



Pet insurance

It's often said that the love of an animal is priceless – but that doesn't mean it won't cost you. Having your pet insured can protect you against being bitten by high vets' bills. *Consumer Choice* walks you through the options.

Just like their owners, pets are living longer lives. Advances in animal healthcare mean that dogs at death's door or failing felines can, with the right treatment, often be restored to full health. As with people, there is an array of treatment options now available to sick or injured pets. But unlike us humans, who at least have the benefit of a public health service to fall back on, our four-legged friends must rely on the financial capacity of their owners to pay their healthcare costs. However vets' bills are not cheap, as anyone who has had the experience of a visit can attest to.

Pet policies are a new, but growing sector of the insurance market and are

intended to pay for the cost of vets' bills. *Consumer Choice* last reported on pet insurance in 2007. Then it was estimated that only 2.5% of Irish pet owners had pet insurance. Part of the reason for this low figure was because consumers in Ireland only had one insurer – Allianz – from which to choose. However, reflecting the growing demand, there are now three insurers offering pet insurance policies in Ireland.

To buy or not to buy?

As with all insurance products the decision to buy is an individual one and based on your attitude to risk. However, The Irish Society for the Prevention of

Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA) believes pet insurance is a worthwhile investment. The ISPCA estimates that on average, one in three pets will require unexpected veterinary treatment for injuries each year.

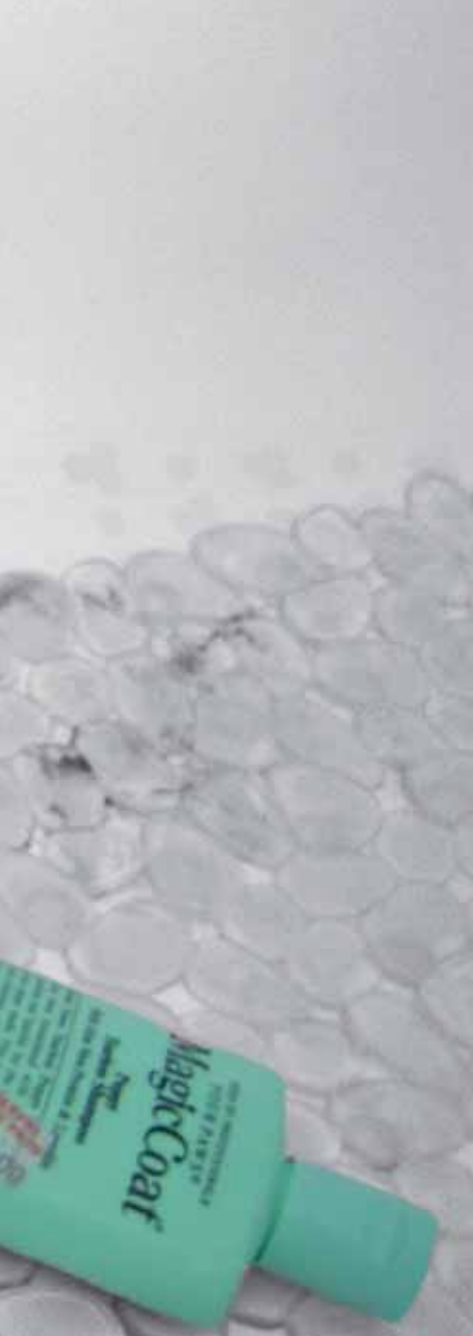
A pet that suffers a broken limb resulting from being hit by a car may be a candidate for a range of sophisticated treatments that give it a better chance of a more successful and sustainable recovery. According to the ISPCA: "Advances in orthopaedic surgery and the availability of specialised implants such as plates and pins, means the animal could undergo surgery to stabilise a fracture internally. The advantage of this is that the animal will have a higher

AT A GLANCE

To buy or not to buy?

Cover compared.

Sample quotes.



resolution of the problem, less chance of developing arthritis subsequent to the injury, and will return to normal use of the limb in a much shorter period of time." And it's not just the cost of surgical events resulting from accidents that pet owners may have to pay for. Many other medical conditions, such as skin or ear infections, arthritis and diabetes can also be costly to treat over the longer term.

While all this is good news for your pet, it is bad news for your wallet. However, a good pet insurance policy mitigates against the risk of getting caught out by expensive vets' bills. Depending on the policy and its restrictions and excesses (the amount you must pay yourself before cover kicks in), the insurance company will pay the bills for any medical treatment your pet may need. There may also be cover for third party liability, boarding fees if you

WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH? GET A PET.

There is a growing body of scientific evidence which suggests that having a pet is linked with better health in the pet's owners. Research suggests that people who own pets are less likely to suffer high blood pressure and other stress related disorders. This may be due to the love and companionship a pet provides along with certain lifestyle behaviours encouraged by owning a pet.

One study funded by US-based National Institutes of Health surveyed more than 2,000 people and found that dog owners who regularly walked their dogs were more

physically active and less likely to be obese than those who didn't own or walk a dog. Another study by the Journal of Cardiology found that dog owners who had suffered a heart attack were six times more likely to survive an additional year than non-dog owning patients.

Owning a cat is also linked with better cardiovascular health. A University of Minnesota study of almost 4,500 people found that those with cats are less inclined to suffer heart attacks, have lower blood pressure, have fewer symptoms of tension or stress, and live longer overall.

are hospitalised, advertising and reward fees in the event your pet gets lost or is stolen, and even cover should it die.

Excluded from cover is the cost of any elective treatments such as vaccinations, worming, and flea treatments. Also excluded is a list of certain breeds/types of dog, such as pit bulls, greyhounds and dogs used for work purposes. For a complete list check the terms and conditions of the policy documents.

Summary of providers

The three providers operating in the market are Allianz, 123.ie and Petinsure.ie. Blue Insurance intends to enter the market over the coming months but has not yet specified a date or published details of its policies. Of the three companies currently selling pet insurance, Allianz has one standard level of cover, Petinsure.ie has two tiers from which to choose from - Care Plan and Care Plus - while 123.ie offers the widest choice, with Gold, Silver and Bronze policies. Cats and dogs are the only insurable pets with Allianz and 123.ie. However Petinsure.ie also insures rabbits for €10.50 a month.

Claims

All the insurers cover vet fees ranging in amounts from €2,000 - €4,000 depending on the level of cover. However, it is important to note that 123.ie's Bronze policy only pays out in the event of your pet being injured in an accident as opposed to the other policies which pay for vet fees resulting from both accident and illness. Claims of up to €1,000 can also be made for the death of your pet by illness or accident, kennel or cattery fees incurred if you are taken ill, as well as compensation if you have

to cancel a holiday because your pet needs emergency, life-saving treatment. You may also be eligible for up to €600 advertising or reward costs if your pet goes missing, as well as benefits for theft or straying, depending on the policy.

Other considerations

As with most insurance policies, the devil is often in the detail, so it's important to carefully read the terms and conditions of the policy to ensure that you know what you are paying for. Besides the minimum and maximum ages a pet must be to qualify for insurance, other important considerations include stand-down periods, excesses and whether or not the policy offers lifetime cover.

Stand-down periods refer to the amount of time you must fulfil on a policy before any claims are accepted. However the stand-down period may be waived if you are switching from one insurer to another provided your pet is not currently suffering from any claimable illness. All the insurers in our survey had a stand-down period of 14 days.

Policy excesses ranged from €60 to €150 in our survey. However, across 123.ie's policies, the excess for pets aged over eight is €69 plus 15% of any treatment costs.

It's important too to be aware of benefit limits and whether the policy gives your pet lifetime cover. Lifetime cover means that if your pet gets a condition that may take some years to treat - such as diabetes - then the policy will cover the treatment for that condition for more than the first 12 months of the condition up to the annual benefit limit, as long as you continue to pay the premium. Only 123.ie's Silver Policy does not come with lifetime cover.

Useful contacts

Irish Insurance Federation

Insurance House
39 Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
tel (01) 676 1820
fax (01) 676 1943
email fed@iif.ie
www.iif.ie

ISPCA Head Office

National Animal Centre
Derryglogher Lodge
Keenagh
Co. Longford
tel (043) 332 5035
fax (043) 332 5024
email info@ispca.ie
www.ispca.ie

The Irish Blue Cross

15A Goldenbridge Ind
Est
Tyrconnell Road
Inchicore
Dublin 8
tel 01 416 3030
fax 01 416 3035
email info@bluecross.ie

Useful websites

www.petinsure.ie

www.allianz.ie

www.123.ie

PET INSURANCE POLICIES COMPARED

PLAN	POLICY FEATURES					LEVEL OF COVER €							
	min age (weeks)	max age (years)	stand-down period (days)	lifetime cover?	excess	vet fees	3rd party liability	death by accident	death by illness	lost and found ¹	theft and straying	kennel/cattery fees ²	holiday cancellation ³
Petinsure.ie Care Plan	8	8	14	✓ ⁹	150	3,500	250,000	800	800	500	800	800	800
Petinsure.ie Care Plus	8	8	14	✓ ⁹	60	3,500	250,000	800	800	500	800	800	800
123.ie Gold Cover	8	20	14	✓	69 ⁸	2,500	250,000	1,000	1,000	600 ⁴	1,000	1,000	1,000
123.ie Silver Cover	8	20	14	✗ ¹¹	69 ⁸	2,500	250,000	1,000	1,000	500 ⁴	1,000	1,000	1,000
123.ie Bronze cover	8	20	14	✓ ¹⁰	69 ⁸	2,000 ⁵	250,000	500	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Allianz	8	8	14 ⁶	✓	75 ⁷	4,000	250,000	1,000	1,000	500	1,000	1,000	1,000
Petinsure.ie Rabbitcare	8	8	14	✓ ⁹	150	1,750	125,000	400	400	250	250	✗	✗

Notes: ¹ Costs pertaining to advertising and recovery. ² If you are unable to care for your pet due to being hospitalised. ³ If you are forced to cancel or cut short a holiday because your pet needs life saving surgery. ⁴ Or 15% of sum insured. ⁵ Payable for fees arising out of an accident only. ⁶ With respect to illness. ⁷ For pets aged ten years or over (seven years for certain breeds) excess is the fixed amount as stated plus 35% of the remaining cost. ⁸ Excess is €69 for pets aged zero to seven years old, and €69 + 15% of treatment costs for pets over eight. ⁹ Provided you start cover before the age of eight if pedigree or non-pedigree, or five if special breed and premiums remain paid. ¹⁰ Bronze cover only covers for accidents and injuries – illness is not covered. ¹¹ Will only cover any one condition for just 12 months. Information correct as at 30.7.2009.

COMPARATIVE PET INSURANCE PREMIUM QUOTES

	Petinsure.ie Care Plan		Petinsure.ie Care Plus		123.ie Gold Cover		123.ie Silver Cover		123.ie Bronze cover		Allianz	
	per year	per month	per year	per month	per year	per month	per year	per month	per year	per month	per year	per month
6 year old female tortoiseshell cat	77.20 ¹	6.43 ¹	94 ¹	7.83 ¹	112.99	9.42	92.10	7.67	46.52	3.88	114.51	9.54
3 year old male pedigree Siberian Husky dog valued at €900	153.40 ¹	12.78 ¹	190 ¹	15.83 ¹	192.39	16.03	164.80	13.73	76.96	6.41	209.94	17.50
3 year old female pedigree Persian cat valued at €1,500	87.40 ¹	7.28 ¹	106 ¹	8.83 ¹	112.99	9.42	92.10	7.68	46.52	3.88	125.41	10.45
4 month old male cross breed dog	107.80 ¹	8.98 ¹	130 ¹	10.83 ¹	149.92	12.49	131.81	10.98	83.95	7.00	114.51	9.54

Notes: ¹ Online price only. Telephone quotes cost an additional €20 per year. Information correct as at 30.7.2009.

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Discounts

Some insurers offer discounts on your policy premium if you meet certain criteria. Petinsure.ie has the widest selection of discounts. It gives a discount in your first year's premium cost if your pet is micro chipped. This ranges from €8 to €15 depending on the plan and the animal. Premiums that are purchased online receive a discount of €20 in the first year and there is 10% discount where a third (and subsequent) pet is insured. There is also a discount if the consumer is aged over 60. Again this depends on the policy and the animal insured but ranges from €5 to €15.

Allianz also offers special premium reductions for multiple pet owners, pensioners and cases where the pet is micro-chipped for the first year only. 123.ie gives a 10% discount on the cost of insuring multiple pets, but only with its Gold Policy.

Pets and pandemics

Many pet owners may be understandably worried about the possible effects of the pandemic influenza A/H1N1 (swine flu) on their pets. However, it seems that we have less cause to be concerned about our pets' chances of contracting the virus than our own.

The UK's leading veterinary charity, PDSA, and the Pet Health Council have moved to reassure anxious pet owners about the possible effects of A/H1N1 on their dogs and cats. PDSA Senior Veterinary Surgeon, Elaine Pendlebury, said: “We're pleased to report that at the moment there is no evidence that pets can be affected by this new virus, so there's no need for alarm. However, because the virus could change or spread to animals from an infected person, pet owners should keep themselves updated on the development of this disease.” As always, consumers should stay informed.

Our survey

We decided to survey all providers currently operating in the market for insurance for both a pedigree cat and dog and also non-pedigree or crossbreed animals. 123.ie's Bronze cover came out cheapest. However, with this kind of insurance, price should not be the sole determining factor. The fact that the Bronze policy only covers vets' bills in the event of an accident involving the pet would probably make this level of cover unattractive to most pet owners and *Consumer Choice* doesn't recommend it.

Of the other policies, Petinsure.ie's Care Plan is a good overall pet insurance product provided you are happy with a €150 excess. However, in terms of vets' bills alone Allianz offers the highest level of cover at €4,000 with an excess of €75, provided the pet is under the age of ten. Both policies offer lifetime cover once you continue to pay the premiums.