Australia has long been a nation of pet lovers, but the past 15 years have seen a steady decline in the number of ‘owner’ pets dogs and cats. Research continues to demonstrate the social and health benefits of pet ownership, but is increased regulation and social change making it all too hard? This week MG WARD considers whether community education and a more strategic approach to regulation could help pets back in our lives.

“Aging Pet Owners: A Growing Challenge”

We give residents the physical help to get up, but we need our activity program and our pet therapy to give them a reason to. Having their own pets would give them a purpose, and that is what we need to take away from elderly people.

— Jo Brandt, Dubbo Nursing Home manager

The price of irresponsible pet ownership:

Dubbo dog statistics for 2010/11 financial year

• Number of micro-chip dogs: 15,390
• Number of dogs spayed or neutered: 92
• Number of dogs privately owned: 1,300

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We are making it very difficult for people to own pets in a lot of urban, suburban and even semi-rural areas, because there is lots of legislation in different areas.

- Dr. Kim Beekhuis, veterinary behaviourist and Australian Companion Animals Council president

"People need to be responsible for the animal they have - they have to be able to afford it and give it the attention and the exercise it needs. That doesn't mean you can't have a pet; you just have to choose the right one for you."

- Debbie Archer, Dalby City Council's environmental control manager