Enhancing Access to Quality Rental Housing for Pet Owners

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Lightening Talk
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Disclosure

Dr. Taryn M. Graham
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Agenda

• How restrictions on pets in rental housing impact human health and animal welfare;

• Why Calgary offers a useful context to study barriers to ‘pet-friendly’ rental housing;

• Analyze the issue, from both sides of the rental market;

• Discuss implications for policy and practice
Pets can promote health, yet...

- Fewer studies have inquired into **housing as an influence** on people’s capacities to keep and care for pets.

- Housing status influences health status (Dunn, 2000), so **policies on pets in rental housing** are relevant to human health.
Top reason for relinquishment

- Moving, rental, or housing issues are among the top reasons why people give up their pets (Coe et al., 2014)
Across the income spectrum

Introduction · Research · Discussion · Conclusion · Feedback
Across the lifespan

Children

Younger adults
Late teens through the twenties, or even thirties

Older adults

- List dogs as a main reason for desiring homeownership (Berman, 2017)
- “Generation rent” (McKee, 2012)
What has previous research said?

**Introduction** · Research · Discussion · Conclusion · Feedback

#### Companion animal renters and pet-friendly housing in the US

*Pamela Carlisle-Frank, Joshua M. Frank & Lindsey Nielsen*

- Tenants with pets **pay more** and **stay longer**
- Tenants with pets **cause less property damage**, on average, than tenants with children
- Tenants with **dogs** have the hardest time trying to secure a rental

#### Renting with pets: a pathway to housing insecurity?

*Emma R. Power*

- Pet ownership can lead tenants to **rent less-desirable dwellings** than they could otherwise obtain
- One response is to **keep pets illegally** yet by doing so tenants could be faced with **eviction**, a **bad referral**, or **other ramifications**
- Again, **dogs** are especially hard to house
Calgary as a case study

Policies on pets → municipal level
Promotes responsible pet ownership and does not limit the number of pets, nor types of dogs a person can keep
(City of Calgary, 2018)

Housing policy → provincial level
permits landlords and property managers to ban pets from rentals, to restrict the number and types of pets that can be kept, and to impose “reasonable” surcharges, such as pet fees or pet rents
(Centre for Public Legal Education in Alberta, 2014)
Booms and busts

Vacancy Rates
Calgary

“Landlords are accepting tenants they never would have dreamed of accepting (owners of large dogs, for example)”

(Stephenson, 2016)
Purpose: To explore issues surrounding housing accessibility, affordability, location, and quality among tenants with pets

Data collected:

- Rental market analysis
- Interviews with younger tenants with dogs
- Survey of landlords and property managers
Online rental listings

303 ‘PET-FRIENDLY’ RENTAL LISTINGS
135 ‘offering’ ads as listed by landlords and property managers
168 ‘wanted’ ads as listed by prospective tenants with pets

- Even when ‘offering’ ads were listed as ‘pet-friendly’:
  - Dogs were banned outright
  - Restrictions were still placed
  - Surcharges were often imposed

- In ‘wanted’ ads, prospective tenants with pets:
  - Were willing to compromise on location
  - Would often describe their pets in apologetic or ideological ways
  - Would sometimes specify rental preferences with pets in mind
Face-to-face interviews

28 YOUNGER TENANTS
- aged 21 to 31
- 20 women; 8 men
- 16 kept one dog, 5 kept two dogs, and the rest kept both dogs and cats

SEARCHING → SETTLING → STAYING PUT

"Pets Negotiable": How Do the Perspectives of Landlords and Property Managers Compare with Those of Younger Tenants with Dogs?
Online survey

24 LANDLORDS & 6 PROPERTY MANAGERS
all of whom were pet owners themselves

• ‘Pet-friendly’ ads tend to receive more applicants
• Tenants with pets tend to stay longer

Suggestions for Improvement:
- Meeting pets prior to signing the lease
- Getting everything pet-related in writing
- Steering clear from furnished units
- Charging utilities to tenants
- Speeding up the pet approval process
• Housing discrimination consists of “any behaviour, practice, or policy in the public and private sectors that directly, indirectly, or systematically causes harm through inequitable access to use and enjoyment of housing by members of a certain group” (Novac, Darden, Hulchanski, & Seguin, 2002, p.1)

• Housing discrimination can take the form of “charging certain people higher prices or rents for housing or applying more stringent or inappropriate screening criteria to some people” (Novac et al., 2002, p.1)
• The human rights code in Alberta prohibits discrimination in housing based on family status.

• Pets are often described as family members (Barker & Barker, 1988; Cohen, 2002; Power, 2008; Walsh, 2009), yet people are unable to find rental housing by virtue of being pet owners.
Impacts on health and well-being

- My results are consistent with previous research from (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2005) and (Power, 2017)

- Tenants with pets may stay longer in their rentals but...

- Living in poor housing conditions or in less desirable neighbourhoods in order to keep pets could negatively influence health and well-being
“A pet is a commitment for life” ≠ “pets negotiable”

A humane city is one where:

✓ Enough housing options exist for families with pets;
✓ Pet ownership is not restricted by breed or size bans;
✓ Human and animal professionals collaborate to develop policies and programs that promote responsible pet ownership and that help keep families together.
Thank you!

Questions? Comments? Suggestions?

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