



The retiring type

With Australia's population aged 65 or over projected to increase to 25 per cent of the overall population during the next 40 years, guidelines on how to plan for pets in retirement communities have been welcomed by the Council on the Ageing.

"Ageing should not be about giving up any of the rights or benefits you had at other stages of your life and with research saying that pets are one of the few interventions capable of permanently lifting the atmosphere of retirement homes and care facilities. These guidelines have the potential to help many older people enjoy a more complete life," Ian Yates, chief executive Council on the Ageing said.

The guidelines are the result of work undertaken by veterinarian and animal behaviourist Dr Gaille Perry and the Halcyon Retirement Community in Queensland.

"After reviewing the current arrangements of retirement communities that allowed pets, we found that there was a

great deal of focus on size and breed, whereas energy levels and proper management by the owner are more important in integrating pets into a retirement community," Dr Perry said.

"Together, we developed guidelines that made it easier for people to bring their pet to the retirement community. They are:

- * Pets must be fully vaccinated against all common animal diseases;

- * Cats must be kept indoors or be kept in a cat run if their owner wishes to allow them outside;

- * Dogs should be assessed by a professional behavioural trainer;

- * Dogs must always be on a lead when outside the owner's premises;

- * Dogs are prohibited from certain areas such as pools; and

- * Dogs are to be de-sexed.

"Of course, there may be other considerations that retirement communities wish to include but these guidelines are a sound starting point that can help bring the benefits of pet ownership to retirement communities across Australia," Dr Perry said.

The benefits to residents in having the opportunity to own or spend time with pets are likely to be significant according to Dr Lisa Wood from the University of Western Australia.



"Our research has identified a number of social and mental health benefits associated with interacting with pets and there are many studies that show specific benefits to older people from having contact with pets.

"One of these studies looked at residents in 37 nursing homes and compared the overall satisfaction with life between groups that had visits from students, visits from pets, or just visits from their existing contacts. The groups that were visited by pets had statistically significant increases in feeling 'enthusiastic', 'attentive', 'interested', and 'inspired'," Dr Wood said.

"Owning a pet can increase our levels of activity and happiness and there is evidence from other research that pet owners make fewer trips to the doctor than non pet owners.

For older people, sharing life with a pet helps with what can sometimes be a lonely time in their life," says Dr Wood.