



AUSTRALIAN
SMALL ANIMAL
VETERINARIANS

FACT SHEET



TENANTS WITH PETS

Over 60% of Australian households own a pet, yet it seems almost automatic for the majority of Australian landlords and managing agents to have a 'no pets' policy on rental tenancies. Perhaps it seems easier to manage a property without pets, or you believe pets might cause damage, maybe you've just never really thought about it. But there are good reasons to consider allowing pets - the benefits can significantly outweigh the negatives.

Recent research points to the fact that a well managed pet-friendly rental can deliver great economic outcomes for those willing to introduce a "pets considered" policy.

Ten good reasons to consider renting to a pet owner:

1. Pet owning tenants are generally willing to pay more rent.
2. Pet-friendly properties rent faster.
3. Responsible pet owners can make excellent tenants.
4. Tenants with pets want to hold longer leases.
5. Reduce your advertising spend.
6. No more problems with 'hidden' pets.
7. Most Australians feel their pet is part of the family and care for them as such.
8. Reduce animal euthanasia; animal welfare agencies indicate that as many as 30% of dogs and cats are surrendered by owners who are unable to locate adequate accommodation.
9. "Considering pets" will not lock you into a pet-particular outcome.
10. Pet application and agreement forms are available to help landlords and managing agents implement a successful pet management policy and help tenants understand how to responsibly manage pets – read on for more information.

Pets considered 10 good reasons

A leading national network of real estate agencies has indicated that of their national rental property listings, only 4% were pet-friendly. With around 50% of all Australian households owning a dog or cat, it's clear that there is a massive imbalance between supply and demand for pet-friendly rental properties.

1. Pet owning tenants are generally willing to pay more rent

Australian research reveals that many dog and cat owners would be prepared to pay more for a pet-friendly rental; in fact, landlords may be able to receive from seven to 14% more rent¹. The payment of a 'pet deposit' or 'pet bond' is very common in some parts of the world, but not permitted in most states of Australia. Western Australia is the only state where a pet bond is permitted - an additional amount of up to \$260 may be charged subject to conditions.

2. Pet-friendly properties rent faster

- A recent American study '*Companion Animal Renters and Pet-Friendly Housing in the US*' revealed some interesting statistics about pet owning renters -
- 25% of all rental applicants were specifically seeking out pet-friendly housing.
- Pet-friendly housing received twice as many applicants for pet-friendly residences than other housing.
- Pet-friendly residences were leased out in an average of 19 days instead of the 29 days it regularly took to lease a non pet-friendly residence. These results may indicate that, like their US counterparts, Australian landlords could be losing a large market segment by not allowing pets.

3. Responsible pet owners can make excellent tenants

Research shows that a responsible pet owner can make an excellent long term tenant that abides by the housing rules. They know it can be difficult to find pet-friendly housing and want to avoid having to search again for it. Think about it - you may own a pet, or you may have friends or family that do. If so, you're probably aware of the close and caring bond people share with their pets. You may also have noticed that many pet owners are very house proud and keep their homes and gardens beautifully. These same people could be renters, and could make perfect tenants.

4. Tenants with pets want to hold longer leases

Tenants with pets are likely to stay longer than non-pet owning tenants. They know that it can be hard to find pet-friendly accommodation, so once they secure a suitable property they are generally inclined to sign a longer lease and/or renew their lease. The US research supports this, indicating that tenants with pets stayed an average of 23 - 46 months compared to just 15 - 18 months for tenants without pets.



"I live with my dog Missy in a unit block that permits pets. My brother owns a unit that he rents out in the same block. A few months ago he was having trouble finding a tenant. The place had been vacant for several weeks. I suggested he should consider renting his unit to a tenant with a pet. He advertised it as pet-friendly and had a new lease signed to a pet owning tenant within two days. It's all worked out really well, the unit is rented and the tenant and their dog are no trouble at all." **Janette, Broadbeach, QLD**

¹Blue Moon Research and Planning 2008, 'Pets in the City - a qualitative and quantitative research report' (unpublished data).

5. Reduce your advertising spend

With pet-friendly properties leasing more quickly and pet owning tenants staying longer, it stands to reason that you will spend less on advertising to find tenants for your rental property.

6. No more problems with 'hidden pets'

With the vast majority of rental properties prohibiting keeping a dog it's not surprising to find that many pet owners simply don't reveal their pet owning status on their application. Australian research indicates that for 11% of pet owning tenants (mainly cat owners) their landlords or body corporate are unaware that they keep pets². In the US the study found that as many as 20% of tenants were keeping pets illegally. Illegal pet possession can be stressful and is not something renters want to do. However, given that 91% of Australians feel very close to their pet, some people will take the risk.

7. Most Australians feel their pet is part of the family and care for them as such

- More than 83% of Australians have had a pet at some time in their lives and of the people who do not currently own a pet, 53% would like to own one in the future³.
- 91% of pet owners report feeling 'very close' to their pet, reinforcing the fact that pets are an integral member of the Australian family unit. People tend to look after their pets as they look after other members of their family; they look after their health and hygiene, exercise and entertainment, they clean up after them and generally care well for them. In fact studies show that Australian pet owners are becoming more and more socially responsible in the care of their pets⁴.
- A Australian research project by Dr Emma Power from the University of Western Sydney, "*Renting with Pets in Sydney, Australia: A Social and Animal Welfare Challenge*", revealed that for many pet owners the experience of searching for a pet-friendly house was very stressful and the inability to secure appropriate accommodation left them with a feeling of housing insecurity⁵.



² Petcare Information and Advisory Service 2010, 'Pets in the City' Sydney, pp 17.

³ McHarg M, Baldock C, Headey B, Robinson A 1995, 'National People and Pets Survey' Urban Animal Management Coalition.

⁴ Headey B 2006, 'National Pets and People Survey 2006 Socially Responsible Pet Ownership in Australia: A Decade of Progress' Petcare Information and Advisory Service

⁵ Power E 2013 'Renting with Pets in Sydney, Australia: A Social and Animal Welfare Challenge' Research funded by Mars Petcare and University of Western Sydney Partnership Grant (unpublished data).

8. Reduce animal euthanasia; animal welfare agencies indicate that as many as 30% of dogs and cats are surrendered by owners who are unable to locate adequate accommodation.

The ratio of pet-friendly rental properties is at odds with the number of people looking for rentals.

Sadly, this has resulted in a high number of animal surrenders. Data from Australian animal welfare organisations suggests that up to 30% of animals surrendered to shelters are the direct result of owners being unable to secure pet-friendly accommodation⁶. Better animal welfare results, along with better outcomes for tenants and landlords, could be achieved by a pet-friendly approach to rental tenancies.

9. “Considering pets” will not lock you into a pet particular outcome.

Allowing one tenant with a responsibly owned pet doesn't mean you've created a “no-holds-barred” situation. Rather, you might choose to include a “pets considered” clause, as opposed⁶ to “pets permitted”. By having clear guidelines on the keeping of pets in your property, irresponsible owners can be carefully screened out without penalising responsible owners. The new Australian research by Dr Emma Power highlighted an absolute lack of advertised petfriendly properties. In fact many tenants reported that the properties they ended up renting were not advertised as pet-friendly, so they had to work hard to find these properties⁷. Clearly advertising a property as ‘pets considered’ ensures the choice to permit a responsibly owned pet remains firmly in the hands of the landlord/managing agent, whilst simultaneously increasing the pool of opportunities from which to identify a good tenant.

10. Pet application and agreement forms are available to help landlords and managing agents implement a successful pet management policy and help tenants understand how to responsibly manage pets.

By using pet application and agreement forms landlords and managing agents can more easily identify responsible pet owning tenants and clearly detail expectations as to how pets will be managed in the rental premises. Read on for further information.



⁶ Nancarrow D 2012, 'Vet Pleads for Landbrds to Welcome Pets' [Brisbanetimes.com.au](http://brisbanetimes.com.au), <<http://brisbanetimes.com.au/business/property/vet-pleads-for-landlords-to-welcome-pets-20120111-1-1-pull.html>>
⁷ Power E 2013, 'Renting Pets in Sydney, Australia: A Social and Animal Welfare Challenge' Research funded by Mars Petcare and University of Western Sydney Partnership Grant (unpublished data).

Clear policies and guidelines

Pet Application and Pet Agreement forms have been developed by the ASAV, the companion animal special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association to assist with the process of renting a property to a pet owner.

Pet Application Forms provide a simple, standardised system, a virtual resume for pets, that allows pet owners to present relevant and specific information relating to their pet. The form also allows the owner to provide information on the way the pet is cared for. A more informed and accurate decision can thus be made by a landlord or managing agent by assessing pet ownership on a case by case basis.

Pet Agreement Forms enable the landlord or managing agent to clearly detail their expectation as to how a pet will be kept and managed once they are approved. Such an agreement sets both a benchmark in pet keeping practices and a confirmed communication channel.

The forms standardise the agreement between the two parties, affording security for the pet owning tenant and setting out the responsibilities associated with both pet ownership and maintenance of property. The forms also allow for a representative of an owner's corporation to provide written approval regarding the keeping of pets in strata situations.

The forms are available on-line and can be modified to suit individual situations and agreements. You can request that all pet owning applicants complete and sign the forms as well as attaching additional information as required. Signed copies of both forms can be retained by each party.

Forms are available from <https://www.vetvoice.com.au/ec/pet-ownership/renting-with-pets/>

Things you need to look for, that will help identify a good pet owner and a good pet:

1. Regular vet visits
2. Regular flea treatment and worming. (All pet owners, even of inside pets, should treat their pet every month to prevent fleas. Doing this ensures that fleas will not be a problem for your property.)
3. A promise to fix any damage that occurs by a pet. (Just like children occasionally a pet accident may occur, but a responsible owner will fix this immediately at no hassle to the property owner. A bad non-pet-owning tenant is much worse than a great pet-owning tenant!)
4. A good pet-track record. Recommendations from your pet's vet, previous neighbours, and especially from previous landlords will help you have piece of mind that the pet will be hassle free for you.
5. A good renting record for the tenant. Good responsible tenants make good responsible pet owners. A tenant going out of their way to show that they will be a good owner probably will be!



Myth busting

Some people have strongly held opinions about pets not being suitable for rental properties, but are these opinions myth or fact?

MYTH: Pets create damage to properties

FACT: The US data showed that there was little, if any difference in damage between tenants with or without pets. Interestingly, the cost of damage from pets was much smaller than the costs associated with tenants with children. 63% of the US landlords that prohibited pets in their properties had no first hand experience on which to base their decision; the source of their concerns was most likely indirect information. It would seem that the concerns versus the realities of pet related damage may be somewhat distorted.

MYTH: A second pet is double trouble

FACT: Tenants with more than one pet need not be seen as a problem. Most pets, including dogs and cats, are social creatures, and companionship is important for their well-being. Keeping two pets can help alleviate issues associated with boredom and loneliness. Of course, excessive numbers of pets in a confined area is not a good idea. Two pets is fine.

MYTH: Strata properties are not suitable for pets

FACT: Dogs and cats can be kept successfully in small spaces and cats, in particular, can adapt well to an indoor or high-rise environment. Not all strata schemes permit pets, so it is important for landlords and managing agents to check that the by-laws allow pets and whether any particular approvals are required before agreeing to rent the property to a pet owning tenant.

Australian research clearly demonstrates that pets can contribute to a sense of community in strata developments by encouraging residents to interact. Dogs help their owners to get to know others within an apartment building and local neighbourhood by increasing the opportunities for social interaction and can be valuable in creating a strong apartment community. Pet owners were keen to ensure their pets fitted in well with others in the community, and regularly helped one another be responsible owners by letting each other know about barking dogs, giving each other advice on training and caring for pets and looking after one another's pet⁸.

MYTH: Bigger pets mean bigger problems

FACT: The size of a pet is not necessarily related to how well it will be suited to a particular living environment. Experts emphasise that it is the owner/pet relationship which results in socially responsible behaviour and activities i.e. toilet training, manners, exercise, care etc. Experts also look to the temperament and degree of socialisation of the pet. Some landlords and agents stipulate that a dog has to weigh less than 10kg or be 'small'. However this is very subjective and many larger dogs tend to be very quiet and docile.

For example, greyhounds make great pets in units and contrary to popular belief spend most of their time sleeping (so long as they can get outside to walk once or twice a day!)



^{**} Power E 2013, 'Dogs and Practices of Community and Neighbouring' Anthrozoos Volume 26, Issue 4. 579-581.