



## Aged Care Bill 2024 [Services list]

20 October 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the services list. It is very disappointing that there is no reference to pet care assistance other than an exclusion under *Domestic assistance*.

Throughout the consultations on aged care reform, we have brought to attention the importance of pets in the lives of older Australians. Australia is a nation of pet owners. 69% of Australian households own a pet. (Animal Medicines Australia 2022 Pet Ownership Report - <https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/>). Many thousands of older Australians living at home will be pet owners for whom a pet is a critically important daily companion.

We have sought to reflect to you the needs of older pet owners. These were expressed to the Federal Government in the August 2022 survey by the Department of Health and Aged Care about needed services in the new Federal program where 14% of informal carers and 17% of older Australians wanted services not on the standard list and the top request was pet care assistance. See: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/08/in-home-aged-care-service-list-survey-results.pdf> We have also brought to your attention national surveys undertaken by Companion Animal Network Australia spelling out these needs. We have had strong support from COTA and OPAN.

Pets are especially important for the medical and mental health and welfare of older Australians, including those living alone and/or isolated. Pets provide crucial and comforting companionship. They can provide social support by connecting older people with others in their neighbourhoods and with mutual social and supportive networks. Pets also help keep older people living independently longer and out of residential care, which governments are keen to encourage.

When older pet owners receiving in-home care have frail aged crises, they may need some support to care for a pet and not have friends or family who can help. Pet care assistance can be far more important to a pet owner than accessing some other services. If this is what an aged person actually wants isn't that what the reforms were meant to deliver?

For *Support at Home*, pet care assistance would be an 'everyday living' expense. These would be either low cost or no cost services. Companion Animal Network Australia (CANA) <https://australiacan.org.au/> has provided a suggested list of limited services (see below), some involving minimal or no cost to taxpayers, and others that could be client-funded or co-funded based on means testing results. CANA is ready to provide information and support to aged care providers about how this can be achieved. We suggest you consult with [REDACTED], CEO, CANA [tennis@australiacan.org.au](mailto:tennis@australiacan.org.au) and [REDACTED] for more detail on how this can be achieved.

We have attached CANA's proposed list of services and ways these can be delivered.

We very much hope that you will reconsider the services list so that this will meet the expressed needs and wishes of older Australians who are also pet owners when accessing aged care.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature]

Di Johnstone AM  
President  
Pets and Positive Ageing Inc

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<http://petsandpositiveageing.com/>

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## Information provided by Companion Animal Network Australia (CANA)

The services proposed by CANA some of which **may involve minimal or no cost to taxpayers, and others that can be client-funded or co-funded based on means testing results:**

- 1. Single Assessment (Needs):** Assessors must inquire about the presence of pets in the home during the evaluation process. This information should be included in the personal care plan, promoting a holistic, person-centred approach.
- 2. Listing of Required Services:** Pet support services be explicitly listed alongside other support options, even if a payment or co-payment for certain pet services is required. This acknowledges and supports the Right to Pet Companions.
- 3. Services for Pet-Friendly Households may cover:**
  - **Home Pet Care Assistance** with qualified Community Vet Nurses and Veterinary Social Workers: to support both the client and their pets.
  - **Pet Respite Support:** Systems in place for situations where the client needs hospitalisation without someone to care for their pets. Volunteer, respite shelter, and foster carer networks can provide these services.
  - **Extension of Existing Services:** Cleaning, light gardening, shopping, and community-based outings could include pet-related responsibilities, such as washing pet blankets, bowls, kitty litter, picking up pet waste, and exploring pet-friendly locations for outings such as pet friendly cafes, beaches and parks.
  - **Pet Transport Services:** Including transport for vet visits, grooming, and dog walking, with potential collaboration with volunteer agencies and charities compensated for through grants or donations.

For aged care providers, CANA suggests staff training programs to equip both residential care and home care staff to effectively deal with pets. CANA is currently pursuing the development of these courses with qualified academics.

In residential care, successful rules and procedures for allowing pets to reside with their owners have been developed and implemented through CANA's collaboration with residential care providers and the Australasian College for Infection Prevention and Control.

CANA is aware that many Home Care Support Agencies do offer help in these areas. This should be listed on the My Age Care web site as Pet Friendly Services for both Home Care and Residential Care to enable easier choice when searching for services.