

## Benefits of pet ownership

There are well-researched and documented benefits of pet ownership for everyone, from children to the elderly and those with special needs.



On a social basis, companion animals are often a powerful means for us humans to develop

positive interactions with others – across many different contexts and cultures. These benefits often go into the wider community and neighbourhood. Dog owners, for example, report greater feelings of safety when out walking or at home with their dogs. Also, children who have formed strong bonds with their pets are shown to develop good empathy and concern for others, an important

characteristic when growing into adulthood.

From a mental wellness perspective, it has been shown that companion animals can be helpful when adults are feeling stressed or depressed. For the elderly, pets can moderate the impact of stresses such as bereavement when a spouse dies, especially for those with relatively few confidants. Children also often seek out their pets when they are upset and see their pets as “friends”.

From an overall health point of view, having pets in the home has been linked to improvements in children in terms of their general immune function and, children from dog owning households, are also shown to be more physically active. In adults, dog owners also engage in more physical activity than non-owners and pet owners generally have lower blood pressure, plasma triglycerides and cholesterol while older adults with pets make fewer visits to their doctor.

Companion animals have also been found to be beneficial in specialised settings such as the class room, rest homes and medical settings. There is also increasing acceptance and understanding of the benefits in being allowed to take your dog to work.

Service dogs help those with a variety of physical disabilities such as blindness and immobility and even medical detection, such as alerting around a medical seizure. Having a companion animal has also been shown to be beneficial in syndromes such as autism and more severe psychiatric situations.

Financially, national health surveys from the UK, Germany and Australia have shown that the health benefits conferred by pet owners can save millions of dollars in national health expenditure.

