



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. 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 Assisted Intervention International (2022) Standards and Competencies [AAII-Standards-and-Comp-June-24-2022-.pdf \(aai-int.org\)](#)
- Animal Therapies Ltd (2023) Code of Conduct, Section A [Australian Code of Conduct for Animal-Assisted Services \(animaltherapies.org.au\)](#)
- Animal Therapies Ltd (2021) Code of Ethics <https://animaltherapies.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ATL-Code-of-Ethics.pdf>
- Association of Animal Assisted Intervention Professionals (2024) Competencies for the ethical inclusion of therapy and facility animals [AAAIP Competencies \(memberclicks.net\)](#)
- Binder et al. (2024) Recommendations for uniform terminology in animal-assisted services (AAS) [Recommendations for uniform terminology in animal-assisted services \(AAS\) \(cabidigitallibrary.org\)](#)
- Glenk (2017) Current perspectives on therapy dog welfare in animal-assisted interventions [Current Perspectives on Therapy Dog Welfare in Animal-Assisted Interventions - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)
- 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
- 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
- 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, Folia, 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>
- Kerulo, Kargas & Mills (2020) Animal-assisted interventions: Relationship between standards and qualifications [Animal-Assisted Interventions: Relationship Between Standards and Qualifications \(purdue.edu\)](https://www.purdue.edu/animal-assisted-interventions-relationship-between-standards-and-qualifications)
- Serpell, McCune, Gee & Griffin (2017) Current challenges to research on animal-assisted interventions <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/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/>
- 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>
- 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_fc496572f11394a1eab78b10f2adef1f3.pdf

Contributors

Animal Assisted Therapy/Treatment Committee 2023-2024

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- **Claire Dickson** (BA, MOccThy, Occupational Therapist at Assistance Dogs Australia, Certificate in Animal Assisted Occupational Therapy C-AAOT, Facility Dog Training Certificate FDT-C, researcher in animal assisted occupational therapy)
- **Sarah Munn** (BHsc (Hons) Occupational Therapy, Animal Assisted Therapy/Treatment Supervisor/Educator, Owner and CEO of Barefoot Therapists Child & Family Centre and their Animal Assisted Therapy/Treatment Programs at Gadara Farm, Owner and Educator at Sarah Munn Therapy Teaching)

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- **Danielle Graber** (Clinical Psychologist, AAT, Board-Approved Supervisor | Founder & Director 12 Points Psychology and 12 Points Training)
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- **Dr Jessica Hill** (Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, The University of Queensland, Deputy Director of the UQ Animal-Assisted Interventions Research Alliance, researcher in human-animal interaction with a focus on animal-assisted therapy, animal-assisted education, assistance animals and companion animals)
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