



Media Release

April 2016

Pets Before Partners: New research reveals 2 out of 5 New South Wales pet-owners would substitute partners for pets

New research released today by Real Insurance shines a spotlight on the evolving role of pets in the traditional family, revealing two out of five pet owners in NSW are using pets to fill the gap of a partner or children.

The *Real Insurance Australian Pet Survey* is the second in a series of comprehensive national studies that investigate the ever-changing realities of navigating modern life.

For many, the pursuit of harmonious coupling has become increasingly out of reach. Head of Corporate Affairs and Real Insurance spokesperson Tatiana Day said, "It's certainly a sign that times are changing in that a considerable 45 percent of NSW pet owners believe their pet substitutes for having a partner."

In a further nod to the fast-closing gap between the importance of our fur family and our human counterparts, the stats are similar when we look at whether NSW based respondents would terminate a new relationship should their potential partner dislike their pet versus their potential partner disliking their family (50 percent for pets compared to 57 percent for family).

For those currently in a relationship, the research reveals that a quarter of New South Welshman prefer their pet's company over that of their partner. Twenty-eight percent say this is because their fur-friend is less argumentative and over half attributing this to pets being more relaxed.

The research also reinvigorated the dialogue around pets and the dwindling size of the average family in NSW, with 44 percent of pet owners with no children agreeing that owning a pet in some way substituted for having kids. A further 58 per cent believed that owning a pet would be less stressful than having kids.

Dr Lisel O'Dwyer, Senior Researcher, Social and Policy Studies, Flinders University and expert on human-animal relationships noted, "As Australia ages and the traditional family size shrinks in the wake of our busy, expensive and career-focused lifestyles, these findings indicate a noticeable shift in the role of pets from a family and relationships perspective."

Nationally, the research shows our love for our furry companions is also impacting our productivity, with 30 percent of pet owners taking 'pet sick-leave' at some point in their career. This equates to a considerable 20 million hours of 'pet-related' paid leave across Australia, which represents over \$607 million cost in wages each year.

While this indicates a notable economic impact, it could be argued that the social impact of pet ownership far outweighs any fiscal woes, with almost all pet owners living in NSW agreeing that owning pets makes people happier and helps them to feel less isolated (96 percent).

“Various studies have found that pets provide motivation for those suffering from a mental illness, while also adding to seniors’ quality of life by providing companionship and reducing loneliness and isolation,” said Dr O’Dwyer.

Further evidence can be gleaned from Australia’s philanthropic habits, which show Australians donate almost as much money to animal welfare foundations as they do to research into new medical breakthroughs, while human rights organisations followed in third place.

“The most significant observation from the research reveals the impact of the human-pet relationship is in many ways shaping our social decisions and interactions, both personally and as global citizens. The age-old adage ‘man’s best friend’ is becoming truer by the day,” concluded Mrs Day.

Supporting data is available on the Real Insurance website, www.realinsurance.com.au/news-views/australian-pet-survey

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About Real Insurance

Real Insurance is an award-winning Australian insurer, with a goal to protect the quality of people's lives. Real Insurance has been named as the top Risk and Life Insurer in Roy Morgan's 2015 annual Customer Satisfaction Awards and was also awarded the 2014 Highly Commended Trusted Brand Award in the Life and Funeral Insurance categories, as voted for by Australian consumers. The company has been in the Australian market since 2005 with product offerings in car, home, life, income, pet, funeral, travel and bike insurance. Real Insurance is a trading name of Greenstone Financial Services Pty Ltd and The Hollard Insurance Company Pty Ltd.

About the 'Real Insurance Australian Pet Survey'

In order to explore the role pets are playing in modern Australian society, CoreData surveyed 1000 typical Australian pet owners across the nation in mid February 2016.

The sample collection employed soft quotas to monitor representativeness of the Australian adult pet owning population and to ensure there were sufficient numbers of singles and those with partners and no kids for analysis. Hard quotas by state were also engaged to ensure all the main states were represented with sufficiently robust samples (NSW = 200, VIC = 200, QLD = 200, WA = 200, Remaining states/territories = 200)