



## New survey reveals Guide Dogs under attack from off-lead pet dogs

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Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has today released alarming new research<sup>i</sup> revealing that one in two guide dogs across NSW and the ACT has been attacked by another dog while guiding its handler who is blind or vision impaired.

In the past year, the national survey of more than 220 guide dog handlers who are blind or vision impaired, including 76 NSW and ACT residents, found that on average one guide dog a month across NSW and the ACT was attacked by another dog.

The findings reveal that some guide dogs were attacked multiple times, with 17 NSW and ACT respondents reporting a combined 75 attacks on their guide dogs over the past three years, including one guide dog being attacked 12 times.

The survey found that one in three (29%) guide dogs in NSW and the ACT that were attacked sustained injuries, with one guide dog retired as a result of the trauma. Off-lead pet dogs were the cause of most attacks.

To address this issue, as part of a national initiative, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is launching a new public education campaign today called *Take the lead*, calling on dog owners to ensure their pet dogs are always walked on a lead in the name of responsible pet ownership.

"We're alarmed that so many guide dogs are being attacked by pet dogs and are appealing to dog owners to keep their pet dogs on leads when out and about," said Dr Graeme White, CEO of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

"Guide dogs play a vital role in enabling people who are blind or vision impaired to get around independently. Attacks compromise this independence and can cause serious injury and trauma to both the handler and the guide dog. In rare serious cases, attacks can result in premature retirement of a guide dog, which costs more than \$30,000 to train.

"There's no doubt Australians love their dogs. In NSW alone there are almost 1.3 million dogs<sup>ii</sup>, but this also means 1.3 million potential safety hazards for guide dogs.

"We're encouraging dog owners across Sydney to take the lead to help create a safe community, not just for guide dogs and their handlers, but for everyone."

Other worrying results show pet dogs distracting guide dogs from their job is a major safety concern for guide dog handlers, with most saying they had experienced off-lead dogs distracting their guide dogs from their jobs on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

"Any distraction to a working guide dog can put its handler's safety at risk. For example, if a guide dog is distracted while guiding its handler across the road, the consequences could be disastrous," said Dr White.

Celebrity vet (Channel 10's *Bondi Vet*) and dog owner, Dr Lisa Chimes has witnessed the trauma of dog attacks first-hand and is supporting the *Take the lead* campaign to remind the public about the importance of responsible dog ownership.

"I've had my own pet dog attacked by another dog, which was absolutely terrifying and I can't imagine how scary that would be for someone who is vision impaired," said Dr Chimes. "And as a vet, I've seen so many pet dogs injured from being attacked by other dogs that are off leads and out of control.

"It's our responsibility as pet owners to take control of our dogs and walk them on a lead because we need to make our community safe for our pets and for guide dogs."

High profile guide dog handler and Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes AM, knows too well the importance of being able to travel safely and efficiently.

Graeme has been blind all his life and currently works with his second guide dog, Arrow, to navigate his way around - whether it be across the city, interstate or overseas.

However, a common inhibitor to this is other dogs distracting Arrow from her job, which can make her anxious and put Graeme's independence and safety at risk.

"The trouble is, distraction is unexpected and it happens so fast. Those situations are very disruptive to my independence. I can't see the other dog so I don't know what we are dealing with and I can become scared for myself and my guide dog as it may put her and me in danger, especially if I'm about to cross the road," said Graeme, who lives in Roseville and works in Sydney's CBD.

As part of its *Take the lead* public education campaign, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has released a TV advertisement, which can be viewed online here at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's Youtube channel: <http://youtu.be/SxSURp7Yi98>

Free dog leads featuring a tagline of 'I'm taking the lead to support Guide Dogs' are being distributed this week (Guide Dog Awareness Week) across Sydney by the Sutherland Shire Council, the Ku-ring-gai Council, Ashfield Council and Woolhara Council to new dog owners. Guide dog handlers will hand them out to students at a series of school talks about the issue. The leads have been produced in partnership with Guide Dogs newly appointed national partner, pet care provider Joseph Lyddy.

For more information about the Take the lead campaign, including access to guide dog handler case studies, survey results and images please visit [www.guidedogawarenessweek.com.au](http://www.guidedogawarenessweek.com.au).

**ENDS**

### **Campaign resources**

High definition video footage of Graeme Innes talking about his support for the Take the lead campaign, can be downloaded here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V1RWImefo&feature=youtu.be>

### **Guide Dog key survey findings summary for NSW and the ACT:**

- 54% of guide dog handlers surveyed said their guide dog had been attacked by another dog while it was working
- 50% of attacks happened in the past year, while 85% of attacks occurred in the past three years
- 29% of guide dogs attacked sustained injuries, with one retired as a result of the trauma
- 70% of attacks on a guide dog were caused by an off-lead dog, with dogs on a lead (but not controlled by their owner) responsible for the other 30% of attacks
- 50% of guide dogs attacked were attacked more than once in the past three years – 21% were attacked twice, 6% three times, 6% four times, 3% five times and 15% more than five times
- 86% of guide dog handlers said off-lead dogs had distracted their guide dogs while they were working

The extended findings and related article will be available in the 2014-2015 *International Journal of Orientation & Mobility* due for release in early 2015.

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### **ABOUT GUIDE DOGS NSW/ACT**

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is the leading provider of guide dogs and orientation and mobility services to enable people with impaired vision to get around their communities independently. Services include providing training and aids including long canes, guide dogs and electronic travel devices such as talking GPS technology. Visit [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au), call 1800 804 805, or follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

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<sup>i</sup> Survey Monkey survey of 220 guide dog handlers across Australia, representing about a quarter of the country's guide dog handlers, conducted by Guide Dogs Australia, March 2014<sup>ii</sup> *Pet ownership in Australia 2013*, report by the Animal Health Alliance [Australia]