

RENTING WITH PETS: A GUIDE FOR LANDLORDS AND MANAGING AGENTS



Did you know that approximately sixty per cent of South Australian households own a pet?

Even so, it seems almost automatic for the majority of South Australian landlords and managing agents to have a 'no pets' policy on rental tenancies. It may seem easier to manage a property without pets, or it's thought pets might cause damage, or maybe you've just never really thought about it. However, there are some good reasons to consider allowing pets in your rental property.

It's important to be aware that special circumstances exist for access to accommodation for people who use assistance dogs, assistance animals and therapeutic animals. Further advice on these matters can be obtained from the Office of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity on 7322 7070 and the Australian Human Rights Commission on 1300 656 419.

REASONS TO CONSIDER RENTING TO A PET OWNER

- A well managed pet friendly rental has the potential to deliver positive outcomes for those willing to introduce a 'pets considered' policy.
- Pet owning tenants may be prepared to negotiate special terms and conditions about their pets.
- Pet friendly properties may rent faster due to higher demand, potentially reducing your advertising spend.
- Tenants with pets can be more reliable long term renters.
- Most Australians consider their pet to be part of the family and care for them accordingly, ensuring they are well groomed, socialised and that a high level of cleanliness is maintained.
- Pets come with a number of positive mental and physical health benefits for their owners which can help to foster more positive relationships within families and with neighbours.
- By making your property pet friendly you will be contributing to reduced euthanasia rates in South Australia. Animal welfare agencies indicate as many as thirty per cent of dogs and cats are surrendered by owners who are unable to find suitable accommodation.
- You have the right to decide who you rent to and the pets you allow in your property. Allowing one tenant with a responsibly owned pet does not mean you will always be required to allow tenants with pets in your property.

CLEAR POLICIES AND SOUND GUIDELINES

Pet applications and pet agreements can help with the process of renting a property to a pet owner. These can be included or used in conjunction with the usual rental application and agreement forms.

Pet applications provide a simple way for pet owners to present relevant and specific information relating to their pet – in effect, a pet resume. A pet application also allows the owner to provide information on the way the pet is cared for. A more informed and accurate decision can therefore be made by assessing pet ownership on a case by case basis.

Pet agreements allow you to clearly detail your expectations about how a pet will be kept and managed once they're approved. The agreement states the terms and conditions for the pet rental, such as the number and type of animals and whether the animals are to be kept inside or outside.

Pet applications and pet agreement terms can help to standardise the arrangement between you and your tenant, giving security to the pet owning tenant and setting out the responsibilities associated with pet ownership and maintenance of the property. More information about pet applications and pet agreement terms, which can be modified to suit individual situations, can be found at www.sa.gov.au/tenancy/renters

Any agreements should be signed and retained by each party.

You may also like to consider slight modifications to your property to help lower maintenance for tenants and reduce the chances of pet damage. For example, tiles or linoleum are a much better option than carpet as they are easier for tenants to keep clean and free from dog hair. Installing or repairing fencing should also be a priority if you're trying to attract tenants with outdoor pets. Maintaining a good relationship with your tenant encourages open and transparent communication, which may help with any hesitation or misgivings you have about tenants with pets.

MYTH BUSTING

Some people have strongly held opinions about pets not being suitable for rental properties, but are these opinions myth or fact?

Myth: Pets always create damage to properties.

Fact: One [US study](#) showed that there is little, if any, difference in damage between tenants with or without pets. Sixty three per cent of the US landlords who prohibited pets in their properties had no first hand experience on which to base their decision; the source of their concerns was most likely indirect information. Further, when damage did occur, the cost was 'far less than the average rent or the average pet deposit'. It would seem that the concerns versus the realities of pet related damage may be somewhat distorted.

Myth: A second pet is double trouble.

Fact: Tenants with more than one pet should not always be seen as a problem. Most pets, including dogs and cats, are social creatures and companionship is important for their well-being. Keeping two pets can sometimes help to alleviate issues associated with boredom and loneliness.

Myth: Bigger pets mean bigger problems.

Fact: The size of a pet is not necessarily related to how well it will be suited to a particular living environment. Experts emphasise that it is the owner/pet relationship which results in socially responsible behaviour and activities i.e toilet training, manners, exercise, care and socialisation. As a landlord, you have the right to stipulate that a dog has to be small. However, many larger dogs can be very quiet and docile.

Myth: Strata and community titled properties are not suitable for pets.

Fact: Dogs and cats can be kept successfully in small spaces and cats, in particular, can adapt well to an indoor or high-rise environment. Remember that not all strata and community schemes permit pets, so it's important for you to check that the by-laws allow pets and whether any particular approvals are required before agreeing to rent your property to a pet owner.

Generally, tenants not only need your permission to keep a pet in a strata or community titled property but they usually require the consent of the strata or community corporation. Specific information on strata and community titles can be obtained from the Legal Services Commission of South Australia.



PETS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Issues relating to pets and domestic violence are becoming increasingly recognised.

Finding safe accommodation for families with pets when they are escaping domestic violence is of vital importance. Sadly, pets can become the focus of violence for a perpetrator if left behind when a family escapes a domestic violence situation.

Many women's domestic violence services in South Australia have limited accommodation for families with pets. Crisis accommodation in hotels is particularly restrictive for pet owners. The cost of boarding a pet at a kennel or the potential lack of family or friends able to look after pets further limits the options for victims.

The RSPCA SA advises that around 1,400 dogs and cats belong to families escaping domestic violence situations each year.

It is important for landlords, managing agents and the real estate industry to understand the significance of the provision of pet friendly rental accommodation for families escaping domestic violence. Allowing for pet friendly rental accommodation is an important way to make a difference in the lives of victims and their pets. Often these families will also receive strong support from relevant services to stay long term in their new home.

For more information, please visit:

www.sa.gov.au/tenancy/renters

For further advice on:

- Landlord and tenant rights and obligations, please call Consumer and Business Services on 131 882
- Strata and Community Titles, please call the Legal Services Commission on 1300 366 424 or see the [Strata Titles Legal Guide](#)