



# Community is better off with pets, says study

A PET-FRIENDLY community is a healthier one, according to research released last month.

The findings, released at a People, Pets and Planning Symposium at Deakin University in Melbourne last month, explained that pet ownership combined with pet friendly urban planning may help to address urgent social issues of poor mental health, social isolation, obesity and depression.

While previous research relates to the individual benefits of pet ownership, this new research suggests that there are collective benefits for communities with pets – with the benefits often extending well beyond the pet owners themselves.

One of the researchers, Dr Lisa Wood of The University of Western Australia, investigated the relationship between pets, social gain, neighbourhood environments and health.

Her research concluded that:

- 84 per cent of pet owners spoke with other pet owners
- 50 per cent of dog owners got to know each other as a result of their dog
- 70 per cent of pet owners

rarely or never felt lonely

- 74 per cent of pet owners rarely or never found it hard to meet others; and

- 60 per cent of pet owners were more likely to be actively engaged in community activities

“Overall, pets help people meet each other, chat together and enjoy each other’s company – all of which goes a long way towards building a happier, healthier neighbourhood,” Dr Wood said.

Beyond the social benefits of owning a pet, the research also found pets promote a healthy lifestyle.

“The Dogs and Physical Activity Study plainly shows that those who own dogs receive a broad array of physical benefits, including increased cardiovascular health, lower blood pressure and fewer visits to the GP,” Hayley Cutt, and associate lecturer at the University of Western Australia said.

The research also found while just 45 per cent of Australians achieve the sufficient amount of physical activity, 80 per cent of dog owners manage to achieve the recommended levels.



Happy and healthy . . . research shows community benefits from pets.