

Cumming School of Medicine  
Department of Community Health Sciences

# **Aging-in-place with pets:** *Is pet-ownership relevant to social participation and life satisfaction for older adults in Canada?*



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY**

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## **CLSA Webinar Series**

Presentation by Ann M. Toohey, PhD candidate  
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## Today's presentation:

- i. Aging-in-place with pets
- ii. CLSA analysis of social participation & pets
- iii. Implications for promoting age-friendly cities

## NATIONAL POST

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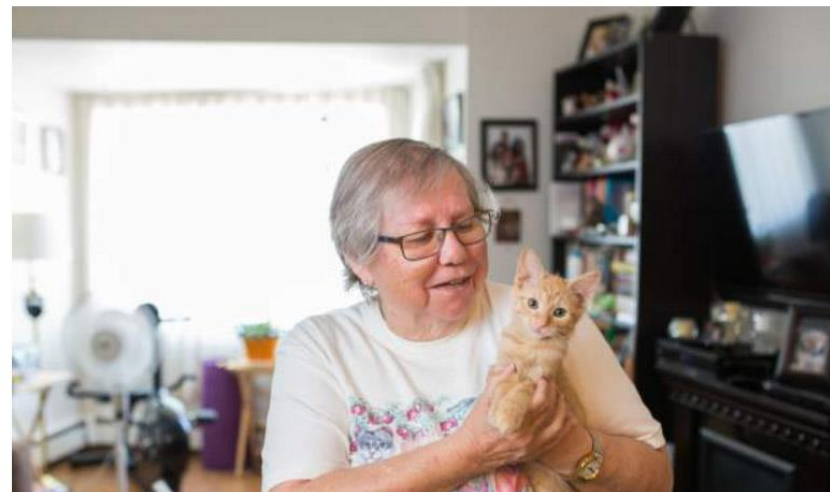
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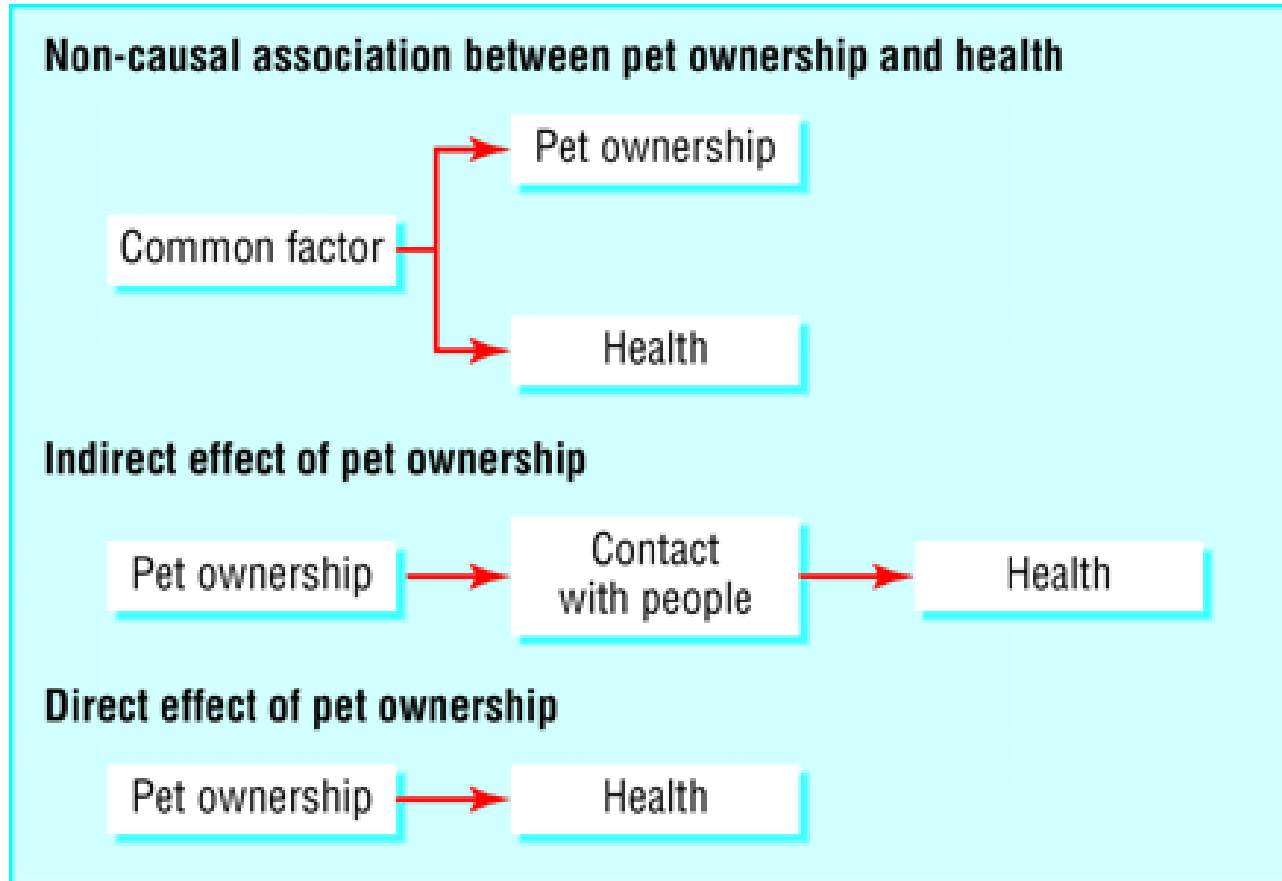
### CANADA

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## 'I'm not getting rid of my kitty': Calgary senior chooses homelessness over giving up kitten

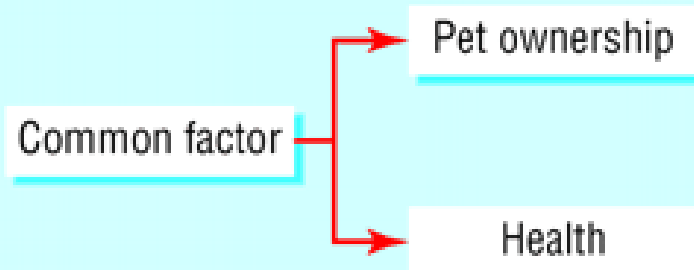
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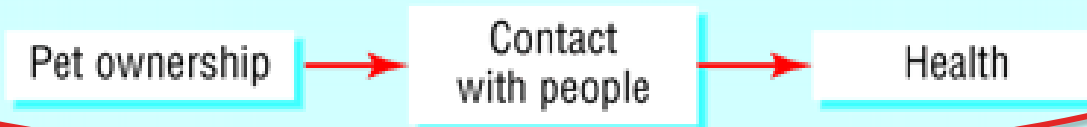


**Credit:** McNicholas J, Gilbey A, Rennie A, Ahmedzai S, Dono J-A, Ormerod E. Pet ownership and human health: a brief review of evidence and issues. *BMJ*. 2005 Nov;331(7527):1252–4.

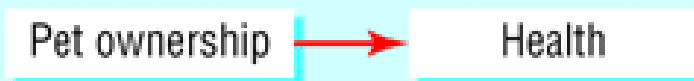
## Non-causal association between pet ownership and health



## Indirect effect of pet ownership



## Direct effect of pet ownership



**Credit:** McNicholas J, Gilbey A, Rennie A, Ahmedzai S, Dono J-A, Ormerod E. Pet ownership and human health: a brief review of evidence and issues. *BMJ*. 2005 Nov;331(7527):1252–4.

Over **1/3 of older Canadians** ( $\geq 65$ yr) report living with a household pet that offers companionship

*What does current research tell us about pets and aging-in-place?*



Evidence suggests that for older adults, relationships with pets may:

- contribute to maintaining **physical function**;
- provide **companionship** and **purpose**; and
- facilitate **social interactions** and lead to a heightened **sense of community**



Yet, some contradictory, counter-intuitive findings exist:

Older adults with pets may be **lonelier**, or **less satisfied with life**, or show various other indications of **poorer mental health...**



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...**BUT** may also be **buffered from the negative consequences** of loneliness and having lower levels of social support



**ATTACHMENT to pets** has been explored as a key to understanding efficacy of pets in relation to “healthy” or “successful” aging...



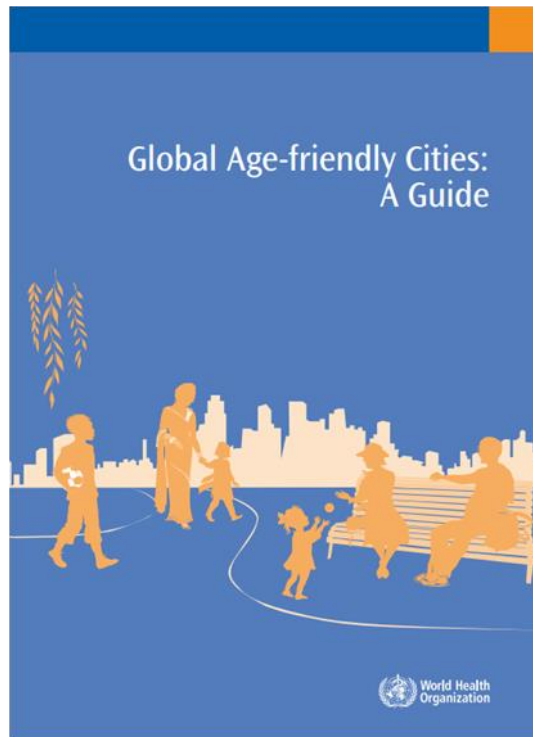
... in fact, some older adults **credit their pets** with contributing to their own successful aging

**CRITIQUES** of pets for older adults have included concern with “extreme” attachment, to the **detriment of participating in social life and neglecting self-care**

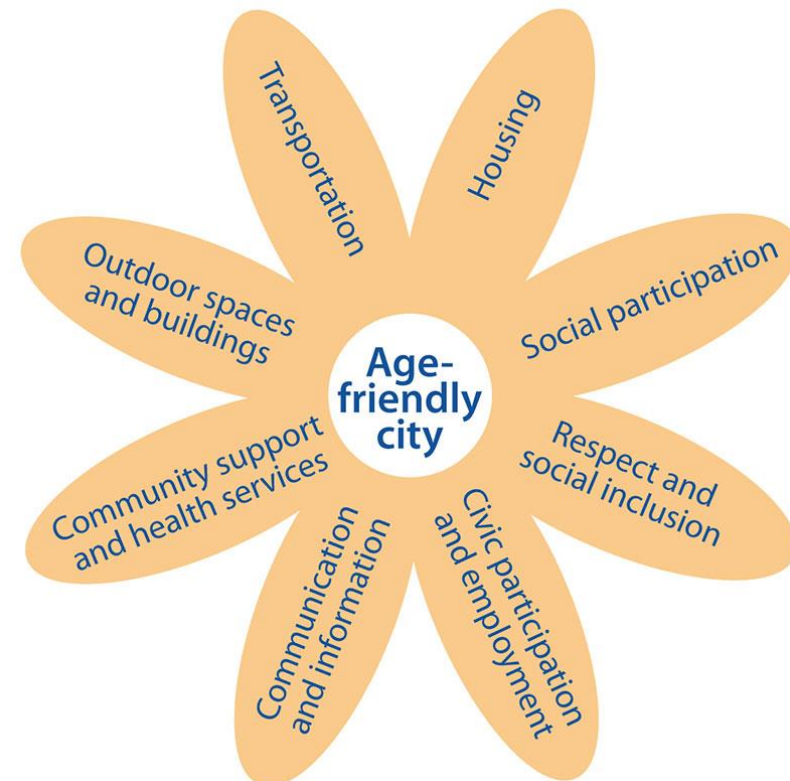


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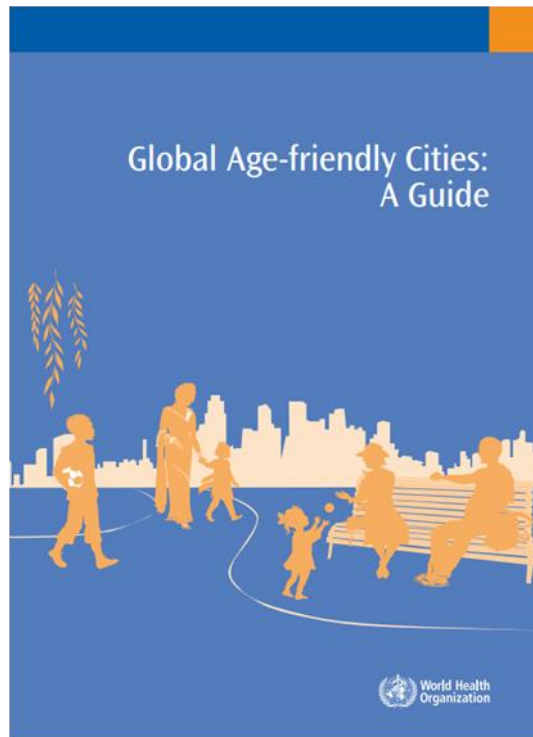
- Few studies seek to understand pets in relation to ways that we actively promote aging-in-place



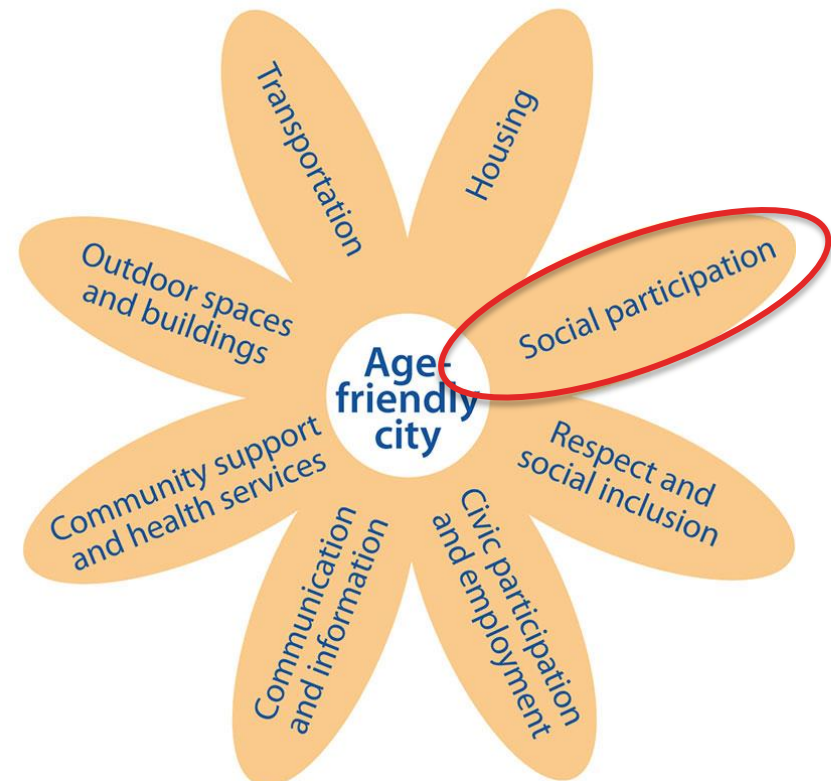
## WHO Age-Friendly Themes



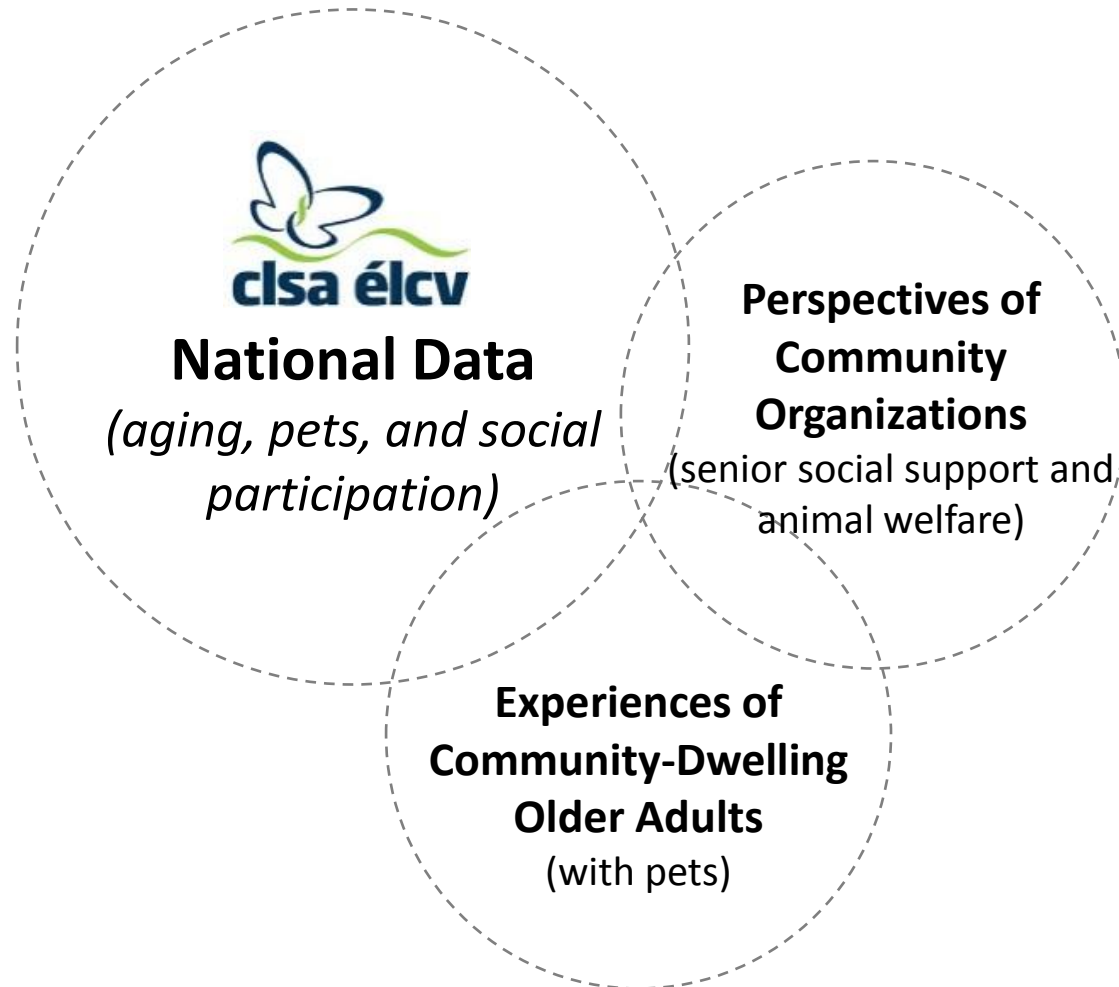
- Few studies seek to understand pets in relation to ways that we actively promote aging-in-place



## WHO Age-Friendly Themes



*Exploring a contemporary phenomenon:  
in depth and in context (Yin 2009)*



**OBJECTIVE I:** To describe the **baseline characteristics** of older Canadian pet-owners and non-owners ( $\geq 65$  yr) participating in the CLSA (Tracking cohort)

**OBJECTIVE II:** To explore measures of **social participation** and **life satisfaction** for older Canadian adults, considering whether and how these differ for pet-owners vs. non-owners

- **CLSA Telephone Tracking cohort (Release 3.0)**
  - Community-dwelling adults residing in Canada
  - 65 yr or older at baseline (N=8,845)
  - Data collected Sept 2011 - May 2014
  - Representative sampling



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## **Social Participation (SPA)**

- (i)** Frequent participation in various types of social, recreational, and group activities over the past 12 months (as per Gilmour, 2012)
- (ii)** Wanted to participate in more social activities over the past 12 months
- (iii)** Barriers to social participation identified by participants and coded by CLSA personnel



## **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS): level of agreement with the following statements:**

- *In many ways my life is close to ideal;*
- *The conditions of my life are excellent;*
- *I am satisfied with my life;*
- *So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life;*
- *If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.*

- **Assessing pet ownership:**

*Do you have a household pet that provides you with companionship?*



- **OBJECTIVE I:** weighted proportions stratified by pet-ownership; F-tests
  
- **OBJECTIVE II:** logistic regression models comparing pet-owners and non-owners in terms of:
  - life satisfaction
  - levels of social participation (current vs. desired)
  - barriers to social participation
  - associations between social participation and life satisfaction

*All models were controlled for socio-demographic variables and probability weighting*

- Compared to non-owners, older pet-owners are **less** likely to:
  - *be older ( $\geq 75$  yr)\*\*\**
  - *belong to a visible minority\*\*\**
  - *live alone\*\*\**
  - *rent their homes\*\*\**
  - *have completed post-secondary education\**

n=7,474 respondents  $\geq 65$  yr, after removing observations with missing data

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

- In terms of considering **vulnerability and diversity** within the aging population, pet-ownership was reported by:
  - *25% of respondents 75 yr and older\*\*\**
  - *29% of respondents living alone\*\*\**
  - *23% of respondents identifying as visible minority\*\*\**
  - *46% of respondents who identified as LGBTQ*
  - *31% of lower income respondents (<\$20K/yr)*
  - *32% of respondents reporting poor to fair health*

n=7,474 after removing observations with missing data

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

- Pet-owners as a whole tend to indicate lower levels of life satisfaction

OR = 0.72, 95% CI [0.64, 0.83]\*\*\*

- As a whole, pet-owners were less likely to be **frequent participators** in one or more social, recreational, or group activities than non-owners

OR=0.68, 95% CI [0.57, 0.81]\*\*\*

- Pet-owners and non-owners were equally likely to have **wanted to be more socially active** over past year

OR=1.06, 95% CI [0.95, 1.19]

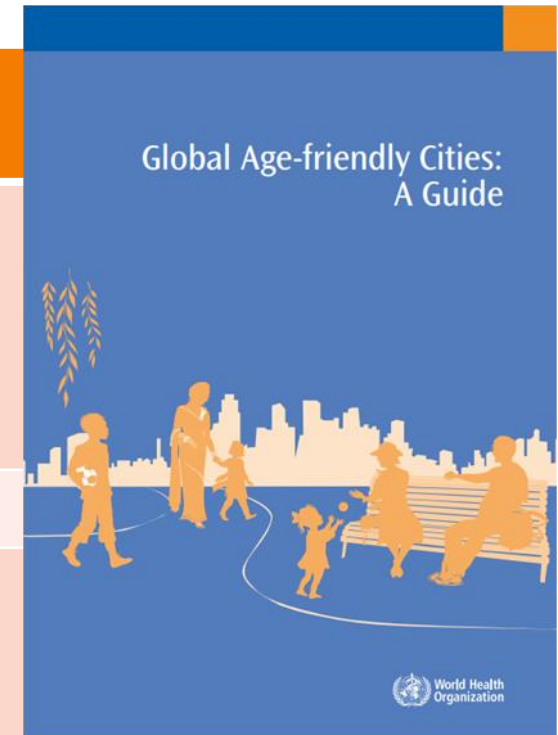
- The **most socially-active** pet-owners (i.e., frequent participation in 5 or more social activities) had **higher life satisfaction** than similarly active non-owners

$$OR_{(\text{pet-owners})} = 2.97, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.99, 4.42]^{***}$$

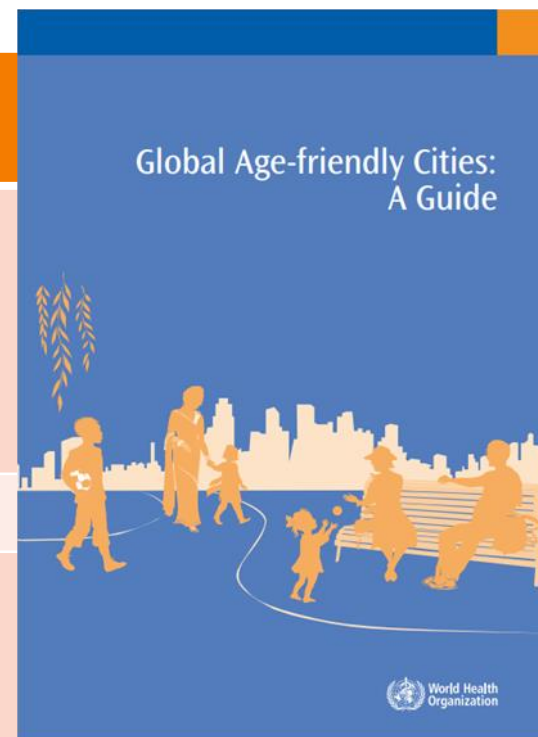
$$OR_{(\text{non-owners})} = 2.38, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.74, 3.26]^{***}$$



WHO Age-Friendly Cities Framework	CLSA Barriers
Accessible opportunities	<i>Afraid, concerned for safety Location not accessible Location too far away Transportation Timing Did not want to go alone</i>
Affordable opportunities	<i>Cost</i>
Appropriate range of events and activities	<i>Activities not available nearby Health condition/limitation Timing Too busy Did not want to go alone</i>
Awareness of opportunities	<i>Language-related reasons</i>
Encouraging social participation	<i>Location too far away Activities not available nearby Health condition/limitation Did not want to go alone Personal or family responsibilities Language-related reasons</i>



WHO Age-Friendly Cities Framework	CLSA Barriers
Accessible opportunities	<i>Afraid, concerned for safety</i> <i>Location not accessible</i> <i>Location too far away</i> <i>Transportation</i> <i>Timing</i> <i>Did not want to go alone</i>
Affordable opportunities	<i>Cost</i>
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Awareness of opportunities	<i>Language-related reasons</i>
Encouraging social participation	<i>Location too far away</i> <i>Activities not available nearby</i> <i>Health condition/limitation</i> <i>Did not want to go alone</i> <i>Personal or family responsibilities</i> <i>Language-related reasons</i>



Interests in pets may **transcend socio-cultural and socio-economic differences**, as well as promote opportunities for inter-generational interactions



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Costs and responsibilities of pet-care may be prioritized over dedicating time or spending money on social activities



Offering more opportunities that align with interests in pets may also involve rethinking ways that public spaces might become more pet-friendly



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*Important to balance needs of all older adults – currently, pet-owners' interests tend to be missing from organized efforts to promote age-friendliness*

## **Strengths:**

*Social-ecological approach*

*Conceptual link with age-friendly cities framework*

## **Limitations:**

*Species distinctions*

*Other indicators of social well-being  
(e.g., Newall/ Menec cluster analysis presented in  
previous CLSA Webinar)*

*Cross-sectional design*

*Measures themselves...*



- Dog-walking: promotes physical activity, but also sense of community for older adults...may not be captured by social participation as currently measured.

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Dog-walking and sense of community in neighborhoods: Implications for promoting regular physical activity in adults 50 years and older



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- Growing recognition that we as researchers are “missing” something important when we fail to pay attention to roles pets play in people’s lives.

## SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH & ILLNESS

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doi: 10.1111/1467-9566.12176

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**On interviewing people with pets: reflections from qualitative research on people with long-term conditions**

**Sara Ryan and Sue Ziebland**

“Pets were often presented as important family members, yet the **researchers’ responses** to the presence or talk about pets was often **markedly different** from their reactions to other household members.”





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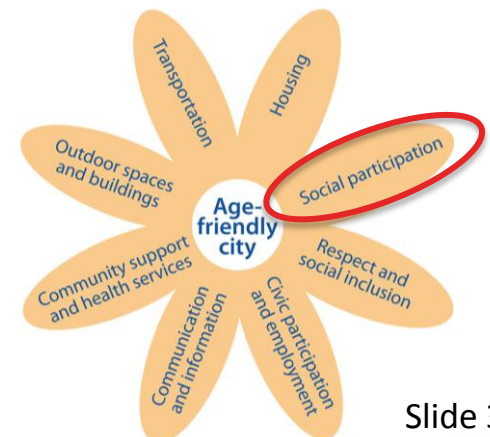
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- i. Many older adults have pets, including members of diverse and vulnerable sub-populations
- ii. Having a pet is associated with both lower life satisfaction and lower levels of social participation for older adults

YET ...

- iii. Having a pet may also help to offset some of the negative outcomes of being socially-isolated
- iv. Pet-owners with higher levels of social participation also have highest life satisfaction
- v. Efforts to promote social participation that also consider pet-owners' needs and interests may contribute to the age-friendly priority of enhancing social participation



- i. Drs Jennifer Hewson, Daniel Dutton, Cindy Adams, and Melanie Rock for substantive contributions and mentorship
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- iii. The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging
- iv. All of my case study research participants



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