

**EMBARGO: 5AM THURSDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2022**

## More than two-thirds of Australian households now own a pet.

- **69% of households across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia are now home to one or more pets.**
- An estimated **28.7 million pets** are now calling home to around **6.9 million households** across Australia.
- **85% pet owners say their pet has a positive impact on their life, noting mental and physical health as key positives.**
- **Australians are estimated to be spending over \$33 billion annually to keep our pets fed, healthy and well-accessorised.**
- **68% say they had considered not going to the vet** when they needed to, driven partly by **cost considerations.**
- Despite the increase, **housing constraints and costs are key barriers holding back would-be owners, particularly renters and apartment dwellers experiencing issues with landlords, body corporates and strata laws.**

Australia's most comprehensive pet population survey has revealed the boom in pet ownership seen during the COVID-19 pandemic has levelled-out to a "new normal" of strong pet ownership in Australia, with 69% of households across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia now home to one or more pets.

Animal Medicines Australia's latest *Pets in Australia* study found an estimated 28.7 million pets are now calling home to around 6.9 million households across Australia. Many of these people are first time pet owners, having brought their pet into their home during the pandemic.

Dogs and cats have led this sustained growth in pet ownership, with almost half of all households having at least one dog<sup>1</sup> and a third of all households housing at least one cat<sup>2</sup>. While the numbers of other pets have remained largely steady since 2019<sup>3</sup>.

For many pet owners, typical reasons for getting a pet include companionship, rescuing animals, relaxation and mental health, with 85% saying their pet had a positive impact on their physical and mental wellbeing.

"The research identified four distinct segments of pet owners. The largest cohort (30%) are driven by affordability and convenience, meaning they are less likely to spend money on non-essential items. Others (25%) - many of whom are retirees and empty nesters - are looking for simplicity & reliability to maintain a happy and well cared animal companion," AMA CEO, Ben Stapley said.

"For 27% of pet owners - who are typically middle to higher income families - 'care and quality' is a key driver in their approach to pet care, with them willing and able to spend money across all pet products and services, including preventative care. Interestingly the least experienced cohort - but arguably the ones more likely to have more pets - are driven to care and share experiences with their pets, even if it means stretching the budget."

Despite the growth in ownership, housing constraints and costs are key barriers holding back would-be owners and current owners hoping to grow their 'pack'. Current non-owners – particularly renters and apartment dwellers – are especially likely to point to unsuitable homes or issues with landlords, body corporates and strata laws as a reason not to bring a pet into their lives.

"In some circumstances, these challenges can lead to difficult decisions to find alternate care arrangements for a beloved pet," Ben Stapley said.

While a family member or friend remains the most popular choice for rehoming a pet if they can no longer care for it, more people are now likely to take their pet to a shelter (20%, up from 15% in 2019).

SEC Newgate's *Mood of the Nation August 2022*, a nationally representative online survey of n=1,804 adults indicates that as Australia emerged from its pandemic-driven pet acquisition boom, there was also a surge in pet

<sup>1</sup> 48%, up from 40% in 2019 but on par with 47% in 2021

<sup>2</sup> 33%, up from 27% in 2019 and 30% in 2021

<sup>3</sup> fish (12% vs. 11%), birds (11% vs. 9%), small mammals (4% vs. 3%) and reptiles (3% vs. 2%)

surrendering occurring in parallel – in part driven by difficult circumstances and amongst pet owners with greater financial and social vulnerabilities.

“This data paints a portrait of some people who are stretched thin and stressed out, dealing with increased living costs and having to give up their pets. It suggests a need for supporting services to help keep pet owners with their animals through difficult times, particularly given the findings regarding the mental health benefits of companion animals,” Ben Stapley said.

“To ensure that as many Australians as possible can access the myriad benefits associated with pet ownership, we seek a policy environment that facilitates responsible pet ownership practices,” AMA CEO, Ben Stapley said.

“This could be achieved by improving strata laws, providing support for vulnerable pet owners, or through greater national consistency in companion animal policy settings.

“We need to encourage informed and thoughtful decision-making by governments, policymakers and others when considering issues that impact Australia’s estimated 28.7 million pets in 6.9 million households,” Ben Stapley concluded.

*Animal Medicines Australia is a peak body representing leading animal health companies in Australia, and we provide up-to-date, authoritative data on pets and pet ownership in Australia to help deliver better animal health and industry outcomes across the country.*

*The study was conducted by Newgate Research, one of Australia’s most sought-after market and social research firms. The study included deep focus group conversations with dog and cat owners from around the country, validated through a nationally representative online survey of more than 2,000 adults – resulting in a robust maximum error margin of +/- 2% at the 95% confidence level.*

*Newgate is a founding member of the Australian Polling Council, with a full methodology disclosure statement for this study available on its website.*

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