

Pets may help prevent elderly suicide (March 16, 2020)

<http://theleadoutaustralia.com.au/index.php/health-and-medical/pets-help-drop-elderly-suicide/>

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Why should human health and human service providers care about pets?

- **68% of US households report having at least one companion animal**
- Majority of these households indicate that they **consider the animal to be family**



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Which pair just met, and which pair has known each other 12 years?



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4 types of “natural” HAI benefits

Fall along “biopsychosocial” dimensions of human functioning

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Social

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Physical benefits

- **Contact-related:**
oxytocin release →
lower blood pressure,
lower heart rate, lower
respiration rate,
decreased cortisol
- **Increased activity:**
walking, playing,
grooming

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AHA Scientific Statement

Pet Ownership and Cardiovascular Risk

A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association

Endorsed by the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation, American Society of Hypertension, American Society for Preventive Cardiology, National Heart Foundation of Australia, Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association, and World Heart Federation

Glenn N. Levine, MD, FAHA, Chair; Karen Allen, PhD; Lynne T. Braun, PhD, CNP, FAHA;
Hayley E. Christian, PhD; Erika Friedmann, PhD; Kathryn A. Taubert, PhD, FAHA;
Sue Ann Thomas, RN, PhD; Deborah L. Wells, PhD; Richard A. Lange, MD, MBA, FAHA;
on behalf of the American Heart Association Council on Clinical Cardiology and Council on Cardiovascular and Stroke Nursing

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in the United States.¹ Despite efforts promoting primary and secondary CVD prevention,²⁻⁸ obesity and physical inactivity remain at epidemic proportions, with >60% of Americans adults overweight or obese and >50% not performing recommended levels of physical activity.⁹ Similarly, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, and other CVD risk factors remain poorly controlled in many Americans. Despite numerous pharmacological and device-based advances in the management of patients with established CVD, morbidity and mortality associated with this

data regarding the influence of pet ownership on the presence and reduction of CVD risk factors and CVD risk.

Pet Ownership and Systemic Hypertension

Some, but not all, studies of pet ownership and systemic blood pressure have found an association between pet ownership and lower blood pressure. An Australian study of 5741 participants attending a free screening clinic found that pet owners had significantly ($P=0.03$) lower systolic blood pressures than pet nonowners despite similar body mass index (BMI) and socioeconomic profiles.¹² In a study of 240 married couples

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Psychological benefits

- **Roles**
(Kabel & Teti, 2015; Clark, 2010; Walsh, 2009)
- **Self-efficacy**
(Vitztum, 2013; Wisdom, Saedi, & Gree, 2009)
- **Sense of purpose**
(Luhman & Kalitzki, 2018; Kabel & Teti, 2015)
- **Behavior activation/motivation**
(Westgarth, Knuiman, & Christian, 2016; Wisdom, Saedi, & Green, 2009)

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Emotional benefits

- **Reduced loneliness** (Antonacopoulos, 2017; Branson, Boss, Cron & Turner, 2017)
- **Increased feelings of well-being** (While, 2017; Brown, Hengy, & McConnell, 2016; Duvall & Pychl, 2014)
- **Source of comfort and affection** (Brooks et al, 2016; Wisdom, Saedi, & Green, 2009; Walsh, 2009)



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Social benefits

- **Direct - companionship from animal** (Branson, Boss, Cron & Turner, 2017; Brooks et al, 2016; Walsh, 2009; Wisdom, Saedi, & Green, 2009)
- **Indirect - animal creates interaction opportunities** (Wood, 2011; Walsh, 2009; Wisdom, Saedi, & Green, 2009; Wells, 2007)

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“Stress-mediation effect”

- Decreased blood pressure (Friedmann et al., 1983b; Katcher, 1983; Slovenko, 1983; Haggerty Davis, 1991; Manor, 1991; Glickman, 1992; Hart, 1995; Allen, Blascovich, & Mendes, 2002; Allen, Blascovich, Tomaka, & Kelsey, 1991);
- Slowed heart and respiration rates (Manor, 1991; Allen, Blascovich, & Mendes, 2002; Allen, Blascovich, Tomaka, & Kelsey, 1991);
- “Feel-good” effect of the bonding hormone oxytocin released into both the person’s body (Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003).

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Stress-mediation effect (cont.)

- Human experiences of stress and anxiety encompass many physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, and release of cortisol.
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- Physical act of stroking and holding an animal can have *immediate* mitigating effects on such physical symptoms related to stress and anxiety, contributing to the subjective sense of feeling good when holding an animal

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How can animals be therapeutic?

- The “natural” benefits of HAI
- “Task training” – animal is taught to do specific things (tasks) to help



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Therapeutic roles of animals (Least to most training)



 **Emotional Support Animals**



 **Therapy Animals**



 **Service Animals**



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Service/Assistance animals

- Entails **training to assist via doing *specific tasks* (services) that compensate for *specific* disability-related impairment**
- Hearing, mobility, vision, psychiatric, seizure alert, diabetic alert, sleep apnea, psychiatric
- **ONLY type of therapeutic animal who a person has "public access" with through Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

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Registered therapy animals

- Help through providing “natural” HAI benefits to multiple people in a range of settings Pass basic obedience and advanced test (e.g. – Canine Good Citizen)
- Pass evaluation and become registered:
 - Therapy Dogs International: <http://www.tdi-dog.org/About.aspx?Page=Getting+Started>
 - Pet Partners (formerly Delta): <http://www.petpartners.org/TAPinfo>

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Emotional Support Animal (ESA)

- A companion animal who is deemed by a licensed mental health/health care professional, in writing, to be necessary for a person to *reduce distress/impairment related to disability**
- Helps this one person through “natural” benefits of human-animal interaction
- **Not trained** to assist/compensate for specific disability impairments
- Conveys a legal status with some legal protections (**housing accommodation**, air travel)
- NO public access rights under ADA

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*Disability

- Definition varies in different legislation/policy
- Fair Housing Act (FHA) definition: having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities
- FHA considers certain mental health disorders to meet *automatically* meet definition of disability: Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder, PTSD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Schizophrenia

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FHA protections for people with ESAs

ESAs are considered a disability accommodation, not a pet, therefore:

- People with ESAs cannot be prohibited from living in “no-pet” housing
- People with ESAs cannot be charged pet deposit
- People with ESAs cannot be charged pet fees

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What is needed in an ESA verification letter for FHA?

To convey the legal status of Emotional Support Animal as a housing accommodation, the following components are needed in a letter:

- On the health/mental health care provider's letterhead
- Includes full name , the date, and the name of your health provider
- A statement from the provider indicating:
 - provider knows client's treatment history and needs;
 - that client has disability under FHA
 - that an ESA is recommended and needed to help reduce disability-related distress and impairment (difficulty functioning)

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Sample letter designating ESA

[Agency letterhead]
[Date]

To Whom It May Concern:

[Full Name of Patient] is my patient. I am very familiar with [insert patient name]'s treatment history and with the functional limitations imposed by [patient name's] health condition.

Due to having this health condition that meets the definition of disability under the Fair Housing Act, [client first name] experiences impairment in daily functioning. To help alleviate this impairment, I have recommended that [client first name] include an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) as part of their treatment plan. This ESA is necessary for [client name]; the animal helps to reduce distress and impairment associated with [client name's] disability.

Sincerely, (Licensed mental health professional's name and title)

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Considerations for animal being adopted as ESA

Match making (like all adoptions):

- Temperament
- Energy level
- Care needs
- Size

Resource: *The role of veterinarians in assisting clients to identify and care for emotional support animals* (2019)
<https://avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.254.2.199>

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Hope and Recovery Pet (HARP) Program

- Developed through collaboration between human healthcare system, humane society, and university
- Places shelter animals from humane society as Emotional Support Animals
- The goal is two-fold:
 - to improve mental health for adults living with mental illness, and
 - to increase homes for homeless shelter animals.



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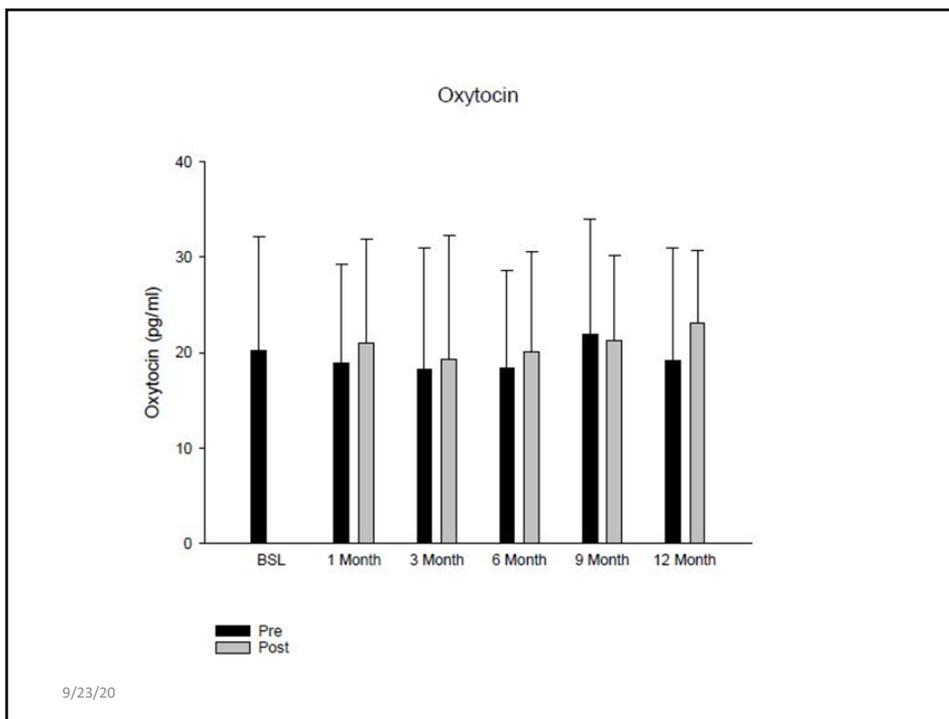
HARP Study Findings

- Significant **reductions in anxiety, depression, and loneliness** scale scores
- While not statistically significant, **consistent pattern of oxytocin increase and cortisol decrease** after focused 10 minute interactions with ESAs
- Qualitative data indicated participations attributed improvements in mental health and well-being to ESAs

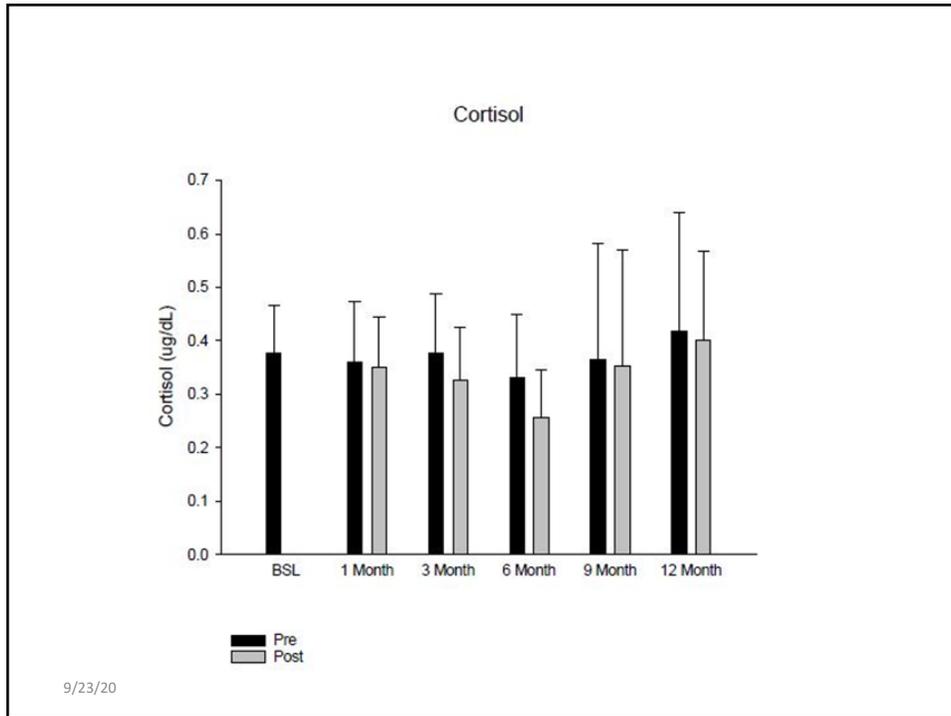
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HARP
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