

Dogs are more than companions, they are great for our mental wellbeing

6 November 2019, by Jess Reid



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A study published in the *Journal of Public Health* by Oxford University Press and led by The University of Western Australia and Telethon Kids Institute has highlighted the positive impact dog ownership has on our mental health.

The research, which is the first of its kind to look at the effect of [dogs](#) on mental [health](#) in the general community over time, adds to a growing body of evidence that suggests dogs are more than great companions, they have positive health benefits.

Mental health disorders are a common problem worldwide, contributing to 14 per cent of the global burden of disease. People have long believed that animals, particularly dogs, are a source of support and a buffer for stress. However most of the research has focused on the benefits to our physical rather than mental health.

The study examined the effect of dog [ownership](#) on mental health over a two-year period. Data from 1023 participants in Perth, Western Australia was collected through surveys to measure mental health, dog ownership and weekly minutes of dog

walking.

Lead author Associate Professor Hayley Christian, Senior Research Fellow from UWA's School of Population and Global Health and Telethon Kids Institute, said the study found dogs had [beneficial effects](#) on our stress levels.

"Dogs entice us to become more active and build strong and healthy relationships and networks with people in the community when we are out walking them," Dr Christian said. "Their companionship is also great for our mental health."

Although the study found a general positive correlation between mental health benefits and dog ownership, Dr Christian said further research would be needed to delve into the extent of the different ways dogs affect our mental health.

"Some of the limitations of the study were that the sample size was relatively small and there are many factors at play that affect our mental health which are hard to separate," she said.

"It will be important for future studies to examine the extent to which dogs affect our mental health including how a change in pet ownership status might impact [mental health](#) across different stages of our lives."

More information: *Journal of Public Health* (2019). [academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/ar... 0.1093/pubmed/fdz094](https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/article/doi/10.1093/pubmed/fdz094)

Provided by University of Western Australia

APA citation: Dogs are more than companions, they are great for our mental wellbeing (2019, November 6) retrieved 15 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-11-dogs-companions-great-mental-wellbeing.html>

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