

## COST OF OWNING A HORSE

*Project Hope Horse Welfare Victoria Inc (PHHWV) attends many cases each year where owners have under estimated the actual cost of keeping a horse. As a direct result of this in many cases the horses welfare has been compromised.*

### Introduction

The true cost of owning and keeping a horse or pony is something horse lovers tend not to admit to. As the saying goes “buying the horse is the cheap part”. All too often people jump in too quickly without considering the ongoing financial and time commitments. Horse ownership is a 24 hours a day 7 days a week commitment – horses don’t know it is a weekend or public holiday.

A bond can be formed very quickly between a horse and its owner (especially if it is a child’s pony). It can be very heart breaking for the owner should it have to be sold due to financial hardship.

The actual costs can vary depending on the age of your horse, whether you have your own land for it to reside and what activities you plan to undertake with your equine friend. Please take the time to carefully consider if you have the time and financial resources to keep a horse. A horse can live well into its twenties and require more care as it ages and often, without the benefits of being able to be ridden. So at the end of the day you may decide that you are not in a position to own your own horse.

All is not lost! There are other options open to you. Just because you are not in a position to own your own horse now does not mean the opportunity won’t be available to you later. In the meantime you may decide to frequent a well run equestrian centre where you can have regular lessons or trail rides. You may like to volunteer for a worth while cause such a Riding for the Disabled; whilst you won’t get to ride you will be able to have the hands on care of horses, or you may like to assist a friend with their horse.

### Types of Keep

The bulk of the funds in keeping your horse will be in agistment and feed. These costs can vary greatly depending on what sort of agistment you require and what activities you are doing with your horse and to how much feed you will need.

#### Own Property

It would be every horse owner’s preference to have their horse live with them on their own property. Looking from the outside it may also seem to be the cheaper option. However there are costs associated that need to be considered. Fencing will need to be installed and maintained, manure will need to be picked up on a smaller acreage, some sort of shelter will need to be provided, the water supply will need to be plentiful and pastures will need to be maintained. If your horse requires a stable you will have the added daily task of cleaning the stable and the cost of bedding. Should you need to be absent for any reason i.e. sick or a holiday, you will need to have someone check and feed your horse at least once a day.

### Agistment

There are generally three types of agistment ranging from full agistment/board to the do it yourself arrangement. Just like the cost the services provided will vary greatly. Remember, “you get what you pay for”.

#### Full Agistment/Board

As the name suggests this will include everything. Your horse will be looked after for you. They will be feed twice a day, they might be stabled at night and turned out in paddock during the day or they may be kept in their own private paddock day and night. They will be rugged according to the weather. But on the whole all you have to do is turn up and ride. This can be seen as the lazy way of owning a horse. But for many that work long hours, have to travel regularly for work or don’t live close to their horse this is the most effective way they can own a horse and ensure their day to day needs are met, and at the same time you will have access to great facilities.

If you decided that full agistment/board suits your lifestyle you need to keep in mind on top of the weekly fee they will still be required to pay for their horses’ essential health and care costs and any additional vitamins or special feed they may require will need to be provided.

#### Part Agistment/Board

Some agistment centres are happy for owners to assume some of the responsibilities for the day to day care of the horse in turn for reduce rates. This might be supplying the feed for their horse, the actual feeding of the horse once or twice a day, cleaning of the paddocks and or stable. While most will include a private paddock some centres are happy for two horses to share a paddock depending on its size. This sort of arrangement can be practical if you live close by and have the time. It is also useful if you have commitments on a particular day and you can’t visit your horse; you will know they will be looked after.

#### Basic Paddock Agistment

This sort of agistment is pretty much the “Do it Yourself” kind and in many instances it will be one large paddock with many horses residing there. Facilities will be limited and where there are facilities you may be required to pay to use them. This sort of agistment is useful if feed is plentiful and you want to turn your horse out to give them a spell. But it is important they are checked daily.

The down fall is when horses have to be fed. It is generally the owners responsibility to ensure the horse is separated from the others in a yard while it eats – this can be very time consuming for owners standing around waiting for them to eat.

### Feeding

Feed costs can vary greatly and there are many factors you will need to consider when budgeting for feed. Pasture quality, the type of work your horse is receiving, age, breed, availability of feed and ability to buy in bulk (this is important when looking at hay prices). Buying

and storing a years supply of hay directly from the farm is far more economical than relying on the supply of the local produce store on a weekly or monthly basis. If your horse requires hay all year round a good rule of thumb is allow a minimum of 100 bales per horse, per year.

### Additional Costs

Additional costs can be broken into two main categories: essential care costs and non-essential costs. Even within these categories your expenses can vary greatly depending on your horses needs. Some of these expenses are ongoing and owners need to have funds available should the need arise.

### Essential Care Costs

#### Farrier

Horses that are at rest or ridden a few times a month generally do not require shoes, all that is required is a farrier to trim the hooves every 6-8 weeks.

Horses that are ridden regularly or on hard surfaces will most likely require shoeing and this will need to be done at 6 week intervals.

Some horses that have problems with their feet may require corrective shoeing intervals. This cost will differ depending on horses situation.

#### Dentist

Unlike human's teeth horses need their teeth filed by a horse dentist or veterinarian. Horses that are younger (3-6 years) will need to be seen to at least twice a year at six month intervals. Older horses require a yearly visit. (See PHHWV Info Equi Note Equine Dentistry for more detailed information).

#### Worming

Horses will generally require a worm treatment every 8 weeks. Commercially prepared pastes are available from feed stores and saddlery stores. (See PHHWV Equi Note Equine Worming for more detailed information).

#### Vaccination

In Australia there are no compulsory vaccination programs in place for horses. Owner can give an annual vaccination for Tetanus and Strangles which are readily available from your veterinary clinic or produce store.

#### Vet

Providing your horse maintains good health you should not need to have your vet out frequently. However should your horse become ill or injured you will be required to provide suitable veterinary care to ensure their welfare is not put at risk. Many veterinary clinics require payment to be made at the time of the visit. You need to remember there will be a consultation fee, travel fee and then fees for ongoing treatment.

#### Euthanasia Costs

This cost is something that owners put to the back of their mind and many don't even consider. However just like veterinary expenses it is an important cost to allow funds for. (See PHHWV Farwell Booklet ~ A Guide to Equine Euthanasia for more detailed information).

### Non Essential Costs

#### Tack

Depending on what activities you are undertaking with your horse costs associated with tack can vary greatly. You can expect that riding items will last a long time e.g. saddle, bridle, helmet, boots etc. Items such as rugs, grooming items etc may need to be more regular purchases. You get what you pay for when purchasing tack items. The important thing to remember is your horses comfort and making sure all tack items fit the horse correctly so as not to cause discomfort.

#### Insurance

There are many types of insurance cover available and some agistment and training centres require owners to have their own insurance cover. The most common is public liability, theft and loss of use. Companies that specialise in Equine Insurance generally have simple packages where you can get your horse and possibility your tack covered all in one simple policy.

#### Training/Breaking

Having to send your horse of to be broken-in or trained can be a costly exercise. You need to choose your trainer carefully and understand the service provided and all associated costs.

#### Tuition

Horse riding lessons in your chosen discipline is available to riders at all levels and the cost can vary depending on your level of riding experience and if your instructor has to visit you.

#### Memberships

Membership fees can vary depending on the type of club or association you are involved with. Being a member of a local Pony Club, Riding Club or Equestrian group can have many associated benefits. These include regular rallies/clinics, being able to compete with your horse at events held within that association, and many have insurance that covers the rider all year round as part of their membership fee.

### Summary

The estimation of costs listed on page three can change depending on location, varying feed prices, the age of your horse and what activities you are doing together.

PHHWV comes across many horses each year that have been neglected as a direct result of owners lack of time and/or funds to be able to provide suitable care for their horse or pony. Many of these horses are unable to be rehabilitated and owners may end up having animal cruelty charges laid against them. Regardless of an owner's financial situation you are required by law to ensure that your horses welfare is not compromised. If owners can no longer afford to keep their horse a new suitable home must be secured for the horse, or as a last resort have the horse humanely euthanised.

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**The information provided is not intended to replace the professional advice you may receive from your veterinarian.  
Please seek veterinary advice if your horse requires specific attention.**

## Break Down of Costs<sup>1</sup>

		Cost – Range Per Week	Cost – Range Per Year
<b>Agistment</b>			
	Full Agistment/Board	\$150 - \$250 pw	\$7800 - \$13,000
	Part Agistment/Board	\$70 - \$120 pw	\$3640 - \$6240
	Basic Paddock	\$15 - \$40 pw	\$780 - \$2080
<b>Feed</b>			
	Hay	\$10 - \$15 per bale	\$1000 - \$1500
	Hard Feed	\$20 - \$50 pw	\$1000 - \$2600
<b>Essential</b>			
	Feet Trimming	\$30 - \$40	\$180 - \$240
	Feet Shoeing	\$100 - \$150	\$800 - \$1200
	Teeth	\$60 - \$100	\$60 - \$100
	Vaccinations	\$20	\$20
	Worming	\$15 - \$20	\$90 - \$120
<b>Other Costs</b>			
	Training/Breaking	\$150 - \$400 pw	
	Competition Entry Fees	Varies \$5 per class to \$50 per dressage Test	
	First Aid Items	Various	
	Grooming Supplies		Minimum \$50
	Membership Fees		\$100 - \$200
	Rally/Clinic Fees	\$25 - \$150	
	Rugs		\$200 and \$400
	Tack		Minimum \$1000
	Tuition/Coaching Fees	\$55 - \$110 per lesson	
	Veterinary Fees	Start at \$100	
<b>Euthanasia</b>			
	Knackery		\$150-\$500
	Burial on your property <sup>2</sup>		\$250-\$400
	Cremation		\$1600-\$2000

Using these figures above as a rough guide, to keep a horse on agistment in a shared paddock being feed basic grass hay all year round and meeting minimum care requirements minimum cost would be between \$2130 (\$41 per week) and \$4060 (\$78 per week).

<sup>1</sup> Figures listed are estimates and were applicable as of September 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Allow for veterinary costs if horse is to be euthanised by the veterinarian \$200-\$300 plus travel.