



MEDIA RELEASE

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The great Australian dream?

Changes in the way Australians are living may impact on community health according to the Planning Institute of Australia and the Petcare Information and Advisory Service who have announced an \$8,000 award for best practice planning for dogs and public open space.

“It is clear that the big backyard is not the priority it once was. The recently released 2011 census data showed that the shift to apartment and townhouse living is becoming more pronounced, while previous studies have shown that lot sizes are decreasing as house sizes increase,” says Susie Willis from the Petcare Information and Advisory Service.

“Although there can be benefits associated with these changes, they have the potential to impact on the health benefits we receive from pet ownership as the presence, or not, of a backyard has been shown to have a direct impact on the likelihood of the household owning a pet.”

Ms Willis recently spoke at the Healthy Cities conference where she outlined the benefits of pet ownership and the challenges our changing lifestyles may present.

“Pet ownership has been shown to provide benefits for individual owners and the community as a whole. It is a normal part of life for two out of three Australian homes but unless we take a more positive approach to pet ownership in higher density environments, we risk losing the many benefits pets bring to our lives.

“In many countries, where high-density living has been the norm for a longer period of time, pets have been successfully integrated into city life. Australia now has an opportunity to embrace design and policy initiatives that support pet ownership in our urban environments. These should include ready access to housing where pets are permitted, public open space that is suitable for pet owners as well as others, and appropriate access to public transport and outdoor cafes,” Susie says.

PIAS has issued the following tips to assist people living in higher density environments with a pet.

- Prospective owner should choose a pet that suits their lifestyle. Dogs and cats have very different care requirements and can exhibit a range of behavioural variations among breeds. Pets need to be chosen on their suitability rather than their looks or breed popularity.
- All pets have basic needs including food, water, exercise and health care. In addition, dogs have social needs and should be trained and socialised from a young age.
- Cats can make excellent pets for busy people living in small spaces. They don't have the same exercise requirements as a dog and they are very quiet and clean.
- Working pet owners need assistance from time to time to help ensure their pet's needs are met. Research shows that neighbours, friends and family frequently provide help in an informal way, but being able to obtain professional services can also help to reduce the burden for busy pet owners.
- Free resources to help pet owners are readily available. The free Selectapet service, run by PIAS, can help prospective pet owners choose an appropriate breed of dog or cat to suit their lifestyle: www.petnet.com.au

- Another PIAS resource, Pets in the City, provides specific, practical information and tips to help owners responsibly manage pets in smaller spaces: www.petsinthecity.net.au

Interested in applying for the inaugural Pet Friendly Planning Award?

2012 entries demonstrating best practice planning for dogs and open space are being invited.

Please e-mail mbuczko@planning.org.au to receive a copy of the entry materials.

Submissions close 12 October 2012.

A summary of the health benefits of pets can be downloaded from www.petnet.com.au

(ENDS)

Issued on behalf of the Petcare Information and Advisory Service

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Australia – A nation of pet lovers

Australia is a nation of pet lovers. It is estimated that 63% of Australian households have some type of pet with 53% of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can help improve a person's mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.

The Petcare Information & Advisory Service (PIAS) provides non-commercial information on socially responsible pet ownership. PIAS' website: www.petnet.com.au is suitable for children, although PIAS encourages parents to supervise any online access by their children.

Images are available for use by the media on www.petnet.com.au

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