



# Volunteer Handbook and Induction

## Welcome to ACT Pet Crisis Support

Thank you for offering to volunteer for ACT Pet Crisis Support (APCS). This document is designed to give you an overview of the organisation, what we do, what to expect when volunteering with APCS and what we will expect of you as a volunteer.

## About APCS

ACT Pet Crisis Support is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit Canberra community organisation registered with the ACNC in March 2019 and dedicated to avoiding the economic euthanasia of beloved family pets.

## Mission Statement:

***To ensure that all pets in need owned by disadvantaged, low-income pet owners in the ACT and local region have access to veterinary care***

ACT Pet Crisis Support assists pets in the community by providing subsidised veterinary care for disadvantaged, low-income pet owners without other options to care for their pets. We are dedicated to avoiding euthanasia purely on economic grounds by providing alternative options for care.

Our values include Transparency, Resilience, Compassion, Respect, Knowledge, and Collaboration, as detailed in our Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

## Volunteer Roles:

We are entirely volunteer-run, so would not exist without the valuable support of volunteers. We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds and interests. There are many ways that you can help, including events, market stalls, the Tiny Vet Clinic, writing procedures, articles and grants, social media and other administration work. Please fill out the [Volunteer Application Form](#) if you are interested in a specific role.



Being an APCS volunteer means being part of a rewarding two-way relationship. It provides an opportunity to achieve our goals by involving you in our activities and for you to make a meaningful contribution to social and community outcomes through your skills and time. As a volunteer, you will also have certain responsibilities, including acting responsibly, being accountable for your actions to APCS, and respecting the APCS values and practices.

### **APCS Committee:**

President and Vet Lead: Dr Eloise Bright ([dr.eloisebright@gmail.com](mailto:dr.eloisebright@gmail.com))

Vice President: Karen Gerrard ([karen@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:karen@actpetcrisis.com))

Secretary: Sue Thomas ([secretary@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:secretary@actpetcrisis.com))

Treasurer: Alex Bai ([finance@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:finance@actpetcrisis.com))

Ordinary committee members: Michelle Tulley, Deidre O'Brien, Nicky Hunt and Jo Lester.

The Committee can be contacted via: [team@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:team@actpetcrisis.com)

### **How Does APCS Help Pet Owners?**

Any vet clinic in Canberra and the local region can apply for assistance from the charity via our website under [My Client Needs Help](#). We do not take direct applications. The different types of support we offer include;

Veterinary clinics are able to apply for up to \$1500 to assist a low-income pet owner with an unexpected veterinary bill. We do not assist with routine care such as vaccination, parasite control and desexing. Pet owners must first apply for VetPay and have exhausted other options for funding such as borrowing from friends and family.

*Dentistry* - we work with the RSPCA to assist pet owners who would otherwise be unable to access dental care (the pet owner or vet clinic can apply via our website under '[dentistry](#)') and the owner is able to utilise Centrepay to pay off the account. Only pet owners receiving a Centrelink payment qualify for this service.

*Tiny Vet Clinic* - the mobile veterinary clinic (launched on 1st March 2023) brings veterinary services to the local community. We currently run on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the



month at Karabar, 2nd Wednesday of the month at Ainslie Village and 4th Wednesday of the month at Kambah.

### **WhatsApp:**

Our WhatsApp groups are a quick, easy way to communicate with other volunteers. Various groups have been created to discuss different topics, so whenever possible it is important to post a message on the WhatsApp group that is most appropriate to the discussion.

Written comments can easily be misinterpreted. We are all volunteers from diverse backgrounds, so it is important to be courteous and respectful of other volunteers. Before commenting, always read your message to ensure you are not likely to upset someone unintentionally.

### **Social Media Policy:**

We have a strict policy of not posting photos without the permission of the pet owner and/or volunteer. Do not post any pictures of animals, volunteers, or clients on your social media page or discuss cases you have encountered while volunteering. Do not include our logo on any personal posts or comments on any website page on behalf of APCS. If you see a comment on social media that needs attention, please email the committee at: [team@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:team@actpetcrisis.com) or simply direct the poster to email our general email address at [actpetcrisis@gmail.com](mailto:actpetcrisis@gmail.com).

Reposting or sharing something published on APCS social media sites is encouraged. Consistent messaging is important. If in doubt please ask a committee member.

### **Attendance:**

We are a small team of volunteers. If you cannot attend a meeting, arranged shift, or event, please let someone know. Please use the relevant WhatsApp group or personal mobile telephones to provide as much notice as possible so arrangements can be made to cover your absence.

### **Dress Code:**



We have a limited number of t-shirts available for volunteers, please let us know if you would like one to wear to volunteer shifts. Otherwise please wear neat, clean and tidy clothing with closed shoes if you will be working with animals.

### **Health, Safety and Support:**

APCS works to ensure that all volunteers, supporters and clients are as safe as possible at all times when dealing with the charity and will provide information, instructions and assistance as required. As a volunteer, you must take reasonable care for your own health and safety, take care not to affect the health and safety of others, carry out tasks in a safe way and follow the reasonable instructions provided by APCS

When volunteering, if something doesn't seem safe or you notice any safety hazards please speak up. Speak to a committee member or the organiser of the event or volunteering opportunity and do not take unnecessary risks. Please also ensure you follow social distancing guidelines to keep yourself and others safe from transmission of COVID-19. Please do not attend a volunteer shift if you are feeling unwell. Follow hygiene measures such as handwashing, wearing a face mask and using sanitiser and gloves when appropriate.

### **Safety with Animals:**

If you are assisting with animals, please ensure you follow the directions of more experienced volunteers. Do not take any risks or assume that pets are friendly and confident; many pets will bite when scared. Do not make direct eye contact or touch any dogs or cats that may be nervous and do not reach out to pat an animal unless they come to you and actively solicit attention.

Dogs should be on a lead at all times. If a client has a flimsy or inappropriate lead, offer to borrow a lead (if available) for the duration of the interaction.

Cats should be in a carrier at all times. Cats not in carriers will be unable to attend the Tiny Vet Clinic. If there is a loaner carrier, this can be borrowed by the pet owner for the duration of the clinic but must be returned by the end of the clinic.

Should you be bitten or scratched during your volunteering shift, please notify the Vet Lead as soon as possible and fill out an [Incident Report](#).

### **Fear Free Vet Care:**



All volunteers working with animals will need to first view the video available [here](#) on how to read body language in dogs. Dogs that are stiff and showing fear signs need to be given distance away from people and other dogs to reduce their fear. Watching body language increases both pet, owner and volunteer safety in what is often a stressful situation.

The liberal use of treats is an easy way to change a dog's emotional state when it comes to fear. However, it is always best to throw treats rather than reach towards a scared dog. Please always check with the owner whether it is okay to give their dog treats in case of food allergies or intolerances.

Cats should always be placed away from other animals and off the ground with a towel sprayed with [Feliway](#) covering their carrier.

### **Other Safety Measures:**

When volunteering, do not lift any animal over 10kg. If you suffer from any conditions that make lifting risky, please do not lift anything and look after your body first. We only get one body, and we want yours to stay in one piece.

When entering or exiting the Tiny Vet Clinic, please always tread carefully and ensure you use the step provided. If you are too tall to safely stand inside, please restrict your volunteering to external tasks.

If you find working at the Tiny Vet Clinic difficult and cannot stay safe, please notify the Vet Lead and avoid the activity. We do not want to aggravate any pre-existing health conditions you may have.

If volunteering for external tasks and at market stalls, please be aware of sun safety, wear sunscreen and a hat as needed and bring a water bottle to stay hydrated in hot weather.

### **Managing Violence - Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment:**

APCS aims to provide a safe and positive environment free of bullying, harassment or discrimination whether from the general public, clients or other volunteers. Respectful and courteous behaviour is expected from all individuals.

Bullying can be defined as victimising, humiliating, threatening or undermining an individual or group. Harassment includes unwanted propositions, inappropriate language or phone



calls, touching, staring and persistent requests for dates. Discrimination is unfair or unfavourable treatment due to a personal attribute such as age, immigrant status, disability, illness, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation or intersex status.

Please advise a committee member if you feel unsafe, feel uncomfortable, or are experiencing bullying discrimination or harassment.

Physical threats towards volunteers will not be tolerated. Should you feel threatened, please advise the Vet Lead, a Committee member or a service provider. If you experience verbal abuse or threats, do not confront or argue with the aggressor and do not make promises you will not be able to keep.

Also do not attempt to disarm an armed person, break up an altercation or turn your back on a person showing aggressive behaviours.

Should the aggressor continue in unsafe behaviour, proceed to a safe place, for example, the car, a neutral building, the Tiny Vet Clinic or an agreed-upon location and await further instructions.

### **Incident, Injuries and Near-miss Reporting:**

An incident includes anything that results in physical or psychological injury, vehicle accidents, disease outbreaks, property damage, fire, theft or environmental damage. Incidents should be reported to a Committee member as soon as possible verbally or via email. If the incident has caused injury or property damage please fill out an [Incident Report](#).

It is also important to report near-misses when something has occurred that might have led to an injury or property damage but no harm was caused, e.g., you trip on an extension lead but manage to grab the edge of a table to prevent a fall. Reporting incidents, injuries, and near-misses allows us to promptly address any health and safety risks and take follow-up action.

### **Boundaries:**

In-person volunteering roles will require you to hold a valid ACT Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) card, which can be applied for online with Access Canberra. You will be advised if this is required for any particular role you may be interested in.



When interacting with clients and other volunteers you may find yourself connecting with people you would otherwise not interact with. You may meet people who are in financial or emotional distress. All our volunteers are good people, but it is important to maintain boundaries and ensure you are not offering to help with tasks that are outside of the scope of APCS.

APCS is non-political, non-religious and inclusive. Any beliefs or views that volunteers communicate can be seen as representing the organisation. As such it is important that volunteers do not impose their personal beliefs or opinions about religion, politics or what they believe to be the appropriate level of care provided to animals. Our clients are often not able to provide 'gold standard' or ideal care for their pets. Should you see an animal that you believe is suffering, please bring it to the attention of the Vet Lead and do not make comments to other volunteers or clients.

Volunteers should never be involved in the purchase or consumption of alcohol or drugs with clients. There is no smoking in and around the Tiny Vet Clinic or at APCS events or fundraisers. Volunteers are also not to give clients money, lifts, food or offer any services besides those offered as part of APCS.

It is also important not to give advice to clients outside of your skills and expertise. Veterinary advice should not be given unless it is confirmed with the Vet Lead first.

### **Rescue and Adoption:**

APCS is not a rescue organisation, and as such, we do not have the facility to rescue, foster, or rehome animals. Clients who need to rehome their pets can be directed to an appropriate organisation for assistance. Further information can be obtained from an APCS Committee member.

### **Complaints and Disputes:**

It is important that volunteers follow all policies, procedures and rules advised to them and can take direction from Committee members. This will support the delivery of activities in a safe, efficient and effective way and will ensure an enjoyable volunteering experience.

Should you have any problems with the way APCS operates or your volunteering experience or you have an issue with a fellow volunteer or service provider, please advise a Committee



member. If the complaint is confidential in nature, please email or phone our President, Vet Lead or Secretary. Please refrain from venting or commenting on social media or to other volunteers, as this often reflects poorly on APCS and can be harmful to the emotional well-being of our other volunteers.

If an appropriate resolution is unable to be determined, please fill out a [Dispute Resolution Request](#).

**Revision:**

APCS may make changes to this document from time to time to improve the effectiveness of the organisation's operation or to reflect any changes in legislation. Should the review find that there is a need to change any policies, volunteers who may be impacted by this proposed change will be advised prior to the change taking place.