



ACIPC

Australasian College  
for Infection Prevention and Control

## ACIPC Position Statement Animals in Healthcare Facilities

## ACIPC Guidelines for Animals in Healthcare Facilities

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### ACIPC Recommends

All healthcare facilities (HCF) should have documentation (procedure or protocols) that complies with Commonwealth, State and local council legislation.<sup>(1,2,3)</sup> and includes information on the following:

- assistance, companion, and therapy animals
- facility pet/s or any pet that resides in any long term HCF
- for any domesticated livestock that reside on the grounds of the HCF
- personal pet visitations.<sup>(1,2,3)</sup>
- handling and storage of residing or visiting animal food and animal waste.
- specific consumer fact sheets or brochures related to the policy and procedure for assistance, companion, and therapy animals.
- visiting animal handlers for the management of animal contact with other people during their visit, including pre-visit requirements, identified animal therapy activity areas, and reporting of incidences.

All HCF with animal assisted therapy programs and animal assisted activities should develop a system to register the animal breed and numbers of animals, with current vaccination status, preventative parasitic medication and other relevant documents related to the animal's health status. In addition, this should also include: types of animals allowed for these activities, certification of animals and their trainers/handlers, education of HCF staff, and education of animal trainers/handlers regarding organisational policies and procedures, animal hygiene including animal waste provisions, animal food handling and storage, patient hygiene, and animal access.

As part of animal assisted therapy programs and animal assisted activities, the facility infection prevention and control professional/s should be notified:

- prior to consumer admittance with an accredited assistance or therapy animal to a HCF to establish any specific requirements.
- of any animal or domesticated livestock in a permanent residence within a healthcare or long-term care facility or resides within the HCF grounds to establish any specific requirements.
- of all proposed animal visitations, assisted animal interventions or introduction of a facility pet or domesticated livestock to a HCF to establish any specific requirements.

### Vaccination Requirements and Veterinary checks:

All animals visiting or permanently residing in HCF should follow the vaccination protocol determined within a veterinarian-client-patient relationship.<sup>(3,4)</sup> The requirements will differ based on the individual animal-patient, situation, and veterinarian-client-patient relationship. Each individual animal shall be vaccinated as frequently as considered necessary by their veterinarian to provide protection. A veterinarian certificate of vaccination is to be provided.

Prior to a HCF visit, each animal should all assistance, therapy and companion animals require a veterinarian certificate of immunisation, preventative parasitic medication, and health check and yearly health check performed by a veterinarian thereafter.<sup>(4)</sup> All animals visiting or permanently residing in HCF should follow a preventative parasitic medication schedule and are screened for parasites and skin problems regularly and prior to a HCF visit.<sup>(3)</sup>

All domesticated livestock residing on HCF grounds should follow the vaccine protocol and parasitic preventative measures determined by a veterinarian that comply with Commonwealth, State, and local council legislation.<sup>(3,4)</sup>

### **Operating Room:**

All animals are restricted from entering the operating room, departments responsible for the reprocessing of reusable medical devices, and intensive care / high-dependency units in exceptional circumstances some high-dependency patient areas may permit animal visitations however approval and management of such is at the discretion of the site and should ensure the mitigation of any infection risk to other patients. Animal visits or activities in health care facilities are not conducted in areas considered unsuitable due to health, safety, and infection control requirements such as food preparation areas, and a risk assessment should be conducted to help inform the risk of transmission of zoonotic diseases, parasites, bacteria, fungi other pathogens via direct and indirect contact with consumers and staff in high-risk settings and vulnerable populations e.g. immunosuppressed patients.

### **Other:**

- Animal access for isolated patients and immuno-suppressed patients is negotiated in consultation with the facility's infection control professional and is based on individual patient/client requirements.
- All patients, healthcare workers, volunteers and visitors who have contact with an animal must perform hand hygiene either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, and don appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when required.<sup>(3)</sup>

## **Introduction**

Healthcare facilities (HCF) may be visited by assistance, therapeutic and companion animals. Long term HCF may have permanent residing animals. HCF in rural and remote areas may have domesticated livestock residing on their grounds. These animals may possess zoonotic diseases, parasites, bacteria, fungi, and other pathogens which may pose a risk of pathogenic transmission via direct and indirect contact with consumers and staff.<sup>(1)</sup> HCF are required to acknowledge that these animals are important for the health and wellbeing of certain populations within communities.<sup>(1,2)</sup> These animals provide companionship and emotional support to their owner, enhancing their health, wellbeing, and quality of life.

Zoonoses account for approximately 60% of all infectious pathogens of human beings and 70% of all emerging infectious diseases.<sup>(5)</sup> Current evidence surrounding domesticated animals and their association with transmission of zoonoses and other pathogens to humans has highlighted a requirement for any HCF to develop policies, procedures, and systems to address risks. Evidence has indicated that human infections constantly emerge from animal populations such as avian influenza, Q Fever (*Coxiella burnetii*), Hendra virus

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(*Hendra henipavirus*), Hydatid Tapeworms (*Echinococcus sp.*), and Methicillin Resistance *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).<sup>(5,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14)</sup> However, available evidence on pathogenic transmission between humans and companion animals is limited, particularly the transmission risks of hospital acquired infection pathogens such as MRSA, *Clostridioides difficile* and other pathogens to consumers and staff in HCF.

Due to the ambiguities around the health risks of animal visitations and residing pets in HCF, ACIPC recommends that all HCF and organisations develop policies, procedures, consumer factsheets, and systems that address the risks among their own specific facility's patient populations.<sup>(1,3)</sup>

## Definitions

Assistance animal – is defined as follows under the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* – Part 1 Subsection 9.<sup>(2)</sup>

‘For the purposes of this Act, an assistance animal is a dog or other animal:

(a) accredited under a law of a State or Territory that provides for the accreditation of animals trained to assist persons with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability; or

(b) accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph; or

(c) trained:

(i) to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability; and

(ii) to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.’

Animal assisted therapy – tailored individual therapy under professional supervision with an animal trained for the role.

Animal assisted activity – animals and specially trained volunteer or professional handlers visit patients and their families at the bedside or in communal areas.

Personal pet visitation – the patient's own pet visits them whilst in a healthcare or long-term care facility.

Facility pets – animals such as birds, cats, dogs, or fish in permanent residence within a healthcare or long-term care facility.

Domesticated livestock – any poultry, sheep, goat, bovine, pig, and equine residing on HCF's grounds.

Workplace animal therapy - animal assisted support program for healthcare facility employees.

Zoonoses - A zoonotic disease is an infectious disease that has jumped from a non-human animal to humans. Zoonotic pathogens may be bacterial, viral, or parasitic, or may involve unconventional agents and can spread to humans through direct contact or through food, water, or the environment.<sup>(6)</sup>

## Legislative Position

Discrimination against a person with a disability who has an accredited assistance animal is not permitted under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*,<sup>(2)</sup> but the following exemptions as outlined may apply in the circumstances outlined in the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992* – Part 2, Division 5, 54A.

‘54A Assistance animals:

(1) This section applies in relation to a person with a disability who has an assistance animal.

(2) This Part does not render it unlawful for a person to request or to require that the assistance animal remain under the control of:

(a) the person with the disability; or

(b) another person on behalf of the person with the disability.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2), an assistance animal may be under the control of a person even if it is not under the person’s direct physical control.

(4) This Part does not render it unlawful for a person (the discriminator) to discriminate against the person with the disability on the ground of the disability, if:

(a) the discriminator reasonably suspects that the assistance animal has an infectious disease; and

(b) the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect public health or the health of other animals.

(5) This Part does not render it unlawful for a person to request the person with the disability to produce evidence that:

(a) the animal is an assistance animal; or

(b) the animal is trained to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

(6) This Part does not render it unlawful for a person (the discriminator) to discriminate against the person with the disability on the ground that the person with the disability has the assistance animal, if:

(a) the discriminator requests or requires the person with the disability to produce evidence referred to in subsection (5); and

(b) the person with the disability neither:

(i) produces evidence that the animal is an assistance animal; nor

(ii) produces evidence that the animal is trained to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.’

**ACIPC believes that:**

- Accredited assistance and therapy animals cannot be prohibited from entering a HCF but restricted from access to certain areas as outlined in the exemptions in the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
- The risk and transmission of zoonotic diseases or infections can be minimized with the implementation of policies, procedures and guidelines regarding: animal and patient health and hygiene, healthcare worker practices following contact with animals within the healthcare facility, and restricted areas within the HCF.

**ACIPC resolves to:**

- Support animal-assisted interventions for patients, their families and healthcare workers, facility pets or domesticated livestock, and personal pet visitations in healthcare facilities where this is evidence-based and appropriate.
- Maintain up-to-date knowledge regarding infection prevention and control issues relating to pet therapy, pet visitors, and residing pets and/or domesticated livestock to and within healthcare facilities.

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## Other Relevant Documents.

1. Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 – Part 1 Subsection 9 (2) and Subsection 9 (4); Part 2, Division 5 s 54A.
2. Australian Capital Territory Domestic Animals Act 2000
3. New South Wales Companion Animals Act 1998
4. Northern Territory Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004
5. Queensland Guide Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009
6. Queensland Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008
7. Animal Care and Protection Act 2001
7. South Australia Dog and Cat Management Act 1995
8. Tasmania Guide Dogs and Hearing Dogs Act 1967
9. Victoria Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994
10. Western Australia Dog Act 1976

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