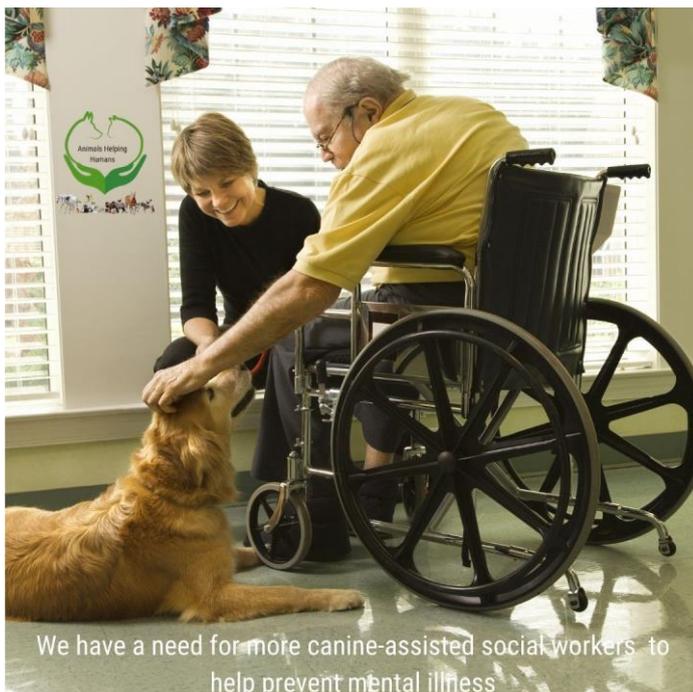




Information Pack

for Animal-Assisted Social Work

Animal-assisted social work is an emerging field due to the beneficial effect animals may have on people's health, well-being, and motivation. Animals have the potential to make humans happier, healthier, and more sociable. The inclusion of an animal in social work practice can enhance the professional helping process (Bode 2020, citing Altschiller 2011). Animal Therapies Ltd (ATL) is a national charity that connects those in need with animal-assisted services that may prevent or help manage disability, illness or suffering. Animal Therapies Ltd is endeavouring to advance the understanding, acceptance and accessibility of animal-assisted social work. This information package introduces animal-assisted social work as a profession. The information pack is designed to encourage and educate organisations in the upskilling of existing social workers to become animal-assisted social workers.



This handbook is to be used in conjunction with the Animal Therapies Ltd ATL [Code of Ethics](#) and [Code of Conduct](#)

Table of Contents

Definition	1
What are the benefits of the human/animal bond?	1
What are the benefits of animal-assisted social work	2
<i>Children</i>	3
<i>Mental Health</i>	3
<i>Disability</i>	3
<i>Aged Care</i>	4
Where and when animal-assisted social work is not appropriate?	4
What are the necessary traits in a therapy animal?	5
What are the rights of a therapy animal?	5
What are the responsibilities of the animal's handler/carer?	6
What is the process for setting up animal-assisted?	7
What are the barriers to animal-assisted social work?	7
What are the risk factors for animal-assisted social work?	8
References	10
Appendix A: Animal-Assisted Therapy Protocol	12
Appendix B: Animal-Assisted Therapy Policy & Procedure	16
Appendix C: Animal-Assisted Therapy Consent and Release of Liability Form	18
Appendix D: Client Screening Form for AAT	20
Appendix E: AAT Dog Assessment Form	21
Appendix F: AAT Client Evaluation Form	24
Appendix G: Animal-Assisted Therapy Training and Education	26
Appendix H: Policies and Procedures	26

Definitions

There is some confusion about the terminology around [animal-assisted services](#). Terms such as therapy animals and assistance animals are sometimes used interchangeably, creating confusion as their roles are very different (Parenti et al. 2013).

- **Assistance animals** (sometimes called service animals) are trained to alleviate the barriers people with disabilities, and mental health issues experience in daily activities. For example, guide dogs are trained to assist the visually impaired (Walker, Aimers & Perry 2015, citing Kruger & Serpell 2006). The training and role of an assistance animal involve the animal assisting an individual and not interacting with a wide range of people when working (RSPCA 2021).
- **Therapy animals** are assessed as suitable to work alongside their allied health handlers in therapeutic settings with a wide range of people (Compitus 2021).
- **Visitation animals** work alongside humans who do not necessarily hold any qualifications but whose animals are assessed as suitable both from a health and wellness perspective for the animal and from a suitability and safety for the human participants. They are generally brought into a facility or organisation by a handler who does not need to have any formal qualifications. Visitation animals visit with people to provide companionship, reduce stress, distract from chronic pain and enhance wellbeing.
- **School support animal** - used to describe an animal working in educational settings, such as schools, engaging in goal-directed, structured programs or services, with outcomes that are educational in nature. In some cases, such education may pertain to animal care and welfare, the development of life skills or practices used in the cultivation of wellbeing.
- **Animal-assisted activities** can be relatively informal, including a wide range of activities undertaken with a visitation animal (Compitus 2021) but not necessarily conducted by allied health professionals. For example, animal-assisted activities include visitation dogs visiting aged care facilities and schools with their handlers.
- **Animal-assisted therapy** is a more structured intervention than animal-assisted activities are. Animal-assisted therapy involves specific treatment plans and is goal-directed, documented, and evaluated by an allied health professional (Compitus 2021, citing Pet Partners n.d.).
- **Animal-assisted learning**- involves an animal and a facilitator in an 'experiential' learning environment to assist an individual or group to develop skills, tools and strategies to achieve a predetermined goal. Animal-assisted learning practitioners are trained in their field of expertise to facilitate specific learning outcomes (ATL 2021, b).

What are the benefits of the human/animal bond?

Animal-assisted services is an

emerging field because of the beneficial effect animals may have on people's health, well-being, and motivation. The beneficial effects animals may have on humans can be demonstrated across age, race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and life condition (Tedeschi, Fitchet & Molidor 2005). Animals have the potential to make humans happier, healthier, and more sociable (Bode 2020, citing Altschiller 2011). Hence, research indicates that humans may derive many benefits from contact with animals, such as:

- Improving ones physical and physiological health (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013).
- Lowering blood pressure (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Allen, Blascovich, & Mendes 2002)
- Lowering cholesterol (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Walsh 2009)
- Lowering cortisol levels (Bode 2021).
- Increasing levels of dopamine (Shena et al. 2018)
- Increasing endorphins (Bode 2021)
- Increasing oxytocin (Bode 2021)
- Heightening levels of well-being (Compitus 2021)
- Providing positive mental health outcomes such as: reduced anxiety, depression social isolation (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Friedmann & Tsai, 2006)
- Assisting people with mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, better cope with their disease (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Beck, 2005)
- Developing a protective factor for people who experience various issues such as exposure to trauma or violence (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Castelh, Hart, & Zasloff 2001)
- Mitigating experiences of social isolation due to illness or age (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Castelh, Hart, & Zasloff 2001)
- Providing social support for people (Hoy-Gerlach, Delgado & Sloane 2019)

What are the benefits of animal-assisted social work?

Research indicates that the inclusion of an animal in social work practice can enhance the professional helping process. Social work is relational. As such social work emphasises the importance of human relationships (Compitus 2021, citing Workers 2008) and animals can assist people to build and maintain relationships (Compitus 2021, citing Compitus 2019). Including a therapy animal in social work may make a social worker seem more approachable, assisting them in building rapport with clients and strengthening the therapeutic alliance (Compitus 2021). The presence of a therapy animal can heighten a client's engagement and increase the client's willingness to communicate (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013, citing Levinson 1997). Likewise, the presence of a therapy animal may enhance the client's sense of trust and safety within the therapeutic relationship; thus, enabling the client to form a safe

attachment to the animal and therapist (Compitus 2021, citing Van Fleet & Faa-Thompson 2017). According to Walker et al. (2015, citing Jackson 2013), animal-assisted social work may be utilised for various therapeutic purposes. Such as building empathy, learning to self-regulate, improving social skills, reducing isolation, combating bullying, and enhancing physical and mental health (Compitus 2021). Animal-assisted social work may benefit clients beyond what the social worker could achieve when working without animal-assistance.

Whilst it is not appropriate to include an animal in every therapeutic session (Bode 2020), animal-assisted social work may benefit a diverse range of welfare populations (Walker, Aimers & Perry 2015). Fields of practice that may benefit from animal-assisted social work include:

Children ~

Children who have experienced a wide range of problems, including child abuse and maltreatment, poverty, family conflict, domestic violence, and mental health concerns, may benefit from animal-assisted social work (Tedeschi, Fitchet & Molidor 2005). An animal working alongside the practitioner may stimulate the child's engagement (Tedeschi, Fitchet & Molidor 2005). Likewise, enhance the child's sense of control and safety and increase children's willingness to communicate, which work to help empower the child (Tedeschi, Fitchet & Molidor 2005 citing Levinson 1972). Animal-assisted social work may additionally assist children in developing empathy, self-esteem and trust and improving socialisation skills, all of which can be especially valuable when working with children who have experienced trauma such as abuse or neglect (Tedeschi, Fitchet & Molidor 2005).

Mental health ~

Animal-assisted social work is a therapeutic tool that can assist clients experiencing mental health issues to recover (Tedeschi, Fitchet & Molidor 2005). Animal-assisted therapy may help reduce symptoms of mental health issues. Research suggests that the effects of trauma, anxiety, stress, anger and depression may all be reduced by introducing animals into the therapeutic relationship (Compitus 2021, Eaton-Stull, Beall, Hutchins, Marino & Zinn 2020). Furthermore, the inclusion of animals in therapy may also improve the client's engagement and socialisation (Jones et al. 2019).

Disability ~

Animal-assisted therapy may benefit people with disabilities physically, psychologically, and socially. Movement and speech areas may be improved by undertaking specific animal-assisted therapies (Eaton-Stull, Beall, Hutchins, Marino & Zinn 2020). Research shows that in paediatric disabilities, animal-assisted therapies can improve client engagement, mood, and cognition (Yap et al. 2016), Grandgeorge et al. (2012) and Solomon (2010) suggest that canine-assisted therapy can assist children with communication difficulties to communicate more effectively. Furthermore, it may reduce feelings of isolation, making it a valuable tool for children with developmental and psychiatric disorders (Grandgeorge et al. 2012, Whalen & Case-Smith 2012). Yap et al. (2016) assert that animal-assisted therapy can benefit most people living with

a disability. Generally, people living with a disability experience some degree of difficulty in social situations and animal-assisted therapy can be a powerful adjunct to that experience (Yap et al. 2016).

Aged Care ~

Elders may benefit from animal-assisted therapy (Bode 2020). Elders may experience issues with social isolation, and the presence of an animal may reduce feelings of loneliness (Eaton-Stull, Beall, Hutchins, Marino & Zinn 2020). Elders are often deprived of touch, and whilst it may be inappropriate for social workers to have physical contact with clients, elders may benefit from being able to stroke and touch a therapy animal (Compitus 2021, Eaton-Stull et al. 2020). Elders involved in animal-assisted therapy have demonstrated improvements in memory, communication, socialisation, and well-being (Bode 2020). Animal-assisted therapies may also assist the elderly suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's. Studies have shown that symptoms such as agitation and irritability commonly experienced by people with Alzheimer's and dementia are reduced through animal-assisted therapies (Bode 2020, citing Motomura & Ohyama 2004).

In addition to benefits to clients, the presence of a therapy animal within an organisation may improve staff morale. An animal's presence may elevate mood and increase social engagement regardless of whether the relationship is therapeutic for people who love animals.

Where and when is animal-assisted social work not appropriate?

Animal-assisted social work is not appropriate for all clients. Before implementing animal-assisted social work sessions with a client, it is essential to first assess whether clients are interested in it and then evaluate their suitability for animal-assisted therapy (Compitus 2021). Practitioners should consider a range of critical areas that can make animal-assisted therapy unsuitable, for instance:

- Some clients may prefer not to work with animals. Clients should be consulted about their interest in engaging in animal-assisted services.
- Some clients may be afraid of animals (Compitus 2021).
- Some clients may experience animal allergies (Shena, Xionga, Choua & Halla 2018).
- Cultural background can also play a role in determining the client's attitudes towards animals. Some cultures perceive animals as unclean. Such beliefs would make animal-assisted therapy inappropriate for this client population (ATL 2021).
- Some clients may pose a risk to the physical or emotional well-being of the animal due to issues such as traits of antisocial personality disorder or a previous history of cruelty towards animals (Compitus 2021, citing Van Fleet and Faa-Thompson 2017, Rislely-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013).
- Some clients with severe attachment disruptions may firmly attach to the therapy animal and feel abandoned when treatment ends. For clients with insecure attachment styles,

animal-assisted therapy should be utilised cautiously. If engaged in, the practitioner must continually encourage the client's self-reliance rather than reliance on the therapy animal (Compitus 2021, citing Van Fleet & Faa-Thompson 2017).

What are the necessary traits in a therapy animal?

Animal-assisted social work is not simply a bring your pet to work scheme. Some animals may make lovely companions for their owners but have temperaments that are not suited to becoming therapy animals. Therefore, all animals must be assessed by an approved therapy animal trainer (Compitus 2021) and a vet both before they begin their role as a therapy animal and at regular intervals throughout their working life. Animals need to be assessed to ensure their temperament is conducive to this type of engagement. Therapy animals need to have a calm temperament and be comfortable with having contact with lots of different people without becoming stressed. The animal should be comfortable being touched and groomed by multiple people and should not startle easily (Compitus 2021). All therapy animals should be trained and evaluated by training organisations that agree to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics [such as the ones listed on the Animal Therapies Ltd website](#). Therapy animals are not trained to do specific tasks (like assistance animals are). Instead, they should be trained to have basic manners such as housebreaking, not biting, sitting, staying and ignoring distractions (Compitus 2021).

What are the rights of a therapy animal?

All animals have rights that are encoded in the 'Five Freedoms' of animal welfare. These rights include but are not limited to:

1. **The right to freedom from hunger and thirst:** by access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigour.
2. **The right to freedom from discomfort:** by providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. **Freedom from pain, injury or disease:** by prevention through rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. **Freedom to express normal behaviour:** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. **Freedom from fear and distress:** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering (RSPCA).

ATL (2021) asserts that therapy animals' welfare must extend beyond the 'Five Freedoms' of animal welfare. For instance:

- Animal welfare should be the concern of all persons associated with an animal-assisted service (ATL 2021).

- Formal oversight of the animal's health and well-being must be designated to a single person (most often, the handler or owner). For facility animals, a clear assignment of this role is imperative (ATL 2021).
- Training methods for animals engaged in animal-assisted services must not rely on force, aversion, dominance, fear, intimidation, or physical punishment (ATL 2021).
- Training methods should be based on instincts and positive reinforcement, using current scientifically validated methods (ATL 2021).
- Equipment used with the animal should not cause pain, distress or risk to the animal. For example, training collars that utilise prongs, spikes, choke, pinch, slip or electric shock should not be used (ATL 2021).
- Therapy animals can be at risk of being overfed or fed inappropriate foods by clients and other staff members. The animal's handler/carer must ensure that this does not occur (Bode 2020).
- Therapy animals should have the right to determine when they want to work and when they need to take a break, and the therapeutic space should be set up to accommodate this (Compitus 2021, citing Barber & Mellen 2013).
- Therapy animals should have the right to be able to choose the level of interaction they have with clients; thus, the practitioner needs to:
 - Monitor the animal to ensure the animal is not uncomfortable or distressed (such as yawning, ears back, or trying to leave the room) (Compitus 2021).
 - Have a plan for situations when the therapy animal needs to leave the session before the session is over (Compitus 2021, citing VanFleet & Faa-Thompson 2015).
 - Have a separate space, or a covered animal crate for the animal to retreat to (Compitus 2021).
 - Advise the client if the animal needs a break to self-regulate and convey that this is not a reflection of the client (Compitus 2021).

What are the responsibilities of the therapy animal's handler/carer?

Animal handlers/carers:

- should be trained and assessed by an accredited body or a suitably qualified person before undertaking that role (ATL 2021).
- should seek registration with a national or international animal-assisted services organisation. Furthermore, handlers must hold insurance policies relevant to their practice (ATL 2021).
- must not allow other persons to work with their animals in their absence (ATL 2021).
- must have specific knowledge of their animals': species, breed, and individual character traits; body language; signs of stress, discomfort, fear, illness, injury, and ageing; and responsiveness, reactivity, and flexibility to a variety of situations, allowing handlers to make appropriate decisions concerning their animals' initial and ongoing suitability for participation in animal-assisted services (ATL 2021).

- must demonstrate responsible, humane, and respectful animal ownership at all times. This includes, but is not limited to, the provision of adequate: housing, nutrition, transportation, preventative and responsive veterinary care, exercise, environmental enrichment, rest and recreation, and companionship (both animal and human where relevant). These requirements are above and beyond those represented by the Five Freedoms (ATL 2021).
- should advocate for the health and well-being of animals engaged in animal-assisted services. The animals must not be viewed as mere tools of the service that can be exploited for human gain but should be considered living, sentient beings whose well-being, including the right to flourish, is of paramount concern (ATL 2021).
- must not engage in or permit any rough or abusive handling of their animals, including, but not limited to, during the training process and before, during, and post animal-assisted service sessions (ATL 2021).
- must abide by all federal and relevant state/territory legislation about therapy animals and animal welfare (ATL 2021).
- must always practice animal-assisted services within the scope of their professional identity and within the limits of their education, training, qualifications, and experience (ATL 2021).

What is the process for setting up animal-assisted social work?

- **The animal** needs to be evaluated and trained to ensure that it is suited to filling the role of a therapy animal (Compitus 2021). Refer to ATL website for training organisations who have agreed to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics and implement the ATL Code of Conduct: <https://www.animaltherapies.org.au/download-documents/>
- **The practitioner** must be trained to ensure that they have appropriate knowledge in animal handling, animal welfare and therapeutic techniques that involve working alongside an animal (Bode 2020). Refer to ATL website for training courses who have agreed to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics and implement the ATL Code of Conduct: <https://www.animaltherapies.org.au/search-courses/>
- **The agency** where the practitioner works needs to be assessed for appropriateness for animal-assisted therapy. Agency regulations need to be understood and adhered to. If policies for the presence of an animal in the workplace do not exist, they will need to be created (Compitus 2021). Policies may include areas such as informed consent for clients to work with animals, risk assessment and management and ethics.
- **The client/s** must be assessed to determine their suitability (Compitus 2021). Additionally, clients must be provided with sufficient information in order to make an informed choice to participate in any animal-assisted service.

What are the barriers to animal-assisted social work?

- Animal-assisted services are currently largely unregulated in Australia (Jones et al. 2018). More work needs to be done to ensure that that animal-assisted therapy is

conducted in ways that ensure accountability, efficacy and ethical conduct that does not harm animals or humans involved (Evans & Gray 2012). ATL is currently working to implement codes of conduct for the animal-assisted services industry to regulate and enhance practice. ATL may move towards becoming an accredited body over the course of the next 5 years.

- There is a shortage of courses offered that teach practitioners how to work with a therapy dog. Most social work programs in Australia do not cover this topic in the curriculum (Bode 2020, citing Curtiss 2010). For social workers wishing to upskill to include animal-assisted therapies, refer to ATL website for training organisations who have agreed to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics and implement the ATL Code of Conduct: <https://www.animaltherapies.org.au/download-documents/>
- Alternatively, some social workers have chosen to study remotely with institutions overseas.
- Training an animal to be a therapy dog is a highly involved and expensive process that requires a significant level of commitment on the part of the handler/carer for the animal (Compitus 2021). Social workers wishing to upskill in this area must commit a great deal of time, money, and energy to upskilling and caring for the animal that will work alongside them. However, this process can be rewarding both professionally and personally.
- Working with animals in professional settings can be a liability risk. The AASW provides liability insurance for registered social workers. However, this insurance does not cover animal-assisted services (AASW 2021). This barrier can be overcome by taking out liability insurance independently. Some insurance companies are willing to simply add the animals to the existing insurance premium for little or no extra cost. It is worth talking to existing insurers to see what they offer. Alternatively, some insurers offer insurance that is specifically designed to cover animal-assisted therapy. For instance, Marsh offers canine-assisted therapist handler insurance.
- Organisations that do not already have animals working alongside practitioners generally do not have the appropriate policies in place to include animal-assisted services. However, these policies can be developed (Compitus 2021). Included below on pages 12 - 25 are some sample documents that can be adapted to suit a range of workplaces. When creating policies and procedures for animal-assisted social work, they must be compliant with federal and state/territory requirements to prevent, identify, detect, and respond to risks to the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults (ATL 2021). Relevant policies are included on pages 30 – 31.
- Animal-assisted social work is still developing as a field of practice in Australia. There is still a limited body of research into its efficacy. As a result, the community and organisations may not know what an animal-assisted social worker does or how to incorporate it into practice. The practitioner can overcome this by developing their own programs.
- Because animal-assisted social work is still an emerging field, it can be challenging to attract funding for programs. This can be overcome by introducing animal-assisted services as an alternative and creative way of delivering existing programs.

- There is a lack of risk assessment tools that have been developed for animal-assisted services across different community settings. There is only one available in Australia that's just been designed for schools, but it's not specific to social work. Where such tools do not already exist, they will need to be developed.
- Social work practice and policy is humanistic and anthropocentric. However, the AASW code of ethics has recently incorporated a small reference ensuring any animals engaged as part of social work practice are protected (AASW 2020, p. 13). The inclusion of Animals in the AASW code of ethics is a step in the right direction. However, there is still need for an increased awareness of animal welfare which may be achieved by building animal rights into organisations existing ethics codes or by becoming familiar with, agreeing to and complying with ATL's code of ethics and codes of conduct.

What are the risk factors for animal-assisted social work?

Animals working alongside humans are at risk of experiencing health and welfare issues (Bode 2020). The animal needs to be protected from being over-fed and/or overworked by staff (Bode 2020). Additionally, animals can experience stress when working alongside humans and interacting with clients, affecting their behaviour and negatively impacting their well-being. Therefore, handlers must develop the ability to read the therapy animals emotions and respond appropriately to situations to maintain a safe environment for their animal and client (Evans & Gray, 2012). This issue can be addressed by undertaking training in working alongside therapy animals. Appropriate training can train the practitioner to read and respond appropriately to the animal's body language (Evans & Gray 2012). Regular breaks, exercise, toileting, and nutrition also need to be considered (Evans & Gray 2012).

- There is a risk of a client being injured by an animal if the animal becomes overly stressed or has a temperament unsuited to working as a therapy animal. The risk of injury can be mitigated through appropriate training for the practitioner, assessment of the suitability of the animal and training for the animal (Evans & Gray 2012).
- There is a risk of animals being harmed by a client displaying aggressive or antisocial behaviours. Clients need to be assessed and monitored to ensure they treat the animals working alongside them well (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge & Kawam 2013).
- There is a risk of zoonosis in animal/human interactions. Clients are at risk of contracting certain infectious diseases from animals. This risk can be mitigated through good hygiene practices such as regular grooming of the animal, regular worming and vaccinations (as evidenced by veterinary certificates) and regular handwashing for the client (Friesen 2009).
- There is a risk of allergic reaction to an animal. This risk can be minimised by carefully selecting an animal that sheds minimally and is groomed regularly (Friesen 2009). Additionally, signs about the presence of animals within the organisation should be displayed at reception asking people to approach reception if they have any concerns.

- There is a risk that an organisation will be sued if a client is injured by an animal or becomes ill due to engaging with an animal. This risk can be mitigated through insurance and by providing clients with a process of informed consent. In order to give consent of an informed nature, clients must be provided with adequate information regarding the nature, risks, and chances of benefit associated with the service, and it should be confirmed that the provided information has been understood (ATL 2021).

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Appendix A: Animal-Assisted Therapy Protocol

Animal-assisted Therapy Program

1. Purpose

(Name of organisation) recognises the value of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in the social work field. To support this recognition, staff social workers who have been properly trained will be allowed to practice AAT under the provisions listed in this document. The purpose of this protocol is to develop guidelines that provide for the safety of clients, visitors, staff and animals involved in Animal-assisted Therapy.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, students, contractors, visiting staff and volunteers of (name of organisation).

3. Definitions

Animal-assisted Therapy relates to the inclusion of animals in therapeutic work with humans. *Therapy Dog* relates to a specific dog that has been trained, assessed and approved to work within a therapeutic environment alongside an allied health professional.

Animal-assisted Therapist is any allied health professional who is trained and capable of bringing animals into their clinical practice with clients.

Animal-assisted Therapy Client relates to any client that has been assessed and approved to engage in Animal-assisted therapy and has consented to do so.

The Responsible Person is the person officially responsible for the dog, under whom the dog is registered.

4. Contact Officer

The manager of (name of organisation) should be contacted for any clarification or resolution pertaining to this protocol.

5. Conditions for Practice

Therapy Dog

- The therapy dog will have an initial animal behavioural evaluation in order to be approved for the program. This will be done by an independent canine behaviourist.
- The therapy dog will be trained and accredited by an approved training organisation. Refer to

ATL website for training organisations who have agreed to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics and implement the ATL Code of Conduct <https://www.animaltherapies.org.au/download-documents/>

- The therapy dog will not engage in AAT at (name of organisation) until the dog has been assessed and approved by the manager and an independent animal trainer.

- The therapy dog will have an annual veterinary examination and must always meet the following health requirements:
 - a. Be under a veterinarian's care
 - b. Be parasite free
 - c. Be on a flea control program
 - d. Have current vaccinations
 - e. Be free of illness
 - f. Be bathed and have reasonable oral hygiene
 - g. Have nails trimmed and filed
 - h. Maintain appropriate temperament (in accordance with the definition of appropriate temperament used in the initial behaviour evaluation)

- The therapy dog must be adequately supervised by a staff member or student at all times whilst at (name of organisation). If necessary, the therapy dog may be properly and safely secured in staff offices or in a pet crate or cage, in a supervised, low traffic area, for a short period of time when it is not working but is required to remain quiet and well behaved.

- The therapy dog must not be left alone with a client.

- The therapy dog shall be kept on a leash or held in an appropriate cage or crate at all times, with the following exceptions: when in an enclosed area where the animal cannot escape (eg when in a therapy room or group room with the door closed, or when in the staff area).

- The therapy dog must not be tied to a piece of furniture that could be pulled over or toppled. The therapy dog must not be left unsupervised if tied up by their leash.

- Prior to bringing a therapy dog into therapy sessions, the dog must visit the site regularly for a minimum of 2 weeks so it may become familiar with the environment and therapy room in which it will be working.

- The therapy dog will have scheduled work hours and regular break times.

- Appointments for the therapy dog will be monitored via outlook calendar.

- The therapy dog will enter and exit the (organisation name) site on leash.

- The therapy dog will wear a visible 'therapy dog' vest whilst working at (name of organisation).

- The therapy dog will not be allowed in areas where food is being prepared.

- The therapy dog will only work alongside its handler and one other designated trained person.

Animal-assisted Therapist

- All clinicians who wish to be involved with the practice of AAT must read and agree to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics and to follow the guidelines outlined in the ATL Conduct Standards
- A clinician or student who wishes to practice AAT at (name of organisation) must have completed sufficient amount of AAT training. The type of AAT training the staff member has received must be approved by the manager before the staff member may practice AAT in (name of organisation).
- No clinician or student may practice AAT without the approval of the Clinical Manager.
- No social worker may practice AAT without first obtaining informed consent from the client (and legal guardian where appropriate).
- Social workers who wish to practice AAT with clients are responsible for screening their clients for appropriateness to participate in AAT, as per the Client Screening Guidelines. The therapy dog must not be present in the therapy room during the screening process or until it is determined that the client is appropriate, and consent is obtained.
- All social workers engaging in AAT must be aware of people's reactions to the therapy dog, and of the dog's reactions to people. Staff must be respectful of both people and animals wishes not to interact.
- Staff should be wary of behaviours of individuals in the facility who may show aggression or harm toward the therapy dog and should avoid having those individuals make contact with the therapy dog.
- Any staff member or student that is tasked with supervising the therapy dog must always clean up after the animal and properly dispose of waste in receptacles outside of (name of organisation).
- Social workers working alongside animals must be respectful of the dog's need for regular breaks and be mindful that the dog may need to retreat at any time during the therapy session. A separate space or animal crate should be provided so that the dog can choose to leave the session at any time.

Animal-assisted Therapy Client

- Prior to participation in AAT, all clients must be adequately screened and determined to be appropriate for AAT, and free of any history of or propensity toward abuse of animals.
- Clients must be willing to engage in Animal-assisted therapy and must provide written, informed consent.

- Clients must be aware that they can request the dog be removed from session at any stage.
- Clients approved for AAT must have no contraindication for Animal-assisted therapy, such as allergies to dogs, fear of animals, aggressive behaviour, open sores, or conditions which compromise immunity.

Hygiene

- AAT should be practiced only in therapy rooms designated for AAT practice. All therapy rooms in which AAT is practiced should be labelled as such for the protection of clients with animal allergies. A sign must also be placed on the outside of the building informing clients of the presence of the therapy dog inside the building. Where appropriate or when requested, clients with animal allergies should be provided a therapy room where AAT is not or has not been practiced.
- It is recommended that all therapists and clients wash their hands or use a hand sanitiser, before and after interacting with the therapy dog. This reduces the risk of contamination and infection that may be harmful to either people or animals.
- (Name of organisation) should make available to the client a fur-removal brush for clients to remove hair shed from a therapy dog to their clothing.
- The Owner should bring accessories to care for the therapy dog at the worksite, such as food and water bowls, appropriate treats or snacks, appropriate clients-animal interaction tools (eg, pet toys, grooming brush), a pet cage or crate, and devices to clean up animal excrement and fur.

6. References/Relevant legislation

- Mental Health Act 2016
- Children, Youth & Families Act 2005
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 7

7. Related Policies/Documents

- Animal-assisted Therapy Program Brief
- Animal-assisted Therapy Client Screening Guidelines
- Animal-assisted Therapy Consent Form
- Animal-assisted Therapy Dog Behavioural Assessment

8. Implementation Procedures

Appendix B: Animal-assisted Therapy Policy & Procedure

(Organisation name) recognises the value of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in the social work field. To support this recognition, staff social workers who have been properly trained will be allowed to practice AAT under the provisions listed in this document.

Part 1: Animal-assisted Therapy – Conditions for Practice in (name of organisation)

1. A clinician or student who wishes to practice AAT at (name of organisation) must have completed sufficient amount of AAT training. The type of AAT training the staff member has received must be approved by the manager before the staff member may practice AAT in (name of organisation).
2. No clinician or student may practice AAT without the approval of the manager.
3. No clinician or student may practice AAT without first obtaining informed consent from the client (and legal guardian where appropriate). Prior to participation in AAT, all clients must be adequately screened and determined to be appropriate for AAT.
4. The therapy dog will not engage in AAT at (name of organisation) until the dog has been assessed and approved by the manager and an independent animal trainer.
5. The therapy dog must be healthy, clean, well groomed, obedient, toilet trained, non-aggressive, friendly, and very well behaved.
6. The therapy dog must be adequately supervised by a staff member or student at all times whilst at (name of organisation). If necessary, the therapy dog may be properly and safely secured in staff offices or in a pet crate or cage, in a supervised, low traffic area, for a short period of time when it is not working but is required to remain quiet and well behaved.
7. The therapy dog must not be left alone with a client.
8. Any staff member or student that is tasked with supervising the therapy dog must always clean up after the animal and properly dispose of waste in receptacles outside of (name of organisation).

Part 2: Animal-assisted Therapy – Practice Procedures for (name of organisation)

1. All clinicians who wish to be involved with the practice of AAT must read and agree to follow the policy and procedures (this document).
2. Social workers who wish to practice AAT with clients are responsible for screening their clients for appropriateness to participate in AAT. The therapy dog must not be present in the therapy room during the screening process or until it is determined that the client is appropriate, and consent is obtained.
3. AAT should be practiced only in therapy rooms designated for AAT practice. All therapy rooms in which AAT is practiced should be labelled as such for the protection of clients with animal allergies. A sign must also be placed on the outside of the building informing clients of the presence of the therapy dog inside the building. Where appropriate or when requested, clients with animal allergies should be provided a therapy room where AAT is not or has not been practiced.
4. It is recommended that all clinicians or and clients wash their hands or use a hand sanitiser, before and after interacting with the therapy dog. This reduces the risk of

contamination and infection that may hurt the dog and that may be transferred from person to person via the dog's coat.

5. AAT clinicians should make available to the client a fur-removal brush for clients to remove hair shed from a therapy dog to their clothing.
6. The dogs carer/responsible person should bring accessories to care for the therapy dog at the worksite, such as food and water bowls, appropriate treats or snacks, appropriate clients-animal interaction tools (eg., pet toys, grooming brush), a pet cage or crate, and devices to clean up animal excrement and fur.
7. The therapy dog shall be kept on a leash or held in an appropriate cage or crate at all times, with the following exceptions: when in an enclosed area where the animal cannot escape (e.g., when in a therapy room or group room with the door closed, or when in the staff area).
8. The therapy dog must not be tied to a piece of furniture that could be pulled over or toppled. The therapy dog must not be left unsupervised if tied up by their leash.
9. Prior to bringing a therapy dog into therapy sessions, the dog must visit the site regularly for a minimum of 2 weeks so it may become familiar with the environment and therapy room in which it will be working.
10. All social workers engaging in AAT must be aware of people's reactions to the therapy dog, and of the dog's reactions to people. Staff must be respectful of both people and animals wishes not to interact.
11. Staff should be wary of behaviours of individuals in the facility who may show aggression or harm toward the therapy dog and should avoid having those individuals make contact with the therapy dog.

Appendix C: Animal-assisted Therapy Consent and Release of Liability Form

Animal-assisted Therapy (AAT) is a type of therapy that strategically incorporates human-animal interactions into a formal therapeutic process. It is considered an adjunct to existing therapy and is guided by a trained professional who has also been certified as an AAT handler to work with a certified animal. AAT works with the human-animal bond in goal-directed interventions as an integral part of the treatment process.

Benefits of AAT:

- Improvement of social attention, behaviour, interpersonal interaction, and mood
- Reduction of stress-related parameters such as cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure
- Reduction of self-reported fear and anxiety
- Improvement in mental and physical health, particularly cardiovascular health
- Improvement in immune system functioning
- Improved pain management
- Increased trustworthiness of and trust toward other persons
- Reduced aggression
- Enhanced empathy
- Improved learning

About (therapy dog):

(Name of therapy dog) is a (breed) who is (age) years old. Hx of the dog ...

Risks Related to AAT:

- Animals have their own natural defences. While the therapist will do everything possible to prevent any injury, it is possible that someone may get scratched or bitten.
- Animals often use their mouths in play. Therefore, even when playing, it is possible for light biting to occur.
- Our animal has been certified as a therapy animal and screened by a veterinarian before joining our therapy team. Our animal is maintained in a healthy condition, however the possibility of disease transfer from animal to human still exists.

Rules Related to AAT:

1. The animal individual rights, just as each client has rights. Therefore, the animal is allowed to determine if and when he participates with others. While it may be planned to have an animal in session, the animal will never be forced to do so.
2. The animal has his own quiet space in the office where he can rest, sleep, or just take a quiet break. The animal should not be disturbed when he is in this area.
3. The animal is always treated gently. He should never be hit, have his tail or any other parts pulled, carried or treated in any other way that is uncomfortable to him.
4. The animal will always need his handler present in any therapeutic situation.
5. If an animal becomes irritated, scared, or in any way acts in a negative manner, the handler will put the animal in a safe place. No other person should touch the animal at these times.

Consent and Release of Liability:

I _____ understand and accept the rules and risks associated with Animal-assisted Therapy and agree to accept full liability in the event that they animal harms you / your young person during the course of treatment.

I _____ consent to the use of the therapy dog in my / my young person's therapy sessions / group program. I understand the benefits and risks associated with Animal-assisted Therapy and would like to participate in such program. I am aware that I can withdraw my consent and/or request that the therapy dog be removed from my sessions as any time.

Client / Guardian Name: _____

Client / Guardian Signature: _____

Appendix D: Client Screening Form for AAT

Animal-assisted Therapy (AAT) is a type of therapy that strategically incorporates human-animal interactions into a formal therapeutic process. It is considered an adjunct to existing therapy and is guided by a trained professional who has also been certified as an AAT handler to work with a certified animal. AAT uses the human-animal bond in goal-directed interventions as an integral part of the treatment process.

As this treatment involves close interaction between the client and the animal, all clients must be screened before they participate in AAT. This is for the protection of both the client and the animal.

Does the client have any of the following (please circle):

Yes	No	Allergies to animals? If so, which animals?
Yes	No	Fear / Phobia relating to animals? If so, which animals?
Yes	No	History of aggression or abuse toward animals? If yes, client is not eligible for AAT.
Yes	No	History of aggression or abuse toward people?
Yes	No	Current psychotic symptoms? Describe.
Yes	No	Emotional Dysregulation? Describe.
Yes	No	Behavioural Dysregulation? Describe
Yes	No	Severe Developmental Delay / ID? Describe

What animals has the client had as pets? What is/was the nature of their relationship with that pet? (eg. close, loving, indifferent, etc).

Has the client ever had negative experiences with animals? Yes / No

Would this client like to participate in Animal-assisted Therapy? Yes / No

Do you have any reason to believe that AAT may be harmful for this client? Yes / No

Do you have any reason to believe the animal would not be safe in AAT with this client? Yes / No

Based on the above information, is this client appropriate for Animal-assisted Therapy? Yes / No

Therapist Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix E: AAT Dog Assessment Form

Dog Details:		
Name:	Breed:	Age:
Owner / Handler Details:		
Name:	Phone:	
Address:		

Canine Behaviour Assessment and Reactivity Checklist

This checklist is to be used for assessing suitability of a dog for use as a therapy dog at headspace Knox. This assessment should be completed only on dogs trained for therapy and should only be completed by a trained and qualified Dog Trainer or Behaviourist.

The dog owner / handler should be present for the duration of the assessment.

Situation	Behaviour / Reactivity		
	Friendly / Appropriate	Fearful / Inappropriate	Aggressive
Stranger Approach Approach dog, make eye contact, use calm voice, extend hand toward dog	<input type="checkbox"/> Approaches in a friendly manner <input type="checkbox"/> Soft/friendly <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed / Playful / Aloof <input type="checkbox"/> Soft eye contact	<input type="checkbox"/> Excitable <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful regression / avoidance <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious/tense <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive reactions: growling, whale eye, side turn, posturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunges to bite/attack <input type="checkbox"/> Baring teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Hackles / stiff body posture / glaring eye contact
Touch / Handling Touch head and body, back side, underneath, front and back. Apply gentle pressure to hips, touch tail, ears, feet, look in mouth.	<input type="checkbox"/> Softens with touch, engages tester <input type="checkbox"/> Licks / nuzzles / seeks attention / rolls onto back <input type="checkbox"/> May move away from teeth/paw touch in neutral manner <input type="checkbox"/> Instigates further contact / paws for pats	<input type="checkbox"/> Excitable / mouthy <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful regression / avoidance / sensitivity <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious/tense <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive reactions: growling, whale eye, side turn, posturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunges to bite/attack <input type="checkbox"/> Baring teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Hackles / stiff body posture / glaring eye contact
Accepts Affection Invite dog on lap /	<input type="checkbox"/> Approaches in a friendly manner	<input type="checkbox"/> Excitable / mouthy <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunges to bite/attack

<p>sit next to you. Put arm over dog. Hug dog. If safe, put face to dog (do not do if aggressive responses previously shown)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Settles on couch / lap <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed with hugs / face proximity <input type="checkbox"/> Soft eye contact</p>	<p>regression / avoidance <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious/tense <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive reactions: growling, whale eye, side turn, posturing</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Baring teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Hackles / stiff body posture / glaring eye contact</p>
<p>Possession Use a toy or ball with rope attached. Engage dog, then attempt to remove the toy. Can offer treat in exchange for toy.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Gives the toy easily, overall playful attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Slight resistance to toy removal, but gives in with slight correction <input type="checkbox"/> Responds to 'leave' or similar command <input type="checkbox"/> Takes toy away</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Possessive over toy, strong resistance <input type="checkbox"/> Hiding toy or body posturing over toy <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious/tense <input type="checkbox"/> Playful growling, engaging</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Growls, freezes, snaps when approaching <input type="checkbox"/> Becomes aggressive with intent to follow through</p>
<p>Food Offer dog treat and allow dog to take it. Offer another, remove as he begins to take it. Drop a treat and cover with foot. Mild general handling when dog is eating treat.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent or friendly <input type="checkbox"/> Confused (looks up at you) <input type="checkbox"/> Dog is assertive (digs / paws at treat), gets pushy for treat, follows treat with focus. <input type="checkbox"/> Can be called away from treat</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Excitable, mouthy <input type="checkbox"/> Snapping at hand / treat <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious, tense, still <input type="checkbox"/> Growling</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Growls, freezes, snaps when approaching <input type="checkbox"/> Becomes aggressive with intent to follow through</p>
<p>Dominance Push down on dog's shoulders using hands or forearm. Maintain pressure for a moment.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Melts under pressure / submissive <input type="checkbox"/> Remains neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Unresponsive</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Stiffens body <input type="checkbox"/> Turns strongly toward handler <input type="checkbox"/> Shows discomfort, whale eye, posturing</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Growls / snaps at handler <input type="checkbox"/> Baring teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Hackles / stiff body posture / glaring eye contact</p>
<p>Correction Walk dog near other people and distractions. Let him sniff/become distracted then give a slight tug on the leash and verbal redirection. *This is not a behavioural correction, just testing for reaction to pressure on the leash.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Easily redirects to handler, compliant <input type="checkbox"/> Slow to redirect, but follows. Needs second or multiple corrections</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Ignores handler and corrections, continues behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Drops in fear, defensive posture <input type="checkbox"/> Becomes unresponsive (shuts down) <input type="checkbox"/> Fights against correction and becomes stubborn to comply</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Redirects aggressively toward handler, bites</p>

<p>Noise Make loud noises, raised voices, banging walls, drop objects</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Interested, curious <input type="checkbox"/> Slight startle response <input type="checkbox"/> Moves away in neutral manner <input type="checkbox"/> Soft body	<input type="checkbox"/> Fearful regression / avoidance <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious/tense <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive reactions: growling, whale eye, side turn, posturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunges to bite/attack <input type="checkbox"/> Baring teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Hackles / stiff body posture / glaring eye contact
<p>Crowded Places Walk the dog through a crowded environment, close proximity to other people and distractions.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed body language <input type="checkbox"/> Soft/friendly when engaged <input type="checkbox"/> Following handler, not pulling away <input type="checkbox"/> Ignorant of distractions	<input type="checkbox"/> Excitable, mouthy, jumpy <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful regression, avoidance, hiding <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious/tense <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive reactions: growling, whale eye, side turn, posturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Lunges to bite/attack <input type="checkbox"/> Baring teeth <input type="checkbox"/> Hackles / stiff body posture / glaring eye contact
<p>Overall Behaviour General overall observations. This is a general summary of your experience with the dog during your interactions.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed, friendly, easy to handle, playful <input type="checkbox"/> No signs of stress <input type="checkbox"/> Accepting of attention, affection <input type="checkbox"/> Soft eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Presents in good health	<input type="checkbox"/> Showing signs of stress, excitable, jumpy, spinning, mouthy <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful, avoidant, shaky, nervous, hiding <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious, tense, mistrusting <input type="checkbox"/> Challenging, defensive reactions: growling, whale eye, side turn, posturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive, willing to engage aggressively <input type="checkbox"/> Dominant, challenging <input type="checkbox"/> Aloof

Notes and Recommendations:

I, _____ have completed the Canine Behaviour and Reactivity Checklist (modified) with: Name of Dog: _____ Breed of Dog: _____ on ___/___/____. Based on the presentation of the dog during the assessment, I deem the dog to be:

Suitable

Not suitable

for use as a therapy dog at (name of organisation).

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Qualification: _____ Date: _____



Appendix F: AAT Client Evaluation Form

We are interested in hearing your views about the Animal-assisted Therapy Program at (name of organisation). The information you provide here will assist us to improve this service. Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. I enjoyed having the therapy dog in my therapy sessions	1	2	3	4	5
2. Having the therapy dog in my sessions was useful for me	1	2	3	4	5
3. Having the therapy dog in my sessions helped me to open up to my therapist	1	2	3	4	5
4. Having the therapy dog in my sessions helped me to feel less stressed	1	2	3	4	5
5. Having the therapy dog in my sessions helped me to trust my therapist	1	2	3	4	5
6. Having the therapy	1	2	3	4	5



dog in my sessions was distracting					
7. My therapy would have been just the same without the therapy dog	1	2	3	4	5
8. I looked forward to coming to headspace to see the therapy dog	1	2	3	4	5
9. I would recommend the Animal-assisted Therapy Program to others	1	2	3	4	5

How was the therapy dog used in your counselling sessions (please tick all that apply)?

- I talked to the dog
- It was just nice to pat the dog
- I was encouraged to look at things from the dog's perspective
- The dog helped to calm my emotions
- I was more mindful of my behaviour due to the dog being present
- Other _____

Is there anything else you would like to add about the Animal-assisted Therapy Program?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this Evaluation Survey.

Appendix G: Animal-Assisted Therapy Training & Education

Refer to ATL website for training organisations who have agreed to abide by the ATL Code of Ethics and implement the ATL Code of Conduct
Animal Therapies Ltd. Training/Certification List
<https://animaltherapies.org.au/training-certification-list/>

If you have any questions concerning ATL's Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct, OR if you would like to provide your thoughts and feedback concerning the Codes, please contact ATL through the email: aasadvisorygroup@gmail.com

If you would like to report a listed service that you believe is not complying with the Codes, please contact ATL on email: info@animaltherapies.org.au

However, if you have serious concerns for the welfare or wellbeing of any animal, please contact the RSPCA immediately via the website: <https://www.rspca.org.au/report-cruelty>

Appendix H: Policies & Guidelines

Animal Welfare Legislation/Regulations for each State and Territory (RSPCA)
<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-australian-legislation-governing-animal-welfare/>

Assistance Animals and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992
<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/assistance-animals-and-disability-discrimination-act-1992-cth>

NSW Health: Animal visits and Interventions in Public and Private Services in NSW
https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/GL2012_007.pdf

QLD Health: Animal contact guidelines – reducing the risk to human health 2014
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/444371/zoo-guidelines.pdf

Animal Therapies: Australian Code of Conduct for Animal-Assisted Services
<https://www.animaltherapies.org.au/download-documents/>

SA: Dog and Cat Management Act 1995

<https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/DOG%20AND%20CAT%20MANAGEMENT%20ACT%201995/CURRENT/1995.15.AUTH.PDF>

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1979-200>

Transport NSW: Assistance Animals Valid Accreditation

https://transportnsw.info/document/3375/assistance_animals_accepted_types_of_valid_accreditation.pdf

Mental Health Acts

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2007-008>

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/mental-health-act-2014/022>

VIC: Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/children-youth-and-families-act-2005/125>

Federal Human Rights Commission

<https://humanrights.gov.au/>

ACT Domestic Animals Act 2000

[ACT Domestic Animals Act 2000](#)

WA Dog Act 1976

http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/legis/wa/consol_act/da197644/s8.html

TAS Dog Control Act 2000

http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/tas/consol_act/dca2000134/

QLD – The Queensland Guide Hearing and Assistance Dog Act

<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/browse/aspassed>

NSW Companion Animals Act 1998

http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/caa1998174/s60.html

VIC: Domestic Animals Act 1994

http://www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/consol_act/daa1994163/