



MEDIA RELEASE

Survey results spell out need for urgent action to keep older people and their pets together to ease loneliness and prevent unnecessary surrenders

AUSTRALIA: 22 June 2023: A host of studies demonstrate how pets offer a myriad physical and mental health benefits for people, such as reducing stress, providing companionship, encouraging social interactions and more.

This is true particularly for older adults who often face loneliness and isolation, and rely on their furry, finned or feathered friends to thrive whether they are living at home or in a residential aged care setting.

Yet, despite 86% of older adults experiencing improved mental and physical health with pets in aged care settings, only 18% of aged care facilities consider allowing residents to keep a companion animal, according to national animal welfare charity [Companion Animal Network Australia's 2023 Aged Care Survey: Status of Pets in Aged Care.](#)

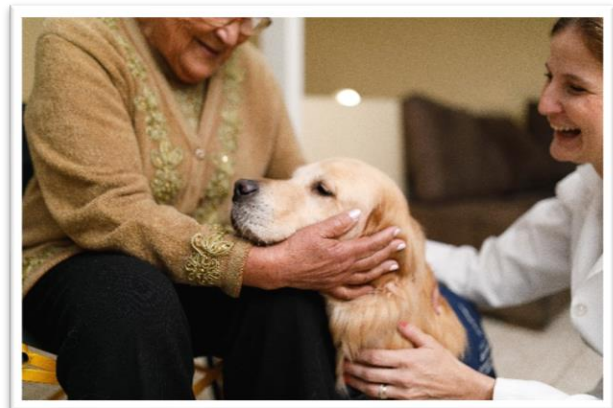
Also, when it comes to older adults living at home, 91% of those with pets who receive a government funded Home Care Package (HCP) do not receive support to help to care for their companion animal, according to survey results.

Trish Ennis, CEO of [Companion Animal Network](#) (Australia CAN or CANA), says, "While we've always recognised the benefits of owning a pet, our survey shows the Australian government and aged care providers have been slow to understand the enduring value of the human-animal bond for older people."

Through its [Pet Friendly Aged Care](#) division, Australia CAN works to preserve the bond between people and their beloved pets by keeping them together for as long as it provides the best health outcome for the animal and their owner.

"There's often a catastrophic emotional harm caused when older people are forced to give up their pets upon moving into an aged care home, and resulting in their much-loved animals being surrendered to shelters across the country," says Ms Ennis.

"People are putting their lives on the line when they refuse to move into aged care because they can't bring their pet with them. If people were allowed to keep their pets, aged care take-up by older people will increase and the number of pets being surrendered to animal shelters will decrease."



68% of people believe residents in aged care should be able to own a pet.

"I think all aged care facilities should have pets... It is no fun giving up everything to move into aged care, especially when you have nowhere for your pet to go to. Giving away a table and chair is easy, but giving up a living pet is sometimes impossible."

Mary, residential aged care, QLD

“(My dog) Mica enhances my life in myriad ways... She is my lifeline and the closest member of my family.”

Jackie, in-home care, WA

In-home Aged Care – urgent need for pet care support

CANA’s Aged Care report also reveals older people who depend on in-home assisted living and the daily companionship of their animals lack the government support they desperately need, says Ms Ennis.

The survey reveals 61% of older adults live alone, and 74% of older adults with pets say their animals provide companionship and reduce loneliness. Whilst 40% of older adults who receive a HCP have pets, only 9% of these pet owners receive pet care support, such as walking their dog (64% need help) and taking their pet to the vet (62% need help).

“Our survey shows there is an urgent need to support pet ownership for older Australians who choose to live independently,” says Ms Ennis.

“The health and well-being benefits of pet ownership are measurable and indisputable. The CHSP (Commonwealth Home Support Programme) and HCP can be extended to determine and secure the necessary assistance for a person to live independently with their pet by ensuring services are offered to support pet health and well-being.

“Increasing the number of pet-friendly in-home aged care support will also help to prevent animals from being euthanised or surrendered to shelters and maximise the physical and emotional health of animal loving older people.”

What are the barriers to pet ownership?

According to CANA’s Aged Care Survey, 60% of people say the main barriers to pet ownership is lack of education among aged care providers on the benefits of pet ownership and a lack of funding to facilitate design changes to accommodate pets being a major challenge.

“Education and knowledge about benefits of pet ownership and accommodating pets are the key factors to allaying fears and opening up opportunities,” says Ms Ennis.

“The inclusion of pets is a great business model as aged care facilities and home care companies that include pets are in greater need and their clients and communities are happier and healthier.”

Australia CAN works closely with the residential facilities that allow clients to bring their pets with them and offer free resources, including pet related policies, guidelines and documents, for aged care providers, support agencies and organisations to manage and care for pets in aged care settings.

“As our population ages, solutions to maintaining a high quality of life include finding ways to help ageing people retain their pets,” says Ms Ennis.

** Survey data is based on 1,130 participants including older adults, aged care staff and the wider public. The survey will continue to collect responses. To participate, please visit <https://petfriendlyagedcare.com.au/surveys/>*

Pets are critical for older people

86% of people with pets in aged care settings experience improved mental and physical health.

74% of older adults with pets say their animals provide companionship and reduce loneliness.

Yet ...

18% of aged care facilities consider allowing residents to keep a companion animal.

9% of pet owners with in-home care packages receive support to manage their pets.

38% of aged care facilities have in-facility pets.

46% of facilities permit pets to visit residents.

How else can you help make a difference?

- Lobby for laws and funding that benefit pet ownership in aged care. Raise the topic with politicians in your state: find your local representatives or contact the relevant Aged Care Minister: [National](#) | [VIC](#) | [WA](#) | [SA](#) | [NT](#) | [NSW](#) | [QLD](#) | [TAS](#)
- Complete our ongoing [survey](#) to help us build our knowledge.
- If you're a pet lover, volunteer your time to an aged care facility.
- Review the resources and guidance at <https://petfriendlyagedcare.com.au>
- If you work in the aged care industry, survey your clients demand for pet friendly services.
- Keep the movement purring with a [donation](#) to help us continue what we do.
- [Share your story](#) about pet friendly aged care living.
- Stay connected to Pet-Friendly Aged Care on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#)
- [Download](#) Pet Friendly Aged Care resources and share on social media with hashtag #petfriendlyagedcare to help raise awareness!

Australia CAN represents the companion animal welfare work of [member organisations](#) across the country. The charity also celebrates the human-animal bond and promotes responsible pet ownership through national campaigns, partnerships and initiatives, such as the [Rent with Pets](#) program.

More stats! The state of play for older Australians

- 3 in 5 Aussie households have a pet*
- By 2050, Australians aged 65 – 84 are expected to double and people aged 85 and over are expected to more than quadruple to 1.8 million*
- By 2066, there will be more than 4.5m people aged 65–74; with 34% of the population being aged 75-84 and 21% being aged 85 and over*
- Loneliness costs Australia \$2.7b each year*

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About Pet Friendly Aged Care

Pet Friendly Aged Care is run by the Companion Animal Network Australia (Australia CAN) whose six member agencies aim to make the world a better place for pets through national campaigns, partnerships and initiatives. 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. To discover more, visit <https://petfriendlyagedcare.com.au/>

About Companion Animal Network Australia (Australia CAN)

Companion Animal Network Australia (Australia CAN) is Australia's peak body representing companion animals. It comprises six member agencies, each aiming to make the world a better place for pets. Through national campaigns, partnerships and initiatives, we celebrate the human-animal bond and promote responsible pet ownership. We use our national voice to campaign for the humane treatment of all companion animals and we rally support for programmes that deliver high welfare standards. To discover more, visit <https://australiacan.org.au/>