People in crisis do better with their pets, researchers say

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Sonya McDowall with her pet dog Dashii. Credit: La Trobe University

Evidence shows human and pet support services should be integrated to avoid people having to relinquish their pets in a time of crisis. Keeping them often results in better health outcomes for both the owner and
animal.

Sonya McDowall, a Ph.D. student presenting her research at the Big Hairy People & Pets Summit and Workshops held 10–14 October on the Gold Coast, wants policy makers to understand the documented positive outcomes when human support services work with animal support services.

"It's cost-effective for the community, and people are healthier if they can keep their animals during a time of crisis," Sonya McDowall said.

"Social, physical and economic factors affecting human health can easily flow onto pets and companion animals."

A 2020 survey by Domestic Violence NSW found that 42% of respondents said victim-survivors delayed leaving a perpetrator for over 12 months due to barriers to accessing support related to their animals.

A recent U.S. survey showed 91% of people had experienced some degree of financial stress in the past year related to the cost of pet care.

Statistics from relevant research:

- In Australia, social return on investment for programs that support people experiencing a crisis to help keep their companion animal is $8.21 for each $1 invested, (Source: Emergency Animal Boarding: A Social Return on Investment)
- Even before the cost of living and rental market crisis, a study in the United States found between 35.1% and 42.1% of participants relinquished their pet due to moving as the landlord would not allow pets. (Source: Moving as a reason for pet relinquishment: a closer look)
- Studies have shown that between 26% and 71% of female
companion animal guardians experiencing family violence reported that the offender had seriously harmed or killed the companion animal.

- 48% of domestic violence survivors are reportedly hesitant to escape their domestic violence environment due to the fact of being concerned about what will happen to the family pet. (Source: An exploratory study of domestic violence: Perpetrators' reports of violence against animals)

- 18%–48% of domestic violence survivors have delayed entering a domestic violence shelter due to the presence of welfare concerns for their pet that they have had to leave behind. (Source)

- Foodbank Australia hunger report 2022 highlighted that over half a million people in Australia are struggling with the cost of food; of this population 67% have pets. This has resulted in a challenge for pet owners of which studies have reported between 30% and 50% of participants identifying that having access to low-cost or free pet food would have prevented them from relinquishing their pet.

Provided by La Trobe University

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