

Pets provide a voice for people with aphasia

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Feathers, fins or fur, all pets can make us feel happier. Now, new research from the University of South Australia shows that pet ownership and pet care can also support communication and well-being, especially for people with acquired language difficulties such as aphasia.

Partnering with Aphasia SA, researchers found that pets have a unique ability to improve communication among people with [aphasia](#), a language difficulty after [brain injury](#) that can affect a person's ability to talk, listen, and connect.

Currently, more than 140,000 Australians live with aphasia.

The study showed that pets can deliver notable improvements in people's emotional and social well-being, from boosting their confidence in [social situations](#), to providing them with company when they felt low.

UniSA student researcher, Charlotte Mitchard, says that while every person with aphasia presents differently, the condition often affects a person's ability to speak, read, write, and understand others.

"Aphasia can have a big impact on a person's life affecting how they connect and interact with others, as well as how they participate in the community," Mitchard says.

"People with affected [communication skills](#) can feel quite isolated and alone. But a pet—whether it's a dog, a cat, or even a fish—can give them greater purpose and companionship, which is especially valuable for people who feel isolated because of their condition.

"Pets are also a non-judgmental communication partner, offering friendship without expectations. In fact, one of the most common phrases we heard was 'my pet doesn't care if I can't talk properly, they love me anyway.'"

Senior researcher and speech pathologist Professor Maria Kambanaros says the study presents a leaping point for other pet and [health research](#) in speech pathology.

"The next phase of our study will examine how [pet ownership](#) can help people who are caring for those with aphasia," Prof Kambanaros says.

"Beyond that, we're also exploring the impact of pet ownership on the well-being of people with different acquired neurological disorders, such as Parkinson's Disease.

"We know pets have a positive impact on our lives. By exploring how speech pathologists can support this in therapy, we can promote a far better quality of life."

Provided by University of South Australia

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