

## Equine-assisted interventions/therapies

There are three main areas of employment using equine assisted interventions, and with the role of the horse in these different approaches ranging from the horse having a minor presence to operating as the fundamental facilitator/mediator of treatment/intervention. These are:

- **Psychotherapy incorporating horses (EAP/EAC/EFP)**
  - also known as equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP)/equine assisted counselling (EAC)/ and equine facilitated psychotherapy (EFP)
- **Equine assisted learning (EAL) facilitator** (occasionally referred to as equine facilitated learning (EFL) – but this title/position is losing traction due to ambiguity and inability of the sector to have consensus what EFL means)
- **Hippotherapy**

Currently there is no organisation or association regulating the practice of equine therapies in Australia. Furthermore, counselling and psychotherapy are also unregulated areas and terms. However, those professionally working in this emerging sector in Australia are encouraged to follow their professional baseline qualifications as referred to in each modality description below. Furthermore, practitioners must ensure they practice within their original profession's code of conduct (ethics and standards), as well as adhere to local, state, and federal legislation and mandatory reporting obligations.

It is also encouraged that practitioners hold the appropriate insurances for personal and professional protection, but most importantly protection for the protection of their participants/clients during sessions (public liability). And, as working with potentially vulnerable participants or clients, to ensure one engages in professional supervision and ongoing professional development and self-reflection.

Additionally, to support best practice and comply with equine welfare and industry standards, demonstrate completion of appropriate horse behaviour safety and industry training. For example, as per Horse Safety Australia. This knowledge will also ensure the horse/s always has/have their welfare needs met. This may be shade or shelter, access to water, and in EAP/EAC/EFP and EAL – the ability for the horse/horses to move away from client/participant at the horse's-safe distance if/when they wish (this is part of the learning or therapeutic environment and process).

Other certifications to support practice: working with children clearance, police clearance, trauma-informed practice, culturally informed practice.

### *Psychotherapy incorporating horses (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Sheade, 2021)*

- Psychotherapy for humans that occurs in an environment with horses. This could be a paddock with a small herd of suitably chosen therapy horses, or paddock or large yard with one horse.
- Practice as per usual psychotherapy approach and integrates the horse into the environment or structured activities specific to the client/s needs.
- Similar to psychotherapy without horses, this work is often ongoing (beyond one session), with timeframe collaboratively determined between person and practitioner.

- Psychotherapist's qualifications: registered psychologist (clinical or counselling via AHPRA), registered counsellor (ACA/PACFA); or other appropriate undergraduate degree (for example nursing/teaching/social work) with post graduate qualification of psychology/psychotherapy/ or counselling.

*Equine assisted learning (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Hallberg, 2018; Sheade, 2021)*

- Experiential learning session that takes place in the presence of or through activities with horse/horses.
- Aimed at promoting mental health, wellness, and life-skills including, personal development or organisational/corporate professional growth. Also, individuals with specific needs including SEWB challenges or disabilities.
- One off, or ongoing sessions – as determined by participant, or in collaboration with participant's treating team.

*Hippotherapy (Sheade, 2021)*

- Therapy facilitated by a credentialed health professional, often allied health such as occupational therapist, physical/physiotherapist, registered nurse, or speech therapist, utilising the horse's movement to enable functional movement or treatment goals.
- The health professional may also work alongside an equine professional if they themselves are not experienced or have horse safety and basic horse industry qualifications.

## References

- Esposito, N., and Fournier, A. (2023). *How change happens in equine-assisted interventions: A theory of horses, humans, and psychotherapy*. Routledge.
- Hallberg, L. (2018). *The clinical practice of equine-assisted therapy; Including horses in healthcare*. Routledge.
- Kirby, M. (2021). *Equine therapy exposed: Real life case studies of equine assisted psychotherapy and equine assisted learning with everyday people and horses*. AWARE Publishing.
- Sheade, H. E. (2020). *Equine-assisted Counseling and Psychotherapy: Healing Through Horses*. Routledge.