

Pets bring health, happiness and healing

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Doctors may soon be prescribing their patients a script to adopt a cat or dog, given a recent study found an estimated \$3.86 billion was saved on health spending in Australia, due to the benefits of pet ownership.

A growing body of evidence confirms the holistic [health benefits](#) people gain from animals, including social, mental, physical, psychological and emotional health.

Maggie O'Haire, from The University of Queensland's Centre for Companion Animal Health and School of Psychology highlighted some of these benefits at the recent RSPCA Animals and Human Health Seminar.

“While we know the health benefits of animals can include a reduction in blood pressure, reduced risk of heart disease, increased sense of well-being and an increased feeling of connectedness to their community, what is less known is the value of animal-assisted interventions for children,” Ms O'Haire said.

By interacting with pets, children can learn valuable lessons in empathy, nurturing and non-verbal communication, she said.

Most recently the benefit of animal-assisted therapy has been linked with helping to encourage an [autistic child](#) to speak, Ms O'Haire said.

“What's interesting to note about such interventions is the little amount of research that has actually been done to understand the benefits.

Especially given that such programs are relatively low in cost in comparison to other alternative practices”, she said.

Acknowledging the need for increased evidence, Ms O'Haire, in conjunction with the Centre for Companion Animal Health and School of Psychology is beginning research into the effect of animal-assisted activities for children with autism spectrum disorder in the classroom.

Provided by University of Queensland ([news](#) : [web](#))

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