

## Who's taking who for a walk? Dog walking and regulation in West Australian local government

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### Abstract

Dog ownership produces considerable health benefit and provides an important form of social support that may encourage dog owners to walk. Although almost 40% of all Australian households own a dog, a number of factors have been identified that either encourage or discourage people walking with their dog. Some of these factors relate to issues that can be addressed by local government authorities (LGAs). The aim of the current study was to examine how local government employees perceive the role of dog ownership in the community and the regulatory issues associated with dogs in public places. Group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted with key personnel from LGAs across metropolitan Perth. LGAs provided information about positive and negative issues related to residents walking with their dogs in public. Positive aspects included a decrease in dog-related problems such as barking and an increase in knowledge of and compliance with local laws. Local government employees also discussed the wider community benefits of dog walking such as increased sense of community and social capital and, deterrence of local crime. Local government-related factors perceived to encourage dog owners to walk included access to off-leash areas, design and quality of parks and the provision of dog-related infrastructure such as dog litter bags and bins. Regulatory issues likely to arise as a result of more people owning and walking their dogs are discussed in terms of designing effective urban animal risk management plans for the future.

### Introduction

There are an estimated 4 million dogs in Australia (2003 data) and almost 40% of households own a dog (BIS Shrapnel Pty Limited & Australian Companion Animal Council 2003). Dogs provide their owners with a variety of health, psychological, physiological, social and emotional benefits (Australian Companion Animal Council 2000; Barker, Rogers, Turner, Karpf, & Suthers-McCabe 2003; Beck & Katcher 2003; Hooker, Freeman, & Stewart 2002; Wilson & Barker 2003; Wood & Giles-Corti 2005). One mechanism through which dogs may help to improve the health of their owners is through the motivation and social support dogs provide for walking. Walking is a moderate form of physical activity now known to produce a range of health benefits including lower blood pressure, improved muscle and bone strength, healthy weight maintenance, improved mental health, and, is critical in the prevention of many chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and some cancers (Armstrong, Bauman, & Davies 2000; National Public Health Partnership 2005).

In a recent review of the literature (Cutt, Giles-Corti, Knuiman, & Burke in press), dog owners were found to be more physically active and were more likely to walk as recommended (150mins of moderate intensity physical activity per week) (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999; US Department of Health and Human Services 1996), compared with non owners. The 1995 Australian National Pets and People Survey (NPPS) found that 75% of dog owners 'usually' exercised their dog, with almost 50% of owners exercising their dog between 1-2 times per day (McHarg, Baldock, Headey, & Robinson 1995). In other Australian studies, dog owners were found to walk between 18-41 minutes more per week than non owners (Bauman, Russell, Furber, & Dobson 2001; Schofield, Mumery, & Steele 2005). These latter studies also found that up to

a half of dog owners never walk their dog (Bauman et al. 2001; Schofield et al. 2005). From a public health perspective, encouraging more dog owners to walk their dog regularly could have a large impact on the health status of owners and hence decrease the burden of disease and health costs associated with physical inactivity. It could also improve the health status of dogs (Kienzle, Bergler, & Mandernach 1998; Mason 1970; Robertson 2003).

Recent research conducted with dog owners found a number of motivators and barriers for people walking their dog in public (Cutt, Giles-Corti, Wood, Knuiman, & Burke under review). Dog owners reported that their dog provided motivation, companionship and social support which encouraged them to go for walks. However, a number of major barriers for dog walking were identified including a lack of local public open space (POS) and inadequate provision of important dog-related infrastructure within parks (e.g. dog litter bags and bins). The results of this study also showed that dog owners appreciated the same attributes in parks (e.g. aesthetically pleasing, safe and close to home) as non owners (Cutt et al. under review). However, apart from this preliminary work with dog owners it appears that policy-related factors affecting dog owners walking with their dog and the impact this has on local government has not been explored.

The Dogs And Physical Activity (DAPA) study aims to examine the effect of dog ownership on human physical activity levels and takes a public health perspective. Importantly, this study will also consider the influence of the local policy environment on people walking their dog and the impact of increased dog walking on local governments. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to examine the perceived role of dog ownership in the community from a local government perspective and local government issues associated with more people walking their dogs in public places. Positive and negative aspects of residents walking their dogs in the community were assessed as well as regulatory issues associated with people walking their dogs in public places such as parks, beaches and streets. Finally, a number of recommendations likely to enable local governments to employ more efficient and effective dog walking risk management plans are discussed.

### Method

#### Recruitment of participants & procedure

Four in-depth interviews with one to two local government employees and ten small group discussions of three to six local government employees were conducted over a six week period between February and March 2006 (one in-depth interview was undertaken with the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority). Support from the Western Australian Local Government Authority was obtained prior to a letter being sent to the Chief Executive Officer of 17 local government authorities (LGAs) participating in the RESIDential Environments (RESIDE) Baseline survey. RESIDE is a 5-year prospective study of the physical activity levels of people building homes in 74 new housing estates in Western Australia (Giles-Corti et al. in press). Local government authorities who were sent a letter were later contacted by telephone (n=14) and asked if they would like to participate in the study. All 14 (100% response) LGAs agreed to take part and provided the study coordinator with the name of a contact person. The contact person recruited participants as

well as the meeting date, time and venue. The contact person was encouraged to recruit rangers, community development officers, town planners, parks and recreation officers and elected members to attend the discussion. They also provided a copy of the study information sheet and consent form to participants. All discussions took place during participants' work time and at their place of work. Informed consent including permission to tape record the discussion were obtained from each participant before commencement of the discussions. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from The University of Western Australia Human Research Ethics Committee.

### Focus group questions

A pre-determined set of open-ended questions reviewed by the investigators for content validity and sensitivity were used to guide the discussions. A number of qualitative research techniques were used to generate discussion. These included; asking open-ended questions, exploring topics until exhausted and encouraging participants to ask questions (Mariampolski 2001). Participants were also shown a series of photographs rated by the research team as good and poor parks, either for walking in general or walking with a dog. Top of mind associations were discussed to gain information on their perceptions of park attributes (Mariampolski 2001).

### Data handling and analysis

The transcripts were analysed as group data, using content analysis to identify common themes. NVivo qualitative analysis software (QSR International Pty. Ltd. 1999) was used to systematically identify, categorize and code the transcripts from each discussion. A framework approach developed from focus groups with dog owners was used for data analysis. In reporting the results, quotes from participants are presented to illustrate major themes and insights that emerged from the discussions with local governments.

## Results

### Sample demographics

In total, 44 local government employees took part in the 14 discussion groups and in-depth interviews (range 1-6 people) (Table 1). Approximately half of the participants had an education level equivalent to a bachelor degree or higher (48%), 73% were male, the average age was 43 years (range 27-60 years) and 59% were current dog owners. Participant occupations were wide ranging and included the areas of ranger<sup>1</sup> services, parks, planning, community development and environmental health and protection.

**Table 1: Socio-demographics of local government\* participants**

Characteristic	Total (%)
Gender	44
Male	32 (73%)
Female	12 (27%)
Age bracket	
21-30	5 (11%)
31-40	9 (21%)
41-50	18 (41%)
51-60	12 (27%)
Mean age	43 years
Education	
Secondary or less	10 (23%)
Trade/apprentice/certificate	7 (16%)
Bachelor or higher	21 (48%)
Not reported	6 (13%)
Occupation grouping	
Management/administration	16 (36%)
Professional	27 (62%)
Clerical/sales/service/other	1 (2%)
Job title	
Ranger	14 (32%)
Senior ranger	7 (16%)
Manager of ranger services	5 (11.5%)
Parks	5 (11.5%)
Planning	4 (9%)
Community development	4 (9%)
Environmental health	2 (5%)
Environmental protection	1 (2%)
Travel smart officer	1 (2%)
Elected member	1 (2%)
Current dog owner	
Yes	26 (59%)
No	16 (36%)
Not reported	2 (5%)

\* Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority (n=1) included in analyses

### What do LGAs think about people walking their dogs?

Participants identified a number of positive and negative factors associated with people walking their dogs in public places.

#### Positive factors:

Participants reported that nuisance barking was one of the largest dog-related problems they were required to manage. Moreover, when they were asked whether problems associated with barking dogs could be reduced as a result of more people walking their dog, the response was unanimous. Some rangers mentioned that they routinely recommended owners exercise their dog regularly as one method of reducing the barking problem. Most rangers pointed out that dogs that are taken out of the backyard and exercised are more socialized and better behaved dogs.

*Lots of people don't walk them at all and consequently we have so many dog barking complaints. (Interview 9; male; ranger services)*

*It's part of the package that we discuss with them (discussing how dog-related complaints are handled). 'Do you exercise your dog?' They say 'oh no we don't have time'. 'Well, perhaps you ought to consider it'. (Interview 7; male; ranger)*

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> In Western Australia 'Rangers' have similar dog-related roles as Animal Management Officers (AMO's) in other states.

Furthermore, many participants thought that regular dog walking was important because of the effect of the changing urban environment on their ratepayers. For example, they raised the issue that as residential density increases people will live closer together and many residents will have large houses with small backyards, if any backyard. These factors combined with owners working longer hours may result in dogs being in more confined spaces with little opportunity for social interaction or exercise. Together these factors could contribute to the onset of dog behavioral problems such as barking and emphasize the benefits of dogs being exercised daily.

*A lot of these complaints in relation to noisy dogs are because they are confined to a 3m<sup>2</sup> backyard most of their lives and they are never exercised. They suffer anxiety separation the moment the owners leave, they are bored to death and any slight movement or noise gives them cause to react to it which causes unnecessary work for us. I think if they were exercised at least once or even twice a day...it's very rare that we get noise complaints from people that we know or find out that do regularly exercise their dogs.* (Interview 7; male; ranger)

A number of community benefits associated with people walking their dogs were identified by participants. These included local dog owners meeting in the street and at the local park and getting to know each other, more people being out and about and aware of their surroundings and finally, as a result of dog owners getting to know each other, an increase in compliance with local laws. This last community benefit was mostly reported by participants who worked in the area of ranger services.

*I think it (dog walking) forms one of our strategic plans, community well being, as well as providing the social context. The social hubs, and reserves and parks play a big part in that. Our LGA currently has three dog training or clubs on our reserves and I think that's integral to community development.* (Interview 8; female; community development)

*I think it would be very beneficial if we had more people on the street. While there is a downside as far as enforcement, there are upsides in regard to neighbourhood watch. People being out on the streets, crime prevention, communities coming together and being exposed to each other, neighbours talking, dogs bring down barriers. It's the same as being a mother with kids at school.* (Interview 5; female; ranger)

*It's worked out really well because they (dog owners) do a lot for us if we aren't there, because you can't be there 24 hours a day. If they see somebody not picking up after their dog they will go and tell them straight off and quite a lot of the women actually do pick up after other people that they don't physically see or catch and I give them extra bags when I am down there and incentives.* (Interview 7; male; ranger)

#### **Negative factors:**

Although a number of positive factors were identified, the downside of dog owners walking their dogs was also discussed. Participants were asked to identify problems they faced with people walking dogs in public places in their area. Participants reported that most problems occurred as a result of owner's lack of knowledge of dog behaviour, state and local laws and inadequate training and poor socialization of dogs.

*The people who do have dogs - a lot are unsure of their responsibilities which is where we come into it. Also, the people who don't have dogs and the lack of tolerance to having them in the community.* (Interview 3; female; manager ranger services)

*A lot of the issues we have with dog owners are in regards to rules and regulations, however at times just don't want to adhere to them.* (Interview 9; male; ranger services)

*Well it depends on the nature of the dog and the training...They walk the dog and they don't have knowledge of dogs behaviour or problems.* (Interview 6; male; ranger)

Dog owners walking their dogs in POS, particularly in off-leash areas, presented problems because of potential conflict with other user groups (e.g. children, cyclists, sporting teams).

*We're here not just to necessarily look after people with dogs. We look after people who want to use the reserves for their own personal use, for picnics with their families. A dog running after their kids and even a non-aggressive dog, just the presence of it would be frightening for certain people. Some people just don't like dogs and we've got to respect that.* (Interview 8; male; ranger)

*In the dog exercise area they are allowed to run free and they are allowed to run off the lead. You get people that walk through there because there are walk paths and you also get cyclists. So when you put all that together there is plenty of opportunity for conflict.* (Interview 3; male; ranger)

Furthermore, dog's off-lead in conservation or protected areas caused a major nuisance for LGAs trying to preserve their natural fauna and flora.

*The issues with dogs in environmental areas are that they cause problems chasing wild animals, birds, defecating, territorial problems, disease perhaps, weed spread. Then there is the risk of them being hurt by snakes...* (Interview 7; male; environment protection)

Despite the problems that dog owners walking their dog in public appeared to present for LGAs there was widespread recognition of the need to ensure people wanting to walk their dog had adequate access to off-leash areas. Nevertheless, participants noted that this presented a problem for built-up areas because of the limited availability of POS. Participants also recognized that parks where dog owners were likely to walk their dog needed to be provided with and regularly serviced with the necessary infrastructure such dog litter bags and bins, so as to encourage faeces removal.

*I think the most burning issue is area and space for people to exercise their dogs.* (Interview 9; female; community development)

*I guess our public open space is prime land. It's situated amongst residential settings so we don't have that freedom; we have to have multi-use facilities for everybody.* (Interview 8; female; community development)

*If more people are walking their dogs, picking more dog poo up, more bags for us to buy, more bins in locations. We may need to look at more parks for dogs.* (Interview 6; female; ranger)

#### **Regulatory issues associated with people walking their dogs**

Problems caused by people walking their dogs in public places were perceived to be the result of owners defying state and local laws relating to off-leash dogs in an on-leash area, keeping an off-leash dog under 'effective control' at all times and faeces removal. Most participants discussed that the methods used to approach dog owners disobeying the law initially included a mix of warnings and education followed by enforcement through fines.

*We've got handouts that we give to people through registration but even if we're out and we see them doing the wrong thing we might give them one of these and that is virtually just a warning and an explanation of what they can and can't do and at worst if you've got repeat offenders we issue fines but we try not go down that path unless someone is really, blatantly flouting local laws.*

So basically we've got a fine balance between education and enforcement. (Interview 8; male; ranger)

However, nearly all participants reported their jobs were made a lot easier as a result of the 'responsible' dog owners spreading the word to other dog owners in the community. Participants mentioned that the social norms created by dog owners walking their dog at local parks helped to improve compliance rates with state and local laws.

*You have different groups come in and they are self enforcing. My wife goes for an early morning walk with her friend and she sees these people and it becomes a social group. Whenever they go down there and if anything happens out of the ordinary it's commented on and frowned upon. It's the same with these groups and in many ways they do a better job than we do...* (Interview 3; male; ranger)

*It is a social group for them and they talk to each other and with humour they will say 'don't let your dog do this or don't let them do that' and there are a couple of people down there who are called the 'sheriffs'. So through humour and a sense of place and belonging to this community they uphold those informal rules that they have set.* (Interview 5; female; ranger)

Participants identified a lack of consistency of dog-related regulation across LGAs as a major problem. This caused confusion in users of POS, particularly those that travel to other areas or LGAs to use POS.

*Our problem tends to be with people who are from ...or... (outside the LGA) actually coming to the river to walk their dogs or use our parks. So it is a case of us educating other people's residents rather than our own.* (Interview 4; male; ranger)

*It means something, its universal, its appropriate to all local government authorities not just one and that's lacking in signs.* (Interview 8; female; community development)

### **Why don't more people walk their dog? LGA barriers:**

Participants were asked what things in their LGA might discourage or prevent people from walking with their dog. While factors related to the individual dog owner (e.g. lack of time) and dog (e.g. old age or poor health) were commonly reported, the results presented here only focus on barriers that indirectly or directly relate to local government.

Most participants perceived that a major barrier to people walking with their dog was coming into contact with other dog owners who had uncontrolled or untrained dogs. Some mentioned that their LGA had a role to play in terms of protecting the well being of other dog owners and park users. Educating dog owners of their rights and responsibilities combined with dog training courses and law enforcement through fines were the main ways that participants attempted to reduce the conflict within dog owners and between dog owners and non owners.

*What would discourage some people is when they're walking their dog and they're doing the right thing (they have got it on the leash), 'Joe Bloggs' and his dog are walking towards them and his dog isn't on a leash. Whilst there is no dog attack but you know it jumps. If it jumps on them and there is a little bit of 'grrr' going backwards and forwards, that will deter some people.* (Interview 2; female; ranger)

*We found how much they did know or did not know about the Dog Act and a major campaign of the rangers was going into schools, retirement villages and we also designed brochures that went out directly to them when we were on patrol.* (Interview 4; male; ranger)

Participants also identified that limited access to off-leash dog exercise areas and a lack of appropriate dog-related infrastructure (e.g. dog litter bags and bins, signage, fencing of children's playgrounds and dog exercise areas, dog drinking fountains) in POS presented barriers for people wanting to walk their dog in their local area.

*Because we are an inner city council there is a real restriction on areas people can go to to exercise their dogs. Especially when the sports club is using it because there is a local law that says when a sports club is using the ground, the dog must be on leash so that makes it a bit difficult.* (Interview 9; female; community development)

*There are also traffic issues because we have got some quite major roads that go through and that can be quite scary...if they have to cross a major road to get to a park can be quite a big issue.* (Interview 8; female; town planner)

*It needs to be signposted and you need to have facilities there for dog walkers.* (Interview 4; male; ranger)

Insufficient support within local government from management and elected members were reported by some participants as barriers to providing the infrastructure that would encourage dog owners to walk their dogs. The lack of support was also perceived to affect the provision of necessary funding for dog walking infrastructure.

*We are going to look at all of our signage, change all the signage. Well we are hoping to...it's a bit hard. If we get support from higher up.* (Interview 6, female, ranger)

*If they (council) want to bring in and adopt new local laws then they should give us the backing to enforce these laws.* (Interview 14; male; ranger)

*You had to cross a major highway to get to the dog exercise area. When I was a ranger there it was a constant argument and we had the residents onto us, unfortunately they didn't have their local member's ear. He was anti-dog so it just stayed the same. It was really bad.* (Interview 3; male; ranger)

### **The role of local government in increasing dog walking**

Participants were also asked what, if anything, their LGA was doing to encourage their dog owners to walk more often. The most frequent comments related to the provision of off-leash dog exercise areas with the relevant dog-related infrastructure and signage.

*I think having so many parks in our LGA really, really helps as far as people walking their dogs goes...* (Interview 8; male; manager ranger services)

*They (off-leash parks) are necessary because not everyone can run at one hundred miles an hour to exercise their dog or ride a bike and you have the elderly and everyone in between and all the difficulties that they have, so yes you do need off-leash dog exercise areas.* (Interview 2; female; ranger)

*You need the dog poop bags. You also need the proper receptacle to put them in and I personally need more than one of two of these scattered around the area.* (Interview 2; female; ranger)

*We have dog drinking fountains on our reserves. So that's kind of an indicator or a tag to say welcome to dog owners.* (Interview 8; female; community development)

*We have signs for whether the dog is off-lead or not off-lead.* (Interview 3; male; ranger)

Participants also highlighted that dog owners appreciated attractive and aesthetically pleasing POS to walk their dog.

Features that were considered important to the quality of POS included; trees and shade, footpaths, lighting, seating and water features (e.g. ocean, river or fountains). Even dog friendly cafes were discussed at some length by some participants.

*A dog owner wants the same facilities as a non-dog owner. So if they are going to take their dog to the park they may wish to combine it as a family outing and take their dog. If it is an exercise area they think 'well that's even better' because the dog can run around and play and they can still enjoy nice surroundings.* (Interview 2; female; ranger)

*It needs to be pleasant to go walking in the first place. Otherwise you put the dog in the car and drive somewhere else.* (Interview 13; female; town planner)

*If you were a dog owner it would be one of the nicest grass areas with one of the nicest beaches with the BBQ, the playgrounds, gazebos. They come for miles because it is beautiful down there. Big pine trees and it is a nice walk.* (Interview 6; male; ranger)

*I think if you are going to take your dog out and exercise it, it needs to be exercised at a certain rate. To get your heart rate up you need a hard, straight walking surface. You need lighting as well and you need the other elements of safe design.* (Interview 15; male; town planner)

Through the support and encouragement of local dog owner groups meeting in parks, dog training courses, annual pet days and other similar events supported by LGAs, participants believed they enabled dog owners get to know each other and build a sense of community. Participants reported that the social interaction that occurs when people meet as a result of their dog was what kept them going for their walk with their dog each day. This was perceived to be especially important for members in the community who lived alone.

*There is a lady that lives by herself and one night there was a thunderstorm and her electricity cut off and one of the walkers came to us and said 'Can you help this lady?'. We only knew her from the dog park. She was very frail and we just helped her out. But if she didn't come to the park no one would have known she was in trouble and she didn't have anyone else... So people sort of watch out for each other and everyone knows each other. You can't really replace that. I mean you wouldn't have that if you didn't have the ability to walk your dog, I mean if we didn't walk our dogs we wouldn't know that.* (Interview 9; female; community development)

*We are organizing Pets in the Park and that is seen as a proactive event where we showcase activities for dogs and there is a vet there to give some advice and we also incorporate these initiatives into our school holiday program.* (Interview 9; female; community development)

## Discussion

This research explored the role of dog ownership in the community from a local government perspective and examined regulatory issues associated with people walking their dogs in public places. Participants also provided perceptions about local government factors that may encourage or prevent people walking their dog in their local area.

The results of this study are discussed in relation to planning for dog owners and, specifically dog walkers, in communities of the future. It is likely that the potential benefits of dog ownership and dog walking may become even more important as the population ages, the number of single occupancy houses increases, people choose to have children later in life or no children at all and mental health problems associated with social isolation and poor community ties increases (Crowley-Robinson & Blackshaw 1998; Norris, Shinew, Chick, & Beck 1999; Toray 2004). With this in mind it is evident that local

government problems related to people owning dogs and walking their dogs in public places may in fact increase over time. In order to address these dog-related issues, local governments need to be pro-active and begin planning for inclusion of dogs in public places.

Long term urban animal management planning needs to incorporate culture, processes and structures directed towards effective management of *both* potential opportunities and adverse consequences of dogs being present in the public places (Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand 2004). Creating a balance between maximising the opportunities and benefits to be gained from increased dog walkers while minimizing any adverse consequences of dogs in the community is essential if a practical harm minimization approach is to be adopted. Urban animal risk management should entail continuous monitoring, evaluation and updating of the risks and associated prevention and control measures related to people walking their dogs in public places (Tillack 2000).

The importance of planning for dogs in the community is highlighted when the effects of the changing urban environment are considered. As residential density increases local government dog-related problems such as barking may be compounded (Chandler 2005; Furber 1998). The discussions with local government employees highlighted the importance of dog owners taking their dog for regular walks to help with the health and socialization of their dog and to prevent behavioural problems such as barking. If local governments wish to encourage regular dog walking planning issues related to dog-friendly POS need to be considered (Harlock Jackson 1998). LGAs will need to plan for available and accessible dog exercise areas and consider the design and quality of POS provided (Harlock Jackson 1998; Jackson 1994; Jackson 1995; Jackson 2005), while balancing the needs of other park users. That is, parks will need to be planned for multiple park users while minimizing any conflict between dog owners and other user groups (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, & Cohen 2005; Giles-Corti et al. 2005; Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, & Payne 2005).

A major factor to be taken into consideration by local governments when planning for dogs in the community is within-council (Jackson 1999), between-council and inter-agency collaboration. The discussions with local government employees suggested a need for employees from different areas within local government (i.e., ranger services, parks and recreation, planning and community development) to communicate and work together on dog-related issues. This is particularly evident when the viewpoints stated in the results are considered in light of occupation category. Those working in the area of ranger services tended to hold more negative views of dogs in the community and this may be related to their primary role as enforcers of dog-related laws. However, local government employees involved with engaging the community (e.g. community development officers) had more a positive outlook of dogs in the community. This point was further emphasized by off-the-record comments made at the end of some discussion groups during which participants commented that the group discussion had provided the first opportunity for people from different sections within their LGA to get together and discuss dog-related issues from their area's perspective. These comments highlight how important it is for the urban animal risk management process to include consultation with all stakeholders both internal and external to local government (Tillack 2000).

Another important means of collaboration when planning for dogs in the community involves communication and cooperation between neighbouring LGAs. The discussions with local government employees emphasized a need for consistency in terms of local dog-related laws and signage of these laws in public places to avoid confusion and maximize compliance with local government by-laws. This is relevant because people often

go out of their local government area to walk their dog especially if the park has a major feature that draws a lot of people. For example, if a park is near the beach or river it will attract people from other local government areas and these people may not be aware of the LGAs dog-related laws or recognize and understand the dog-related signs. Consistent regulatory and educational approaches across LGAs could be achieved if there was coordination at the organizational level. For example, involvement at the state government level would assist with the consistent wording, design and displaying of dog-related signs in public places throughout metropolitan Perth.

Finally, local governments need to consider collaborating with other agencies and institutions that promote responsible dog ownership. For example, if an intensive health promotion intervention was to focus on increasing the number of people who walk their dog regularly (daily) it is likely that this could have a large impact on local government staff and resources. From a

ranger's perspective more people out walking their dogs could result in increased problems associated with untrained and unsocialised dogs being out in the community, an increase in the resources required in parks for dog owners (e.g. dog litter bags and bins) and pressure to increase the number of dog exercise areas. However, from a community development officer's perspective more people out and about in the community walking their dogs could facilitate the building of social capital and a sense of community. Health promotion practitioners and representatives from different sections of state and local government need to develop and strengthen their networks to enable successful future collaboration and enhanced communication.

Table 2 summarizes the factors considered important for LGAs to consider when planning for more people walking their dogs in the future. A number of factors relating to POS, dog-related local laws and education programs are listed.

**Table 2. Factors local government employees perceived should be considered when planning for more dog walkers in the future.**

<b>Dog walking planning factors</b>	
<b>PUBLIC OPEN SPACE:</b>	
Accessibility	Access to off-leash dog exercise areas, extension of existing areas, more off-leash areas, linking of dog exercise areas with walking trails
Infrastructure	Provision of dog-specific infrastructure such as dog litter bags and bins, fencing/barriers around children's playgrounds, fenced dog exercise areas, dog drinking fountains, dog ponds, dog friendly cafes
Signage	Consistent, strategically placed (at major entry/exit points, on bins) and user-friendly signage
Quality	Trees and shade, seating, drinking fountains, walking paths, lighting, water features Footpath infrastructure within POS and along streets. Over/under passes on busy streets
Multiple users	Minimize conflict between other user groups such as sporting clubs, cyclists and non owners
<b>LOCAL LAWS:</b>	
	Consistent with neighbouring and all metropolitan LGAs Consistent dog-related signage at POS Collaboration within LGAs, between LGAs and with other organisations
<b>EDUCATION PROGRAMS:</b>	
General	Courses prior to getting a dog about what owning a dog entails Checklist for dog ownership to include: size of backyard, working hours, reasons for ownership, owner dog-related education completed, ability to regularly walk dog. Make checklist available from LGAs, pet shops, breeders, pound etc – anywhere can get a dog from Education programs conducted regularly on responsible dog ownership Puppy pre-school and dog training courses School education programs (e.g. PetPEP). Micro-chipping day Subsidized sterilization and micro-chipping via local vets
Specific to people walking their dog & compliance	Advertising and promoting where people's local dog exercise areas are and where groups of dog walkers meet each day Encourage and support local dog walking groups/clubs. Promote the benefits of dog walking from both the owner and dog's perspective Community events such as 'Dog days out'; 'Picnic in the park – bring your dog'; other dog walking events Mobile caravan visiting "hot spots" (i.e. lots of dog walkers in an area) Information brochures, website, on the ground patrol and passing on of correct information Reward/incentive/prize systems for dog owners doing the right thing
Resources required	Survey of local dog owners and dog walkers to assess needs Funding from state government to conduct dog walking programs Evaluation of current programs

