# Summary: 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: secretary@petsandpositiveageing.com