



Responsible Dog Ownership

What is Responsible Dog Ownership?

Responsible Dog Ownership is about ensuring that dog ownership within the community does not have an adverse effect on the community as a whole. Every single person that keeps a dog as a pet or companion has a responsibility to make sure their animal does not become a nuisance or impact the health and wellbeing of others.

Responsible pet ownership covers everything from making sure you provide your dog correct care – water, shade, nutrition, veterinary care and adequate mental and physical stimulation – to ensuring that your dog does not cause a nuisance by straying, barking or posing a threat to public safety.

Part of responsible dog ownership also relates to ensuring that you follow the laws relating to dogs – registering your pet with the council, keeping it on leash when off your property, and picking up after your dog when out on a walk.

Registering your dog with your Local Council

It is a requirement in Victoria, that all dogs are registered with their local council by the time they reach 12 weeks of age.

Council dog (and cat) registration becomes due every April, and you will pay a fee each year to keep your dog registered. Most councils issue a collar tag that your dog needs to wear when off your property - it will have your dog's registration number on it, and will be paired with your details should your dog get lost.

Your council will have a limit on the number of pets you can have, along with a variety of requirements for dog and cat owners within their municipality. They will have designated areas where dogs are prohibited (either completely, or at certain times) and areas where dogs are allowed off leash.

Even when off the leash, there is the expectation that your dog will respond to you and not run off after people or other dogs (this is termed 'Under Effective Control').

Your local council will have details of all of their requirements on their website, so make sure you are familiar with the rules in your area.

Microchip Identification

In Victoria, every dog or puppy has to be microchipped prior to sale, so your breeder will have had this done at your pup's first vet visit.

The microchip is the size of a grain of rice, and is implanted under the skin in between your dog's shoulder blades. The chip contains a large 15-digit number that is unique to your dog, and the chip can only be read with a scanner. This number is then kept on a government licensed database along with contact details of the current owner, the breeder or previous owners and the licensed implanter who implanted the chip.

Your breeder will have given you a microchip transfer form when you collected your puppy, or will have lodged it on your behalf, but it is up to you to ensure that your details that are kept on the central database are updated throughout your dog's life.

If your phone number or address changes, make sure to let the microchip registry know. There is nothing more frustrating than having scanned a chip and finding that the contact details paired with it are no longer valid when you are trying to get a much-loved pet back home.

Minimum standards of care

The Victorian Government has produced a **Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs**. This is a document that outlines the community's expectations in regard to minimum standards of care and housing for pet dogs. It is quite an informative document, and a great place to get started if you have a question about what is expected of you as a regular dog owner.

You can access a copy at <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/domestic-animals-act/codes-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-the-private-keeping-of-dogs>.



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Making sure your dog does not cause a Nuisance

A big part of Responsible Dog Ownership is ensuring that your dog does not create a nuisance to your neighbours or the wider community.

This means making sure your dog is safely confined to your property and is not allowed to roam, making sure that your dog does not bark incessantly, and ensuring you pick up your dog's droppings and dispose of them appropriately.

In Victoria, the **Domestic Animals Act 1994** outlines quite strict laws in regards to nuisance behaviour. Council Authorised Officers have the power to fine owners, impound or seize dogs, or have a dog declared menacing or dangerous.

You can prevent your dog's behaviour getting you in trouble by managing your dog to minimise any impacts on others in your neighbourhood. This means regularly checking and making sure your fences are secure, providing your dog with adequate physical and mental stimulation and actively working to minimise barking if your dog is noisy.

You also need to keep your dog safely on a leash when off your property (unless in a designated off leash area) and ensure your dog has some basic obedience/manners training so that they respond to your requests to come back should they accidentally get loose.

If your dog displays behaviours that are a concern, you should seek advice from an appropriately qualified professional.

Increased or excessive barking can be a sign of separation distress, altered hearing or vision, or simply lack of mental stimulation. These all have very different treatment strategies, so getting the right advice from the start is critical.

Dogs that are fearful or behave aggressively in certain situations need to be managed to prevent danger, either to themselves or to other.

These dogs may need intervention strategies aimed at modifying their behaviour longer term. These are not simply things that can be 'fixed' with a bit of training.

A visit to the vet can help rule out any health issues that might be contributing to the behaviour and your vet can recommend an appropriately qualified behavioural trainer or specialist that can help.

If you are interested in finding out more about being a responsible dog owner, you can visit <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/dogs>