

Therapy Dogs in Professional Settings



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In Fact Sheet: **What is a Therapy Dog?** We looked briefly at Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). In this Information Sheet we take a closer look at how professionals can add AAT to their work to enhance outcomes for their clients.

There is growing interest in and demand for AAT and in particular Caine Assisted Therapy (CAT) in professional practice in Australia. With wide ranging benefits: physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional, dogs are being integrated into the work done by occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, and social workers in supporting a wide range of conditions from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to Dementia and Autism. Benefits range from improved motor skills and reduced stress to enhanced communication skills. Dogs also help to improve the rapport between client and professional.

AAT of this kind can happen two ways:

- The dog is handled by a trained volunteer supported by a reputable pet therapy provider. In this instance the health professional guides and directs the interaction with the dog. Generally, the dog with its handler will be available for specific times of a set duration.
- The health care provider handles their own dog. Here the animal may remain at a practice for extended periods of time and be involved in multiple sessions in a day.

Things to consider when introducing a dog into your practice include their age, suitability, temperament, overall health, and general obedience level. Therapy dogs must be well mannered, impeccably groomed, comfortable and friendly in different environments and with different people, not distracted easily, quiet, and easily handled.

Other issues to consider include insurances, permission to have animals on site, client cultural and ethical considerations, allergy awareness, and canine welfare including knowing the signs of burnout.

Introducing AAT to your practice can be as simple as having your dog trained for purpose by a local qualified dog trainer and supplementing this with personal research and study to completing a comprehensive online course or undertaking university study.

It is important to note that presently there is no peak body for AAT in Australia nor is there an accrediting body. Any certification or training obtained relies on the professionalism, reputation, and credibility of the provider.

For course and further information:

La Trobe University: Animal Assisted Therapy for Healthcare Professionals – online course which covers the theoretical basis for working with animals in therapeutic settings - <https://www.latrobe.edu.au> – Animal Assisted Therapy for Healthcare Professional

<https://therapydog.com.au> : Therapy Dogs Australia offers online courses and ongoing support.

<https://therapydogsnsw.com.au> - Therapy Dogs NSW offers training courses.

www.pawspettherapy.com : provides trained and supported volunteer dog therapy teams.

Thinkdog.com.au – for local dog training assistance in Camden and surrounds

Information provided in this Fact Sheet is for general informational purposes only. Please consider your personal circumstances and always do your own research to ensure the right outcome for you.