

**Human**



**Animal**



**Bond**

A research  
compilation on  
**#PetPower**

**PetAlliance  
Europe** 

#PetPower is our way of talking about human-animal interactions, the bond between our species, and the many benefits that can be drawn from close relationships between people and animals, particularly companion animals.

It's another way of talking about animal-assisted interventions and the human-animal bond. And it refers to any situation where there is interchange between humans and animals at an individual, community or cultural level.

# #PetPower

## What's it all about?

## Why #PetPower matters

#PetPower, or the human-animal bond, is important as it is a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals. Influenced by behaviours linked to health and well-being, #PetPower creates favourable emotional, psychological, and physical interactions between people and animals, positively shaping societies and communities. There is even some evidence that it can have positive economic impacts on healthcare systems.



# The science behind #PetPower

There is a long history of anecdotal and observational evidence of the mutual benefits of the human-animal bond. Internationally, the depth and quality of evidence and research on the substantive benefits to people and pets is growing.



Many peer-reviewed studies illustrate the myriad beneficial effects of pet ownership to people, with positive impacts on areas such as: **physical wellbeing and mental health promotion, early child development, healthy ageing and social inclusion for marginalised and disadvantaged peoples.**


Findings to date confirm the significant social and societal potential that the human-animal bond offers in directing national and regional priorities for healthcare policies, healthy aging policies, education policies, etc.





We have selected a few key findings from studies carried out in Europe


## PHYSICAL HEALTH




 A UK study showed: Dog owners often have higher activity levels and shorter sedentary time even on days when the weather is bad.

 A study in Italy showed: For cancer patients animal-assisted activities during chemotherapy reduces feelings of depression and increases arterial oxygen saturation.


 A study in England showed: The odds of dog owners meeting current physical activity guidelines of 150 mins per week were four times greater than for non-dog owners. Children with dogs also reported more minutes of walking and free-time activity.


 A study in Sweden showed: Within 1 year after an acute heart attack the odds of death were lower in dog owners than in non-owners. Dog ownership was also associated with lower risk of a recurrent heart attack 30 days or later after the initial attack. Risk of death among pet owners following a stroke was also recorded as lower.


 A Czechia study showed: Young women with 3 or more animals reported higher levels of moderate physical activity. Owners of dogs, horses and other domestic animals are more likely to be active, due to carrying out a lot of physical exercise with them. In particular horse owners had significantly higher levels of activity than non-animal owners.



## MENTAL HEALTH

 A UK review of studies found that: Pets provided calming support and were perceived to have a 'sense' of when it was needed. People were able to confide in their pets when they were unable to open up to other people.

 An Austrian paper reported: Dogs can boost the self-esteem and agency of their human partners and are excellent "social lubricants," thereby connecting people.


 A UK study showed: Pets constituted a valuable source of support for managing feelings through distraction from symptoms and upsetting experiences. Pets provide a mechanism for engagement with the social world through having to care for them no matter how you feel, and creating a sense of purpose considered fundamental to wellbeing.


 Study from the Netherlands: Companion animals were reported to alleviate loneliness. Owning a companion animal has been associated with lower levels of depression and with higher levels of life satisfaction.







## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

 Studies in Norway and Switzerland showed: Exposure to pets reduces the risk of developing allergy-related diseases in early childhood. Childhood exposure to pets including cats was associated with reduced allergies to cats in adulthood.

 A UK review of studies reported: Companion animal ownership may facilitate language acquisition and potentially enhance verbal skills in children. The long-term presence of pets at home can have tangible influences on children's cognitive development and educational outcomes.

 A study in Croatia showed: By taking responsibility for the well-being of a pet, children learn through experience about the importance of empathy in responding to others' feelings and needs, as well as appropriate forms of prosocially oriented behaviour.

 A survey of Scottish children showed: A childhood attachment to pets significantly predicts positive attitudes towards animals in general. Children involved in pet care behaviour may have positive outcomes in terms of better well-being and quality of life.

# HEALTHY AGING



🐾 A Spanish review of studies reported: Animal presence or therapy stimulates increased rates of social contact amongst older adults in homes or institutions, and reduced behavioural disturbances in people with dementia. Elderly pet owners also had fewer doctor visits that were attributable to stressful life events.


🐾 A UK study showed: Owning a dog, may motivate older adults to engage in appropriate levels of physical activity supporting healthy and active aging.

🐾 A study in Italy showed: People with Alzheimer's receiving animal-assisted therapy showed an improvement in both cognitive function and mood.


🐾 A Dutch/Swiss review of studies showed: Pets foster feelings of being protected and safe, both inside and outside the home for elderly pet owners. Dogs are viewed as providers of safety, security, and protection, with older adults perceiving themselves to be safer when walking accompanied by a dog or when at home.


🐾 A joint US/UK review of studies showed: There is an increasing body of evidence suggesting that pets may offer a range of health benefits supporting older adults to retain their physical and mental health, independence, social connectedness and engagement. Older adults having contact with dogs reported reduced levels of loneliness and improved mental functioning.



 A Netherlands study showed: Knowledge that an assistance dog is present and able to respond during a seizure can be reassuring for people with epilepsy, which may reduce seizure worry, stress and onset, meaning decreased seizure frequency. Such support dogs lead to administering of rescue medication on time and decreasing the likelihood of sequential seizures.

## OTHER SPECIFIC ISSUES

 A study in Italy showed: Equine assisted therapy for children with autism spectrum disorders showed an improvement in social functioning and executive ability. Horse-riding activities also show improvement in motor skills.

 A UK study showed: For many people who are homeless, having a pet is an important and valued activity. The psychological benefits of pet ownership can modulate some of the negative consequences of the homelessness experience.



At a European-level there remains significant gaps in the evidence base. There is also a lack of harmonised guidelines for animal-assisted activities and for the care of animals involved in interventions or service.

Our alliance believes this would be an important focus area for Horizon Europe research funding projects. Particularly given increasing isolation, older adults now forming around 20% of our population, and rapid urbanisation and the associated social challenges.

Suggested areas for further research include:

- 🐾 evidence relating to healthcare economics
- 🐾 animal assisted primary prevention
- 🐾 ongoing care for older adults, people with disabilities or others in need of ongoing care
- 🐾 benefits for professionals who work in traumatic or conflict situations such as hospital staff or security forces
- 🐾 the benefits the bond bestows in return on companion and working animals





[animalhealtheurope.eu](http://animalhealtheurope.eu)

AnimalhealthEurope represents companies that research, develop and manufacture veterinary medicines in Europe. It represents innovators and generics alike, as well as large, medium-sized and small companies. AnimalhealthEurope's membership covers 90% of the European market for veterinary products.



[fediaf.org](http://fediaf.org)

FEDIAF represents the European pet food industry. While we work sustainably every day to provide safe products that benefit pets, our work goes beyond pets, and goes beyond pet food. Our work is also about society. Because we believe that pet ownership has the potential to enhance the lives of all Europeans.