

Canadians Could End Pet Homelessness in a Generation **New survey reveals simple steps to save lives**

While most Canadian pet parents say they are aware that pet homelessness is a problem, they don't necessarily connect that to the estimated 70,000 pets euthanized in shelters each year. And few know that they personally can play a huge role in ending pet homelessness in their communities.

These are among the findings of the first *PetSmart Charities of Canada Shelter Pet Report*, a survey of more than 3,000 Canadians' attitudes toward adoption and spay/neuter.

"Canadians could end pet homelessness in their country within a generation if they just took action today," said Julie White, senior director of programs, grants and field initiatives at PetSmart Charities of Canada.

White pointed to a sharp decline in euthanasia rates for shelter pets, especially for dogs, [since the 1990s](#). PetSmart Charities of Canada also saw hundreds of cats find homes within days at a Mega Adoption Event in Toronto in July, the first event of its kind in Canada. That indicates strong demand for cats among Canadian urban residents, a promising sign. What's more, increased access to low-cost spay/neuter clinics has helped Canadians reduce the amount of unwanted litters arriving in shelters.

"If the trend of more Canadians adopting and fixing their pets continues, we can see a bright future in which every pet has a lifelong, loving home," said White.

To sustain that trend, the survey suggests that more Canadians will need to get actively involved in helping local animal welfare groups. Despite strong awareness of the problem, most respondents (73%) did not donate time or money or provide any other support to help solve pet homelessness.

Adopt to get the pet you want at a lower cost — while saving a life

The desire to save a pet was the top reason for adopting among both people who had recently adopted (49%) and those who planned to adopt (55%). Cat owners, in particular, saw the convenience of adopting a pet who was already fixed and vaccinated.

Other top adoption findings include:

- **Pet ownership:** More than half (52%) of the Canadians surveyed had a cat or dog, and one-third of those had at least one of each.
- **Pets as companions:** Both cat (79%) and dog (80%) owners believed that a pet is a member of the family, even a closest friend (30%). And three-quarters of them said they got a pet because they wanted companionship.
- **Value of pet adoption:** Of those who recently got a cat or dog, nearly half did so through a shelter, rescue, pet adoption company or family/friends who could no longer keep the pet. However, 16% of respondents said they just don't know much about pet adoption.
- **Breeders still acceptable to some:** Unfortunately, some respondents who were considering a pet said they would rather purchase one. Most unsettling were the responses from people planning to get a puppy. 51% said they would consider

purchasing from a breeder — just slightly less than the 57% who said they would consider adopting from a shelter.

Why would Canadians be inclined to purchase rather than adopt? People often said they wanted a purebred pet, or the shelter didn't have the specific breed they wanted. Those who had adopted a cat recently, or were considering adopting a cat, indicated that adoption fees from shelters were too high.

In reality, [1 in every 4 dogs who end up in shelters are purebred](#) — adopters can find almost any breed they want in a shelter. Breed-specific rescues are another option for both cats and dogs. Many cats who are available through animal welfare organizations will be in foster care instead of in a shelter, so adopters may even have the added benefit of learning about the cat from a foster parent who has lived with the pet in their home.

In addition, shelter veterinarians and behavior experts evaluate pets in their care for health and temperament issues. Pets from shelters are also likely to be spayed or neutered as well as vaccinated.

As for the cost of adoption, the adoption fee for shelter pets is typically a fraction of the cost of a breeder's purchase price.

Surgery cost, confusion can stop Canadians from doing the right thing

86% of pet owners surveyed said their pets were already spayed or neutered. Nearly 70% of respondents who had recently brought home a cat or dog planned to have the pet fixed, with 42% of them saying "it's the right thing to do."

However, a large number of Canadians still fail to fix their pets soon enough to avoid accidental litters.

Among the survey's findings were:

- **Confusion on timing:** More than a third of respondents believed that pets under 6 months of age are too young to be fixed, when the [Canadian Veterinary Medical Association](#) actually suggests that it should be done early, [between 1 and 4 months](#).
- **Cost remains a factor:** The cost is also a barrier to fixing pets for one-quarter of respondents. Most think private veterinary hospitals would be expensive (68%) or would overcharge (48%). 86% of those who thought the surgery would be too expensive were not aware of low-cost, safe options for the operation in their communities.
- **Cat homelessness:** Almost half (46%) of the participants were aware of free-roaming cats in their communities, even if they weren't taking care of the cats themselves. More than half (53%) believed that the high number of homeless cats is mainly a result of not fixing the cats.
- **Specialized clinics:** Even two-thirds of those who were aware of free-roaming cats did not know that low-cost spay/neuter clinics provide services for those cats. Veterinarians at these clinics perform spay/neuter surgeries using highly efficient techniques, putting the procedure in financial reach for many more families. The clinics' services can help improve neighborhoods by enabling community cats to live healthier, safer lives while reducing overpopulation.

How you can help

The PetSmart Charities of Canada Shelter Pet Report makes it clear that Canadians have a huge opportunity to end pet homelessness within a generation. But pet lovers need to take action now to ensure that adoption and spay/neuter become lasting trends. Here's how you can help end pet homelessness in your community:

- Adopt your next pet. [Search for a pet online](#) or [find an adoption event](#).
- Get your pet spayed or neutered. [Find a clinic near you](#).
- [Donate to PetSmart Charities of Canada](#) to help save pets' lives.

Together, we can create a future in which pet homelessness is a relic of a less humane past. In this new world, every pet will have the lifelong, loving home they deserve.

The PetSmart Charities of Canada Shelter Pet Report is based on research conducted among more than 3,000 Canadians age 18 or older. A nationally representative sample of responses from people with and without pets was collected in February 2014. The study has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

PetSmart Charities of Canada will use the study's findings to help improve its adoption program in PetSmart stores and make smart decisions as a leading funder of animal welfare in Canada.