

Call to protect Australian tenants with pets

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With the national squeeze in rental accommodation, Flinders University researchers say it's more important than ever that the South Australian Parliament legislate to uphold the rights of tenants with pets.

Lack of legislative protection enables landlords to refuse applications

from tenants with [companion animals](#), giving some people few choices but to give away or foster their pets, says Flinders University Ph.D. and academic Dr. Zoei Sutton, who is presenting on the SA rental market and pets at the Australian Sociology Association Conference this week.

"My study shows Australian landlords and property managers are particularly reluctant to [house](#) cats, as they're seen as leaving allergy hazards or the need for deep cleaning of carpets. Owners of bigger dogs and certain breeds can also have a harder time finding housing.

"And while we're starting to see legislative shifts in Victoria and NSW, legislation to protect pet owners has been defeated in South Australia."

In the SA study, Dr. Sutton conducted in-depth interviews with 15 tenants and 10 stakeholders, including landlords, real estate agents and emergency housing organizations.

"One tenant reported finding just ten potential properties listed as pet friendly while another family found only two within their price range. Some tenants are being asked to pay higher rent to secure a house.

"Multiple participants reported that there was a bidding war for houses with some tenants offering 3 or 6 months rent in advance, just to secure a house.

"One family had fallen through the damaged floor of their house multiple times but were reluctant to report the landlord's failure to maintain the home because this might result in a bad reference when they next had to move."

"It's a constant source of worry, knowing that your lease might not be renewed or your house might be sold and you'll have to try to find something again," she says.

Dr. Sutton says interviews with study stakeholders found a number of strategies to improve chances of obtaining a tenancy. They include to prepare a pet "resume" for agents and landlords, be prepared to take responsibility for any damage if it occurs, and actively access relevant supports to maintain the house and pet if necessary.

"Both tenants and stakeholders agreed that there needs to be an understanding that rental houses are homes. This means working with both landlords and tenants to make sure everyone has a clear understanding of what fair 'wear and tear' is."

Dr. Sutton, who co-convenes the Australian Sociological Association's Animals Thematic Group, also co-founded the International Association of Vegan Sociologists. The SA study was funded by the Society for Companion Animal Studies and conducted in partnership with Safe Pets Safe Families.

"We need more protections for tenants so they can report unfair housing conditions without jeopardizing future housing.

"Animals need to be able to use the home too, and there are small things you can do to minimize any potential damage.

"Property managers have a key role in educating landlords and tenants to ensure everyone is happy and has reasonable expectations."

Provided by Flinders University

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