



Friends with benefits

There are a number of social and mental health benefits associated with having pets, as **Samantha Robin** discovered

PETS can have positive physical and mental health benefits for their owners.

Research has shown pets provide companionship and can fill the void of loneliness.

These qualities are particularly important for elderly people who may not have many friends or relatives to provide companionship.

Research by veterinarian and animal behaviourist Dr Gaillie Perry and the Halcyon Retirement Community in Queensland investigated the presence of animals in retirement villages and the effect they had on residents.

Dr Perry has created a set of guidelines to plan for pets in retirement.

The Council on the Ageing has welcomed the guidelines.

Chief Executive for the Council on the Ageing Ian Yates said the elderly should have the opportunity to own a pet.

"Ageing should not be about giving up any of the rights or benefits you had at other stages of your life," he said.

"With research

saying 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."

The

“

Pets provide companionship and help to reduce feelings of loneliness and depression

”



guidelines outline basic hygiene practices to ensure the safety of both pets and residents.

Measures include making sure animals are vaccinated and de-sexed.

“There may be other considerations 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.

Dr Lisa Wood, from the University of Western Australia, said a number of social and mental health benefits were associated with having pets.

“Pets provide companionship and help to reduce feelings of loneliness and depression,” she said.

“They also create a point of interaction between community members.

“With an aging population it is important to accommodate pets in these facilities.”

Dr Wood said often when older people moved to retirement villages they were forced to relinquish their pets.

“With higher density living, and many people living in smaller dwellings, we have to accommodate people’s needs,” she said.

“People have to keep in mind the positives of pet ownership far outweigh the negatives.”

Dr Wood said the guidelines would help retirement facilities to manage pets.

“Guidelines are important because all pet owners have to be responsible pet owners,” she said.

“They need to make sure the arrangement is going to work for everybody.”





Mid-West Times
19-Nov-2009
Page: 13
General News
Region: Geraldton WA
Circulation: 19872
Type: Regional
Size: 526.25 sq.cms
Frequency: --W----

