

FACT SHEET

Pets in ECH Retirement Villages

Why are ECH villages treated differently when it comes to allowing pets?

Historically ECH Retirement Villages were not of a suitable design to comfortably house larger domestic animals such as cats and dogs without negatively impacting on both the animal's quality of life and the broader village community's peaceful occupation of the village.

Villages were predominantly small one or two-bedroom, interconnected dwellings with no private outdoor area for an animal to safely roam without intruding on a neighbour's space. As a result of this ECH enforced a strict pet free policy across all villages until 2016.

Around this time, ECH began to expand its village portfolio, investing in new purpose-built villages and acquiring villages from other providers. Additionally, we began a dedicated village upgrade program which saw many of our older units fitted with fenced private yards where space permitted. This drastically altered the overall landscape of our property portfolio and created opportunities to re-consider our position on pets in villages.

Recognising that each ECH village is unique (some villages continue to have no private outdoor areas) and that many long-standing residents had chosen ECH specifically for its pet free status, individual village surveys were attended as part of a broad and detailed consultation period in 2016.

With respect to resident preference the survey results informed the classification of villages as being pet free or pet friendly.

What pets are allowed in ECH villages?

All ECH units can accommodate one small, caged bird (to be kept indoors and occasionally outdoors in a location previously approved by ECH) or an indoor aquarium animal i.e. fish.

Villages without any private enclosed yards may be considered pet friendly for indoor cats only provided the village community has voted in the majority for it to be classified as such.

Only units within pet friendly villages with private enclosed yards are approved for dogs.

The housing of any pet within an ECH unit is subject to an application process.

All animals approved to reside in ECH villages are subject to the conditions of a Pet Agreement.

Are the outcomes of the survey's final?

Where a village has been fully endorsed by the residents as pet friendly, this classification will not be rescinded, and the village will remain and be marketed as being pet friendly into the future.

Villages that have elected to be pet free will be re-surveyed every 2 – 5 years with the frequency determined by resident movement (how many previously surveyed residents still reside in the village) and any changes to the village amenities that might influence a residents position on considering pets i.e. upgrades to the village that provide more space to comfortably house a pet without negatively impacting the peaceful occupation of other residents.

Some ECH villages (such as high rise villages) are unlikely to ever be reclassified as pet friendly, as the village environment is wholly unsuitable for keeping pets healthy and happy and the higher density style living makes it overly challenging to ensure peaceful occupation for all residents per the Conditions of Residency.

If the village is pet friendly and the unit has a private yard, is my dog automatically approved?

No. There is an assessment process required prior to approving a dog to live in an ECH village.

Why? Changing an animal's physical environment can present challenges that last beyond a normal settling in period. Some animals do not have the right temperament to live in a retirement village environment where homes are closely co-located. Other considerations include the age, size, breed and level of activity required for the individual animal.

Clause 1.1 of the Conditions of Residency states *"Residents shall reside peacefully and quietly with all other residents in the village where the resident resides"*.

It is ECH's responsibility under the Retirement Villages Act to make decisions that holistically consider the needs of the whole village community and support residents to meet the conditions of residency.

The only exception to the approval process is for an accredited and certified assistance animal such as guide dog for vision or hearing impaired or other disabled person, that meets the criteria defined under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995. While Assistance or Services Animals will attract automatic approval per the relevant legislation, owners of these animals are still required to complete the application forms so ECH can collect the relevant evidence of the animals status and other information pertinent to its future residence in an ECH village.

What happens if my neighbours complain about my pet?

From time to time pets can be disruptive to other residents. Generally, this is only occasional and not cause for major concern.

Common cause for complaints include, pet owners not picking up waste, allowing pets to roam freely in communal areas and nuisance barking.

Where nuisance behaviour presents a regular disruption to other residents and a complaint is made, the Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure are enacted.

The initial steps of the dispute resolution process include raising the issues and concerns with you and agreeing to strategies or solutions to resolve the problem. If problems persist and mediation is ineffective you may be asked to re-house the pet.

I have a "Therapy Pet" – why can't I get an exemption?

While ECH recognises that all companion animals can provide therapeutic benefits to their owners physical, mental and emotional health, we have a responsibility to ensure the needs of each village community is holistically met along with the conditions of the Retirement Villages Act and related Conditions of Residency.

"Therapy Animal" or "Emotional Support Animal" are terms that are being used more frequently in the broader community. These terms generally describe a companion animal which provides emotional support for people with special physical or mental needs in a home setting but who have not necessarily been specifically trained and/or certified.

There is a genuine risk of people misusing the term "Therapy Animal" to describe their pet in an effort to circumvent processes and procedures that are designed to protect the interests of a larger cohort of people, such as a retirement village community. Therapy animals do not have any legal status in Australia which allows them special consideration.

As such ECH requires evidence of an animals specific training, accreditation and/or certification as an **assistance or service animal** to provide an exemption. This evidence must be consistent with the requirements of the relevant Commonwealth and State Legislation. In South Australia, Assistance Animals are issued with a special Disability Dog Pass by the Dog and Cat Management Board.

The following references provide additional information about the classification of Assistance Animals in South Australia:

<https://dogandcatboard.com.au/dogs/assistance-dogs>

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-an-assistance-animal/>

Why can't I have more than one dog, if my unit and village are considered "pet friendly" for dogs?

Most local council by-laws prohibit the housing of more than one dog at a small property, the definition of which being, a property involving any self-contained dwelling where the property or part thereof (i.e. flat, home unit, etc) contains a secured unobstructed yard area of less than 100 square metres.

ECH endeavours to uphold all relevant legislation when setting the parameters of its own guidelines.

Beyond this ECH has a responsibility to ensure peaceful occupation for all residents. In order to balance this responsibility with the accommodation of pets, a limit on the number of animals per unit in "pet friendly" villages applies.

My family/friend want to bring their dog to visit me at the village. Is this allowed?

Visits from family or friends with their pets is a lovely way for residents to enjoy the company of animals without owning one themselves.

ECH is supportive of *occasional* visits to the village by the pets of resident's family and friends with the following caveats.

- Non-resident owned animals are not permitted to stay in the village or unit overnight.
- Visiting animals must be leashed and under effective control in external areas and when walking through the village. Cats must be restrained in a suitable pet carrier. It is preferred that the pet owner always remains with the animal.
- The resident must be prepared to assume responsibility for ensuring the pet owner appropriately manages the animal's behaviour while in the village.
- The resident is responsible for ensuring the pet's owner bags any animal excrement and removes it from the property. Waste is not to be disposed of in communal bins.

ECH encourages residents residing in any village with a "pet free" status, to visit with the pets of friends and family away from the village.