



# IMPACT REPORT

A social research snapshot of pets and people  
accessing Cherished Pets services in 2023



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, work and play, and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise their continuing connection to the land, waterways, and community and acknowledge that this land was never ceded.

As an organisation that values the human-animal bond, we endeavour to learn from, and incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and the idea of oneness into our practice, in order to benefit both the land on which we live and all beings residing upon it.

## B CORP CERTIFIED

Certified



Corporation

Cherished Pets joined the growing community of B Corp certified companies in August 2017. B Corps use the power of business to solve social and environmental problems, and are certified by not-for-profit B Lab to meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency.

Cherished Pets aims to create inclusive, socially connected and sustainable communities by finding solutions to help end cycles of disadvantage linked to veterinary care in Australia. We became a B Corp because of the match with our own mission to positively impact and transform the global economy into a more inclusive and equitable system.



## Our Story So Far

Cherished Pets' story is one of deep belief and commitment to the outcomes we believe our society of people and pets needs.

I founded Cherished Pets in 2015 with a vision for a world where the human-animal bond creates and contributes to the development of connected and healthy communities. I am the CEO and Founder of Cherished Pets Community Veterinary Care, a social enterprise and BCorp, and Cherished Pets Foundation which supports the delivery of our social veterinary services, and Australia's Social Hearted Vet®.

We believe solutions across every sector of social and veterinary services are needed to solve the challenges people face when in crisis and owning a pet. Over the years we have developed a deep perspective and hands-on experience supporting people and their pets. We are committed to accelerating the change in service delivery needed to ensure a fairer, kinder and more supportive society where the benefits of healthy companion animals and a flourishing human animal bond are accessible to all people.

With this clear focus, we are steering a new chapter that preserves the health and wellbeing of pets alongside their owners, and empowers individuals facing vulnerability.

We have a bold, ambitious and appropriate strategy for supporting more people with pathways out of disadvantage. And we are working towards long term sustainable change.

This is our first impact report, and as we delve into the pages the common thread is clear — Cherished Pets is a catalyst for social cohesion through accessible veterinary support and nurturing the human-animal bond. It is important to understand the challenges faced by our community and how our solution creates positive outcomes for greater context of our impact. Our report shares this and the social value of all our services across Cherished Pets Community Veterinary Care (social enterprise and BCorp) and Cherished Pets Foundation (social veterinary services). We welcome your feedback and thoughts as we continue to improve and refine our measurement and evaluation approach.

A handwritten signature in teal cursive script that reads "Lisoi".

**Dr Alicia Kennedy**

By supporting people in our community like Grace, a pensioner surviving on two-minute noodles determined to save for her cat's vet bills, or Beth, a 65 year old battling mental health challenges, and living in her car with her faithful dog, or Gordon in his late 70s, discharging himself from Barwon Hospital against medical advice to be with his dying Dachshund - we've extended a lifeline.

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We've assisted them in avoiding agonising decisions between prioritising their own wellbeing or that of their beloved pets, fostering positive health and wellbeing for both.



# About Cherished Pets

**Cherished Pets is proudly the first veterinary social enterprise in Australia that focuses on the human-animal bond to enhance the health and wellbeing of people, pets, and communities.**

Our reputable veterinary clinic and social enterprise has been delivering exceptional veterinary care and innovative services to the community since 2015. As a certified B Corp, we're deeply committed to ethical business practices.

Our unique social veterinary service brings together a passionate team of veterinary social workers, veterinary professionals, and skilled volunteers dedicated to bridging the gap between human health and animal welfare.

The people we help are facing immediate challenges. From victim survivors of domestic and family violence, people experiencing homelessness, and pet owners challenged by a range of difficulties such as acute hospitalisations and natural disasters, and older people who live independently and who may not have any support from family or friends to help care for their beloved pets. We offer crisis pet care, personalised home care assistance packages, and a volunteer program, all centered around preserving and strengthening the human-animal bond.

In 2022 to 2023 we engaged to measure the social impact of Cherished Pets veterinary social work services and veterinary clinic services to better understand Cherished Pet's areas of strength, service delivery and impact in our community.



## What Is the Human-Animal Bond?

The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial relationship between people and animals, characterised by behaviors that are essential for the overall health and wellbeing of both. This connection is profoundly beneficial to the mental, physical, and social health of people and animals.

# The Challenge

**In our community, vulnerable and marginalised individuals who have pets, including those experiencing homelessness, mental health crises, domestic family violence, age-related constraints, or disabilities, face significant barriers in accessing essential veterinary care and social support services.**

Australia's pet population is estimated to be 28.7 million, with 6.9 million households having a pet. And 85% of people with pets feel having pets impacts their lives positively.<sup>1</sup> Pets bring love, joy, and companionship, and are often viewed as integral family members. They boost physical and mental wellbeing, promoting activity and emotional stability. Pets also enrich lives by fostering community connections and enabling unique interactions. This relationship between humans and their pets is known as the human-animal bond.

But despite the numerous benefits for both individuals and pets, the relationship is complex and multifaceted. While it contributes to improving health and wellbeing, it can also serve as a barrier to people seeking assistance. Adding to the challenge, the human and animal welfare and support sectors operate independently, lacking integration in public policy and service delivery, which hinders the achievement of positive outcomes for both humans and animals.<sup>2</sup>

Pets are a reason why victim survivors delay leaving domestic and family violence. Animals can be used by perpetrators as a tactic of coercive control and psychological torture. Perpetrators can commit financial abuse by withholding funds for the care of animals, and can force victims to witness or partake in violence against animals, causing severe emotional trauma. Leaving a pet can hinder recovery, fostering negative thoughts about their safety. Additionally, in Australia, most domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, aged care residential homes, and rental accommodations do not accept pets, compounding the challenge.

Homelessness affects the most socially isolated members of our community and for those with companion animals, pet welfare and the human-animal bond are vital. People experiencing homelessness share profound emotional bonds with their pets, and this social support is essential for their resilience and social connection. Most would rather forgo accommodation than relinquish their pet to a shelter.

Research also shows that individuals facing crises often experience social isolation and heightened stress levels, so the presence of a pet provides health benefits by offering social support, thereby reducing stress responses.

Growing financial stress and concerns about inequality have significant implications for social cohesion, impacting people's sense of belonging and participation in society. Findings from the 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion <sup>4</sup> survey reveal a decline in social cohesion, highlighting the urgent need for community support initiatives like ours at Cherished Pets.

## Our Solution

**The good news is that Cherished Pets Veterinary Services nurtures the human-animal bond contributing to public and animal health and wellbeing. By offering vital veterinary services and support to vulnerable people we address disadvantage and discrimination and foster increased social cohesion.**

Knowing that crises significantly impact the fundamental rights of individuals with pets and that crisis cases are complex and need professional support from a team with specific skills and training, our veterinary social services address the gaps in services and unmet needs for effective crisis intervention for vulnerable pet owners.

Our Veterinary Social Work model fosters collaborative, interdisciplinary support for vulnerable clients. Through partnerships with service providers, human health professionals, and veterinarians we minimise adverse outcomes and maximise benefits for both humans and animals.

We assist clients experiencing homelessness, residing in insecure accommodations, and victim survivors of domestic and family violence. We support those dealing with mental health issues, aging, acute hospitalisations, disaster relief, and individuals living with disabilities.

Our services include home pet care assistance, dog walking, pet maintenance, Community Vet Nurse services, temporary pet housing, fostering, emergency boarding, case management, financial aid, and access to veterinary treatment and emergency care plans. We receive referrals from human welfare service providers and connect individuals with community support networks such as pet loss services, mental health professionals, and grief counselors. Through financial assistance packages for eligible individuals, we eliminate barriers to affordable veterinary care.

For victim survivors of domestic and family violence, where it is estimated that companion animals are present in 70 per cent of cases, providing accommodation for their pets ensures they are safe and supported to recover and thrive and are reunited with one another.

For individuals experiencing homelessness, our services mean their devoted animal companions can continue to uplift mental and emotional wellbeing, alleviate isolation, and inspire a sense of purpose even during life's challenging moments.

For older people we provide at-home case management and assistance, veterinary treatment, transport, grooming, and emergency boarding. Most importantly, it ensures that elderly folk are able to remain with their animal companion.

With a person-centered approach and dedicated volunteers collaborating with our vets and staff, we offer support to individuals facing overwhelming challenges compounded by pet ownership. Our focus is on ensuring pets receive essential care, preserving the unique bond between them and minimising the likelihood of pets being surrendered.

# Supporting the Solution

## Cherished Pets' Veterinary Social Work Model of Care

Veterinary Social Work (VSW) is an approach that attends to human needs that can arise in the intersection of veterinary medicine and social work practice. At its core is a strong focus on the human-animal bond.

VSW encompasses the four pillars of:

- Animal-assisted interventions
- Compassion fatigue
- Animal-related grief & bereavement
- The link between human-animal violence

Our Community Care team consists of multidisciplinary professionals including:

- Qualified Veterinary Social Workers
- Volunteer management and program coordination
- Community Vet Nurses
- Counsellors and psychologist support
- Social hearted veterinary consultants

We see that vulnerable pet owners who might be hesitant due to veterinary care costs, find subsidised pet care more appealing than assistance with their wellbeing. This not only breaks down barriers for patients struggling to access care but also opens opportunities for community involvement in meeting both pets' and people's needs.

**Our powerful approach significantly enhances companion animal welfare, addresses financial barriers to promote responsible pet ownership, and fosters social cohesion.**





# Measurement Approach

**Measuring our impact is a dynamic and integral part of our journey at Cherished Pets, guiding our continuous efforts to enhance the wellbeing of both individuals and their beloved pets.**

It aligns with our commitment to transparency and accountability. By incorporating social value calculations, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the lasting outcomes of our services and seek to understand and recognise every dimension of our impact.

Our aim is to account for the social and economic value of Cherished Pets' outcomes and has been done through the categorisation of services by service type, in addition to a series of stakeholder surveys to understand the effects of services on clients, animals, and agency services.

The outcome of the SROI analysis is a story about the value of change created, relative to the investment. Financial proxies are used to value an outcome where there is no market value.

## Data Collection & Inputs

Impact measurement followed a four step process.

1. The first step included understanding the scope of the analysis, refining the Theory of Change, designing the measurement framework, and determining the stakeholders for consultation.
2. The next step involved survey design, consultation with stakeholders, and the collection of data related to Theory of Change outcomes.
3. The third stage focused on analysing the data.
4. The final stage was reporting the impact through the Impact Report.

The project's initial focus prioritised refining administration and data recording procedures to establish reliable data practices, laying the foundation for effective evaluation.

Our impact measurement framework spans the dual entity structure of Cherished Pets Veterinary Clinic (our human-animal-bond-centered services Social Enterprise and B Corp) and Cherished Pets Foundation (crisis care and veterinary social work services), adding substantial weight to our social enterprise model.

During the survey design and deployment phase, our goal was to collect evidence-backed insights and feedback from clients accessing all services as well as agencies. The online survey targeted three stakeholder groups: veterinary clinic clients, veterinary social work clients, and agency partners engaged in reciprocal referrals. A total of 91 stakeholders completed surveys, including 17 agency providers.

The cost of inputs for Cherished Pets services was determined through Cherished Pets' Neo veterinary management software and examination of financial records. Values are based on actual costs for 2023. Both monetary (cash) and non-monetary (in-kind) contributions are considered.

We analysed and categorised the services offered by Cherished Pets. Of particular focus were social assistance services - services provided for free or with discounts to the community.

**Society needs services that work at the intersection of human and animal health.**

**Our veterinary social work model offers a solution to alleviate the significant challenges impacting vulnerable people with companion animals.**

# Key Findings

The investment in 2023 generated a range of outcomes for stakeholders to the total present value of \$4.39 Million.

The SROI ratio is 1:3.85 which indicates, for every \$1 invested, \$3.85 of social and economic value was created across Cherished Pets Community Veterinary Care (social enterprise and BCorp) and Cherished Pets Foundation (social veterinary services).

All surveyed pet owners reported health and wellbeing benefits from their pets.



## TOTAL VALUE

The total present value of the social value expected to be created from Cherished Pets services is

**\$4.39M**



## SROI per \$1

For every \$1 invested, the amount of social and economic value expected to be created is

**\$3.85**





## AGED CARE

**1080**

Elderly people aged 65+ supported

**1200**

Elderly people's pets supported

**\$1.75M**

of total projected social value created through Aged Care services.



## RESPITE CARE

**1970**

nights of pet accommodation respite care generating social value of

**\$780,000**

**\$1.38M**

is the total market rate of all services offered in 2023.

Not only does Cherished Pets offer financial assistance but heavily discounted rates which have been factored back into this equation.

**93%**

Said their pet makes them feel less lonely  
(Reduced isolation)

**76%**

Reported overall improved quality of life as a result of having a pet (Enhanced human-animal bond)

**62%**

Experience greater physical activity and motivation to exercise with a pet (Improved physical health)

**78%**

Reported improved mental health due to their pets  
(Positive mental health & wellbeing)



**2125**

**Veterinary Social Work services provided**

Over 2125 services provided to community members through Cherished Pets' Veterinary Social Work support

**5080**

**Total people and pets supported**

**2100**

**Total pets supported**

900 dogs, 300 cats, 200 birds, 35 reptiles, 400 other (fish etc)

**2980**

**People supported**

**250+**

**Community Vet Nurse visits**

**350**

**End of life support**

**CRISIS CARE**

**280**

crisis care clients supported generating social value of

**\$185,000**



**\$50,000**

**Funding packages and vet assistance**

**5000**

**Volunteer hours**

**80%**

Reported the most significant challenges encountered in maintaining the health and wellbeing of pets is the cost of veterinary care.



# Cherished Pets Clients were asked to report on a likert scale how certain outcomes have changed for them as a result of support from Cherished Pets:

## **78% reported positive feelings of being supported and socially connected**

- Feeling supported and socially connected can contribute to a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.

## **17% found access to safe accommodation improved**

- Finding safe housing is crucial for both personal safety and the wellbeing of both the individuals and their pets.

## **35% experienced improved access to care for themselves, indicating increased access to healthcare services**

- Clients reported having support with their pets helped remove barriers to access the healthcare they needed, especially treatment requiring hospitalisation.

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## **35% experienced decreased financial stress.**

- Reduced worries about financial matters can alleviate stress and improve overall wellbeing.

## **57% experienced reduced worry about their pets safety, health and wellbeing**

- Reduced worries about pets' safety, health, and wellbeing indicate a stronger bond and sense of responsibility towards their pets.

## **35% felt more connected to their community**

- Feeling connected to the community fosters a sense of belonging, reduces isolation, and promotes social interaction.

## **54% experienced improved mental health and wellbeing**

- Improved support can strengthen the bond between individuals and their pets, leading to better relationships and overall wellbeing.

## **25% experienced improved personal safety**

- Veterinary crisis care support contributes to an improved sense of safety. In the context of people experiencing homelessness, medical or mental health crises, finding secure accommodation would be expected to provide a similar outcome for clients.

## **54% people's pet experienced improved health and wellbeing**

- Animals who accessed veterinary treatment, whether routine medical care or treatment for injuries or illness, as a result experienced improved physical health and improved wellbeing as a result of preserving or improving the human animal bond.

## **12% rely on Cherished Pets services as live alone**

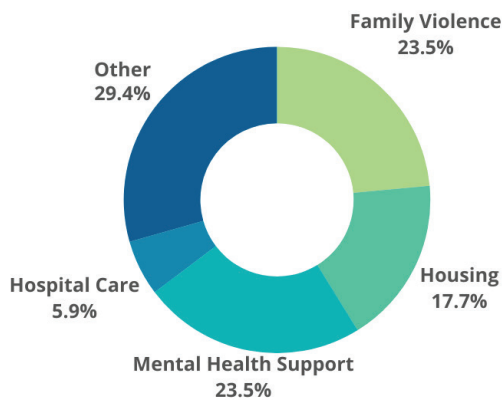
# Referral Agency Partner Outcomes

**Outcomes experienced by referral agencies were identified through a survey with the agency provider stakeholder group to understand the type of support provided by agencies referring to Cherished Pets and impact of the support provided.**

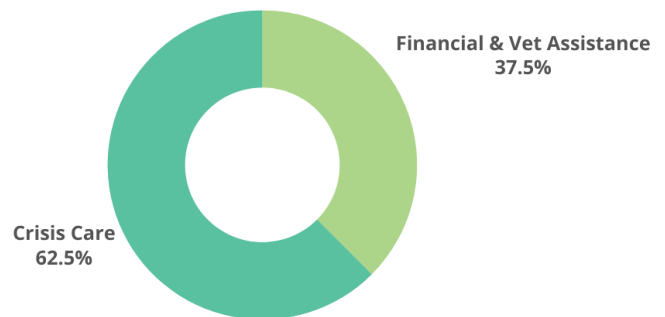
The types of support most frequently provided included family violence and mental health, with housing access closely following. Categorized into crisis care and financial/veterinary assistance, crisis support took precedence, constituting 62% of cases.

Feedback was extremely encouraging, emphasising the success of linking individuals to services and enhancing collaboration between community services. With an overwhelming 94% reporting these outcomes as extremely successful, it indicates that engagement with human service interventions through veterinary social work effectively produces a great impact on people's health and wellbeing.

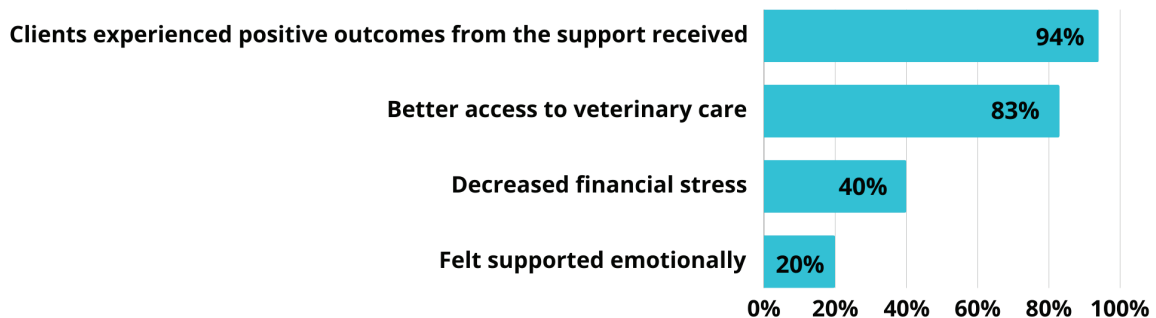
## Type of Support provided by agencies referring to Cherished Pets



## Services accessed



## Agencies reported the support they provided in linking clients with Cherished Pets assisted the client in the following ways:



# Insights

Analysis reveals insights about our impact for all people and pets supported across Cherished Pets Community Veterinary Care (social enterprise and BCorp) and Cherished Pets Foundation (social veterinary services).



# Outcomes for People with Companion Animals

**Our services nurture a multitude of positive outcomes for people who access our services and especially for those who struggle to access affordable vet care.**

Positive outcomes of decreased financial stress, reduced worry about pets safety, feeling more connected to their community, improved physical health, and a strengthened bond between them and their pets leads to better relationships and improved health and wellbeing. 78% of clients reported positive feelings of being supported and socially connected as a direct result of Cherished Pets' support.

For the 1080 elderly clients supported, our interventions such as routine health checks had profound benefits, contributing significantly to the health and happiness of the individuals and animals.

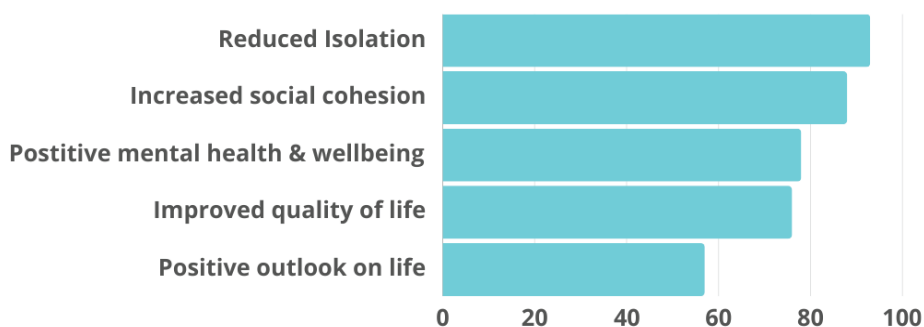
**Our survey also indicated that on average four other friends and family members were positively impacted per pet assisted.**

We are filling an existing gap in service provision for vulnerable people and enhancing people's bond with their animals. We must continue to provide subsidised veterinary care packages and a Veterinary Social Worker public health model that combines primary and veterinary care and focuses on the relationships between people and their pets.

**When asked “How has having a pet benefitted you?” almost all people surveyed reported at least one benefit to their health and wellbeing from their pets including increased companionship, reduced loneliness, and improved overall quality of life.**

Specifically:

93% experience increased sense of companionship and emotional support from their pet; 78% experience improved mental health and wellbeing due to their pet's presence; 62% experience greater physical activity and motivation to exercise; 76% reported they felt an improved overall quality of life as a result of having a pet; 57% have an enhanced sense of purpose and responsibility through pet care; 88% people experience increased social engagement and community connections to enhance the lives of our beloved animal companions.



# Animal Health & Wellbeing

**Improvement in the health and overall wellbeing of pets is one of the areas where we had the most impact for people who access our services.**

People reported experiencing increased safety for their pets. With the provision of 2,036 nights of pet accommodation respite care our support generated \$814,000 in social value.

The dedication of our community vet nurses, who conducted over 250 home visits, ensured that pets received thorough and compassionate care such as routine health checks and preventative care which creates wellbeing benefits for the animals. A significant number of these pets supported was for our Aged Care clients, with 1080 elderly people and their 1200 pets visited by the Cherished Pets care teams. Behind all these numbers is our team of passionate volunteers who collectively contributed over 5,000 hours.

Recognising the evident mutual benefits of the human-animal bond, providing veterinary care for individuals facing financial challenges or struggling to access these services ensures the wellbeing of both pets and their people. This whole of community approach directly supports social cohesion, economic participation, and a sense of community belonging.

## Engagement with Services

**With agency partners reporting an 83% improvement in clients' access to veterinary care and a remarkable 94% stating positive outcomes from the support provided, it is evident that vulnerable and disadvantaged people with pets need to be appropriately supported to help meet their companion animal's needs as well as their own needs.**

What society needs involves convening interdisciplinary cross-sector services to share information and resources, generating appropriate and accessible service delivery and support for vulnerable and disadvantaged people with pets. The veterinary social work model is a very powerful way to protect health and wellbeing overall.

Our vision is to enable cooperation, coordination, and coherence between multiple human and animal welfare sectors (professionals in human health such as doctors, nurses, public health practitioners, and animal health professionals such as veterinarians, and veterinary social workers) to achieve the best health outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged people and their companion animals to build strong, resilient and cohesive communities.

Cherished Pets transformative goal seeks to remove siloed ways of operating and to mobilise different types of partnerships and joined-up solutions to harness collective actions with the purpose of realising safe and just futures for all.

# “What would happen to you if Cherished Pets did not provide the services they currently provide?”



**“If I didn’t have Cherished Pets, I would feel that Mikey is being neglected and I’d feel alone. I’d have no one to call when I’m worried about him.”**

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**“Milly would have been destroyed and thrown away. I’m unsure what would have happened without you as I couldn’t afford to get her cremated.”**

**“More financial worry and fear about caring for my animals while I’m in hospital.”**

**“I would currently be very depressed and wouldn’t have known what to do. Other vets just don’t compare at all in their services and charges.”**





# Our insights from impact measurement

**Our journey into impact measurement has been instrumental in helping us to make sense of complexity, aiding us and others in understanding the intricate systems we impact and identifying pivotal leverage points for systems change.**

Our research has highlighted data gaps, meaning the numbers offer an overview rather than a definitive portrayal. However, we've pinpointed methods to enhance data collection and measurement design for greater accuracy and depth in our insights. We will continue to refine and assess our approach.

Please contact us if you're interested in the details of our measurement methodology and calculations.

**Thank you to our generous supporters and funders.**



**Pets Regardless  
Foundation**

## References

<sup>1</sup>[https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AMAU008-Pet-Ownership22-Report\\_v1.6\\_WEB.pdf](https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AMAU008-Pet-Ownership22-Report_v1.6_WEB.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>McDowall, S., Hazel, S.J., Chittleborough, C., Hamilton-Bruce, A., Stuckey, R. and Howell, T.J. (2023). The Impact of the Social Determinants of Human Health on Companion Animal Welfare. *Animals*, [online] 13(6), p.1113. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13061113>

<sup>3</sup>Deborah L. Wells (2019) The State of Research on Human–Animal Relations: Implications for Human Health, *Anthrozoös*, 32:2, 169-181, DOI: 10.1080/08927936.2019.1569902 <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2019.1569902>

<sup>4</sup><https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2023>



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accountability, transparency,  
and continuous improvement.**

**Corporation**

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