

<i>Title:</i>	<b>3.21 Animals at CoMHWA Policy</b>		
<i>Version:</i>	2.0	<i>Type:</i>	Org wide
<i>Approved by:</i>	CEO	<i>Date:</i>	12/05/2026
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## 1. BACKGROUND

CoMHWA recognises that animals can be integral supports for people with lived experience of mental health challenges.

While we encourage our members to do what they need to support themselves when visiting our offices or attending CoMHWA events, including bringing animals with them that they use for support or assistance, it is important that any animal brought to CoMHWA offices or to a CoMHWA event can be around other people and animals safely.

Note: in the case of a CoMHWA event held at an external venue with rules stricter than our policy, those rules override this document.

## 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy/procedure is to detail minimum standards of behaviours for animals who are brought to CoMHWA or to CoMHWA events by our members, visitors, volunteers or staff members, and to outline what steps must be taken if a visitor or staff member has an animal that becomes aggressive.

The scope of this policy is limited to dogs given that dogs are the most common assistance animal, are more likely to be brought into public spaces due to societal norms, and are more likely to cause significant harm than other less conventional assistance animals including cats, birds, rabbits etc.

## 3. DEFINITIONS

**Assistance animal** – is an animal trained to assist a person to alleviate the effect of a person’s disability.

**Pet** – a domestic animal kept for personal enjoyment, companionship and not trained to perform any disability-related function.

**Attack** - (a) aggressively rushing at or harassing any person or animal; or (b) biting, or otherwise causing physical injury to, a person or an animal; or (c) tearing clothing on, or otherwise causing damage to the property of, the person attacked; or (d) attempting to attack, or behaving in such a manner toward a person as would cause a reasonable person to fear physical injury

## 4. POLICY

Due to the current inadequacies in legislation surrounding access to and National standards for assistance animal behaviours, we recognise that some CoMHWA members or staff may have a pet that supports their emotional wellbeing, but who is not a trained or accredited assistance animal.

While it is lawful to ask for evidence that an animal being used as an assistance animal is accredited as an assistance animal and trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability, CoMHWA does not require and will not ask for proof of accreditation to demonstrate that an animal is a legitimate assistance animal because this process currently does not suit or understand the needs of consumers. However, we do require that any animal brought to CoMHWA must be trained to a standard, outlined below in 5.1: Minimum Behaviour Standards, to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of all other visitors and staff members at CoMHWA.

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According to the Disability Discrimination Act 1999, it is not unlawful for a person to request that a person with disability produce evidence that the animal is trained to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

Liability for damage to property caused by an assistance animal remains with the person who controls the animal, which may be the person with a disability or another person on behalf of the person with the disability, according to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth).

## 5. PROCEDURE

### 5.1. Minimum behaviour standards

CoMHWA has the right to ensure minimum standards for all animals brought to the CoMHWA office, including requiring that:

- the visitor or staff member maintains control of and supervises the animal at all times and does not expect or require other people to take control of or supervise the animal
- the animal does not engage in behaviour that endangers the health or safety of the individual with the disability or others in the workplace or displays behaviours considered an attack under the *Dog Act 1976* (WA) (e.g. biting, scratching)
- the visitor or staff member follow reasonable directions for ensuring that the animal does not interfere with the performance of work or disturb, distract, offend or intimidate other visitors or staff members who may have allergies or reasonable fears of the animal
- the animal display habits appropriate for the work environment, including the ability to eliminate waste in an appropriate location designated for this purpose, e.g. grassed area in the rear carpark.
- The animal does not require control with the use of training devices that cause pain or evoke fear (e.g. Prong collars, shock collars, threats to the animal)
- the visitor or staff member maintains the animal on a leash, harness or other restraint at all times, except when performing a task that requires release from any such restraint
- The animal can be around other animals or people without distraction
- the visitor or staff member clean up after the animal – this includes being responsible for providing their own waste bags and taking the animal on regular toileting breaks outside of CoMHWA.
- the animal be free from offensive odours
- The animal is not in heat or discharging body fluids
- The animal is not considered wholly or in part a 'restricted breed' in accordance with the Dog (Restricted Breeds) Regulations (No.2) 2002.

### 5.2. Addressing aggressive behaviour

If a staff member observes a person's animal engaging in aggressive behaviour that is disrupting or threatening to other visitors and staff (constant barking, lunging, biting, scratching) the staff member must alert a manager who will speak to the person to ask them to take the animal outside or to a quiet space where the animal can calm down.

If the animal cannot calm down and behave safely so that its owner can rejoin the activity in which they are engaging, the manager must ask the person to remove the animal, or in the case that removing the animal is only possible if the person leaves with them, leave, making it clear that the person is welcome to come back without the animal.

All incidents – attacking, bites, near-misses, damage to property – must be reported using CoMHWA's incident reporting system. While external reporting is not mandated, CoMHWA may report serious incidents where

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significant injury to a person or other animal has occurred to local authorities (e.g. the City of Belmont). Any enforcement action is determined by the relevant authority, not CoMHWA.

### **5.3. Withdrawing Approval**

If a visitor's or staff member's animal is known to be aggressive, or if the person consistently disregards the minimum standards outlined in 5.1, CoMHWA can withdraw approval for the animal to be brought to CoMHWA, and a relevant CoMHWA manager must have a discussion with the visitor or staff member about other possible accommodations that would enable them to attend CoMHWA offices or events.

### **5.4 Liability**

Supported by the *Dog Act 1976 (WA)*, the owner of the animal retains full legal responsibility for the dog at all times in the event of the dog causing property damage or injuring another person or animal at CoMHWA offices or at a CoMHWA event.

Owners are strongly encouraged to hold appropriate public liability insurance covering their dog.

CoMHWA reserves the right to request evidence of such insurance where reasonably necessary, including following any incident or complaint.

### **5.5 Staff or members' objections to or issues with dogs**

We recognise that some staff members or other CoMHWA members who visit our premises or events may have severe allergies, phobias or cultural reasons meaning they are not able to be around dogs or other animals. Where a staff member discloses this proactively, CoMHWA can direct the staff member and their manager to create a safety plan to indicate what the staff member needs in the event of an animal on the premises, both when it is planned or unexpected.

When an event is open to members, we will ask members upon registration to advise staff in advance if they are bringing their animal. This will allow staff to make required adjustments such as changes to room set-up and/or facilitators present.

For members, our 'Where to Find Us' document will link to a copy of this policy and will include a disclaimer that we do permit assistance animals on the premises or at CoMHWA events in external venues where permitted, trained to minimum standards, and kept under the control of a person at all times. If members are concerned a dog or other animal might be at an event they want to attend, we invite them to reach out to us with their concerns and we can make reasonable adjustments or provide alternatives to the event where possible.

## **6. COMMUNICATION**

Visitors, volunteers and staff will have access to this policy on the CoMHWA website. A link to this policy will be included in the 'How to Find Us' document sent out in invitations to visit CoMHWA.

## **7. REFERENCES**

*Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*

*Dog Act 1976 (WA)*

Dog (Restricted Breeds) Regulations (No.2) 2002

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## 8. VERSIONS

VERSION	DATE	Comment
0	06/10/2025	Initial draft released
1.0	06/11/2025	CEO Approval
2.0	12/05/2026	Updated and CEO approval