

RSPCA Australia Submission

Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032)

July 2026

The RSPCA is an independent, community-based charity dedicated to advancing animal welfare for the humane treatment of animals. Guided by our vision where animals and people live together with dignity, respect and compassion, we work tirelessly to prevent cruelty by actively promoting the care and protection of animals Australia-wide.

Our activities span all states and territories and include operating animal rehoming shelters, investigating and prosecuting animal cruelty complaints and educating the community on responsible pet ownership. Informed by contemporary values and the latest scientific knowledge, we work with governments and industries to address critical animal welfare issues.

This submission reflects our ongoing commitment to the development of policies and practices that uphold the welfare of animals across all sectors. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this consultation, with the objective of working collaboratively towards meaningful progress in animal welfare.

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Executive summary

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is at crisis levels in Australia. Companion animals are estimated to be involved in 70 per cent of DFV cases, are used as tools of coercive control and are often the first casualties of DFV violence, including physical, sexual and verbal assaults, neglect and death.

Many DFV victim-survivors consider their pets to be family members, and around half delay leaving, or stay with, or return to a violent partner because they fear for the safety of their pets and do not want to leave them behind. A lack of emergency accommodation, including animal shelter and pet-inclusive DFV refuge accommodation, is a critical and often overlooked barrier to many people leaving violent perpetrators. This barrier can delay or prevent victim-survivors from reaching safety. Human and companion animal safety is therefore inextricably linked. For many victim-survivors, concern for the safety and wellbeing of a companion animal is not a secondary consideration – it is a determining factor in whether they are able to leave a violent situation safely. Without appropriate support, victim-survivors, their children and animals may remain exposed to serious and escalating harm. Children, in particular, may suffer significant psychological impacts due to DFV and early intervention can help reduce trauma, strengthen recovery and contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of violence.

The RSPCA, as Australia's leading provider of DFV pet crisis support programs, is experiencing significant and unmet demand for these services and has identified an opportunity to address the issue under the Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

The RSPCA proposes the establishment of a national grant program of \$45 million over four years to fund human and animal welfare organisations to:

- Provide emergency boarding, veterinary and care services for pets of DFV victim-survivors
- Invest in pet-inclusive DFV refuges
- Create an online education program to help veterinarians, animal welfare inspectors, police, paramedics, fire fighters and other frontline support workers to identify DV risk earlier – in particular, where animal abuse is involved – and provide victim-survivors pathways for safe refuge.

The proposal would help keep people and their companion animals together to preserve the human–animal bond, which is recognised as contributing to emotional wellbeing, recovery and resilience during and after periods of crisis.

It would also deliver broader social and economic benefits. According to economic consultancy The Centre for International Economics, the national grant program proposal would deliver net benefits of \$150 million, with a benefit-cost ratio of 3.9, meaning that for every \$1 invested, at least \$3.90 is returned to the Australian community.

As part of our submission, the RSPCA also identifies the need for a national approach to data collection on DFV and pets to assist with research, policy and planning of service and program delivery.

Introduction

The RSPCA delivers crisis support programs to people and their companion animals experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV). These include emergency accommodation (including foster care), transport, care and veterinary services for pets, and casework support for victim-survivors. Specific DFV support programs are provided in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT¹.

In FY2023-24, the RSPCA's emergency care programs serviced a total of 1127 clients and 1540 animals, with 69 per cent of clients experiencing DFV, 10 per cent in aged care and 21 per cent experiencing housing insecurity or requiring emergency medical treatment. Approximately half of that activity was in NSW and only 13.5 per cent of requests in that state were able to be met.

Significant unmet demand in those states and territories where the RSPCA provides these services remains, particularly in rural and regional areas. For example, in NSW, only 28 per cent of DFV requests or referrals were able to be met with some form of service delivery response in FY2025-26.

Our submission seeks to identify and address the increasing and unmet need in the community for these services and highlights the important role they play in mitigating risk and preventing harm to people and animals experiencing DFV situations. This approach recognises that human and companion animal welfare is inextricably linked. Where concern for an animal delays or prevents a person from escaping violence, animal-inclusive services are not simply an animal welfare response; they are an essential pathway to human safety, recovery and long-term wellbeing.

The recommendations we propose are relevant to all five priority areas in the consultation paper for the Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, as shown on page 6.

¹ See Appendix A.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1	The Second Action Plan should highlight the safety of companion animals as a critical barrier for DFV victim-survivors leaving violence, and the lack of emergency pet-inclusive accommodation as a key factor.
RECOMMENDATION 2	To address the current shortfall in crisis accommodation available to people and pets experiencing DFV, and to provide them access to safety sooner, the RSPCA proposes the establishment of a \$45 million national grant program² over four years, open to human and animal welfare organisations, to: (a) Provide emergency boarding, veterinary and care services for companion animals of people experiencing DFV and homelessness, including temporary accommodation, veterinary treatment and pet care services. (b) Invest in pet-inclusive DFV refuges for victim-survivors that allows for people and their pets to stay together in times of crisis. (c) Create an online education program to help veterinarians, animal welfare inspectors, police and paramedics, fire fighters and other frontline support workers to identify DFV risk earlier and provide victim-survivors pathways for safe refuge.
RECOMMENDATION 3	The Australian Government, working with states and territories, should establish a national approach to data collection on DFV and pets, and review and update data collection and reporting systems to capture data on the incidence of DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse in the human DFV context.

Alignment of recommendations with the five priority areas for consultation under the Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children

RSPCA recommendation	1. Victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence	2. Prevention and early intervention	3. Children and young people in their own right	4. People who use violence	5. System integration and workforce
1.	✓	✓	✓		
2 (a), (b), (c)	✓	✓	✓		
3.		✓		✓	✓

² [RSPCA-Pre-Budget-Submission-2026-27.pdf](#), pp10-11.

Situation analysis

Around 70 per cent of Australian households live with companion animals³ and many people regard their animals as family members⁴. Perpetrators of DFV may use animals as tools of coercive control and threaten, harm and kill animals to control and intimidate women and children⁵. In this context, violence against companion animals can include threats of, or actual physical or sexual abuse; threats of or causing death; verbal abuse; and deliberate neglect, including not providing, or preventing others from providing, essential care such as food, water, shelter, grooming, basic medical needs and veterinary care (including for injuries inflicted by the perpetrator)⁶.

In Victoria, Crime Statistics Agency data shows that from 2020-2025, the number of incidents where DFV perpetrators were reported to have threatened or harmed a family pet increased by 80 per cent from 2794 cases in 2020-21 to 5054 in 2024-5⁷. In NSW, 55 per cent of DFV and community workers reported clients disclosing that the perpetrator killed an animal or animals in the context of DFV⁸. According to research, 'more severe domestic abuse and animal abuse within the household should be markers of a high-risk environment for domestic homicide'⁹.

Companion animals are likely to be present in as many as 70 per cent of DFV cases in Australia¹⁰. Concern for the safety of companion animals has been identified as a critical barrier to many people leaving DFV situations and accessing safety. This means that people may delay leaving, stay with, or return to a violent partner because they have valid fears for the safety of their pets and do not want to leave them behind¹¹. In NSW, 86 per cent of DFV and community workers reported their clients expressing concern for their animals or disclosing acts of violence against animals, and 48 per cent said their clients delayed leaving a perpetrator by more than a year due to fear or threat of an animal being harmed¹². This latter figure is replicated in RSPCA NSW client reporting which shows that more

³ *Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people*, Animal Medicines Australia, 2025, p5.

⁴ *Ibid*, p16.

⁵ Butler, K and McDonald, J, *Violence against family animals in the context of intimate partner violence: policy and practice paper*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2024, p3.

⁶ *Ibid*, p5.

⁷ Table 33. Number of family violence incidents with risk factors recorded on L17 Risk Assessment and Risk Management Report, 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2025, Crime Statistics Agency: [Justice System Data Tables 2025.xlsx](#)

⁸ Dam, M and McCaskill, C., *Animals and people experiencing domestic and family violence: How their safety and wellbeing are interconnected*, Domestic Violence NSW, 2020.

⁹ Diemer, K., Gallant, D., Mosso Tupper, N., Hammond, K., Ramamurthy, A., and Humphreys, C., *Exploring the linkages between animal abuse, domestic abuse and sexual offending: A scoping review*, Health and Social Care in the Community, 2024.

¹⁰ *RSPCA NSW Domestic Violence: Social Return on Investment*, RSPCA, 2023, p6.

¹¹ Butler, K and McDonald, J, *Violence against family animals in the context of intimate partner violence: policy and practice paper*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2024, p7.

¹² Dam, M and McCaskill, C., *Animals and people experiencing domestic and family violence: How their safety and wellbeing are interconnected*, Domestic Violence NSW, 2020.

than 50 per cent of DFV victim-survivors delayed leaving a violent perpetrator due to concerns for their pets' welfare¹³.

DFV is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia¹⁴ and is the leading cause of homelessness for children¹⁵. Those experiencing homelessness due to DFV may not be able to temporarily and safely care for their pets.

As a result, many people experiencing DFV put themselves at risk of harm, or may need to surrender, rehome or euthanise their pets, which may negatively impact their wellbeing. Importantly, companion animals are a key source of support and healing in the recovery phase after leaving an abusive relationship.

Children who experience DFV, including violence directed towards companion animals, may suffer significant developmental and psychological impacts. Early intervention that addresses the safety and wellbeing of both people and animals can help reduce trauma, strengthen recovery and contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of violence¹⁶.

While some DFV victims can escape abusive relationships for refuges, most refuges do not allow companion animals, and there is a lack of affordable private alternatives for boarding accommodation for animals. Boarding rates at private kennels are high at approximately \$50 per night, with many kennels capping maximum stays at two to four weeks. If an animal requires veterinary treatment, this will also escalate the cost of stay¹⁷.

The limited availability of affordable emergency accommodation and support for companion animals significantly restricts the options available to people experiencing DFV. For many victim-survivors, concern for the safety and wellbeing of a companion animal is not a secondary consideration – it is a determining factor in whether they are able to leave a violent situation safely.

Keeping people and their companion animals together, wherever it is safe and appropriate, preserves the human–animal bond which is recognised as contributing to emotional wellbeing, recovery and resilience during and after periods of crisis. It also delivers broader social and economic benefits¹⁸.

Supporting people and pets to remain together whenever possible can also reduce pressure on DFV services, homelessness services, animal shelters and emergency welfare responses. By removing barriers to safety earlier, animal-inclusive services help prevent avoidable pet surrender, reduce demand on crisis services and improve long-term outcomes for victim-survivors, children and their animals.

Recognising and responding to the needs of companion animals should be considered an integral component of an effective DFV response. Where concern for an animal delays or prevents a person

¹³ RSPCA NSW *Domestic Violence: Social Return on Investment*, RSPCA, 2023, p26.

¹⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2021) *Housing, homelessness and domestic and family violence*

¹⁵ Campo, M., *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence*, Child Family Community Australia paper No. 36, 9 December 2015, p2.

¹⁶ *Traumatized Witnesses: Review of Childhood Exposure to Animal Cruelty* - PMC

¹⁷ <https://www.petscare.com/en-au/news/faq/how-much-does-dog-boarding-cost>

¹⁸ *Keeping Australians and their Companion Animals Safe program: Australian Government Funding proposal*, The Centre for International Economics, 19 March 2026, page 11.

from leaving violence, animal-inclusive services are not simply an animal welfare initiative, they are an essential pathway to improving safety, recovery and long-term wellbeing for victim-survivors and their families.

This approach recognises that protecting animal welfare is often a gateway to safety, stability and recovery for people accessing domestic violence, housing and health services.

***Recommendation 1:** The Second Action Plan should highlight the safety of companion animals as a critical barrier for DFV victim-survivors leaving violence, and the lack of emergency pet-inclusive accommodation as a key factor.*

Current government action on DFV and companion animals

While there is currently some recognition of the link between animal abuse and DFV by the Australian Government, the scale of the problem and implications for human and animal welfare are not sufficiently acknowledged or addressed by current plans or funding arrangements.

For example, the National Risk Assessment Principles for DFV recognise that ‘cruelty and harm directed to pets and other animals can indicate risk of future or more severe violence’¹⁹. The National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence state that ‘a perpetrator may harm animals, particularly when a victim-survivor has a strong emotional connection to a pet or when the animal has a service or support role for the person’²⁰.

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 includes ‘animal abuse’ in a list of behaviours that perpetrators may use as part of a pattern of coercive control²¹ and acknowledges that ‘pet owners’ face additional barriers to accessing emergency accommodation²².

While programs for ‘victim survivors leaving violent situations who have pets’ are eligible to be funded under the Federation Funding Agreement Schedules for each state and territory²³, such funding decisions are at the discretion of jurisdictions. Currently, and in the face of high and unmet demand

¹⁹ Toivonen, C., and Backhouse, C., National Risk Assessment Principles for domestic and family violence (ANROWS Insights 07/2018), 2018.

²⁰ National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence, Attorney-General’s Department, Commonwealth of Australia, 2023.

²¹ National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2031, Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Australia, 2022, p37.

²² Ibid, p59.

²³ Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-30 Schedule, Federation Funding Agreement – Affordable Housing, Community Services and Other. See Funding Principles section 7e (ix), p3.

for DFV pet programs nationwide, RSPCA Tasmania's Safe Beds program is the only RSPCA DFV program that receives a funding allocation by a state government under the National Plan²⁴.

RSPCA DFV emergency programs

RSPCA shelters across Australia have been successfully providing DFV programs for some time, including emergency accommodation (including foster care), transport, care and veterinary services for pets and case management for people experiencing crisis situations. Specific DFV pet programs are provided in NSW, Victoria, ACT, Queensland, WA and Tasmania²⁵.

Animals that enter RSPCA DFV programs may have some health issues as a result of coercive control by perpetrators who withhold access to healthcare. These issues can be addressed when the client and animal enter the program.

Most dogs and cats in the program have some behavioural issues which are often a reaction to trauma, and due to separation anxiety and the anxiety of being housed in a shelter. Where possible, these animals are placed into foster care, although there is a shortage of foster carers who can provide longer-term care and manage trauma or anxiety. In FY2025-26, 45 per cent of animals in RSPCA ACT's DFV program were placed into foster care.

When the client and animal are reunited, the client receives advice on any health and behavioural issues that need follow-up with their new veterinary service provider.

RSPCA's provision of veterinary assessment, treatment and appropriate preventative healthcare also supports longer-term recovery by improving animals' health and increasing opportunities for people to access pet-inclusive housing or alternative care arrangements. Where appropriate, clients are provided with documentation such as vaccination records, microchip details and desexing certificates which helps to facilitate ongoing care and housing options following reunification.

DFV clients either self-refer or are referred by DFV advocacy services, refuges or other human services, such as hospitals and emergency services, or family or friends. The RSPCA connects self-referred clients with a human DFV support service to support and assist them with safety planning. The RSPCA forms part of the safety plan through its case management support for the client.

At RSPCA NSW, the Crisis Support Program team includes a call centre with specialist intake officers, five caseworkers and animal officers. All staff are trained in mental health first aid, trauma-informed care, suicide care and DFV. In addition, caseworkers have accredited human services qualifications. Caseworkers work directly with DFV clients, providing them with updates on their animals' wellbeing, and assist with reuniting them with their pets as soon as possible. Caseworkers also liaise with refuges and DFV speciality services in the client's local area.

There is significant unmet demand in those states and territories where the RSPCA provides these services, particularly in rural and regional areas, as services are at capacity and limited in their ability to provide ongoing levels of support to meet community demand.

²⁴ [First Action Plan 2023–2027 Activities Addendum](#), Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, p64.

²⁵ See Appendix A.

For example, in NSW, the RSPCA receives approximately 1500 to 1800 DFV related crisis enquiries each year. In FY2024-25, only 28 per cent or 226 of the 805 DFV requests for assistance or referrals were able to be fulfilled with some form of service delivery, while a greater number of people received advice and information.

RSPCA Queensland is increasing its DFV program intake target by almost 70 per cent this financial year – from 160 to 270 pet boarding places – to meet growing demand²⁶. And in May 2026, RSPCA Victoria launched its dedicated DFV ‘Safe Paws’ program, in response to public demand.

In some jurisdictions, such as the ACT, while 92 per cent of DFV clients’ pets were offered a place in boarding in FY2025-26²⁷, the required duration of care was not always able to be provided. As a result, some families had to make the difficult decision to surrender their pets after months of care, as no pet-inclusive housing or accommodation options were available to them. This can compound families’ psychological trauma, grief and stress at a time of great vulnerability.

RSPCA’s DFV emergency programs have also provided veterinary services to companion animals so that they can accompany their owners to live in pet-inclusive refuges. For example, an RSPCA ACT DFV client needed to have her cat desexed, microchipped and vaccinated before she could have him live with her at a refuge. RSPCA ACT provided these services free of charge, normally valued at \$425:

“I would like to thank you for the assistance you provided in neutering my cat and giving him all of his vaccinations. I am currently living in a refuge, so I had very limited resources to ensure he received the care he needed. Your DFV program made it possible for me to keep him and ensure he was properly looked after.”

RSPCA DFV programs improve client safety and save lives

In NSW, in FY2020-21, 92 per cent of clients and their children reported experiencing improved personal safety as a result of the RSPCA DFV program. The outcome they most valued was being able to keep their companion animal, after an average length of stay of approximately 30 days²⁸.

■■■■■, who was living in regional NSW, knew she was not safe when her former partner’s threats began to escalate, but held off going into a refuge until she had somewhere for her dog, ■■■■■ to stay. ■■■■■ fled with just the clothes she had on and left ■■■■■ behind. She went back to the house to feed Rusty, but only after dark. Two days before Christmas, ■■■■■ found the RSPCA NSW Domestic and Family Violence Program and by Christmas Eve, she was in a safe house. “If I didn’t have somewhere safe to put ■■■■■, I probably would have stayed,” she said. After two months, ■■■■■ and ■■■■■ were reunited. “I lost furniture, photos and everything else, but I still had him,” she said²⁹.

Other clients are similarly grateful for the RSPCA’s DFV programs:

“I just wanted to thank you from the depths of our hearts for the support the RSPCA Safe Beds program has provided for our family while we are experiencing difficulties with homelessness and domestic violence. Our animals are definitely part of our family – in fact, they are our

²⁶ RSPCA Queensland expects to fund expanded DFV service delivery through public donations.

²⁷ RSPCA ACT estimates that demand for their DFV program would be greater if they partnered with other organisations.

²⁸ *RSPCA NSW Domestic Violence: Social Return on Investment*, RSPCA, 2023, p3.

²⁹ [Women delay leaving abusive relationships out of concern for pets' safety, RSPCA says - ABC News](#)

therapy animals. From the moment we made contact [with the RSPCA], we could be confident our animals would be looked after. Without this support, it would have been a much harder experience for the children especially and I doubt they ever would have forgiven me or come willingly knowing we couldn't take our animals with us.

"Around seven years ago, my sister died. She couldn't leave her animals to seek refuge in a shelter and as a result, was tragically a victim of domestic violence. We are aware that we could have also been part of these statistics. No-one is immune to domestic violence and people need all the help they can to help their family, including animals, to access safety and supports, which so sadly can't accommodate or support animals."

RSPCA Tasmania Safe Beds program client

"This program was the first stepping stone to allow myself, children and dogs to be safe, happy and in a stable environment. If I didn't go into this program, I wouldn't be here today. It was a life-or-death situation. It was the first program I got put into that made me feel safe. It took the worry off everything knowing that my fur babies were ok... [Without RSPCA NSW] both dogs would have had to be euthanised, 100%. Me and my children would be homeless still ... it changed everything. Without this program, I would not have had both my dogs, so it literally saved their lives³⁰."

██████████, RSPCA NSW client

"I was able to leave a very violent relationship and find a safe place for my child and I to go, knowing RSPCA NSW were taking care of my animals until I could have them back ... [without RSPCA NSW] I would have stayed in a very abusive relationship which was unhealthy for all of us³¹."

██████████, RSPCA NSW client with one child, one dog and one cat. Joanne had delayed leaving her abusive partner for more than six months due to concerns about her animals.

"I was able to take my daughter into a refuge where they have found us a house we can live in with our pets. We were previously sleeping in a tent after leaving DV³²."

██████████, RSPCA NSW client

There are additional and significant challenges for victim-survivors in rural areas. An elderly RSPCA client was forced to relocate with three pets several hours away from their rural Queensland home to escape their abuser. Being so far from their existing support systems meant they could only access short term accommodation and services, and the uncertainty around legal processes meant they were uncertain when, if ever they would be able to return home. This combination of circumstances made it extremely difficult for the client to make long term plans for themselves or their pets. RSPCA Queensland was able to board all three pets beyond the usual 28-day period which enabled them to be safely reunited at the end of the extended boarding period.

³⁰ RSPCA NSW Domestic Violence: Social Return on Investment, RSPCA, 2023, p3.

³¹ Ibid, p14.

³² Ibid.

RSPCA NSW Safe Families program: making refuges pet-inclusive

Through its Safe Families program – the first pet-inclusive framework of its kind in Australia – RSPCA NSW has supported 14 DFV crisis refuges to become pet-inclusive since 2018, with a further three currently in development. The goal is to expand this network by supporting an additional two to four refuges each year to become pet-inclusive.

Under the program, RSPCA NSW provides specialist, trauma-informed support including staff training (including understanding a pet's trauma), access to essential pet supplies, behavioural guidance, guidance and specialist advice on constructing pet enclosures, and intervention for animal health and welfare concerns, which often arise due to prolonged exposure to DFV.

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW attests to the value of its partnership with RSPCA NSW under the Safe Families program:

“The comprehensive support and partnership with the RSPCA has been instrumental in assisting us to successfully establish pet-friendly crisis accommodation and embed sustainable, best practice models of care... Having pet-friendly crisis accommodation reduces barriers that can save lives... Partnering and supporting the RSPCA means creating safer, more inclusive pathways out of violence for women, children and their pets³³.”

The following refuge client feedback illustrates the importance of maintaining the human–animal bond in the recovery and healing process:

“It is a lot easier to leave an abusive relationship when you can bring your pet.”

“Having my pet babies with me in refuge helped me recover quicker after we had been sleeping in the car.”

“Having my pets at the refuge with me helps me feel loved and keeps me calm.”

“I was finally able to get my pet the medical attention they needed after years in a violent relationship.”

“I am so grateful to the RSPCA for the care and support I received during one of the hardest times of my life.”

Refuge staff have consistently reported the positive impact that pets have on the mental health and recovery of women and children, with several women stating that they would not have left a violent relationship if they had been unable to bring their animals.

Recommendation 2: *To address the current shortfall in crisis accommodation available to people and pets experiencing DFV, and to provide them with access to safety sooner, the RSPCA proposes the establishment of a \$45 million national grant program over four years, open to human and animal welfare organisations, to:*

(a) *Provide pet emergency boarding, care and support services for pets of people experiencing DFV and homelessness, including temporary accommodation, veterinary treatment and pet care services.*

³³ Letter of support, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW Support Services, 16 December 2025.

(b) Invest in pet-inclusive DFV refuges for victim-survivors that allows for people and their pets to stay together in times of crisis.

A national grant program would support consistent access to these services across jurisdictions, reducing postcode inequity and enabling scalable, community-embedded models of support.

Expanding programs in both location and capacity would help meet increasing need in communities across Australia, particularly in rural and regional areas.

In its report, *Keeping Australians and their Companion Animals Safe program: an Australian Government Funding proposal*, economic consultancy The Centre for International Economics estimates the program's net benefit as \$150 million to the Australian community, with a benefit cost ratio of 3.9. This means that for every \$1 of funding, at least \$3.90 of benefits are returned to the Australian community³⁴.

Outcomes resulting from the proposal are estimated to include improved personal safety, improved psychosocial health, extended human animal bond, and improved social inclusion.

Estimated benefits include:

- Owner wellbeing benefits from continuing to own an animal
- Avoided health system costs
- Avoided health costs to clients
- Avoided cost for rehoming animals or euthanasia of surrendered animals
- Improved safety for victims of DFV³⁵.

Educating practitioners about the link between violence against people and animals

The relationship between animal cruelty and DFV is not well known or understood in the community, or by human and animal welfare and veterinary practitioners. It is important that practitioners in human and animal services have the capability to recognise and respond to DFV perpetrated against people and animals, by making referrals and reports where appropriate³⁶.

Practitioners in DFV and homelessness services should also be trained and supported to undertake animal-inclusive intake, risk assessment and safety planning. Similarly, practitioners in animal

³⁴ *Keeping Australians and their Companion Animals Safe program: an Australian Government Funding proposal*, The Centre for International Economics, 19 March 2026, p21.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p11.

³⁶ *Lucy's Project National Roundtable on Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrated against People and Animals Draft Report*, Lucy's Project, July 2026, p15.

welfare and veterinary services should be trained to recognise, respond to and refer people with animals who are experiencing DFV³⁷.

Investing in enhanced training programs for support services and frontline workers to help identify and respond to animal abuse in the DFV context will help remove people and pets experiencing DFV from dangerous environments sooner.

***Recommendation 2 (c):** Create an online education program to help veterinarians, animal welfare inspectors, police and paramedics, fire fighters and other frontline support workers identify DFV risk earlier – in particular, where animal abuse is involved – and provide victim-survivors pathways for safe refuge.*

Bridging the information gap: collecting national data on DFV and pets

There is currently no national approach to collecting data on a wide range of indicators relating to DFV and pets, particularly in terms of met and unmet demand for emergency accommodation and other supports for people experiencing DFV. This information is vital for research, policy and planning purposes.

While we know that around 50 per cent of people experiencing DFV delay leaving a violent situation due to concerns for their pets' wellbeing, there is no nationally consistent data available on the number of people being turned away from emergency pet accommodation services that are at capacity, or those who are being turned away or declining to access a service because they cannot be accommodated with their pets.

Likewise, there is no requirement for data on DFV perpetrated against animals to be collected by:

- DFV, animal welfare or other services. Data collection relating to people with animals and animals experiencing DFV tends to be ad hoc, fragmented or limited to individual organisation or service provider level data³⁸.
- Animal welfare, animal management and veterinary services
- Social and health workers, including DFV practitioners.

In addition, there is no data collection system on complaints and charges of animal abuse made by police or animal welfare law enforcement agencies that are DFV related³⁹. Where data is collected by these services or agencies, it is not integrated or shared across systems.

³⁷ Ibid, p16.

³⁸ Lucy's Project Roundtable on Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrated Against People and Animals Report, July 2026, p21.

³⁹ Ibid.

An integrated, national approach to DFV and pet data collection would provide researchers, policymakers and those working in the sector with essential information with which to fund and plan the provision of prevention, early support and response interventions accordingly. This would support cross-sector collaboration between DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, veterinary services and police⁴⁰.

Recommendation 3: *The Australian Government, working with states and territories, should establish a national approach to data collection on DFV and pets, and review and update data collection and reporting systems to capture data on the incidence of DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse in the human DFV context.*

⁴⁰ Ibid, p19.

Appendix A

Most RSPCA Member societies offer emergency pet boarding.

Specific DFV pet programs are provided by NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. Due to a lack of funding and infrastructure, all of these services run at or beyond capacity, with DFV victim-survivors often having to be referred elsewhere or provided with a lower level of service than they require to meet their needs.

NSW

The RSPCA NSW Domestic Violence Program offers safe crisis accommodation for companion animals, allowing clients to be reunited with pets as soon as possible, including:

- Temporary foster accommodation and/or emergency pet boarding
- Financial assistance for veterinary treatment
- Financial assistance with impound fees
- Practical and financial assistance with transportation.

Through the Safe Families program, RSPCA NSW assists crisis accommodation services to adopt pet-inclusive models, directly addressing one of the most significant barriers to people leaving DFV situations. The program also includes the provision of staff training, specialist advice on pet enclosures and intervention for animal health and welfare concerns.

Victoria

Under the Safe Paws Program, launched in May 2026, RSPCA Victoria works with welfare professionals and organisations to provide:

- Secure and safe crisis pet boarding
- Veterinary care for pets with DFV injuries or rehabilitation for animals recovering during transitions to safety
- Emergency pet packs with essentials for distribution through case workers.

In addition, targeted education sessions are provided to upskill and equip welfare teams, stakeholders and industry professionals on the critical link between DFV and animal cruelty. These sessions provide insights to support the inclusion of pets in risk assessments for exit planning and emergency accommodation.

Queensland

RSPCA Queensland's Pets in Crisis program provides 28 days of emergency boarding and care for pets whose owners are escaping domestic violence. It is delivered in partnership with DV Connect to ensure people can be supported by a case worker to access the human services they need.

When a pet enters the program and arrives at an RSPCA shelter, they are health checked, treated for intestinal worms and fleas, and vaccinated if required. If not already desexed, they undergo spay/neuter surgery under a general anaesthetic. If not already microchipped, they have a microchip implanted. If they require grooming, they are bathed, brushed, trimmed and/or clipped.

Pets remain at the shelter or with an approved foster carer until their collection date. The program is free for participants and is funded through the generous support of the Pet Barn Foundation and a

grant from the Queensland Government. In FY2025-26, the program supported 160 animals, of which 90 per cent were reunited with their owner.

Western Australia

RSPCA WA offers three months' temporary pet care for people in DFV situations in Perth, the South West and in the Great Southern, via a caseworker referral.

Tasmania

RSPCA Tasmania offers the Safe Beds program, working with caseworkers to assist people whose animals need temporary care due to homelessness as a result of DFV and unplanned hospitalisation.

ACT

RSPCA ACT's Pet and Family Assistance program provides safe, free temporary emergency boarding for those experiencing DFV, homelessness, hospitalisation, mental wellbeing issues, and other crises.

All animals in care under this program receive free veterinary care, including desexing, and other necessary surgical interventions (within scope).