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## Renting with pets: a pathway to housing insecurity?

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### ABSTRACT

Companion animals are rarely considered in rental policy or research. This absence belies their prevalence and growing centrality within practices of family and home, and persists despite evidence of links between companion animals and rental insecurity. This paper begins to address this gap. Through an online survey and in-depth interviews with people who rented with companion animals in Sydney, Australia, over the 10 years to 2013, the paper identifies connections between pet ownership and rental insecurity, including perceptions about the low availability and poor quality of advertised 'pet-friendly' properties. The paper argues that pet ownership can trigger feelings of rental insecurity, and advocates for inclusion of pet ownership as a variable impacting secure occupancy. It suggests companion animals are an escalating rental risk, their significance to their owners causing some to accept accelerating levels of rental insecurity by keeping pets without landlord knowledge. These experience impact on the ability of renters to feel 'at home' in rental properties.

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Secure occupancy; housing security; companion animals; rental housing; tenancy

## Introduction

In Australia, the United States and United Kingdom, state-led housing policy has traditionally prioritised the promotion of home-ownership (Balchin, 1996; Berry, 1999; Schwartz, 2015). These state-led policy regimes have profoundly shaped cultures of home, positioning renting as a transitional and low-security tenure that is inimical to the production of senses of 'home' (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Recently, however, the proportion of households renting has grown in each of these countries, while a corresponding decline in home-ownership has been witnessed. In the United States, 35.4 per cent of households (up from 34.1 per cent in 2009, US Census Bureau, 2013), in England and Wales, 36 per cent (up from 31 per cent in 2001, Office for National Statistics, 2013) and in Australia, 25 per cent (up from 18 per cent in 1994–1995, ABS, 2013) rent their housing. Factors such as rising housing prices and low levels of income growth in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2013), economic recession with increasing rates of joblessness and high levels of housing foreclosures in the US (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2013; Schwartz, 2015), and increased rates of household formation alongside rising housing costs in Australia (Hulse *et al.*, 2012) have driven these changes. Yet, despite the growing importance of renting, many significant gaps remain in rental policy and research, with particular questions surrounding

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the capacity of renter households to achieve a sense of security within a tenure that is popularly constructed as being short term and transitional. Research suggests that legal, market, policy and cultural factors shape senses of security, with some households, such as those that are large, low income or from minority ethnic groups, experiencing discrimination in housing access and being more likely to experience reduced rental security (e.g. Massey & Lundy, 2001; Wulff, *et al.*, 2011). A particular gap surrounds knowledge of the experience of renter households that include companion animals, domesticated animals such as dogs and cats that are kept for companionship.

Despite the ubiquity of companion animals across households in Australia, the United States and United Kingdom (where they are found in 63, 62 and 47 per cent of households, respectively, see Animal Health Alliance, 2013; Humane Society, 2014; PFMA, 2014) and the growing tendency for these animals to be considered as family members (Franklin, 2006; Power, 2008), they have rarely been considered as important cohabitants of rental housing within policy or research. Within rental policy, investor concerns about the risks of companion animals (e.g. property damage) appear to be prioritised, with restrictions placed on pet-keeping (Carlisle-Frank *et al.*, 2005), while pets are simply absent from the bulk of rental research. These absences belie the importance of companion animals within everyday practices of family and home and the very central role of housing in the relations that take place between people and their pets (Power, 2012). They also persist despite growing evidence of a link between ownership of companion animals and rental insecurity: media stories and reports from animal welfare organisations suggest an under-supply of pet-friendly rentals in a number of key markets, which make it challenging for pet owners to acquire rental housing (see, e.g. from the UK: DogsTrust, 2011; Smith, 2011, and from Australia: Mitchell, 2013; White, 2010). There is also evidence of connections between rental insecurity and poor animal welfare outcomes, with housing (including rental access) recognised as a key factor motivating accelerating levels of pet relinquishment in a number of studies (New *et al.*, 1999; Shore *et al.*, 2003). This paper begins to address this gap. Building on Hulse & Milligan's (2014) recent work in this journal, which developed the expanded notion of 'secure occupancy' in rental, it explores the ways that pet ownership shapes renters' feelings of housing security, particularly access to rental housing. Importantly, this discussion explores both *de jure* and *de facto* security, considering the impact of tenancy contracts as well as sociocultural attitudes and practices towards renting and pets that shape 'the degree of security experienced by tenants.' (Hulse & Milligan, 2014, p. 641).

The paper starts with a review of factors contributing to secure occupancy, before reflecting on the nature of possible connections between rental security and companion animals. It then examines the experiences of households renting with companion animals in Sydney, Australia, over the past decade. The experiences of this group highlight perceptions about the (1) low availability and (2) poor quality of advertised 'pet-friendly' properties and suggest a connection between pet ownership and rental insecurity. A final section explores (3) the decision of some renters to keep companion animals without approval. The paper argues that pet ownership may be a trigger for feelings of rental insecurity, and advocates for the inclusion of pet ownership as a variable in research that explores secure occupancy. It suggests particularly that companion animals may constitute a form of escalating risk, their significance to their owners causing some households to accept accelerating levels of rental risk through the choice to keep pets without landlord's knowledge. The paper does not consider the perspectives of landlords or real estate tenancy managers.

## Housing in/security

Rental security is important because it speaks to the capacity of renter households to create and maintain a sense of home, which research shows underpins senses of well-being, security and belonging (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Hulse & Sauger, 2008). On a more practical level, it avoids the broader costs of insecure housing, such as the costs of moving house and disruptions to education, employment, health care and so on.

In this journal, Hulse & Milligan (2014) recently advanced 'secure occupancy' as a framework for understanding rental security. They define secure occupancy

as the extent to which households who occupy rented dwellings can make a home and stay there, to the extent that they wish to do so, subject to meeting their obligations as a tenant. (Hulse & Milligan, 2014, p. 643)

This framework expands beyond the long-running emphasis on lease terms such as tenancy length (or what Hulse and Milligan describe, following van Gelder, 2010, as *de jure* security) as a proxy for rental security, to recognise the interplay of broader forces including *de facto* and perceptual security. *De facto* security attends to property use and occupation across four domains: (1) legal factors are broadened to include a range of tenancy terms and conditions including those connected to property maintenance and management, rent regulation and 'rules that affect daily living', such as provisions for pet ownership; (2) market forces include the affordability of entry costs, ongoing rent and rent increases; (3) public policy recognises the role of policies impacting housing supply; and (4) cultural factors include popular and institutional attitudes towards the rental sector. Perceptual security explores renters' perceptions of the security of their tenancy and the degree to which it provides the capacity 'to feel "at home": [through, for example, provision of] safety, privacy, lack of surveillance, control over one's environment' (Hulse & Milligan, 2014, p. 644). These factors are fundamentally interconnected, with elements of *de jure* and *de facto* security impacting on residents' perceptions of rental security. A diverse body of research expands these categories focusing on, firstly, the legal status of renters, and secondly, household factors such as income and household type that inform rental security. These factors incorporate what Hulse & Milligan (2014) term *de facto* security. Pet ownership has rarely been considered in this mix. This literature suggests, firstly, that the legal status of renters shapes rental security. However, it also shows that rather than assume an a priori link between particular tenure forms and housing security, it is necessary to understand the policy context of each tenure form, and the social and cultural values that underpin the legal status of renters in different markets. In Australia, the United States and United Kingdom, for instance, a key cultural value suggests that 'home' can only be found through home-ownership (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Renting, by contrast, is popularly viewed as a transitory arrangement and a stepping stone on the way to home-ownership, or as an inferior tenure form with its 'dead money' paid in rent. These cultural perceptions are made real through government policy that provides extensive support for home-ownership. In the US, for example, the majority of housing support is targeted towards home-owners. In 2008, the 7 million low-income renters receiving government housing subsidies were dwarfed by the 155 million home-owners receiving mortgage-related tax deductions, and home-owner tax benefits were worth more than 4 times federal expenditure on direct housing assistance (Schwartz, 2015, p. 7, and see Balchin, 1996, in the UK, and Berry, 1999, in Australia). In Australia and the UK, the practice of providing short standard lease agreements of between 6 and a maximum of

12 months, and terms that enable landlords to terminate leases after short periods of notification, further ingrain rental instability. These types of policies favour landlord investment values over a valuing of rental housing as a site of homemaking for tenants by prioritising landlords' ability to quickly buy and sell investment housing when market conditions are favourable. While such policies are often normalised within a domestic context, international comparisons show different values shaping rental policy. For example, Hulse *et al.* (2011, p. 5) show that in countries such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, 'renting has strong historical and cultural underpinnings and can be perceived as being on a par with owning one's own home'. In these countries, rental policy supports a more secure rental experience. In particular, in Germany (where 50.4 per cent of households rent compared to 45.4 per cent in owner occupied dwellings, see Pittini *et al.*, 2015), rental policies are more supportive of long-term tenancies and offer stronger protection against lease termination (Easthope, 2014).

Secondly, research shows that security of occupancy is connected to housing availability (including market supply) and household characteristics. Relative income and housing affordability are critical, with lower income households most likely to experience rental insecurity (see Kemp, 2011, in a UK context, and Yates *et al.*, 2007, in Australia). Rental security is also impacted by the discretionary power of property managers to select away from less desirable tenants. This power activates cultural perceptions of social groups, with agents making evaluations about the risk brought by different tenant groups. This form of de facto security is beyond the control of prospective tenants but can have significant implications for the ease with which they source housing. As Wulff *et al.* (2011, p. 19) note,

in a tight private rental market, in which landlords and agents can choose to let properties to households they deem to be reliable tenants, characteristics such as age, family type, presence of children and/ or employment status may influence a household's access to affordable housing.

In the United States, for example, race discrimination significantly shapes housing security (e.g. Massey & Lundy, 2001; Pager & Shepherd, 2008), especially for lower income minority households (Hanson & Hawley, 2011). Similarly, Hulse *et al.* (2011, p. 59) show that in Australia, 'people on Centrelink [social welfare] payments, families with small children, large families and people with physical and mental disabilities' are at particular risk. Discretionary tenancies produce disadvantage and relative rental insecurity for groups that are socially less desirable.

Renters' sense of housing security, or what Hulse & Milligan (2014) term 'perceptual security', is a further dimension of secure occupancy and is impacted by a range of factors including those outlined above. Sense of control over housing futures is an important factor. As Campbell *et al.* (2013, p. 13) note:

The notion of secure housing refers first of all to housing that allows residents to plan ahead with minimal anxiety about the future and to choose whether and when to stay or leave. Conversely, housing insecurity arises when circumstances are such that residents cannot plan ahead because their housing arrangements are threatened by financial factors, insecure tenancy arrangements or some other hazard.

Hulse & Saugeres (2008, pp. 20–28) identify six factors associated with senses of rental security: (1) housing mobility, or frequency of moving house, with involuntary moves strongly associated with feelings of insecurity; (2) housing instability prompted by factors outside an individual's immediate control including concerns about housing costs or difficulties securing housing; (3) lack of privacy; (4) feeling unsafe; (5) lack of belonging in the locality

where the housing is located; and (6) lack of comfort associated with poorer quality housing. These factors are connected to *de jure* and *de facto* forms of security and can profoundly inform renters' senses of control over their housing futures.

## Companion animals

Although analyses of rental security acknowledge the significance of legal mechanisms, cultural norms, household characteristics and renter perceptions, companion animals have not been substantively considered as a factor that may influence housing security (see Hulse, Milligan & Easthope, 2011; Hulse & Milligan, 2014). This section argues the importance of examining pet ownership within such analyses. It first underscores the growing importance of companion animals within contemporary cultures of home and family, before pointing to possible connections between pet ownership and rental insecurity.

### *Growing social importance of companion animals*

The absence of companion animals from analyses of rental markets is striking given the growing importance of these animals within contemporary society. Companion animals are common across households in Australia, the US and UK and have recently become central to patterns of living, not only cohabiting with people inside the home but also having close emotional bonds with their owners. For people living in single-person households, a growing demographic, companion animals can be a significant source of regular social contact (Franklin & Tranter, 2011). There is also a growing tendency for companion animals to be viewed as family members (Blouin, 2013; Fox, 2006; Power, 2008), with 88 per cent of households in Australia (Franklin, 2006) and 63.2 per cent in the US (Burns, 2013) describing their pets this way. Power (2008) shows that in many instances, companion animals come to be viewed as core 'more-than-human' members of the family, with household practices shifting to incorporate their needs and interests.

Growing emotional proximity between people and their companion animals is closely paralleled by growing spatial proximity. There have been two dimensions to this change. The first is a steady shift that has seen animals such as dogs increasingly moved from living primarily outside the house to assuming residence inside; the second has seen companion animals welcomed within formerly 'human' spaces such as living areas and bedrooms (Franklin, 2006; Grier, 2006). In Australia, for instance, Franklin (2006) found that dogs were allowed in living rooms in 76 per cent of households and bedrooms in 52 per cent. These changes are driving shifts in the ways that people live within the home, including to the types of decorative and furnishing choices that are made (Power, 2012).

Despite the prevalence of companion animals and their growing importance as family members and cohabitants of home, little research has examined interconnections between companion animals and issues of housing access and security. This absence is brought into sharper relief by recognition that housing is the key site of interaction between people and the vast majority of companion animals, particularly cats and dogs, which are the most popular companion animals.

### **The connection with renting**

There is a range of evidence that companion animals may detrimentally impact rental access and security. Media reporting and evidence from renter advocacy groups suggest that companion animals are seen as undesirable co-tenants, and that households including companion animals are de-prioritised as property applicants (DogsTrust, 2011; Mitchell, 2013; Smith, 2011; White, 2010). This is supported by scholarly literature, with Carlisle-Frank *et al.* (2005) showing that landlord concerns about risks brought by companion animals underpin the low supply of pet-friendly rentals in the US. Specifically, around two-thirds of their landlord respondents were concerned about property damage, half cited the potential for issues with noise, and a little over 40 per cent cited concerns about insurance liability and conflicts with tenants about pet management. These concerns persisted despite 63 per cent of respondents having never allowed pets in their rental properties, or having experience of the listed concerns. Concerns that companion animals may constitute a property risk reflect broader framings of pets through discourses of risk. Borthwick's (2009) analysis of legal settings surrounding pet ownership in Australia, for example, shows that recent policy settings are increasingly geared towards making pet owners responsible for the risks brought by pets, including risks to safety, and the risks of noise and mess (through dog faeces). 'Good' pet-keeping is increasingly defined through these practices of responsibility, with responsibility oriented towards care of the animal, and the management of risk to the community.

Animal welfare research also points to connections between pet ownership and rental security, with moving house one of the most significant factors influencing the decision to relinquish companion animals, particularly dogs (New *et al.*, 1999, Shore *et al.*, 2003). Specifically, low-income status, landlord restrictions and housing uncertainty amongst renters were the key factors identified by Shore *et al.*, (2003), while New *et al.* (1999) identify moving house as the most significant factor, with landlord restrictions the primary cause for dogs and third for cats. Accordingly, periods of housing crisis see higher rates of relinquishment. During the recent US foreclosure crisis, higher rates of animals were relinquished due to mortgage defaulters facing difficulties finding alternative pet-friendly accommodation (Nowicki, 2011). Similarly, the UK-based Dogs Trust reported a 56 per cent increase in relinquishments to their shelters over the 5 years to 2011 due to 'housing problems', a trend they connect to the growing costs of home-ownership and subsequent growing competition in the rental market. Although not specifically analysing factors active in the rental market, these diverse forms of evidence suggest that companion animals may be an independent marker of risk for renters seeking rental housing, while also potentially consolidating the 'high risk' status of already marginalised groups.

Changing cultures of human – companion animal relations have a number of specific implications for renter households. First, while these changing cultures foreground the growing importance of pets within the lives of their human owners and highlight a likely demand for housing that is pet-friendly, they may concurrently concern landlords. The trend to keep pets inside, for example, may exacerbate property risk concerns and is likely to be a particular problem in markets where investor value is prioritised over the value of rental housing as 'home' to renter households. Second, pet ownership brings unique challenges for renter households, who need to identify and secure pet-friendly housing. Reports from animal welfare agencies, as outlined above, suggest that in many markets, there is an undersupply of this housing and that supply further restricts in periods of housing crisis

or market tightening. High levels of mobility in the rental market (compared to home owners) are likely to exacerbate these effects as most households will need to identify new pet-friendly housing several times within the lifespan of their companion animal. This challenge is intensified in markets with short average tenancy lengths, such as in Australia. A third issue concerns the distinction between pet-friendly and pet-appropriate housing. Renters have limited capacity to make properties companion animal appropriate and there are no formal requirements that properties advertised as pet-friendly are pet-appropriate. The economic cost of changes, possible landlord restrictions on property modifications and short-lease terms can make it difficult for renters to make a property safe and secure for companion animals, further reducing the pool of pet-friendly housing.

Rental policies are a further dimension of rental security. The enhanced spatial and emotional proximity of companion animals within contemporary households is typically ignored and sometimes directly challenged through tenancy policy that imagines household units as exclusively human. Hulse *et al.* (2011) briefly review companion animal-relevant rental policies across several international case studies and note significant variation, as well as a general lack of support for the 'right' to keep pets. In New Jersey, United States, for example, there is no 'right' to keep a pet, though there is protection to limit landlords from banning pets once they have been approved. In Ontario, Canada, by contrast, the Human Rights code makes banning pets illegal; however, despite this, there is significant variability between landlords with owners of apartments most likely to ban pets. These trends are echoed in Australia. In New South Wales<sup>1</sup> tenancy law, the Standard Agreement (the basis of most tenancy agreements) offers landlords two choices: to disallow all companion animals from being kept on the premises, or, to authorise the keeping of a specified companion animal/s. While these statements can be erased manually as needed (Fair Trading, 2012, and Residential Tenancies Act, 2010) the default position is usually 'no pets allowed'. People renting in apartments that are part of a strata scheme<sup>2</sup> face more hurdles: tenants must apply to both the landlord and the owners' corporation for permission to keep a companion animal. There are no standardised procedures for applications, producing high variability in processes. There is anecdotal evidence that tenants within strata schemes are less likely to gain approval than owners within the same scheme, placing cohabitation with companion animals at the discretion of landlords.

This overview of possible connections between companion animals and security of occupancy for renter households points to challenges lying across the legal, market and perceptual dimensions of housing security. Housing policies, market demand and landlord evaluations of risk may contribute to rental insecurity for households that include companion animals. In turn, it is possible that these factors may influence renters' sense of security through creating perceptions of vulnerability in housing access. Of the factors contributing to secure occupancy identified above, this overview suggests that pet ownership is most likely to impact on housing security through the negative perceptions and discretionary preferences of real estate agents and landlords. Housing mobility may be an additional, consolidating factor, bringing additional stress to the experience of moving house.

### **The research and the Australian context**

The research examined the experiences of people who have rented with companion animals in Sydney, Australia, over the 10 years to 2013. This was an exploratory study involving two



phases: an online survey followed by in-depth interviews. This section first overviews the housing context in Australia, before introducing the research methods.

### **Australian rental housing market**

Renting is an increasingly important tenure form in Australia. Growing numbers of households rent (see introduction), and long-term renting is becoming more common (33.4 per cent of renter households rented for 10+ years in 2007/2008 compared with 27 per cent in 1994, Stone *et al.*, 2013). Nationally, there is a shortage of rental dwellings, with a vacancy rate of 2.3 per cent (3 per cent is considered to balance supply and demand so that households can move home, National Shelter, 2014, p. 10). There are particular shortfalls of affordable housing. Twenty-nine per cent of low-income households (bottom 40 per cent of incomes) nationally and 40 per cent in metropolitan areas paid unaffordable rents in 2011. These issues are intensified in major cities such as Sydney, where housing costs are even greater: in Sydney in 2011, 92 per cent of very low-income households (bottom 20 per cent of incomes) paid unaffordable rents (Hulse *et al.*, 2014). Affordability has decreased over time, with housing costs increasing at a greater rate than average incomes (National Shelter, 2014). Despite the growing importance of renting to many households in Australia, tenure security is low with short standard lease agreements (as above) and no automatic right to lease renewal. It is likely that this insecurity contributes to currently high rates of renter housing mobility: in the 5 years to 2007/2008, 87 per cent of renter households moved house (compared to 29 per cent of home-owners, ABS, 2010).

There is no publicly available data about the prevalence of renter households with pets or of pet-friendly rentals. However, some internal company data sourced for this project speak to media and animal welfare agency reporting about the limited availability of pet-friendly properties. In October 2013, REA Group (one of Australia's largest property advertising groups) noted that nationally 'just 5 per cent of active rental listings [were] considered "pet friendly"' (REA Internal Data, 2013). This statistic is significantly lower than estimates of the total pet-keeping population in Australia (see Introduction).

Together, these data point to the growing prevalence of renting, and growing competition within the rental market. At the simplest level, this competition is apparent in declining housing affordability and evidence that lower income households are missing out on affordable housing. High rates of mobility amongst renter households point to the necessity of identifying new housing every few years, and most likely multiple times within the approximate 10–15-year life expectancy of a dog or cat.

### **Phase 1. Online survey**

This section provides an overview of the research methods. Phase 1 was a publicly available survey that was promoted through media stories and online, including to renter and pet-focused groups. The strategy was pursued because it was not possible to gain a list of renters known to keep companion animals as these details are not collected (other than in individual leases) by real estate agencies; the method also enabled inclusion of renters who do not declare their companion animals on application. The sample cannot be viewed as representative, but rather sought to explore the diverse experiences and concerns of renters. Survey settings allowed only one response per IP address, with 679 valid responses received. A primary goal of the survey was to begin to uncover the types of decisions that

renter households were making when choosing rental housing, including locality and housing characteristics that they valued, and how they identified appropriate housing. Survey respondents were therefore asked about their companion animals and their experiences and practices renting and identifying rental properties. This paper presents data relating to connections between pet ownership, the identification of rental properties and perceptions of rental security; while this was not the explicit focus of the survey, it was a key emerging theme within both the survey and in-depth interviews (Phase 2).

Detailed demographic data were also collected and is the basis of the analysis. Table 1 overviews respondents. It is important to note that data cannot be viewed as representative of the total pet-keeping/renting population. Rather, data tables show the prevalence of themes within the survey data and how these themes connected to factors such as household income, age, household type and companion animal type. Chi-square tests are used to describe trends in the data, in particular, connections between rental experiences, housing characteristics and pet type. These connections are interrogated further in discussion of in-depth interviews and through connections to existing literatures and are suggestive that the experiences of households may differ according to the type of pet (dog or cat) and type of household.

### ***Phase 2. In-depth qualitative interviews***

Phase 2 involved in-depth interviews with 28 people renting, or who had recently rented, with companion animals. Participants were recruited through the online survey. Respondents who indicated a willingness to participate in an interview were sorted by geographical area and contacted at random within these groups to ensure a geographical spread across suburban and inner-urban areas. Participants received a \$25 gift voucher to encourage a diversity of respondents and acknowledge research contribution. Interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient to the participant.

Interviews were semi-structured, asking participants to share their experiences renting with pets while also building on questions from the online survey, including exploring relationships with tenancy managers and landlords. They were tape-recorded and transcribed. Participants were spread across suburban and inner-Sydney and lived across a mix of houses and apartments. The majority lived with up to 2 companion animals, though 1 participant involved in a rescue programme lived in a semi-rural area with 14 cats and 2 dogs. Content analysis, conducted using QSR\*Nvivo, identified key trends in the data. Concern about connections between companion animals and rental housing access and security was a key theme that emerged from participant accounts in the interviews. Dimensions of rental experience that shaped this theme were coded and are explored in this paper. Quotes provided in the paper are characteristic of a broader theme.

## **Renting with companion animals: the experiences of renters in Sydney, Australia**

### ***Searching for pet-friendly properties***

#### ***Survey***

Respondents emphasised the challenges of securing pet-friendly housing. While the majority rated finding pet-friendly housing in their current suburb as difficult and perceived that

**Table 1.** Summary of survey respondents.

Age		The largest group of participants were 26–35 (43.9%) followed by 36–45 (28.4%). The median age of renters in Australia is 37 (based on the household reference person, ABS 4102.0)
Household type		Couples without children (48.8%); Single person (19.9%); Couple with children (11.9%); Share houses (11.8%); Single parent (4.1%)
Household income		Median income: \$81 000–\$100 000 p.a. Median household income in Sydney is approx. \$89 000 p.a. (ABS 2013) The income bracket \$61 000–\$80 000 p.a. had the largest concentration of participant households (17.5%). 20.6% of household incomes were below \$60 000, while 18% of households had very high incomes greater than \$140 000
Housing type		Detached houses (40.1%); attached houses (25.3%); apartments (34.6%)
Tenancy length	<i>Range</i>	1 month–28 years
	<i>Housing mobility</i>	Lived at a different address within the last year: 38.5% (compared to 35% of Australian renters) Lived at a different address five years ago: 86.1% (compared 63% Australian renters)
	<i>Reasons for moving</i>	Problems with a property or landlord, including being given notice from the landlord (36% of moves), other housing issues such as wanting a larger or smaller house, or purchasing a property (26%), family related (10%), pets not allowed at the property (4%).
Companion animals	<i>Type</i>	Cats (62.6% of household); Dogs (53.5%) Australian comparison: 29% of all Australian households include a cat/s; 39% of households include a dog/s <sup>a</sup>
	<i>Comparing cats and dogs</i>	Forty-four per cent of households had a cat (but no dog), 34.9% had a dog (but no cat) and 18.7% had both a cat and dog. 2.5% had neither a cat nor a dog

<sup>a</sup>Pet ownership statistics are for total pet ownership in Australia. Tenure specific data are not available (Animal health Alliance, 2013).

it became more difficult to find properties once they acquired their companion animal, there was no significant relationship between household income or type, age of reference person or level of education and difficulty ratings (see Table 2).

Respondents were asked if they had ever had a property application denied because of pet ownership. Approximately half of the respondents who always declared their pets when applying for properties had been given pet ownership as the reason for rejection (see Table 3). These figures are likely to represent only a small proportion of those who have been rejected for pet ownership as reasons for rejection are rarely provided. Those who had previously been rejected for a property due to pets were significantly more likely than those who had been not been rejected to describe the process of finding pet-friendly properties in their current suburb as difficult (89 per cent compared to 75 per cent,  $p < 0.001$ , see Table 4).

### *In-depth interviews*

Participants described identifying pet-friendly rentals as difficult and disheartening, highlighting the absolute lack of advertised pet-friendly properties.

Every now and then when you search for a place, like I lived in places for a long time so I didn't really go through the search that often, but when you do you try to refine a search and put in 'pets allowed'. Literally it's like the whole search just disappears into the void. It just goes boom, nothing available. [...] there's nothing – for the suburbs where I was moving to there was nothing. Never one property available. (Interview 2)

To see that screen go from blob, blob, blob – tick pet-friendly to, like, a couple of blobs – it's frightening. (Interview 23)



**Table 2.** Difficulty ratings by respondent age, household income and household type.

Age	Difficulty finding properties with pets compared to without										Difficulty finding pet-friendly properties in current suburb													
	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+	Total	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+	Total	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+	Total						
Difficulty ratings	49.2%	68.3%	60.2%	65.8%	73.1%	63.9%	87.3%	83.5%	76.5%	82.7%	81.6%	15.3%	6.0%	14.5%	12.3%	7.7%	10.2%	7.0%	8.1%	13.7%	13.3%	14.8%	10.5%	
More difficult About the same Easier	59	252	166	73	26	576	71	273	183	75	27	7.9%	8.4%	9.8%	4.0%	7.4%	7.9%	5.6%	8.4%	9.8%	4.0%	7.4%	7.9%	
N	$\chi^2(8) = 15.87, p 0.44$										$\chi^2(8) = 9.06, p 0.34$													
Household income	0-60K	61-120K	121-180K	181-240K	241K+	Total	0-60K	61-120K	121-180K	181-240K	241K+	Total	0-60K	61-120K	121-180K	181-240K	241K+	Total	0-60K	61-120K	121-180K	181-240K	241K+	Total
Difficulty ratings	64.3%	62.5%	67.4%	66.1%	50.0%	63.8%	83.7%	79.3%	86.5%	72.4%	86.4%	81.5%	9.8%	11.3%	7.8%	12.5%	13.6%	10.4%	10.9%	11.5%	7.8%	13.8%	4.5%	10.5%
More difficult About the same Easier	112	248	129	56	22	567	71	273	183	75	27	5.7%	9.3%	5.7%	13.8%	9.1%	8.1%	5.4%	9.3%	5.7%	13.8%	9.1%	8.1%	
N	$\chi^2(8) = 4.03, p 0.86$										$\chi^2(8) = 8.89, p 0.35$													
Household type	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent + child	Share house	Single person	Total	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent with children	Share house	Single person household	Total	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent with children	Share house	Single person household	Total	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent with children	Share house	Single person household	Total
Difficulty ratings	67.6%	59.4%	60.0%	56.7%	62.8%	64.0%	85.4%	73.3%	81.5%	76.3%	81.8%	81.9%	7.0%	14.1%	20.0%	13.4%	11.5%	10.1%	7.1%	17.3%	14.8%	14.5%	11.6%	10.5%
More difficult About the same Easier	287	64	25	67	113	556	309	75	27	76	121	608	7.4%	9.3%	3.7%	9.2%	6.6%	7.6%	7.4%	9.3%	3.7%	9.2%	6.6%	7.6%
N	$\chi^2(8) = 9.4, p 0.31$										$\chi^2(8) = 11.13, p 0.19$													

(Continued)

**Table 2.** (Continued)

Level of education	Difficulty finding properties with pets compared to without						Difficulty finding pet-friendly properties in current suburb					
	High School	Trade	University	Other	Total		High School	Trade	University	Other	Total	
Difficulty ratings	62.8%	53.8%	65.4%	67.4%	63.8%		77.7%	76.4%	83.1%		81.5%	
More difficult	9.7%	18.5%	8.9%	10.9%	10.3%		11.5%	12.5%	10.0%		10.5%	
About the same												
Easier	27.4%	27.7%	25.7%	21.7%	26.0%		10.8%	11.1%	6.9%		8.0%	
N	113	65	350	46	574		130	72	379		627	
	$\chi^2(6) = 6.73, p.0.347$						$\chi^2(6) = 4.9, p.0.56$					

**Table 3.** Respondents' declaration of pets when applying for rental properties compared to the experience of being rejected and given pet ownership as the reason.

		Pets declared on application			
		Yes	No	Some but not all	Total
Declined for a property and given pet ownership as the reason	Yes	49.0%	31.5%	47.8%	43.7%
	No	51.0%	68.5%	52.2%	56.3%
	<i>N</i>	388	197	92	677
		$\chi^2(2) = 16.99, p < 0.001$			

**Table 4.** Respondent ratings of difficulty finding pet-friendly properties in current suburb by experience being declined for having pets.

		Have experienced being declined for having pets		
		Yes	No	Total
Difficulty ratings in current suburb	Difficult	89.1%	75.2%	81.5%
	Neutral	5.6%	14.6%	10.5%
	Easy	5.3%	10.2%	8.0%
	<i>N</i>	284	343	627
		$\chi^2(2) = 20.19, p < 0.001$		

**Table 5.** Pet-friendly properties: Was the property that you are currently living in advertised as pet-friendly?

Was property advertised as pet-friendly?	Per cent	<i>N</i>
Yes	17.6	95
No	70.6	381
Unsure	11.9	64
Total		540

In these emblematic quotes, participants describe the process of using a popular online property search engine to identify properties, explaining that lists of advertised available properties 'disappear into the void' when the pet-friendly filter is activated. A simulation of this process completed once each during December 2012 and February 2013 for Sydney's residential postcode areas illustrate this: 1.59 per cent of properties in the December 2012 survey and 2.11 per cent in February 2013 were listed as pet-friendly. In December 2012, 51.3 per cent of postcode areas had no pet-friendly properties and 26.3 per cent had only one; in February 2013, 50.8 per cent of postcode areas had no pet-friendly properties and 23.3 per cent had one. Across either period, 34.7 per cent of suburbs had no pet-friendly properties. The lack of advertised pet-friendly properties makes it difficult for renters to identify properties that will consider companion animals and lends a sense of housing scarcity.

The lack of advertised pet-friendly properties meant that households wishing to declare their pets (as usually required by tenancy policy) typically searched for all properties in their desired locality and price range, and then individually contacted agents to determine if properties would consider pets. The prevalence of this practice amongst survey participants is shown in Table 5. Two participants framed this process positively, explaining that contacting individual agents vastly expanded the range of properties available to rent (Interview 23), and describing the process as time-saving, explaining it was more efficient to make a phone call than view a property before knowing if pets would be considered (Interview 21). However, despite these positives, they explained that most properties would not consider

pets. Most participants subsequently found the task of contacting agents disheartening, explaining that many contacts were required before any pet-friendly properties were identified and describing a loss of time and sometimes rude or dismissive agents. Participant 4 captures this experience:

I found 99 per cent of the time they don't indicate whether pets are allowed or not. I got into the habit of calling before inspections to ask after the first couple of times and they weren't overly polite about it. They would mostly say pets would be considered on application. But you put the application in and if they've got two in front of them and one has a pet and one doesn't, I think they tend to go for the one without a pet.

Advertisements indicating that pets were 'considered on application' were described as frustrating due to the amount of time that a comprehensive property application takes and the perceived likelihood that landlords will always prefer an application that does not include pets.

The competitive nature of Sydney's rental market was widely believed to have increased the challenges of finding pet-friendly properties (Box 1), giving agents a greater pool of possible tenants from whom to choose. Participants believed that households with pets were undesirable, or at least less desirable, to agents. Three participants gave specific evidence of this, describing instances when they were offered properties if they got rid of their companion animal:

I was actually told flat out. Actually one real estate agent called me up and said you're a great tenant and we'd really like to have you would you get rid of the dog? I asked him if he would get rid of his kids. [...] He kind of went yeah but it's a dog. I was like you don't get it. (Interview 18)

## Experiences searching for pet-friendly properties

### Box 1.

#### (A) Contacting agents

If there's – if you're looking in an area and there's 20 places available for rent, you might be lucky if one of those is going to still accept you with a pet. (Interview 21)

I think the fact – initially when I was applying, the ones that didn't actually say anything about pets I would still put the request in and it would just come straight back from the agency: no. Well if that's the case, put it on the actual advertisement for the property. If they're flat out saying no pets, put it on the property so than I don't waste my time because I've got to get all the paperwork that they want to see, all the references, all the statements and all the rest of it, to get to them for them just to go no, because I've listed on there I have a pet. (Interview 26)

I found 99 per cent of the time they don't indicate whether pets are allowed or not. I got into the habit of calling before inspections to ask after the first couple of times and they weren't overly polite about it. They would mostly say pets would be considered on application. But you put the application in and if they've got two in front of them and one has a pet and one doesn't, I think they tend to go for the one without a pet. (Interview 4)

#### (B) Competitive rental market

Well coming back to Sydney, trying to find rental properties, it used to be the market was quite open. So you'd go to a real estate agent and they'd give you a list of properties to choose from. Now, you get the list and you turn up and there's 50 people wanting that property. So if you've got a pet, you can forget it, they don't even ask you. (Interview 14)

So it would have been around 2006 maybe. It was around the time when the rental market was just starting to get a little bit haywire. You'd turn up to viewings and there'd be 25 million people, that was when it first started. So it was really hard to get into a place. I was selected on my credentials and salary and my great record. So to get to the stage where they said yes we want you and the real estate agent said the landlord's very happy with you – it was another high rise in [suburb name], a nice suburb. Then I felt so bad, they were so nice to me, but I felt so guilty – 'cause that's the type of person that I am – that I came clean. I had two at that stage but didn't say, I just said I had one old cat and literally he was about to die. I said I've got one old cat and he literally just sits in the wardrobe, which is what he did do. She said oh, well – it was kind of like that. She said let me get back to you, I'll speak to the landlord. It was pretty quick. Swiftly said no, sorry. (Interview 2)

It depends on the market and when you're in a slow market where there's lots of – where the vacancy rates high so there's lots of empty properties and landlords are really sort of keen to get you in, it's obviously much easier. In the tighter market where you know, it's a lot more competitive and you're obviously going to be up against a lot of other people, potentially people who don't have pets who are going to be perhaps seen as more desirable on the face of it [...]. (Interview 24)

Mostly the agents are just very short, like you bring it up and they just go no, no pets. I did have one lady, it was a very small townhouse, just one down and I asked her about the cat and she said well, I don't know, would you be willing to get rid of it. I just went no and she said well I don't know if I can help you. (Interview 4)

I said I've got one old cat and he literally just sits in the wardrobe, which is what he did do. She said oh, well – it was kind of like that. She said let me get back to you, I'll speak to the landlord. It was pretty quick. Swiftly said no, sorry. (Interview 2)

These agents did not recognise the importance of companion animals to applicants, instead viewing them as a form of property that could be disposed of as needed to secure a house. This reflects broader framings of pets as property. It also affirms the valuing of investor values in rental housing over recognition of the rental property as a site of family and homemaking. While this emphasis can appear as common sense when viewed from a domestic perspective, its cultural specificity is apparent when compared internationally. Easthope (2014), for example, shows that tenancy policies in Germany are more strongly geared towards protection of renters' rights to autonomy in homemaking.

Perceptions amongst participants that pet-friendly properties were scarce and that households without pets were viewed more favourably by agents led to a sense of rental insecurity amongst participants, in particular, a reduced sense of control over their rental futures. These concerns were elevated when participants were prompted to move house, whether by choice or necessity. Further, participants provided specific examples of missing out on rental properties that they perceived as pet appropriate due to the preference of the landlord and/or agent that pets not reside at the property. These experiences suggest the value of considering pet ownership as a household characteristic that may impact on rental access, in addition to factors such as household type, age and income that are already research recognised.

### **Quality of advertised pet-friendly properties**

Property quality and low levels of choice were the next most cited concerns, with most participants believing that undesirable properties were more likely to accept companion animals. As Participant 7 explains, rentable properties were often those that others rejected:

I think the harder it is for them to get rid of an apartment the more likely they are to agree to have pets there because I know that the last place that we lived at with the dog, they'd been empty for a few weeks. I think that's probably why they said yes to us having a dog, because they just wanted somebody in there.

Further, advertised pet-friendly properties were often described as being in disrepair, with externals lacking landscaping and internals requiring maintenance (see Box 2(A)). Participants conceptualised property quality through notions of risk. They believed that existing disrepair meant that companion animals were less likely to be viewed as bringing property risk because further damage would only marginally reduce property value; they therefore believed they were more likely to be accepted within these properties. These discussions parallel the framing of pets as risk by landlords in Carlisle-Frank *et al.* (2005). A related concern was the difference between pet-friendly and pet-appropriate. Inadequate fencing was frequently cited and was a particular problem in older and run-down properties.

Property compromises were a second dimension of property quality, with some participants applying for less desirable properties in order to increase their chance of success. The most common compromises were (1) property quality and cleanliness, with participants applying for undesirable properties to increase their chance of success (Box 2(B)),



(2) property location (Box 2(C)) and (3) property cost (Box 2(D)). Those compromising on cost stretched their housing budgets so that they could afford pet-friendly properties. For some, like Interviewee 27, cost compromises simply took them to the top end of their budget. However, for others such as Interviewees 10 and 5, cost compromises created financial stress. Though these stresses were sometimes quite significant, they were often felt to be less stressful than not having a house, or living in a property that was not pet-friendly and which brought risks of eviction.

## Poor quality of advertised pet-friendly properties

### Box 2.

#### (A) Property quality and degradation

Probably about four or five weekends I went to look at places and I think in that time I found maybe two pet friendly places. They were horrible. There was no way I would live in them. They're always the really crappy ones that need a total renovate and the backyards are dirt and there's just like a clothesline there. I would never have moved into either of the ones that were pet friendly. I think they call them pet friendly because they don't really care what happens to them. They're probably going to pull them down eventually. (Interview 15)

We'll do a search on pet friendly, see what the results bring up but it's usually – we find that they're older style houses, they're a bit grotty or they've got carpets that you wouldn't want your children crawling round on, so why would I want my dogs crawling round on them? I find that people mark things as pet friendly when they're struggling to rent it. We do filter on that but I've never found a property through searching that way. It's not been one of the ones we've lived in. (Interview 20)

[...] we wanted to stay roughly in the area, and there would only be three or four properties a week, if we were lucky. It was quite heartbreaking when you looked at the properties, because they were pretty much all run down and disgusting. [...] Really sort of dark and dingy, bathrooms that you would see were, I suppose, just not up to scratch. [...] Or, houses that seriously probably haven't had a lick of paint or anything done to them in 20, 30 years. (Interview 23)

#### (B) Property compromises I: quality and cleanliness

I was very lucky to get that one. In saying that, I had to spend a week cleaning up the backyard, making it safe. There was things in the backyard. There was rubbish. There was nails. There was wooden poles. There was – the house was fully – you could get under the house and through the house. So people who don't have animals don't really understand that concept. Well, you've got to make sure the perimeters are safe. So it took me one extra week paying rent, not living there. But because it was a good little house in a good little street and they said you can have your dogs, I thought well, I'm paying double rent for a week or two to be able to live there. So I cleaned it up and we're still there. (Interview 11)

Even though I hated the place, it wasn't the best place to live in, it wasn't easy to keep clean, it got really messy. I went through a couple of relationships there. I really wanted to get out, generally you just want to get out. But yeah, I stayed there because I knew it was going to be damn near impossible to get anywhere else that would accept pets. (Interview 2)

Yeah, it's got a backyard for the dogs, but it had nothing for them, only a carport that floods. So this one's not that great for them. The one before was very – was good for them, because it had a double garage. So that one we looked, and it was suitable for them. But when we looked this time, we couldn't find anything so we just had to go with what we can afford. (Interview 3)

#### (C) Property compromises II: Location

I hate moving in general but I hate house hunting with a pet even more. [Facilitator: Do you think you would have left by now if you didn't have the cat?] Interviewee: Probably because the neighbourhood really is pretty bad. My car is on the street and it's been broken into several times and there are a few personal safety issues but they let me have the cat, so ... (Interview 4)

It wasn't – location-wise it wasn't really what I wanted. I didn't really want to live underneath my landlord, but yeah I took it for the cat so... [...]. [And] It wasn't all that close to work, it wasn't in a spot that I probably would have lived in otherwise. (Interview 21)

#### (D) Property compromises III: Cost

But it got to the stage – we got this house – because we'd looked at so many, we'd put so many applications in, and this is the house that we ended up getting. It's not exactly the house we wanted, because it was a bit dearer. It's bigger – it's got five rooms or something, but it was the one that we go, and we were pleased it had hard floors. (Interview 27)

Well, I know when my partner and I split up I certainly would have moved into something smaller and cheaper if I didn't have the cats, which I haven't done. So as I said, I'm paying more than what I would like to but you know, at the time particularly, I'd seen, because I'm on the Facebook for the Cat Society and just saw how many cats had been surrendered from people who had moved into places that weren't pet friendly. I was going through a divorce at the time so I couldn't cope with losing the cats as well so I just didn't want to risk anything. So I'm still there at the moment. (Interview 10)

Because there were actually a couple of other places that were cheaper and that I wanted a bit more. There was an actual house in Erskineville where they could have had a nice garden to go and hang out in. There was a much cheaper, but really nice flat in Camperdown. But they weren't [pet friendly] – they offered me this on the Monday. I looked at it on the Saturday; they offered me this on the Monday. I just went pet-friendly building, just say yes. That's why I'm paying more money than I could afford for this. So some regret there and I can't wait to move. (Interview 5)

Perceptions of low property availability and quality contributed to senses of reduced security of occupancy, with participants describing feeling forced to choose less desirable properties. These experiences parallel two factors that Hulse & Saugeres (2008) connect with rental insecurity: feelings of 'lack of housing stability' and 'lack of comfort', and Hulse & Milligan's (2014, p. 644) identification of 'housing quality and condition; housing repair and safety' as factors shaping de facto security. For some, this meant living in housing that they considered sub-standard, including properties that were unclean or located in undesirable or unsafe areas. Locational compromises sometimes shifted stresses to other areas of life, with a number of participants accepting longer work commutes to secure a property, while others lived in financial stress. If true, the perceived availability of poorer quality properties may be a landlord response to evaluations of risk brought by companion animals (Carlisle-Frank *et al.*, 2005). Interestingly, while some participants experienced feelings of housing insecurity due to financial, locational or quality issues in their current home, many others experienced feelings of housing instability despite the stability of their current housing. For these respondents, insecurity was expressed through concerns about how they would find future housing if they wanted, or needed, to move. The intensity of bonds with pets, and the belief that commitments to pets were for the lifetime of the animal, meant that housing futures were part of the expression of the responsibility of pet ownership.

## Keeping companion animals without approval

### Survey

A third issue concerned the decision to seek approval to keep companion animals. Declaring companion animals and having a 'pets allowed' lease provides housing stability through reduced threat of eviction. However, it can increase the perceived difficulties of seeking housing as outlined above. The vast majority of households (71 per cent) declared some or all of their companion animals when applying to rent. There was a significant relationship between respondent age, household type and type of pet and the likelihood of declaration (see Table 6): older respondents declared pets more frequently than younger households;

**Table 6.** Respondents who declare pets when applying for properties.

Household income	0–60K	61–120K	121–180K	181–240K	241K+	Total
Yes	71.0%	70.2%	70.0%	75.4%	64.0%	70.6%
No	29.0%	29.8%	30.0%	24.6%	36.0%	29.4%
N	138	295	150	61	25	669
$\chi^2(4) = 1.27, p = 0.867$						
Participant age	18–25	26–35	36–45	46–55	56+	Total
Yes	60.8%	65.8%	79.3%	75.3%	78.8%	70.8%
No	39.2%	34.2%	20.7%	24.7%	21.2%	29.2%
N	74	298	193	81	33	679
$\chi^2(4) = 15.75, p = 0.003$						
Household type	Couple without children	Couple with children	Single parent with children	Share house	Single person household	Total
Yes	70.1%	84.0%	82.1%	65.0%	65.9%	70.8%
No	29.9%	16.0%	17.9%	35.0%	34.1%	29.2%
N	331	81	28	80	135	655
$\chi^2(4) = 11.46, p = 0.022$						
Have cat or dog	Cat only	Have dog	Total			
Yes	57.9%	82.9%	71.6%			
No	42.1%	17.1%	28.4%			
N	299	363	662			
$\chi^2(1) = 50.64, p < 0.001$						

and households that included children, whether single parent or couple households, declared more often than those that did not. The type of pet was also significant. When households were divided into two groups, the first being those that had a cat but no dog, and the second being any household that included a dog, dog ownership stood out as a critical differentiating factor. While 83 per cent of households that included dogs declared pets when applying for properties, only 58 per cent of those with a cat but no dog declared. Household income appeared unconnected to the likelihood of declaration.

### *In-depth interviews*

Interviews explored motivations behind declaring pets in property applications, highlighting the importance of personal honesty by not misleading property agents. The stress of non-declaration was also foregrounded. Associated with the ethic of declaration was a belief in the importance of substantiating to property agents that the tenant was responsible and would take good care of the property. A number of tenants achieved this through detailed pet applications that included details such as pet type, how it would be cared for and references from previous landlords or professionals such as vets prepared to vouch for the animal's suitability within the property.

Alongside honesty, stress and worry associated with non-declaration was the most significant theme and was expressed by participants who did and did not declare pets. This language was explicit (see Box 3(A)), with terms such as stress, worry and risk reappearing throughout interviews. Stress was prompted by the risk of eviction if the agent discovered the pet, and was particularly felt during property inspections and when repairs were required. At these times, undeclared pets were hidden. As the excerpts in Box 3(B) capture, hiding pets was often a complex and time-consuming process associated with high levels of stress. Failure to adequately clean the presence of a pet from a property, or the possibility of an agent arriving early, was associated with the risk of a pet being discovered and could lead to eviction. Participants who chose not to declare pets sometimes managed this risk by limiting the number of occasions when agents or landlords needed to think about or attend the property. Participants 18 and 19 described this as staying 'under the radar'. In practice, this meant living in a house that required repairs, for example, Participant 18 was left waiting for workmen to come and clean up after some property repairs had been made (Box 3(C)). A failure to declare pets can have long-term impacts on housing security, resulting in poor agent/landlord references when applying for future properties.

Despite the stresses of non-declaration, some households still preferred not to declare pets. The primary motivating factor was a concern about not being able to find a property. These households had often been rejected for properties due to pet ownership, or had friends who had faced this challenge (see Box 3(D)). The perceived low quality of advertised pet-friendly properties was a related motivation. Some participants chose to declare some, but not all, of their companion animals, making this choice because they believed that higher numbers would make them undesirable to landlords (see Box 3(E)). Older animals were less likely to be declared and dogs were declared more frequently than cats. These choices favoured declaring the most visible animals, which as Participant 11 explained often meant dogs because they are visible in the community: 'they come and go in my car and they come and go on walks' and 'they bark and they play and they are out in the yard with me.' This visibility is supported by research that foregrounds the role of dogs within communities

## Deciding to keep a companion animal without permission

### Box 3.

#### (A) Stress and worry associated with non-declaration of pets

[Facilitator: Did you ever consider not telling the landlord that you had a cat?] No. Not worth it. [Facilitator: Not worth it?] No, the risks are too high of getting evicted or ending up on the bad tenant register and all sorts of nasty things. [...] Plus I'm just too honest. Too honest for my own good I think sometimes. (Interview 4)

[Facilitator: So does the landlord know you have a cat?] Yes, actually, this one does. It was just so stressful, you know, when there was inspections happening to have to hide her and stress putting her in the box and that sort of thing, so I just didn't really want that added worry this time, and it was like a load off, the fact that it was accepted by the landlord. (Interview 1)

So you're living under the constant threat of being evicted, or getting into trouble, or something like that, if you hid your pet, or you pretend that – you know. So even though I had that option open, there were plenty of places I could have moved to that I could have done that with. I don't want to. I don't want to have to hide him every time they do a three-monthly inspection. Where am I going to take him? I've got to take time out of work to move him if they come and do it during the day. It was just too much of a hassle. It's so much easier to actually live in a place that says, yes, you can have your pet. Everybody knows. It's all out in the open and it's less stress for everybody. So yes, in the past I've hidden my pet, but it was too much stress to have to keep doing that. (Interview 25)

#### (B) Managing undeclared pets during property inspections

Well, when I have real estate inspection, the cats just go in their cat boxes and they either go to my work or go in my car for about 10 minutes. I just pack their litter tray away. You really wouldn't know that they're there. They're not – they just disappear. It's terrible, I know. [...] So when the real estate come what I do is do a bit more of an extra clean. You know, extra brush, extra mop, extra vacuum. (Interview 11)

If we've got enough time we would drive everything to my parents' house. If it's sort of short notice or if we're busy with work and things, we would just pack everything into the car when we know the inspection's on and take the cat for a drive until it's finished. [...] If they're going to come in on their own, we make sure that we've taken the cat to my parents' house ... and all the cat stuff. It makes it seem very deceptive [laughs]. [Facilitator: Is it a big process?] Yeah, well my parents live on the opposite end of Sydney, so it is a bit of a process. It takes us about an hour and a half to drive there, so a three hour return trip just to hide the cat from the real estate. Yep, it is a process. (Interview 12)

Usually, I have inspections probably every six months. So, when I do, he goes back to mum's place. I'll do a lot of vacuuming, a lot of triple dusting and everything like that. So, there's no fur everywhere, because he sheds a lot. Hide all his toys, hide his scratchpost, which as you can see is quite big. I have to hide it under the bed. Take it apart. (Interview 22)

We called it a military operation. We would both have to take the day off work, which was really quite inconvenient. We'd then stash everything – so, I don't know if you can see, we've got toys and cat stands and everything. So, we would be hiding that sort of behind the door or under a blanket – that's a big cat stand. Put all the toys away, hide all the cat beds – Keith would then go down into the car with the two cats, like 20 minutes before, because I'd arrange a specific time – none of this whole, you're going to rock up within three hours, I need you there at 11, sort of thing. They'd come, do the inspection, then I'd wait say 10 minutes until I've heard them go into another unit, then I'll quickly go down, get Keith, get the cats, and we'd sneak them back up again. (Interview 23)

#### (C) 'Flying under the radar': deferring property repairs

I kind of was like I should call them, but then again I'm like don't cause problems. I don't want to give them any reason to come out to my property at all, or even remember my name. That's what I – that's kind of my thing with real estate agents anyway is just really fly under their radar and keep the peace as much as possible. I think when you've got pets you need to do that even more so. (Interview 18)

I've got one air conditioner that's broken and something else. But the thing is, if they want to come they have to – oh, we'll just let ourselves in. I say no, no. I then would have to make an effort to go and pack the pets away again. I'm now with one broken air conditioner. I'm without the roof fixed, because I can't afford the time to be waiting for them, whenever they choose to come. (Interview 11)

I haven't had very many inspections, but I found when I've been renting, and probably because of them, I've never been the sort of person that's rung up every time a light bulb needs changing or something like that. I tend to keep that as – under the radar with the real estate as possible, not just because of that, but I find you don't want to attract too much attention. (Interview 19)

#### (D) Non-declaration of pets: motivated by challenges of finding pet-friendly properties

I have [declared] and then they've knocked back lots of places and I'm just going to have to keep it a secret. (Interview 10)

We didn't declare that we had a pet. It was just too hard to find a place (Interview 12)

[After moving back in with mum and dad – ] Mum and dad got to the point where they turned around and said look, we're just going to have to say that we don't have pets. (Interview 26)

Gave up looking for pet-friendly as: No pets. Every enquiry, no pets, no pets. (Interview 14)

I've actually never confessed to having my cats because I have a lot of friends with pets. I've had friends with pets who were homeless for periods of time and had to stay with friends and board their pets [to cat: – yeah, hi buddy -] had to board their pets because they couldn't find pet friendly rental accommodations. (Interview 5)

At first I wasn't being dishonest, but in the end it was like I was going to – we were literally going to end up homeless. Like I had a date where I had to get out of my house, and we ended up moving three days before that date. Like I ended up getting the property three days before that date, like we were getting to the point where it was kind of a bit dire straits for us. You come clean [and declare your pet] because you've given yourself, say, two months to find a place and then time is ticking and everyone is saying no, so then you go, okay, well I need to move; better keep quiet. (Interview 22)

**(E) Declaring some but not all pets**

I'd just moved to a house in [suburb name] and I was sharing with two others, and one of my flatmates had a cat, which the landlord had approved that cat. [...] Wasn't so forthcoming with the fact that we were getting a second cat, but figured that since we had one, two wouldn't hurt; it was a big property. (Interview 1 – who now declares all as too stressful)

When we started renting here, nearly three years ago now, we had three dogs. One was a boxer. So we had a boxer and two terriers, but that gave us a lot of problems as well, because we had to keep one quiet. We only disclosed that we had two. So I think this is typical of the games that tenants have to play, if you want to find good accommodation with the dogs. We'd rather it wasn't that way. [...] So yeah, we had three dogs initially. We only disclosed two, and then one passed away about a year ago, so we're not criminals any more. (Interview 28)

I just put the two dogs because one of our cats died. This cat was still staying at a relative's house and I wasn't 100 per cent sure – because she was old, I didn't want to move her around too much. But then he's moved to [a different state], and so we got the cats. So only here doesn't know we've got the cat. She's 17. **[Facilitator: The real estate agent doesn't know you've got the cat?]** No. She's 17, you know.

I had the two dogs first and they are the more visible because they are outside. They are visible. So they come and go in my car and they come and go on walks. [...] if one suddenly disappears and someone will say well, where is your two dogs? I thought it was more important to be honest about the two dogs, because they bark and they play and they are out in the yard with me. I just thought they are more visible and I'd rather be upfront. If the guy had said no, well he would have said no. (Interview 11)

making people recognisable and increasing connections with others (Power, 2013, Wood *et al.*, 2007). The risk of not declaring dogs was thus seen as heightened because they were more likely to be noticed by the property owner or neighbours.

Connections between stage of life and the decision to declare pets were also discussed, with older participants and those with families most frequently declaring pets. Participant 25 described a willingness to risk eviction 'in my younger years,' but more recently has prioritised finding pet-friendly properties. Participant 24 explained changing motivations across the life course:

Oh look, when I was younger I didn't – I would have taken a very different approach. I did take a very different approach and I generally didn't disclose to a landlord or a real estate agent that I kept a pet. I generally would take him somewhere else when the landlord was coming to visit. I would take him around to a neighbour or a friend's place for the day. That was – yeah, it was only when I was – after kind of I guess getting married and having kids and not sort of – I guess moving on from the share house world where I started taking that more direct step of actually ensuring that the landlord knows I've got pets, being up front about it. *[Interviewer: What changed your approach to that?]* Well I guess I'm a little more concerned about the security of my property. [...] I guess it's really the implications of being found out are much easier to deal with when you're single and living in a share house than when you're living as part of a family with kids and yeah, trying to balance all the things that come with that. (Interview 24)

For this participant, having a family increased the importance of rental security. By contrast, when she was single and living in a share house, the threat of forced eviction could be readily managed as her life and residential choices were comparatively flexible.

Undeclared companion animals were recognised as an eviction risk and therefore carried strong connections to senses of housing security. Housing security was captured through the sense of comfort associated with knowing that the animal was allowed to live at the property, and conversely through the stress experienced when the animal was unapproved.

These connections were profound, and particularly apparent when participants discussed management of ‘illegally’ kept animals. Connecting to Hulse & Saugeres (2008), undeclared pets brought the risk of involuntary housing mobility. Companion animals emerge from these discussions as a form of escalating risk as will be discussed in the concluding section.

## Conclusions

Despite the growing social importance of companion animals within imaginaries of family and home (e.g. Blouin, 2013; Burns, 2013; Franklin, 2006; Power, 2008), and evidence of connections between housing access and pet relinquishment (e.g. New *et al.*, 1999; Shore *et al.*, 2003), little research has considered how pet ownership may impact on security of occupancy, real or perceived, in the rental market. This paper has taken a first step towards exploring this issue. It builds on Hulse & Milligan’s (2014) framework of secure occupancy, which shows that *de jure*, *de facto* and perceptual security are dimensions of security of occupancy, by identifying pet ownership as a factor that intersects with perceptions of rental in/security for many renters. Connections between pets and reduced security of occupancy appear to flow from rental policies and cultural norms that view pets as a property risk and that fail to recognise these significant others as key household members.

First, Hulse & Milligan (2014) list lease conditions around pet ownership as a condition shaping *de facto* security. This paper expands understanding of how pet conditions operate in practice, and elucidates a connection between *de facto* and perceptual security. It has shown that for many pet owners, pet-permissive lease terms are associated with security of occupancy. However, it has also shown that difficulties securing pet-friendly tenancies can lead to a proportion of households deciding not to seek approval to keep their pet. This represents a ‘real’ threat to security of occupancy: by putting these households in breach of their tenancy terms, a failure to declare pets places them at risk of eviction. At the same time, they risk poor references when applying for future tenancies, a factor that can make future property searches more challenging. For participants in this research, this knowledge impacted on perceived security of occupancy, with those who were in breach of lease conditions describing feelings of stress and tenancy insecurity. They emphasised concerns about the risk of eviction and described the necessity of obscuring their pets when landlords or real estate agents needed to visit the property. Additionally, this group described delaying and avoiding property repair requests, with the associated risks of declining property quality over time. By contrast, the bulk of participants were motivated to seek approval for their pets so that they could ensure security of occupancy. Those with dogs and children were most likely to seek this security of tenure. Pet-keeping is a unique type of tenancy breach due to the strong emotional bonds that connect people and their companion animals. These connections make it a difficult breach to resolve: either moving out of the rental property, or requiring the relinquishment of the animal – a personal, emotional and often ethically challenging breach of the pet-keeping contract.

Second, the paper expands Hulse & Milligan’s (2014) discussion of market factors that shape access to housing. While they focus on the mechanics of housing affordability, this paper suggests that cultural framings of pets through notions of risk (Borthwick, 2009) and specifically as a property risk (Carlisle-Frank *et al.*, 2005) may shape rental access for households that include pets, in some cases constituting a further risk to affordability. Participants perceived a limited availability of advertised pet-friendly properties. This was

supported through property search simulation conducted for this research, and internal data provided by the REA group (both discussed above). Participants also perceived that lower quality properties were more likely to be advertised as being pet-friendly. Competitive market conditions were felt to exacerbate the scarcity of quality pet-friendly properties, giving landlords greater chance of securing tenants without pets. Many therefore described the necessity of making significant compromises around property cleanliness and quality, location and cost in order to secure a rental. For some households, cost compromises stretched household finances, which drove feelings of housing stress. For the majority, however, the threat was primarily to perceived security. Their ability to feel 'at home' was compromised by the perception that they were living in lower quality housing.

Third, pet ownership was associated with concerns about security of occupancy over time. Concern was focused on involuntary moves (as explored in a range of research, e.g. Hulse & Saugeres, 2008) as well voluntary and desired moves. The prospect of moving house was, for many, associated with feelings of stress and worry. This prompted some participants to stay in unsatisfactory housing, including housing that was too expensive, far from work or of a poor quality. Lifelong responsibility for the well-being of pets, part of the dominant cultural and policy framings of 'good pet-keeping', may be prompting these future focused concerns. These experiences suggest the value of a temporally expanded concept of security of occupancy, that considers not just security within the current home, but rather, lifetime security of tenancy. This would foreground the ability of renter households to move when and where they wished (or needed), bringing greater recognition that rental mobility is at times a choice rather than evidence of a lack of rental security (Dufty-Jones, 2012). This is particularly cogent in a period where long-term renting is expanding. These experiences suggest the value of including pet ownership as a variable in research that examines rental access. More broadly, they suggest that housing futures may be part of modern expressions of 'responsible' pet ownership.

Fourth, the research points to an interesting and novel connection between property quality and pet ownership. Where previous research identifies poor property quality as a contributor to feelings of housing insecurity, for households renting with pets the relationship was more complex. While the poor quality of advertised pet-friendly properties was clearly viewed as a negative and contributed to the stress of moving house, the choice of poorer quality properties was also a strategy that pet owners used to secure housing in a competitive market. A second strategy was not requesting property repairs so that the agent and landlord would not think about or need to attend the property. This brought the risk of steadily decreasing property quality which is a concern for both tenants and landlords, but was framed by these participants as a way of assuring rental security over time.

Further research testing the significance of pets across a representative population sample would be of value. This research could valuably expand beyond the present paper's focus on senses of housing security in renter households to ascertain the connection between pets and 'real' housing insecurity through comparing the housing access and mobility of households that include and do not include pets. Research with landlords and real estate tenancy managers would further extend this focus, bringing understanding of how these groups conceptualise pets. The findings further suggest the value of including pet ownership as a discriminating factor in access to rental housing, alongside factors such as household income, age, type and ethnicity that are already research recognised. Though restrictions on pet ownership cannot be considered as discrimination in the way that racism or age-based

selection are, the social importance of pet-keeping, and the close bonds between people and their pets, make it an issue of community interest. More pointedly, the vast numbers of animals being relinquished to shelters and pounds, and the recognised role that limited volumes of pet-friendly housing play within these figures, make the issue of broader ethical concern.

## Notes

1. New South Wales is the state within which Sydney, the research location, is located.
2. In Australia, Strata Title governs the majority of apartments. It allows for separate ownership of each apartment within a building and governance through a 'body corporate' consisting of property owners. Tenants are not part of the body corporate and cannot vote on any issue, including apartment building management or by-laws governing apartments.

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