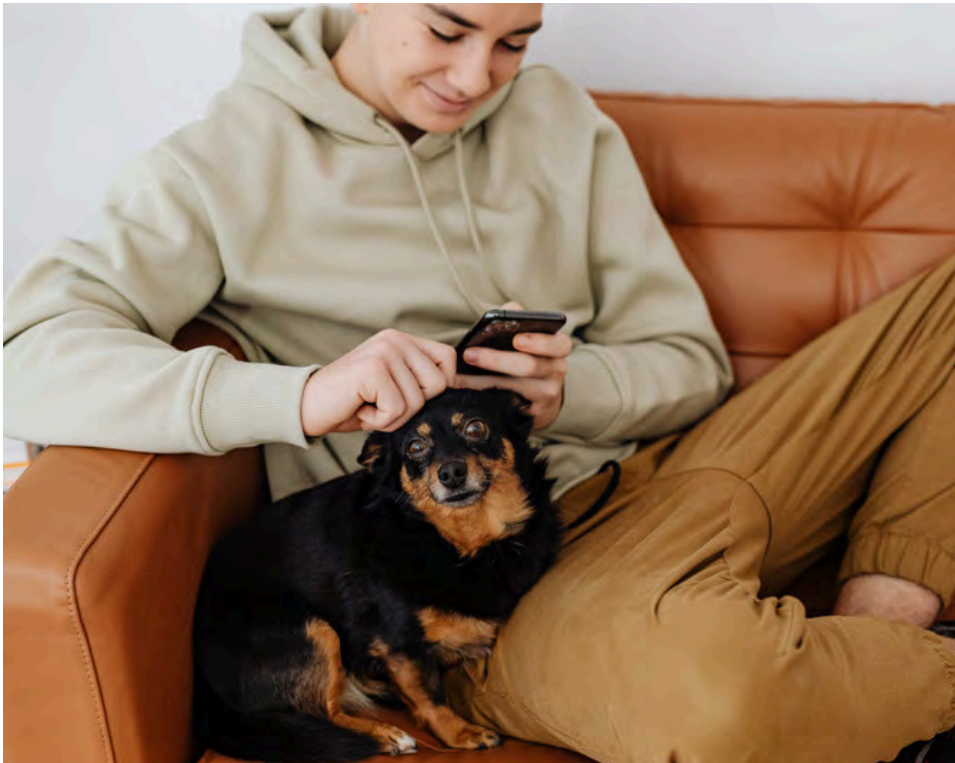


BCSPCA

PET-FRIENDLY HOUSING TOOLKIT

Research Summary



Brief Summary of Pet-Friendly Housing Research

Pets are important members of British Columbian and Canadian families:

- Over half of B.C. families have pets (another 29% have had pets as an adult), and 89% identify their pets as family members (Stratcom, 2025).
- 60% of Canadian households have companion animals, and 70% identify them as family members. 80% of dog owners and 68% of cat owners describe their pets as members of the family (Canadian Animal Health Institute, 2022).
- A 2024 survey indicated that 61% of Canadian Gen Z respondents would choose pets over children (Financial Post, 2024).

“For many, the ability to keep pets is an essential extension and expression of the meaning of home” (Rose et al., 2020).

Research has revealed the power of the human-animal bond and the love and support that pets can provide for their families:

- Pets can be associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and heart-related health issues (Levine et al., 2013).
- Interacting with animals can reduce anxiety and depression and help protect against a variety of negative feelings and emotions (Human Animal Bond Research Institute, n.d.)
- Pet ownership is associated with improved quality of life through social support, reduced depression and other psychosocial predictors of health (Schreiner, 2016).
- Pets can be significantly associated with lower self-reported anxiety symptoms in older adults (Bolstad, 2021).
- Pets can provide unique emotional support in times of crisis, reduce feelings of isolation, and offer a source of companionship and opportunities for communication (Brooks et al., 2018)
- Pet can facilitate better interaction with and more trust in neighbours, and less social isolation (Taniguchi et al., 2018).
- Pets can be a catalyst for social interaction in a neighbourhood setting, and pets can facilitate relationships that provide practical and emotional support for their families (Wood et al., 2015).
- The majority of British Columbians agree that their pets have helped them feel less lonely (86%), positively affected their mental health (84%), positively affected their physical health (76%), and helped them connect with other people (67%) (Stratcom, 2025).

“From a strengths-based perspective, pets reflect a set of strengths in the people that own them, as they can be sources of responsibility, structure and routine, resourcefulness, pride and motivation” (Kerman et al., 2020).

For vulnerable people, the positive impact of pets is even more important:

- Pets help seniors be more physically active, maintain mobility, cope with bereavement and feel needed, responsible and valued (Enders-Slegers & Hedinger, 2019).
- Pets contribute to a stronger sense of identity in people with mental health conditions by helping reduce negative perceptions of their conditions or diagnosis and can be a main source of support for the long-term management of mental health conditions (Brooks et al., 2018).
- For children, pets are often nonjudgmental, confidential and accepting sources of support, and can aid in healthy social development and improve self-esteem (Purewal et al., 2017).
- For gender-based violence survivors, their pets' emotional support and physical protection are significant in their ability to survive and heal (Urban Resource Institute, 2021).
- For people experiencing homelessness, pets provide a sense of responsibility and a reason to live, reduce substance use and seek healthcare (Kerman et al., 2020).
- For members of the LGBTQ+ community, pets provide a sense of identity and purpose, enhance self-esteem and promote feelings of belonging and being needed (Díaz Videla et al., 2023).

However, having pets can also heighten systemic barriers to finding and keeping safe affordable housing and other social determinants of health:

- Homeless youth with pets are less likely to access safe or affordable housing, soup kitchens and medical or mental health care if their pets aren't welcome in those places (McCreary Centre Society, 2016).
- Women experiencing gender-based violence may delay leaving, stay in, or even return to unsafe situations if they can't find pet-friendly housing or shelter (Stevenson et al., 2018).
- Seniors with pets are less likely to agree to hospitalization and may delay moving into assisted living if they can't bring their pets (Enders-Slegers et al., 2019).
- In British Columbia ((Stratcom, 2025):
 - 50% of renters, 41% of young people and 36% of low-income households have had difficulty finding a place to live with their pet(s).
 - 94% of women, 90% of seniors and 84% of young people report that pet bans in rental housing are a challenge.
 - 60% of low-income households and 42% of young people report that the cost of pet-friendly housing is a challenge.
 - 30% of seniors and of low-income households have had to give up a pet to find housing, and 27% of seniors have felt the need to keep a pet secret from their landlord.
 - 23% of women have settled for a place that is smaller, more run-down or lacking basic amenities because it allowed pets, and 12% have settled for a place in a neighbourhood where they do not feel safe because it allows pets.

“Although pets may be an important source of social support and companionship that can promote resilience in the context of adversity, multispecies families experience unique challenges that have the potential to exacerbate vulnerabilities that result from systemic inequalities” (Applebaum et al., 2021)

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