

# Lort Smith Pet Therapy

## Information for facilities

Lort Smith is an animal hospital in the heart of Melbourne – a not-for-profit organisation with a unique legacy of supporting vulnerable pet owners and championing the human-animal bond. For 37 years, its Pet Therapy program has been providing comfort and relief to people experiencing illness, adversity, loneliness and the long-term impacts of trauma

Lort Smith's Pet Therapy program involves volunteers taking their own, specially assessed dogs to people in hospitals, residential care, justice, mental health and other settings across Melbourne. The positive interaction with visiting volunteers and their dogs brings comfort, happiness and connection, supporting recovery for people in difficult circumstances. Whether through sitting with a patient and sharing some affection, placing a gentle head on the lap of someone in distress, or by showing off their special talents and making people laugh, the impact of Pet Therapy dogs – and their human sidekicks – can be profound.

Interacting with therapy dogs can:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Alleviate pain
- Bring a sense of calm and contentment
- Improve motivation for recovery
- Reduce loneliness
- Create positive distraction
- Create a sense of safety and build trust
- Build calm and connection in groups
- Improve communication
- Improve confidence and self-esteem
- Improve empathy and social skills
- Increase attendance and improve engagement in therapeutic and educational activities
- Support healing from the impacts of trauma

**Commitment to Best Practice:** Lort Smith is a leading provider of Animal-Assisted Support Programs in Victoria. As a proud member of the leading international peak bodies for Animal-Assisted Services (AAS), Lort Smith is committed to advocating for best practice standards in the delivery of AAS in Australia, where the sector lacks regulatory oversight.



## How the Pet Therapy program works

- Pet Therapy volunteers and their dogs go through an extensive recruitment process, including assessments, interviews, screening and comprehensive training. Each volunteer-dog team is matched with a facility based on their unique attributes, skills and experience.
- Each Pet Therapy Team makes a weekly or fortnightly visit to their matched facility at a set time.
- Visits generally last 1-2 hours depending on the facility and the team; however, most dogs start with shorter visits as they adapt to the role.
- Lort Smith collaborates with facilities to determine optimal volunteer numbers and visit frequencies and how visits might best work at your facility.
- Visits vary between facilities but typically involve interactions with clients (and staff!) in communal areas and/or individual rooms. Pet Therapy can also be purposely integrated into group activities to build connection, improve engagement and enhance therapeutic outcomes.

## Collaborative approach

Lort Smith believes in the power of collaboration, where people and organisations with a shared commitment to improving community wellbeing, can create lasting change. We work closely with our partner facilities to plan and deliver pet therapy visits in a manner that is safe, effective and supportive for all involved. Partners must be willing to invest time and effort into making pet therapy work and providing comprehensive volunteer guidance and support. Facilities are required to:

- Appoint an appropriate contact person/people to provide support and supervision
- Complete a comprehensive facility induction with each referred volunteer
- Provide intensive volunteer support during early visits and, depending on the unique environment at the facility, provide a chaperone for the duration of pet therapy visits
- Participate in an ongoing planning, review and support activities

**Facility intake** varies at each site, but generally includes:

- Completing a [Facility Application Form](#)
- Site visit and planning meeting with Lort Smith team
- Negotiating and signing of a [Pet Therapy Service Agreement](#)
- Liaising with Lort Smith to finalise paperwork and processes

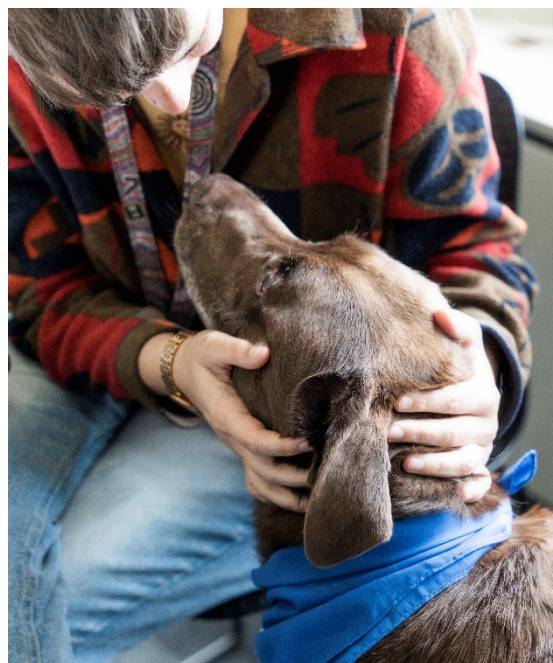
## Program streams

Lort Smith is a not-for-profit organisation that relies on the generosity of its volunteers, partners, donors, and other supporters to deliver its community programs. Lort Smith's Pet Therapy program is delivered by volunteers, as a community service – with a focus on helping the most vulnerable members of our community. There are several streams:

**General Visit Program:** Lort Smith does not charge fees for its general pet therapy visit program, where teams visit people in shared spaces and individual rooms, where the risk is relatively low, and where tailored interventions and training are not required. However, we do encourage organisations with available budget to make a donation towards our running costs.

**Specialised Community Program:** In other settings where more tailored services, volunteer training and coordination are required, Lort Smith requests that partners make a contribution towards our costs in delivering the program. A tailored package will be worked out with each partner.

**Corporate / Workplace Visits:** Lort Smith Pet Therapy volunteers, along with program staff, also make regular visits to corporate partners, with a focus on improving staff morale and wellbeing. The funds raised as part of these visits are used to offset the costs of delivering pet therapy to vulnerable people in the community, enabling Lort Smith continue delivering pet therapy to those in greatest need.



## For more information

Please contact Lort Smith Pet Therapy via **(03) 9287 6486** or [pettherapy@lortsmith.com](mailto:pettherapy@lortsmith.com)