



Australian Aged Care Quality Agency
PO Box 773
Parramatta, NSW 2124

Dear Sir/Madam

DRAFT AGED CARE QUALITY STANDARDS AND OLDER PET OWNERS

WHO ARE WE

Pets and Positive Ageing Inc (PAPA) is a small voluntary organisation based in the ACT but with national outreach for our message. Our mission is helping keep older pet owners and their beloved pets together, in the interests of older pet owners and their pets.

Our priorities are: encouraging aged care organisations to allow pet owners moving into various forms of aged accommodation to continue living with their pets, where appropriate; and in-home support for frail-aged, low income pet owners living at home during periods of medical difficulty. We focus on practical initiatives and on the welfare needs of both older pet owners and their pets. Our membership includes a major aged care operator, a community service provider, a vet, RSPCA, a Domestic Animal Services volunteer and volunteers with dog rescue groups. Our Patrons are a former and a current MLA

OLDER PET OWNERS AND AGED CARE

Pet companionship is important all times of life and including when we are older. For many older people who are living alone, pet companionship is central to their welfare and their pet may be their only daily companion. Caring for a pet can be a reason for facing each day and can bring many health and social benefits.

With the number of older Australians growing rapidly, so are the numbers of older pet owners. According to the Federal Government's Australian Institute of Family Studies *'The population of people aged 65 years and over is projected to increase from 3 million in 2012 (14% of the population), to close to 6 million in 2031 (18–19%), to 9–11 million in 2061 (22–25%), and to 11–18 million (25–27%) by 2101.* The RSPCA has estimated that around 63% of Australian household own a pet, most a cat or dog. Although pet ownership dwindles as people get older, the number of older people with pets will continue to be significant.

Many older pet owners want to continue living with their pets, and to take their pets when they move to independent living, residential care facilities and other forms of aged accommodation. There are a few pet-friendly options but the demand is growing fast. This presents a real commercial opportunity for aged care operators as many older pet owners are keen to downsize but unwilling to move without their pet. We have produced information which is accessible on line about some pet-friendly options and a copy is attached.

The vast majority of older Australians pet owners will continue living in the community - in retirement villages and independently in their homes. As they need them, this population of older pet owners is accessing aged care packages in large and increasing numbers.

THE DRAFT STANDARDS AND PET OWNERS

We welcome consumer-directed aged care and look forward to consumers being able to *'make decisions about their own care and the way that care and services are delivered'* both in the nursing home sector and when in the community and that for providers the *'assessment and planning identifies and addresses the consumer's current needs'*. In particular we welcome that the standards require that *'each consumer gets safe and effective services and supports for daily living that are culturally safe and meet the consumer's needs, goals and preferences and optimise their independence, health, wellbeing and quality of life'*.

As mentioned there are increasing numbers of older Australians living in the community with pets as companions and those pets are essential to both their welfare and to their quality of life. However there are particular hardships for older pet owners on low incomes living at home, who are frail and ageing, when they face medical crises or emergencies. The problem is magnified if they are also socially isolated. They may put off essential treatment, walk out of hospitals or refuse to go for important operations if there is no care for their pets.

A small number of volunteer-supported in-home pet support programs can provide this support and the need for more such programs is growing rapidly. One program in the ACT is the Northside Community Service Pet Assistance and Wellbeing Service <http://northside.asn.au/?service=paws-pet-assistance-and-wellbeing-service> which we strongly support. Some of us also volunteer for this program.

Although technically in-home help is accessible to pet owners through consumer-directed packages, a major issue can be that pet owners don't know that they can ask for this help when the assessment team comes to talk to them and that it is an option in a package. There is also no assistance to consumers with this information through the government's own website. We have produced a flyer (attached) with the assistance of two major aged care providers which is designed to provide information for consumers about how they might access pet care in packages and which we give out to enquirers and at aged care events in the ACT. But more needs to be done on a national scale by both government and providers to meet a growing and critical need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first instance there needs to be **advice to pet owners when ACAT teams visit** that they can access this option. Perhaps this is something that could be addressed in the requirements for ACAT teams when they go to see a new consumer. In the standard list of required questions for the team, along with questions about garden maintenance and house maintenance, there should be a question 'do you need pet support?'

The second area is in the provision of such support when it is requested by the consumer. There are commercial services available where these can be afforded and not-for-profit organisations providing such services where there is a financial constraint. There should be a **comprehensive list available to providers in each state** so that they can find the organisation that best fits the consumer. Ideally this should be done with an on-line list.

Third, it would be helpful if there were **more funding support from governments through grant funding for the operation of not-for profit organisations offering in-home pet support**. These are small scale, and inexpensive operations, but very effective. The main cost is that of a volunteer coordinator. It may be that the government could look at aged care funding in this area in the future and we would be happy to discuss this with you.

Finally for older pet owners moving into aged care or accessing aged care services, or those trying to assist them, there is of course the myagedcare website. However if you type 'pets' into the search function on the site you get one link – this one which deals with asking questions about aged care homes and if they allow pets <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/aged-care-homes/find-an-aged-care-home> The most relevant part <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/service-finder/help-at-home> gives no advice about in-home pet support services. It would probably be classed as a 'specialised support service' but anyone looking for this would not necessarily know. When you click on this link it lists many services, but not in-home pet support, which is clearly an oversight. The myagedcare.gov.au website should include **readily findable information on the site about the option to access in-home pet support in aged care packages** (presumably under 'specialised support service' or better still in its own separate category) and a link to in-home pet care and the names of, at very least, the not-for-profit pet support services in this link. We would be happy to assist you with putting together a list of those that we know about around Australia.

We look forward to hearing from you about our recommendations and in assisting you with dealing with what is currently a gap in essential information and services to consumers.

Yours sincerely

Jan Phillips

President

Pets and Positive Ageing inc

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Did you know?



If you are 65 or over and a pet owner
And if you are on an aged care package
or receiving in-home community care
services

You can ask for in-home pet support

For more information see over

www.petsandpositiveageing.com

What pet support services you can have covered

You can ask for services such as walking a dog, grooming a pet, feeding or washing a pet, vaccinations, help with a visit to the vet, boarding in an emergency.

How this works

You need to be 65 or over. Pet support is a 'specialised support service'. Your care provider can advise how it handles pet support and the many options. If you are now or will be receiving a home-care package, pet support can be part of the consumer directed care element of your care package. You can make a choice to use your care funds for pet support instead of some other service. A pet support service can be supplied commercially. Once a pet support service is agreed with the packaged care provider, the service provider directly invoices your packaged care provider for the cost. If you are now or will be receiving home support with a local community service, ask your community service care provider about pet support options.

When you need to ask for pet support

For Home Care Packages: when applying for an ACAT assessment and when being assessed; and at any time while on the package and pet support is required

For Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP): at the initial assessment for home support and at any time pet support is required.

A simple guide to the process

MyAgedCare website or phone call

Initial needs assessment (mention your pet)



Regional assessment service ----- (mention your pet) ----- ACAT



CHSP

(fees may apply)



Home care packages

(fee based)

Who can help you with information

Your packaged care provider or the community service providing your care or staff at My Aged Care

ph: 1800 200 422 or <http://www.myagedcare.gov.au>

Prepared with the generous assistance of Wendy Marshall of RSL LifeCare and Samantha Henry of Northside Community Service. Produced by Pets and Positive Ageing Inc:

www.petsandpositiveageing.com

For further information contact Jan Phillips (President) on 0412 411 424

Moving from your family home soon?



Are you - or is a member of your family - moving to a retirement village, independent living unit, hostel or nursing home - and worried about being parted from a pet?

See over for information that will be helpful.

Ask if you can take your pet with you

Aged care operators are recognizing the benefits of pets, with some allowing owners to take their pets with them. There will be rules and some pets are not appropriate in some circumstances. If you have more than one pet, you could ask if you can bring more than one. You may also want to ask whether you may get another pet if your current pet passes away. Useful information about aged care accommodation that allows pets can be found in DPS guides or see contacts below.

Tell them how important your pet is to you

When making enquiries, be ready to explain the benefits owning your pet has for you. Give accurate information about your pet(s) including type, size, age, behaviour, whether desexed (vet certification is probably required) and any vaccinations.

Consider options for care

If you have to move and are unable to take your pet with you, you do not have to euthanise your pet. There are other options. Contact an animal shelter (RSPCA: 02 6287 8100) or a local rescue group (such as ARF: rehome@fosterdogs.org). They may be able to assist with rehoming advice. Alternatively, check online to find out if your breed of dog has a special rescue group.

You are not alone

If you are likely to experience the loss of a pet, or have to part with one, your vet can discuss the issues with you before this happens. If required, pet bereavement support is available from Dr David Foote, veterinarian and counsellor (0425 281 424 - fees apply) and Rev Barbara Allen, Uniting Church Australia (0439 317 924 - Mon-Fri: 9am - 5pm).

These are useful contacts for aged care organisations that offer some pet-friendly options:

Anglicare: 1800 457 255 • BUPA Aged Care: 1300 302 350

Calvary Retirement Community, Canberra: 02 6464 7400

CatholicCare: 02 61626100 St Vincent Villas (Aranda) and Aloysius Morgan Villas (Campbell)

EdeninOZNZ: 03 8819 4732 • Freedom Aged Care: 1800 994 763

Goodwin: 02 6175 5058 (Ainslie, Farrer, Monash and Crace)

Hindmarsh: 02 6169 3669 (Bellerive and Marigal Gardens, Kambah) and 02 6282 1782 (The Grange Deakin)

Lend Lease Aged Care: 02 6257 8798 (Isabella Gardens) and 02 6230 6253 (The Grove, Ngunnawal)

Murray Glen Village (Tumut): 1800 996 126

RSL LifeCare: 02 6226 1899 (Linton Village and Gardiner Grove)

Stockland Retirement Living: 1800 72 71 70

UnitingCare Ageing: 02 6294 8200 (Amala Village)