



You are warmly invited to attend  
**“ Keeping older people and their pets  
together: supporting older pet  
owners at home ”**

An information session

Presented by the Pets and Aged Care  
Steering Group

Thursday 27 March 2014 from 10am-12noon

Hughes Community Center,  
Hughes Shops, ACT

RSVP on [dijohnstone@bigpond.com](mailto:dijohnstone@bigpond.com) or  
02 62731054 (leave a message)

Most older Canberrans will age at home. For some, especially those who are socially isolated, a pet is their essential daily companion. When they face temporary medical and other crises, a pet may be difficult to physically manage. They risk the trauma of losing a beloved pet – and the pet faces an uncertain fate.

This session will talk about ways to support low-income, frail aged pet owners who face temporary medical and other crises. It will look at successful in-home pet support programs in communities around Australia and issues that need to be addressed. Come and hear what could be done to better support older pet owners in the ACT – in the interests of older people and their beloved pets. There will be opportunities to ask questions. Personal stories and ideas will also be warmly welcomed! The session is free but bookings are essential.

#### Information session

- 10:00 - 10:05 *“Welcome to the session”*- Mary Porter AM MLA, Patron, Pets and Aged Care Steering Group
- 10:05 - 10:25 *“Issues facing older pet owners at home”* - Jan Phillips, Chair, Pets and Aged Care Steering Group
- 10:25 -10:40 *“A successful in-home support program for frail aged pet owners”* – Karen Schlieper, Administrator of Community Outreach programs, RSPCA, NSW
- 10:40 - 10:55 *“A veterinarian’s perspective”*- Dr John Aspley-Davis, ACT Veterinary Surgeon; Deputy President, ACT Veterinary Surgeons Board
- 10:55 - 11:10 *“Psychology, behaviour and training issues”* - Heike Hahner, Dog and Pet Training and Psychology Consultant
- 11:10 - 11:20 Tea and coffee
- 11:20 - 11:35 Questions and personal stories session
- 11:35 - 11:45 *“Seniors for Seniors – better outcomes for older people and older pets”* – John Vilskersts, Manager, Retirement Villages and Business Support, Anglicare (NSW and ACT)
- 11:45 - 11:55 Wrap up - Jan Phillips, Chair, Pets and Aged Care Steering Group
- 12:00 Close

*Photo Courtesy of EdenInOzNZ*

## Information on main speakers

**Jan Phillips:** Jan started PAWS as a community project when she was franchisee of The Body Shop Canberra. The service was for the elderly and those living with a serious illness in the ACT and Queanbeyan. Jan and the volunteers walked dogs for people who could not do this themselves. PAWS also fostered out the dog or cat when the person went into hospital or respite and found new homes for their pet if they died or went into full-time care. She built a kennel at the RSPCA for dogs that were unsuitable to foster. PAWS ran for over 12 years. Today Jan runs the PAWS Dog Café during canine events such as the Million Paws Walk, runs Scottie Rescue for Australia through the Scottish Terrier Club of NSW, and is a committee member of that Club. She also runs The Scottie Group in Canberra. She is the Chair of the Pets and Age Care Steering Group and hopes to re-instate an in-home service for the elderly and their pets and help people find aged care where their pets are welcome.

**Karen Schlieper:** Karen has worked for the RSPCA NSW for over 30 years in various roles, including all areas of shelter work, veterinary nursing, accounting, workers compensation and payroll. Karen now works in the Community Outreach Programs, assisting people and their pets to stay together and improve the health and wellbeing of them both. Karen has personal experience with dogs, cats, birds, fish and a goat (and is currently a proud mother to 3 dogs and 3 cats!). The ability to have care and accommodation for both herself and her 'family' in the long-term if required are close to Karen's heart and has been a driving force behind Karen's involvement in the Pets and Aged Care Steering Group.

**Dr John Aspley-Davis:** John qualified at The Royal Veterinary College, London (where his son-in-law is presently a resident). He married and came to Australia in 1975 where he set up Kippax Veterinary Hospital which has achieved many national awards. He has twins and a daughter (who is aiming to be a specialist vet). For 23 years he was a Boys Brigade Captain and for 35 years has served on various committees and councils of the Australian Veterinary Association of which he was made a Fellow in 2005. He has completed 16 years on the ACT Veterinary Surgeons Board, most as Vice President. He is a one-time Chairman of the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council and for 2 years was on the committee accrediting university veterinary faculties. He is currently semi-retired but still running a small animal mobile practice; an inspector of veterinary premises in Australia and in the ACT; and is a pastoral care worker at Ginninderra Gardens Aged Care Facility. John is a member of the Pets and Aged Care Steering Group.

**Heike Hahner:** In 1988 Heike gained a Bachelor of Visual Arts, BA. VA at the Australian National University (A.N.U). She lectured at the Open Art and Centre for Continuing Education from 1988 to 2002 and also at University of Canberra in Design Communication Skills from 1996-2005. In 1992 and 1998 she gained Obedience Instructor Certificates, Levels 1& 2 at the ACT Companion Dog Club and participated in their Pets as Therapy and Coaching for Athletes with Disabilities program. She studied Psychology at ANU from 1995-98 and in 1999 gained a Certificate in Canine/Human Interface from the Institute for Animal Care Education, England. She commenced working with livestock in 1993 and since 1994 has taught dog training and psychology. Since 2010 she has been a part-time co-host on Radio 2CC's "Pet Tales" program. Contact addresses are [heike.braidwoodnswcom](mailto:heike.braidwoodnswcom) and [www.facebook.com/heike.hahner](http://www.facebook.com/heike.hahner). Heike is a member of the Pets and Aged Care Steering Group.

**John Vilskersts:** John has wide management experience in residential aged care and retirement villages, providing him with a practical insight into the benefits of pets in aged care, as well as the barriers that exist. He has managed aged care facilities that allowed residents to keep pets, and now manages several retirement villages including pet-friendly villages in Canberra and Goulburn. He has a strong passion for, and personal commitment to, promoting the benefits of pets for older people. John is a member of the Pets and Aged Care Steering Group.

Keeping older people and their pets together: supporting older pet owners at home

## Summary Report: Information Session on supporting older pet owners at home: 27 March 2014

The session considered how older pet owners can be supported to remain at home with their pets. It looked at possible models for an in-home pet support program, in particular one directed at supporting frail-aged owners who are socially isolated. The model of particular interest was the Pets of Older Persons program (POOPs) run by RSPCA NSW which has a large volunteer base (160 volunteers), covers the Sydney area and supports socially isolated people who are 65 years and over and anyone in palliative care.

Speakers also addressed issues for older pet owners including the benefits of pet companionship, access to veterinary services, veterinary costs, appropriate pet selection, managing pet behavioural issues and a planned Anglicare program for matching senior dogs from shelters with older people wanting to live with a pet.

There was strong support for an in-home program for socially isolated, frail-aged and an interest in this happening quickly. However there was also strong view that any such program needs careful preparation before launch, including a substantial volunteer base, administrative arrangements and secure resources. There was discussion of issues to be addressed such as

- a critical need for this program
- a lack of available help to manage pets when an owner faces emergency hospitalisation
- a critical shortage of pet foster care options in the event of emergencies
- special issues for people with assistance or guide dogs needing emergency help
- the existence of RSPCA ACT Pet Support but also limitations posed by funding, lack of suitable volunteers to walk dogs and strain on resources and existing kennel space
- the potential for an in-home program to approach care organizations, like Red Cross or Meals on Wheels, to link with their extensive volunteer programs to deliver pet support
- the existence of a local program that provided pet support for older owners (through Mirijnai volunteers)
- the opportunity for HACC customers to ask for pet support as a HACC service and for providers to use HACC service funding to access commercial operators; opportunities this offered for more such operators
- the option that unused vet supplies might be donated for a program but also potential problems
- the development of more easily administered vet treatments that would assist older pet owners
- the possibility of a mobile vet service in Canberra to visit older pet owners in their homes rather than requiring them to come to surgeries (including on public transport)
- the development of an animal ambulance system, perhaps run by RSPCA, which could also allow easier transport of pets to vet clinics
- some financial options to support emergency pet care for low income older pet owners
- the importance of encouraging older people to select age-appropriate pets
- the importance of good diets and sufficient exercise for pets of older owners
- the need for access to affordable pet training and behavioural assistance for older pet owners
- the importance of ensuring pet welfare while also looking after the welfare of the older person

It was noted that an increasing number of retirement villages had advised they allowed owner pets and these were listed on the Steering Group flyer (which will be updated shortly). But there were still issues to address. It was also important to have village manager support for pet-friendly policies and pet-friendly policies that balanced the interests of pet owners with those of non-pet owners.

The session was attended by a good representative selection of people across the aged-related organizations, aged care sector, medical sector, volunteering, animal rescue and animal welfare related organizations.

Many attendees signed up for further information. It was noted that the Steering Group would incorporate, providing a structure for any new program. The incorporated organization would be looking for members.

*If you would like any further information please contact: [dijohnstone@bigpond.com](mailto:dijohnstone@bigpond.com)*