



<http://understandinsurance.com.au/types-of-insurance/pet-insurance>

Pet insurance

If your pet is involved in an accident or suffers a sudden illness, the veterinary bills can quickly add up. Surgical costs alone can run into thousands of dollars.

Pet insurance can help you pay for unexpected vet treatments. Some policies offer cover for routine care such as general checkups and everyday preventative care, from teeth cleaning and de-worming to vaccinations.

Most pet insurance products are only for dogs and cats. However, some policies are designed for horses.

To find an insurer that offers these types of policies, visit www.findaninsurer.com.au [<http://www.findaninsurer.com.au>]

Choosing a policy

The chance your pet will need to go to the vet for more than just a routine check up at least once in its life is high.

As most pet owners know, veterinarian bills can be very expensive when you add up consultations, surgeries, x-rays, medications and other necessities.

When deciding if you need pet insurance, take into account the type of pet you have, the breed of pet, and where you live. It's also important to look at the pet itself – is your pet accident prone or is the breed prone to certain illnesses?

Take your own circumstances into account. Could you afford the unplanned expenses if your pet is sick or injured? The reality is many Australians would struggle to pay a hefty vet bill and might have to make the distressing decision to put their beloved pet down because they can't afford costly treatments.

If your pet is involved in an accident or suffers a sudden illness, pet insurance can give you the ability to consider all treatment options and not be restricted by cost.

What does pet insurance cover?

Though pet insurance is quite a new product in Australia, consumers have a wide choice of policies and providers, each with different product features, terms and conditions.

These range from basic policies that will cover your pet only for accidental injury, to more comprehensive policies that also cover illnesses such as tick paralysis, or cancer and routine care for things like vaccination or heartworm medication.

There are three main types of pet insurance policies:

- Accident-only
- Accident and illness
- Accident, illness and routine treatment

Some pet insurance policies also include third-party cover for damage or injury that your pet might cause to other people or property, and can also include cover for your pet going into a boarding kennel if you become ill and need hospital treatment.

Some things to consider when comparing policies

- Is there a maximum annual benefit?
- Is there a limit on claims? There may be a yearly limit on claims, or a limit per condition. Check if there are sub-limits for items such as medications
- What percentage of the vet bill (co-payment or co-share) will be covered?
- Is there a waiting period? Some conditions may not be covered immediately
- What accidents and illnesses are covered?
- Will emergency boarding be covered if you are hospitalised?
- Will your pet be covered for life?
- Is routine care covered?
- Is there any excess to pay?

- Are there restrictions for reoccurring conditions?
- Will your pet be covered if taken interstate?

What else should I know?

Pet insurance policies have a variety of features, which will vary from policy to policy.

Take time to consider the different types of pet insurance policies available. It's important that you look for the right policy, not just the cheapest.

Some policies won't cover older pets, or may require you to pay a percentage of the vet fees. Here are some things to consider when choosing the right policy.

Waiting periods

Once you purchase a policy accidents will usually be covered immediately, but your insurer may impose a waiting period on the cover of illnesses or routine treatment.

For illness, this is usually about 30 days. This information will be detailed in the Product Disclosure Statement. Contact your insurance company if you have any questions about the product's inclusions, exclusions and other features.

Co-payments

Some policies will require you to pay a percentage of the vet fees with the rest being paid by the insurer. This is commonly known as a co-payment or co-share.

For a policy with a co-payment of 20 per cent, this means your insurer would cover 80 per cent of the cost, while you would pay 20 per cent as a co-payment.

For example, if a vet bill was \$1000, you would pay \$200 while your insurer would cover \$800.

In some policies a co-payment and an excess may be payable.

Limits

Most policies have an annual limit on benefits you can claim, and some may also have sub-limits. If you pick a competing plan with per-incident limits, make sure you know exactly how they work so you won't be surprised when you make a claim.

For example, your insurer may pay out to a maximum of \$15,000 within a year, but within this may be sub-limits on different areas of care such as x-rays, drugs and surgery.

Age limits

Generally, you can insure your dog or cat as soon as they're eight weeks old.

The age of your pet may affect the coverage you can get. Make sure you understand what the age limits are on your policy at the time you take it out.

Some insurers will only start insuring pets below a certain age. Pets over eight or nine years of age may not be eligible for some types of cover, but if you take out insurance on your pet before they reach eight, they will usually be eligible for lifelong cover.

The best time to get pet insurance is as early as possible before medical problems develop. This is because pre-existing conditions are not normally covered by pet insurance.

Common exclusions

Pet insurance does not cover every circumstance or expense. Your insurer will have some policy exclusions, which helps keep premiums low. These are explained in the Product Disclosure Statement (PDS).

Common pet insurance exclusions include:

- Treatment for a diseases or illness that could have been prevented by vaccination
- Elective treatments
- Treatment for pre-existing conditions where signs or symptoms were visible before you bought your policy
- Breeding-related expenses such as pet pregnancies and births
- Behavioural problems
- Treatment while your pet is used for commercial or occupational purposes
- Treatment of illnesses during specified waiting periods (usually 30 days)
- Treatment if you did not take reasonable precautions to protect your pet from situations that may result in injury or illness or from aggravating a treated condition
- Certain breeds that are banned or declared dangerous

How premiums are calculated

Pet insurance premiums [<http://understandinsurance.com.au/premiums-explained>] are based on the risks associated with the insured pet and the likelihood of a claim being made on your policy in the future.

Your insurer may take various factors into account when determining your premium, such as:

- The species, breed and age of your pet. Certain breeds may be genetically predisposed to certain illnesses. For example, French bulldogs are prone to glaucoma
- Where you and your pet live. Some areas may make pet ownership more risky. For instance, living in an area where paralysis ticks are present may affect your premium
- The type of cover selected
- The amount of excess selected
- Applicable government charges and administration fees

You may be able to get certain discounts if you insure more than one pet.

When comparing pet insurance, don't just look at the premium – check what is included in your policy and make sure it meets your needs.