



23 January 2026

Dear Senators,

This submission is made in relation to Chapter 4 – Funding of Aged Care Services, with a specific focus on the absence of funding for pet care assistance services within the current Aged Care Rules. It supports and builds upon the submission made by Pets and Positive Ageing Inc (PAPA) and incorporates new, nationally significant evidence from Companion Animal Network Australia's (CANA) 2025 Status of Pets in Aged Care Survey.

Taken together, this evidence shows that the exclusion of pet care assistance from funded aged care services is:

- inconsistent with person-centred care principles underpinning the Aged Care Act 2024,
- contrary to strong and sustained community expectations, and
- undermines the health, wellbeing and independence of older Australians receiving in-home aged care services.

About Companion Animal Network Australia

Companion Animal Network Australia (CANA) is the national peak body representing companion animals and organisations dedicated to their care and welfare.

CANA comprises five founding members and four affiliate members operating across ACT, NSW, SA, TAS, VIC and WA.

In 2025 our members provided vital services to more than 20,000 animals, including rescue, shelter, rehoming, foster care, healthcare, and enrichment programs.

As a unified national voice, CANA advocates for legislation and policies that enhance the lives of both animals and people. We actively share knowledge, foster collaboration, and rally support to develop and promote initiatives that ensure the highest welfare standards for companion animals and their humans.

CANA is dedicated to protecting and strengthening the human-animal bond, a cornerstone of Australian life.

With more than 31.6 million pets across the nation, 73 per cent of households share their lives with a companion animal.¹ Australia ranks as one of the world's leading nations in pet ownership per capita.

Our mission is to create, uphold and encourage the highest standards of care, health and welfare for pets in our community by promotion the human-animal bond and responsible pet ownership.

This bond forms the foundation of all our programs, and recognises companion animals are integral to the psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing of most of Australians. We subscribe to Getting to Zero (G2Z)² where no rehome-able animal is euthanised.

CANA's founding members are Animal Welfare League Queensland, Dogs' Homes of Tasmania, Lort Smith, Saving Animals from Euthanasia Inc, and Sydney Dogs & Cats Home. Affiliate members are ACT Rescue and Foster Inc, Cherished Pets, Ginger Ninjas, and Scruffer Lovers.

¹ Pets in Australia: A National survey of pets and people; Animal Medicines Australia 2025; <https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/resources/pets-in-australia-a-national-survey-of-pets-and-people-3>

² <https://g2z.org.au>

Legislative intent and funding misalignment

The Aged Care Act 2024 places strong emphasis on dignity, meaningful relationships, social connection, quality of life and person-centred care. However, the Aged Care Rules do not give practical effect to these principles for older Australians who live with companion animals.

While the importance of pets is recognised in principle in the Act, the explicit exclusion of pet care assistance from not only allowable funded services, but also discussions around appropriate care for individuals, creates a policy gap whereby:

- older people are encouraged to live independently at home, yet
- are unable to discuss or make reference to the minimal assistance required to maintain relationships that directly support their independence, health and wellbeing.

Evidence of need: CANA 2025 Status of Pets in Aged Care Survey

CANA's 2025 national survey received 2,846 responses³ from people receiving in-home aged care, residential care, aged care staff, providers, families and the general public.

Community expectations

- **96%** of respondents believe people in aged care should be able to keep a pet.
- Only **1%** believe pets should not be allowed in aged care settings.

Health, wellbeing and independence

Respondents consistently identified benefits of pets for older people, including:

- improved mental and physical health,
- reduced loneliness,
- companionship and emotional stability,
- motivation to remain active and engaged, and
- continuity of identity, routine and purpose.

These outcomes align directly with the objectives of aged care reform, including prevention, wellbeing and delayed entry into residential care.

In-home aged care realities

Among respondents receiving in-home aged care:

- **90%** reported pet care costs affecting their ability to afford basic needs;
- **43%** delayed veterinary care due to lack of transport; and
- **22%** delayed their own medical care because they had no one to care for their pet.

The most requested supports were:

- transport to veterinary appointments,
- assistance with cleaning related to pet care,
- dog walking,
- feeding support, and
- temporary or emergency pet care during hospitalisation.

These findings reflect the same unmet needs identified in CANA's 2023 submission, *Supporting Pet Ownership through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and Home Care Packages*; and CANA Pre-Budget Submission 2024–25, both of which demonstrate a persistent and unresolved gap in services.

³ <https://petfriendlyagedcare.com.au/>

Demonstrated public and sector support

Public support for reform is strong and sustained. A Change.org petition launched in 2023, calling for pet care to be included in aged care services, has received 20,368 signatures.⁴

Sector support is also well established. **CANA's advocacy has been supported by:**

- aged care providers,
- veterinary and animal health professionals,
- community organisations delivering pet care assistance services, and
- advocacy groups representing older Australians.

Our position today, is that the issue is no longer one of awareness or evidence, but of policy implementation.

Alignment with Pets and Positive Ageing Inc

CANA supports the submission made by Pets and Positive Ageing Inc (PAPA), which highlights that:

- pet care assistance is explicitly excluded from funded aged care services,
- this exclusion is misleadingly categorised under “general cleaning”, and
- pet companionship provides continuous therapeutic benefit comparable to other funded psychosocial supports.

Together, the PAPA submission and CANA's evidence present a consistent, sector-wide position.

Conclusion

CANA submits that the inclusion of pet care assistance within funded in-home aged care is a practical and proportionate step that aligns with the intent of the Aged Care Act 2024.

The evidence demonstrates that small, targeted supports can materially improve wellbeing, independence and continuity of care for older Australians who live with companion animals. These changes are achievable within existing aged care frameworks and reflect strong community and sector support. CANA welcomes the opportunity to provide further information or assist with implementation.

Please find **Attachments A and B** summarising our recommendations and practical, operational changes for consideration.

If we can provide further information at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



Julie Jensen,
Acting CEO,
Companion Animal Network Australia

⁴ <https://www.change.org/p/demand-for-the-australian-government-to-support-older-pet-owners-in-home>

Attachment A: Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations outline practical and implementable amendments to the Aged Care Rules and associated guidance that do not extend the intent of the Aged Care Act 2024, but rather give effect to its objects, principles and Statement of Rights by supporting dignity, wellbeing and independence for older Australians who live with companion animals.

Priority Area	Action Needed	Alignment with the Aged Care Act 2024 objectives
In-Home Aged Care Funding Rules	Amend the Aged Care Rules to explicitly include pet care assistance as an allowable funded service within in-home aged care programs.	Supports person-centred care, quality of life, and dignity by recognising companion animals as integral to daily living and wellbeing.
Assessment and Care Planning	Require aged care assessments to identify whether a person has a companion animal and document related support needs in individual care plans.	Aligns with holistic assessment, individualised care, and recognition of personal relationships central to high-quality care.
Everyday Living and Social Support Services	Include practical pet related tasks (e.g. transport to veterinary appointments, dog walking, assistance with feeding and cleaning related to pets) within everyday living or social support service categories.	Advances independence, social connection, and participation in community life.
Temporary and Crisis Support	Enable short-term pet care assistance during hospitalisation, illness, or acute care transitions for in-home aged care recipients.	Supports continuity of care, safety, and prevention of unnecessary transitions into residential care.
Provider Guidance and Capability	Issue clear guidance to aged care providers confirming that pet care assistance may be delivered directly or through approved community and volunteer partners.	Supports safe and effective service delivery and flexible care models within the aged care system.
Choice and Control	Allow in-home aged care recipients to allocate package funding to pet care assistance where it supports their assessed goals and wellbeing.	Reinforces consumer choice and control and the Act's emphasis on autonomy and self-determination.
Visibility and Transparency	Identify and promote pet friendly aged care providers and services through My Aged Care and related information channels.	Supports informed decision making, accessibility, and equitable service choice.

Attachment B: Operationalising pet care assistance within aged care services

CANA has identified a limited and practical set of pet care assistance services that can be integrated into aged care with minimal administrative burden and, in many cases, minimal or no additional cost to government. These services may be funded, client-funded, or cofunded based on means testing.

Assessment and care planning

CANA recommends that aged care assessments explicitly inquire about the presence of companion animals in the home. This information should be recorded in the individual's care plan to support a holistic, person-centred approach and ensure care arrangements reflect the person's full living circumstances.

Service listing and transparency

Pet care assistance services should be explicitly listed alongside other support options within aged care service frameworks, including where co-payments apply. This provides clarity for consumers and providers and acknowledges the importance of companion animals in daily living.

Scope of pet care assistance services

Pet care assistance for people receiving in-home aged care may include:

- **Home pet care support**, delivered by qualified Community Veterinary Nurses or Veterinary Social Workers, supporting both the client and their pet;
- **Pet respite support**, enabling continuity of care during hospitalisation or acute illness through volunteer, foster or respite shelter networks;
- **Extension of existing everyday living services**, such as cleaning, light gardening, shopping and community outings, to include pet-related tasks (e.g. washing pet bedding, managing litter or waste, attending pet-friendly community spaces);
- **Pet transport services**, including transport to veterinary or grooming appointments and dog walking, delivered directly or in partnership with volunteer agencies and charities.

Provider capability and partnerships

CANA supports the development of **training programs for aged care staff**, equipping both residential and in-home care workers to safely and confidently support clients with companion animals. CANA is currently pursuing the development of these courses with qualified academics.

CANA has also collaborated with residential aged care providers and the **Australasian College for Infection Prevention and Control** to develop and implement effective policies and procedures for pets residing with their owners, demonstrating that risks can be managed appropriately.

Visibility through My Aged Care

CANA is aware that many Home Care Support Agencies already provide pet-related assistance. These services should be clearly identified on the **My Aged Care website** as pet friendly services to support informed choice and transparency for older Australians and their families.