3		55
Grand Total	728	161	129	32	7	1057

Count of Model Percentage	Residents' Pets	Facility Pet	Visiting Pets	Incursion Programme	Pet free	Grand total
Family & Friends	26%	6%	5%	1%	0%	38%
Seniors	19%	3%	3%	1%	0%	26%
Public	10%	2%	2%	0%	0%	14%
Staff	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%	10%
Volunteers	4%	1%	1%	1%	0%	7%
Animal Industry	4%	1%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Grand Total	69%	15%	12%	3%	1%	100%

Status of pets in aged care

Thank you

Take our online surveys
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