

Pets bring people big mental health boost: Poll

March 4 2024, by Ernie Mundell



The vast majority (84%) of Americans with pets say their animal

companion brings a positive mental health impact to their lives, a new poll shows.

The poll of more than 2,200 adults conducted early last month also found about two-thirds of respondents calling their pet "a true friend," a "companion" and someone who "provide[s] unconditional love and support."

That's according to a news release from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), which jointly funded the poll.

Pets can provide a kind of mental health therapy for humans, according to APA president [Dr. Petros Levounis](#).

"It's easy to overlook the role of pets when we're talking about [mental health](#)," he said. "But for people who do enjoy the company of animals, they can be a source of companionship, comfort, love and friendship. I routinely encourage adoption of a pet to my patients who struggle with addiction to alcohol, drugs or technology. We're also starting to see more and more research around the role that animals can play in recovery from depression and other [psychiatric disorders](#)."

In the poll, about one in five (18%) of people with pets said one or more of their animals was a certified emotional support animal.

Other findings from the poll:

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents said their pet provides a calming presence
- The same amount said their pet is a real stress-buster
- About a third said having a pet encourages them to be physically active

- About 3 in 10 said pets add structure to their schedule
- About one in five folks said having an animal companion boosts their social life

None of this came as any surprise to [Dr. Rena Carlson](#), president of the AVMA.

"As veterinarians, we witness firsthand the powerful bond between people and their animals, and the positive impact pets can have on their emotional well-being," she said. "From offering companionship and unconditional love to reducing stress and anxiety, pets can be invaluable sources of comfort and support. These [survey results](#) further reinforce the importance of responsible pet ownership and the critical role pets play in our lives."

As with anything one loves, pets can also bring worry. The poll found 76% of pet owners were concerned about their pet passing away, while about two-thirds (67%) had concerns about a pet's health.

A full 72% of respondents to the [poll](#) did have some kind of animal living in the home.

As to what kind of animals Americans share their lives with:

- 52% had dogs
- 37% had cats
- 7% had fish
- 4% had birds
- less than 3% had turtles, chickens, horses, snakes, lizards, rabbits, guinea pigs, or hamsters

More information: Harvard Health has more on the [heart benefits of pet ownership](#).

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