

## ***Dogs in Society Position Paper***

### **Dog bite incident reporting and data collection**

Comprehensive, national statistics are essential to quantify the effectiveness of current strategies for reducing the incidence of dog bites in the community. ACAC believes that access to reliable data on dog bite incidents would be invaluable for educators, legislators and regulators to identify areas in existing programs that need to be improved, and assist in the development of targeted new programs for dog bite prevention.

At present no comprehensive reporting system exists for dog attacks in this country. Data concerning dog bite incidents are collected and held by many different government authorities across Australia.

Details of incidents involving dog attacks can be recorded either as human injury reports through the health system, or as dog attack incident reports from Local Government authorities.

In the public hospital system, records are kept of patients treated for injuries due to dog attacks, as outpatients in Accident and Emergency departments, and for those patients requiring admission to hospital. However information about patients treated for dog bite injuries at private hospitals and by general practitioners is difficult to obtain. Data collection in the hospital system is primarily designed to record the medical treatments and costs involved. The circumstances surrounding the dog attacks and details of the dogs involved are not necessarily recorded.

Many Local Government authorities voluntarily collect data on dog attacks. Some State Governments have recently introduced a requirement for reporting of dog bite incidents by local authorities. This data tends to reflect incidents occurring in public places, and may include attacks by dogs on humans or other animals. Bites in the home are rarely reported to local authorities.

Dog bite incident data are not subject to uniform analysis and publication. As a result, the statistics currently available on dog attacks in Australia are incomplete and fragmented.

There is a need for a standardised method of reporting of dog attacks. The data collected should identify the individual dogs involved, the severity of the incident and details of the circumstances surrounding each incident. The data collected by various government authorities could then be collated and analysed in a consistent manner at a State Government and national level.