

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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