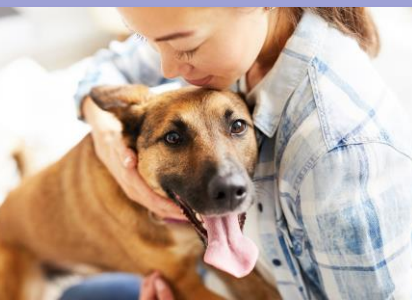


What is a Therapy Dog?



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The term **Therapy Dog** refers to a companion pet that is trained along with its handler, generally their owner to provide psychological or physiological support to individuals and groups in the community. The work of a therapy dog is considered an Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) and can be categorized as an Animal Assisted Activity (AAA) or an Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT).

Animal Assisted Activity (AAA) is more casual in nature. For example, visits to clients in Aged Care for companionship and comfort. Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is more structured in nature. This type of interaction can happen as follows:

- A professional may use their own trained pet as a therapy dog in their work, assuming control of the animal and the interaction to achieve set goals for clients.
- A trained team is supplied by a pet therapy organisation for a specified period with the handler/owner assuming control of the animal with the interaction carried out under supervision. This is a collaborative form of therapy where the dog and handler may have specialised knowledge or training to assist them in meeting client goals as set by the professional in charge.

There are no standard guidelines or regulations for accrediting or certifying therapy dogs in Australia and they have no special public access rights. Therapy dogs must be invited into hospitals and aged care, schools, and other facilities by the owner or governing body. Visits are subject to the regulation requirements of the facility and in health settings also by NSW Health guidelines. This may include policies regarding training, animal welfare, vet screening, dog hygiene, animal and handler vaccinations and general infection control.

Whilst a dog and handler may work independently undertaking a course of study privately it is often the case that a pet therapy organisation such as Paws Pet Therapy will train, assess, and help people and dogs to visit hospitals, aged care, other health and educational settings. They provide uniforms, insurances, and ongoing support for the team, which is registered with that organisation, often a nonprofit. They have no certification or standing outside the auspices of the parent business and team credibility is based on the professionalism, reputation and standing of the pet therapy business in the industry and applies only if the team remains registered with that organisation.

Pets owned by a professional such as a health practitioner or teacher and used as a therapy dog are trained and supported in their therapy work at the discretion of their owner.

Therapy dogs come in all shapes and sizes and can be any non-restricted breed. They have easy going personalities, great manners and are calm, reliable on lead, adjust well to new environments, are sociable with other dogs and love to be patted. Before visiting, a therapy dog is assessed for their suitability including their temperament and general obedience whilst their owner is trained to undertake visits safely and professionally.

The Fact Sheet: **How Therapy Dogs Help People** looks more closely at the work of Therapy Dog teams in the community.

Reference: [Animal Visits and Interventions in Public and Private Health \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)

The 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.