

Pet Partners' Position on Therapy Animal Health and Welfare

Pet Partners is the nation's leading nonprofit registering handlers of multiple species as volunteer teams providing animal-assisted interventions, which includes animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted education (AAE). Our position on therapy animal health and welfare during animal-assisted interventions is centered on the concept of the handler being an animal's best advocate. Being an animal's advocate requires making decisions based on the preference of the animal, rather than the best interests of a client, researcher, professional, or healthcare team member. This means being attuned to not only the animal's needs for bathroom breaks, food, and water, but also to the animal's unique body language cues. The ability to successfully interpret what an animal is communicating is an uncompromising safety feature in responsible therapy animal visiting practice.

Considerations for Researchers

Pet Partners fully supports and encourages the practice of conducting empirical research on the effects and outcomes of animal-assisted interventions. While many intuitively understand the benefits of positive interactions with animals in our lives, an emerging body of research is recognizing the impact that the human-animal bond can have on mental health and wellness.

Researchers interested in studying the effects of animal-assisted therapy or activities should plan to utilize registered handler teams from credible organizations in order to ensure maximal welfare for the therapy animal. This allows researchers to place the responsibility of maintaining the animal's welfare in the hands of an educated, registered handler with the proper knowledge and expertise appropriate for monitoring the therapy animal while maintaining the utmost credibility and standards in the field. If you are interested in working with the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program for research purposes, please [contact us](#) for more information.

About This Document

Pet Partners holds a variety of positions on therapy animal health and welfare that are not only important to our message and organization, but are also important to researchers, professionals, facilities, and the general public. The following position statements have been approved by Pet Partners' Human Animal Bond Advisory Board and Board of Directors.