

## **Minimum Competencies for Australian Allied Health Clinicians Providing Animal Assisted Treatment/Therapy**

To be read in conjunction with the [ATL Code of Conduct](#) and [ATL-Code-of-Ethics.pdf \(animaltherapies.org.au\)](#)

### **1. Knowledge & skills**

- Understanding animal-assisted therapy/treatment (AAT) is considered an area of advanced clinical practice provided by clinicians who are tertiary qualified/ registered/ licenced by a professional or regulatory body. AAT providers are required to:
  - establish their professional skill set in their area of clinical practice prior to implementing AAT.
  - complete further study in AAT theories, techniques and principles relevant to their professional field, workplace and species *before* commencing AAT.
  - connect animal-participant interactions to participant goals and progress within the scope of clinical discipline.
- Understanding that safe AAT services require:
  - animals to be autonomous, actively consenting participants in session goals and activities without use of coercion or force.
  - a strong relationship and attunement between the clinician and the individual animal/s.
  - respect for freedom of choice and advocacy for the animal/s wellbeing.
  - continuous adjustment of the session plan/activity in line with animal needs and preferences to model safe interactions for participants.
- Undertaking training programmes that include:
  - face to face clinical components.
  - species specific assessment for animal suitability (e.g., temperament, consistency, predictability, training, safety, preferences).
  - assessment of clinicians and animal/s completed by experienced AAT practitioners.
- Possessing in-depth knowledge including:
  - ability to integrate unexpected events or interactions within an AAT session into goal directed activities.

- the health, welfare and wellbeing, communication, needs and rights of the animal/s relating to individual animal/s, breed/s, and species.
- competency to assess, manage and mitigate species specific health, safety and welfare concerns.
- implications of involving animals in practice for different participant populations and concerns, and ongoing evaluation of effectiveness.
- adjusting provision of AAT in line with the current evidence base and endorsed best practices.
- Ongoing professional development and assessment of the clinician-animal team, including:
  - Engaging in clinical supervision/supervised professional practice by an experienced AAT clinician.
  - Engaging in continuous AAT specific education and professional development over and above annual discipline specific requirements for continuous professional development.

## **2. Ethical Competence**

- Equal consideration is given to animal wellbeing and participant goals and needs at all times. Animal welfare and wellbeing is not secondary in pursuit of participant goal attainment.
- Recognising and discussing the ethical and safety considerations of involving animals in clinical practice, for both humans and animals.
- Modelling respectful and empathetic animal care and interactions.
- Informing participants about the purpose and risks of involving animals in clinical practice, including contraindications for both participants and animals, as part of informed consent and service co-design.
- Maintaining awareness of personal biases and emotional bonds with animals when determining the appropriate or indicated mode of treatment/therapy for a participant and throughout engagement of services.

## **3. Attitudes**

- Promoting professional, evidence-based AAT, and the wellbeing of the animal/s involved, over the general inclusion of animals in clinical environments.
- Commitment to collaboration with experienced and knowledgeable AAT providers and participation in peer support.

- Willingness to consult with professional species-specific specialists.
- Openness to staying up to date with, and supporting the growth of, AAT including research, literature and education.

### **Guiding Documents**

- Animal Therapies Ltd (2023) Code of Conduct, Section A [Australian Code of Conduct for Animal-Assisted Services \(animaltherapies.org.au\)](https://animaltherapies.org.au)
- Animal Therapies Ltd (2021) Code of Ethics <https://animaltherapies.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ATL-Code-of-Ethics.pdf>
- Animal Assisted Intervention International (2022) Standards and Competencies [AAll-Standards-and-Comp-June-24-2022-.pdf \(aai-int.org\)](https://aai-int.org/AAll-Standards-and-Comp-June-24-2022-.pdf)
- International Association for Human Animal Interaction Organisations (IAHAIO) International guidelines for minimum standards for education and training in animal-assisted interventions [https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/iahaio-educational-standards\\_final.pdf](https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/iahaio-educational-standards_final.pdf)
- International Association for Human Animal Interaction Organisations (2018) The IAHAIO definitions for animal assisted intervention and guidelines for wellness of animals involved in AAI [https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/iahaio\\_wp\\_updated-2018-final.pdf](https://iahaio.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/iahaio_wp_updated-2018-final.pdf)
- Stewart, Chang, Parker & Grubbs (2016) Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling Competencies <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/animal-assisted-therapy-competencies-june-2016.pdf>
- Binder et al. (2024) Recommendations for uniform terminology in animal-assisted services (AAS) [Recommendations for uniform terminology in animal-assisted services \(AAS\) \(cabidigitallibrary.org\)](https://cabidigitallibrary.org/Recommendations-for-uniform-terminology-in-animal-assisted-services-(AAS))
- Kerulo, Kargas & Mills (2020) Animal-Assisted Interventions: Relationship Between Standards and Qualifications [Animal-Assisted Interventions: Relationship Between Standards and Qualifications \(purdue.edu\)](https://purdue.edu/Animal-Assisted-Interventions-Relationship-Between-Standards-and-Qualifications)
- Glenk (2017) Current Perspectives on Therapy Dog Welfare in Animal-Assisted Interventions [Current Perspectives on Therapy Dog Welfare in Animal-Assisted Interventions - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31811111/)

- Serpell, McCune, Gee & Griffin (2017) Current challenges to research on animal-assisted interventions  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ful/10.1080/10888691.2016.1262775>
- Shue, Winkle & Mulcahey (2018) Integration of Animal-Assisted Therapy Standards in Pediatric Occupational Therapy  
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/paij/vol1/iss1/3/>
- Association of Animal Assisted Intervention Professionals (2024) Competencies for the Ethical Inclusion of Therapy and Facility Animals [AAAIP Competencies \(memberclicks.net\)](#)
- Trevathan-Minnis, Johnson & Howie (2021) Recommendations for Transdisciplinary Professional Competencies and Ethics for Animal-Assisted Therapies and Interventions <https://www.mdpi.com/2306-7381/8/12/303>
- The Israeli Association of Animal Assisted Psychotherapy Code of Ethics  
[https://www.iaapsytherapy.org/files/ugd/aa2bac\\_fc496572f1394a1eab78b10f2adef1f3.pdf](https://www.iaapsytherapy.org/files/ugd/aa2bac_fc496572f1394a1eab78b10f2adef1f3.pdf)
- Jones, Filia, Rice & Cotton (2024) Guidance on Minimum Standards for Canine-Assisted Psychotherapy in Adolescent Mental Health: Delphi Expert Consensus on Health, Safety, and Canine Welfare <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/5/705>
- Jones, Filia, Rice & Cotton (2023) Guidance on minimum standards for canine-assisted psychotherapy in adolescent mental health: Delphi expert consensus on terminology, qualifications and training  
<https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/10.1079/hai.2023.0041>

## Contributors

### Animal Assisted Therapy/Treatment Committee 2023-2024

#### Committee Chairs:

- **Claire Dickson** (Occupational Therapist at Assistance Dogs Australia, Certificate in Animal Assisted Occupational Therapy C-AAOT, Facility Dog Training Certificate FDT-C)
- **Sarah Munn** (Occupational Therapist & Animal Assisted Therapy Supervisor/Educator)

#### Committee Members:

- **Anita Geary** (BSocWk, DipAppSocSc(Couns), Accredited Mental Health Social Worker - AAT, Registered Counsellor, Clinical Supervisor and Director of Insight Therapies Counselling and Consultancy.
- **Danielle Graber** (Clinical Psychologist, AAT, Board-Approved Supervisor | Founder & Director 12 Points Psychology and 12 Points Training)
- **Dr Jessica Hill** (Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, The University of Queensland)
- **Karen Clark-Dickson** (Bcrim, MSW(Prof.Qual.), Accredited Mental Health Social Worker, NDTF Certified Dog Trainer, Certified Trainer and Assessor, Owner and Head Trainer Therapy Dogs NSW, Counselling Private Practice Owner – Paws for Thought Counselling)
- **Melanie G. Jones** (Registered Psychologist & supervisor, Animal Assisted Therapist, Professional Dog Trainer, Director and founder of Lead The Way. Melanie is a pioneer of AAT in Australia with over 20 years experience. Her PhD research focuses on the development of standards and guidelines in Canine Assisted Therapy)
- **Nicki Pettendreigh** (Psychologist)
- **Dr Rachel Hogg** (Senior Lecturer, Charles Sturt University) has a PhD in Equestrian Psychology and is a leading researcher in human-animal interaction, focusing on animal-assisted therapies, equestrian sports, and human-animal relationships. She has authored guidelines for the selection and training of horses in animal-assisted interventions and studies the implications of animal labour in sporting, therapeutic, and educational contexts.



- **Vani Gupta** (Speech Pathologist at Summer Hill Speech, PhD Candidate at Griffith University, MA, BAppSci- SpPath, Level 1 Animal Assisted Play Therapy)