

A small, fluffy grey kitten with large green eyes is being held gently by a person wearing bright blue nitrile gloves. The kitten is looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred wooden fence.

Hill's Pet Nutrition

2025 State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report

To our friends in animal welfare and the veterinary profession,

At Hill's Pet Nutrition, in collaboration with shelters and veterinarians nationwide, our commitment to ending pet homelessness is unwavering. We see your resilience and dedication to animals in need every day, and we know solving the shelter crisis requires all of us — inside and outside of the animal welfare community.

There are tall barriers to adoption — like the cost of pet ownership and veterinary care. But there are other, less tangible barriers to pet ownership tied to guilt and doubt — like how people believe they must delay pet ownership because they can't return love to a pet in the same way they love us because they don't have enough time or the perfect circumstances to welcome a new pet into their home.

At Hill's, we are building on our support to fill the gap of consumer data available to animal welfare professionals across North America. We are proud to present the third annual Hill's Pet Nutrition 2025 State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report, a vital resource for animal care professionals to understand consumer barriers, perceptions and opportunities to help our nations' most vulnerable pets. This year, the report includes new consumer data from Canada — expanding the insights across North America.

Throughout the report, we saw many similarities year-over-year. Still, there are growing barriers to adoption and pet ownership for North American consumers. The cost of pet ownership remains the top concern among many Americans and Canadians alike. This insight alone underscores the urgent need for innovative solutions and collaborative efforts to ensure that every pet has the chance to find and stay in a loving home.

We are honored to partner with the Association for Animal Welfare Advancement, Shelter Animals Count, and other key thought leaders in the animal welfare and veterinary communities to bring this report to life. The knowledge and expertise shared by these professionals is invaluable. We are proud to work hand-in-hand with our partners to end pet homelessness and provide nutrition to more than 1,000 shelters every day through our Hill's Food, Shelter & Love Program, which has supported more than 15 million pets being fed and adopted since 2002.

We invite you to delve into the findings of this report and join us in taking action to address the challenges facing shelter pets. Whether you are a shelter professional, a veterinarian, a policymaker or simply a pet lover, your contribution is essential.

Together, we can create a world where every pet has a healthier, happier future.



Chelsie Estey, MSc, DVM, DACVIM (Neurology)
U.S. Chief Veterinary Officer
of Hill's Pet Nutrition



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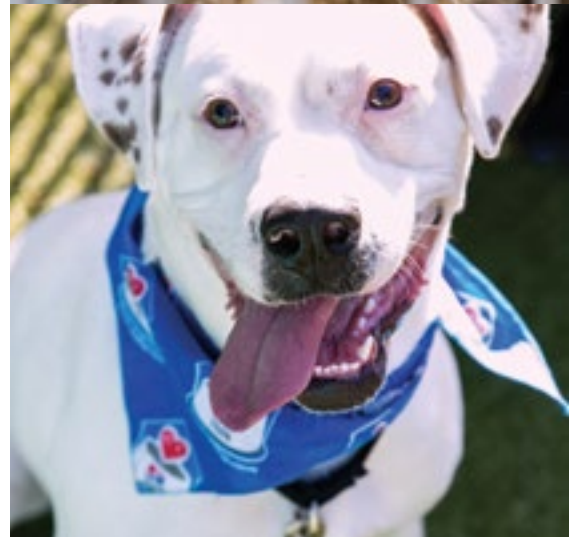
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Introduction

In 2024, 5.8 million dogs and cats entered shelters and rescues in the U.S. alone, which marks the fifth consecutive year shelters are experiencing more intakes than outcomes, according to [Shelter Animals Count](#). This animal-level data points us toward three key trends:

- Intakes outpacing outcomes is resulting in a gap that is contributing to higher shelter populations.
- Length of stay is increasing for dogs across the board, but large dogs are impacted the hardest with a nearly doubled median length of stay.
- Cats continue to gain popularity across the country, with a 2% increase in adoption rates year-over-year and 7% increase in adoption rates since 2019.

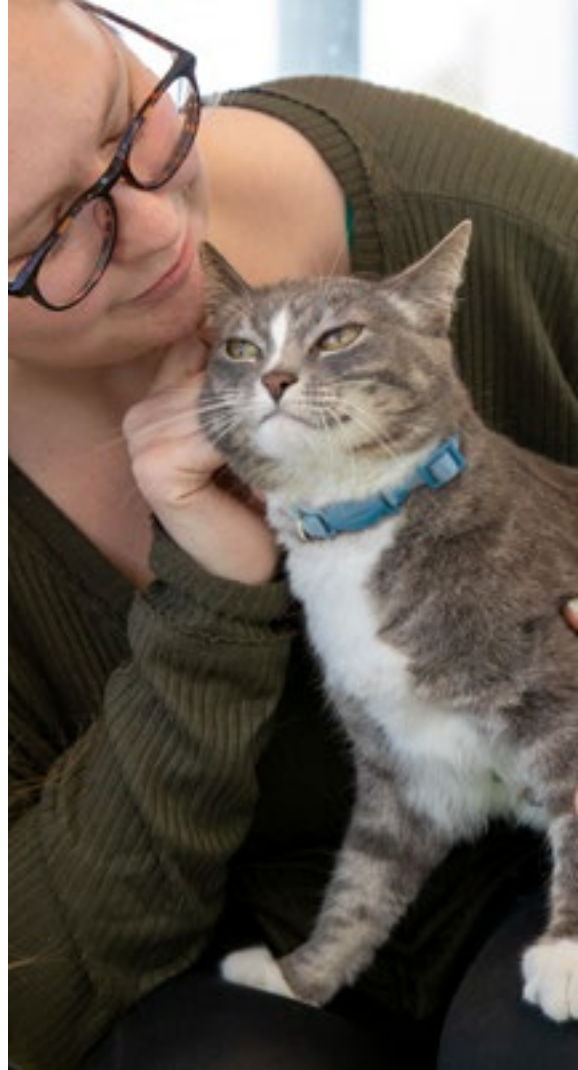
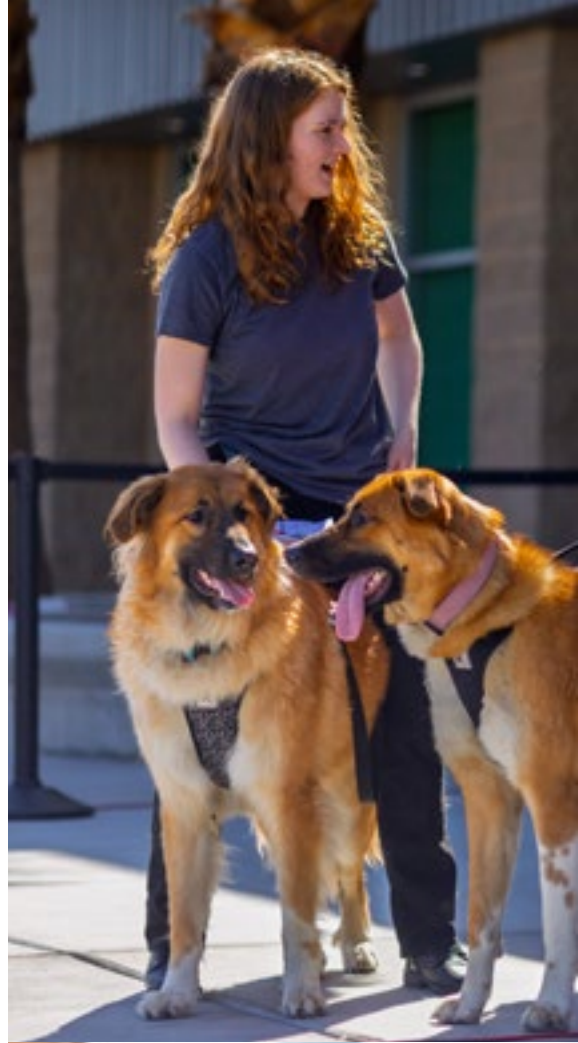
To further understand consumer beliefs and behaviors driving this increase, the animal welfare community needs more data-driven insights. The third annual Hill's State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report fills this need, presenting year-over-year findings from a proprietary, single-blind survey of 2,000 Americans and 500 Canadians with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The survey was administered to adults aged 18 and older.

For the purposes of analyzing age demographic differences, respondents are grouped as follows:

- Gen Z and Millennials: under 45 years old
- Gen X and Baby Boomers: 45 years and older

The findings highlight significant barriers to pet adoption, primarily economic concerns related to the cost of pet care. These financial considerations are impacting potential adopter conversion, and in some cases, leading to surrender situations. The report also identifies opportunities to boost foster participation and explore strategies to place more pets in homes, and keep pets and people together.

Despite these challenges, a majority of people remain receptive to adopting shelter animals.



2025 Animal Welfare Trends

Shelter adoption intention remains strong for the majority of Americans, but an increasingly large number of people are opting to acquire a pet from family or friends. This could be a lower-cost or easier acquisition method, or a search for familiarity when rehoming pets versus relinquishing to a shelter.



63%

Americans said they would likely choose a shelter when adopting a new pet

Top acquisition method in 2025:
“Got from a family member or friend”



33%



23%

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

The price tag of pet ownership creates barriers at two critical points of the adoption journey.



Getting Started

The percentage of Americans who say the initial cost to adopt or acquire a pet made it difficult to consider pet ownership:

2024

28%

2025

32%



Ongoing Commitment

The percentage of Americans who report the biggest concern of pet ownership is the overall cost:

2024

43%

2025

48%

ACCESS TO VETERINARY CARE



The cost of veterinary care continues to be the #1 barrier to owning a pet year-over-year, regardless of age, income level or geographic location.

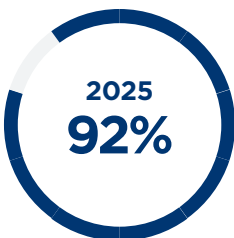
Americans most frequently rank veterinary care in their top three pet expenses



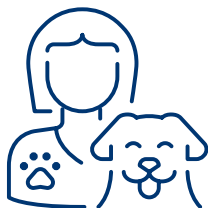
Gen Z & Millennials



Gen X & Baby Boomers



64% of Americans report that the cost of veterinary care directly impacts their decision to adopt a pet.



Gen Z and Millennials are consistently more likely to report veterinary access factors as a barrier to adoption than Gen X and Baby Boomers.

Percentage selecting the following factors as impacting their decision to adopt:

Gen X & Baby Boomers		Gen Z & Millennials
41%	Availability of preventative, sick or urgent visits	53%
39%	Availability of post-adoption vet visits	51%
35%	Proximity of vet offices	45%
30%	Reliable transportation to the vet	45%

Younger Americans often feel an “accessibility gap” and a pressure to meet a “gold standard” of pet care, leading to hesitation and guilt about adoption. This gives shelters a key opportunity to emphasize that committed care, even if imperfect, is truly enough.

THE FOSTERING LANDSCAPE

Awareness of fostering continues to grow despite registered fosters declining. Financial clarity and expert support can help unlock untapped potential.



2024		2025
52%	Familiarity with fostering programs	55%
14%	Respondents actively fostering	11%
38%	Respondents familiar with fostering who have not fostered	44%

Expert support is a key motivator for Americans to consider fostering.



Access to trainer/expert guidance	74%
Foster pets who have experience with other animals	72%
Short-term fostering options	71%
Financial compensation for fostering	70%

Despite fears and misconceptions, fostering, especially foster-to-adopt programs, presents new pathways to pet ownership, allowing potential adopters to try pet ownership guilt-free.

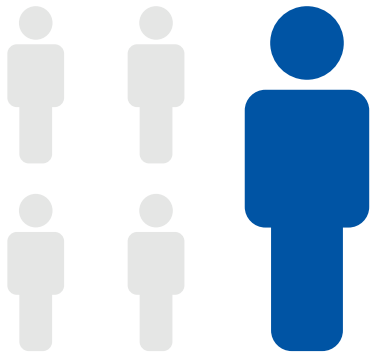


Americans view fostering positively as a way to try pet ownership	65%
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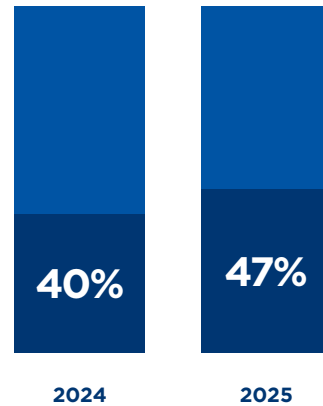
THE FOSTERING LANDSCAPE

Potential foster parents hesitate to open their homes due to 2 cost concerns: misunderstanding associated costs and fearing the long-term financial commitment of a “foster fail” (adopting a fostered pet).

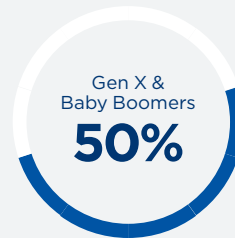
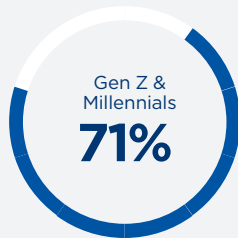
1 in 5 prospective fosters are concerned about the affordability of fostering, unaware that shelters typically cover these costs.



Americans who say they haven't fostered because they fear getting too attached to the pet:



Willingness to consider fostering if pet care costs are covered:



INTENT TO ADOPT

Getting first-time adopters to successfully bring home a new companion is key to establishing a pipeline of repeat adopters.



of previous shelter adopters are likely to adopt.

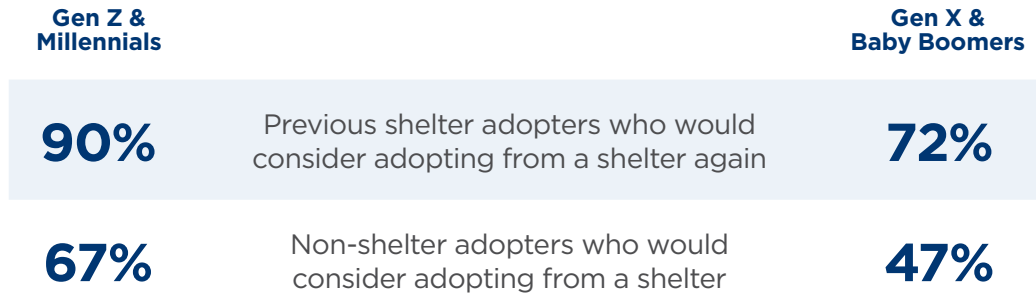


of non-shelter adopters* are likely to adopt.

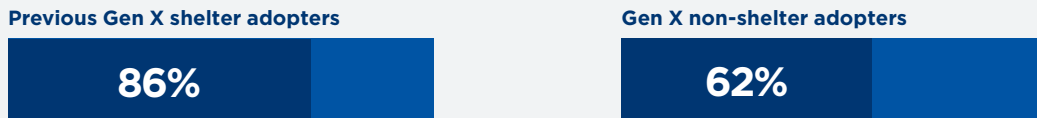
*Non-shelter adopter: Anyone who has never adopted from a shelter or rescue.

INTENT TO ADOPT

Younger generations show stronger intent to adopt from shelters, but developing targeted strategies for all age groups — from highly receptive Gen Z and Millennials to the substantial potential within Gen X — is key to converting intentions into actions.

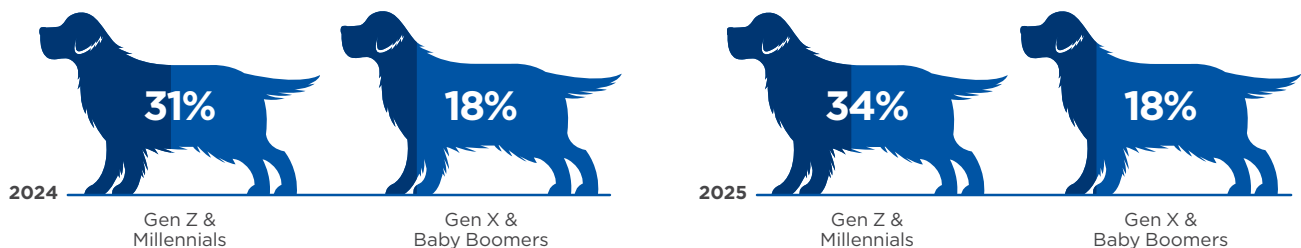


Younger Gen X individuals show promising adoption intent, creating an opportunity to incentivize this demographic to choose pet ownership again.



Younger generations remain key to large dog adoption.

1 in 3 Gen Z and Millennials are likely to adopt a large dog.



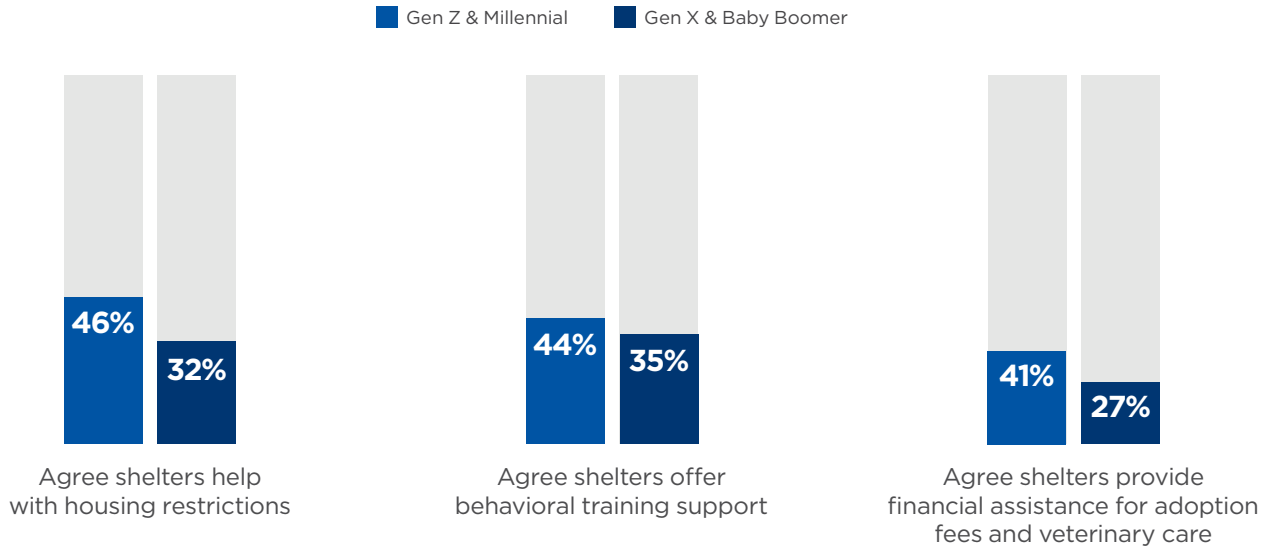
However, engaging younger generations in pet adoption requires improving awareness of local shelter locations.

21%

1 in 5 Gen Z and Millennials are unaware of shelters or rescues nearby.

POST-ADOPTION EXPERIENCES

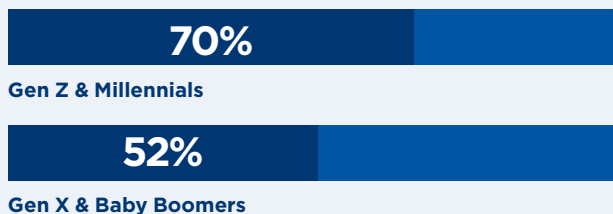
Despite pre-adoption wariness, younger Americans are more likely to agree that shelters offer valuable post-adoption support:



Younger adopters report stronger emotions

The adoption experience evokes stronger emotional responses — positive and negative — in younger generations.

Americans reporting feelings of excitement post-adoption:



Americans reporting feelings of anxiety post-adoption:



When doubt and anxiety arise, shelters and veterinarians play a crucial role in keeping pets and people together



Among Americans who received support or resources when considering surrender, **95% kept their pets.**



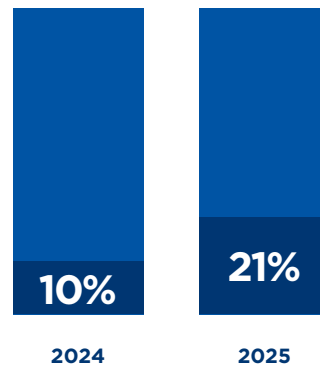
While the vast majority (87%) of adopters report feeling happy post-adoption, understanding challenges can help set realistic expectations.



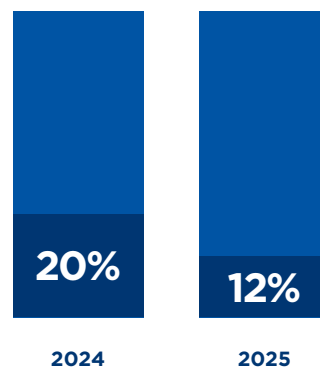
44%

Behavioral issues remain the primary post-adoption concern.

“Time commitment exceeded expectations” is a growing concern.



Post-adoption health issues have become less problematic.





Section 1

Shelter Perceptions & Adoption Trends



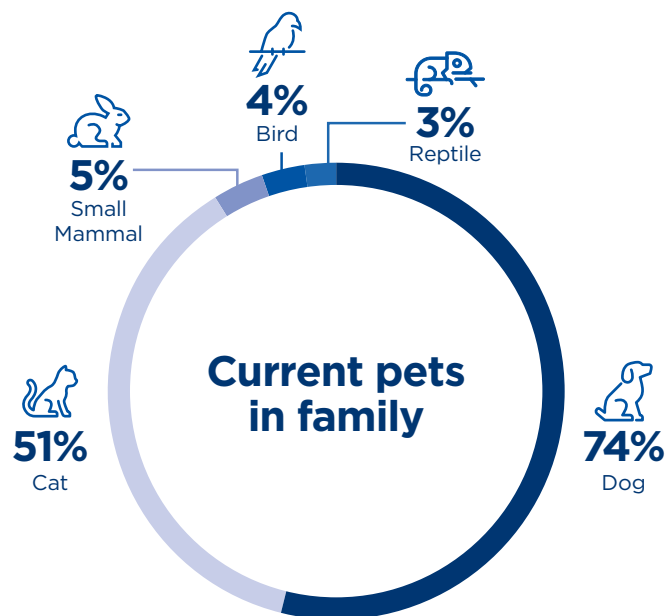
Jim Tedford
President & CEO of The
Association for Animal
Welfare Advancement

Today, adopters face several challenges that impact their decisions to acquire new pets. The animal welfare profession is working hard to address barriers, but there are no quick-fix solutions. [The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement](#) offers webinars, workshops and roundtable discussions on a host of challenges to help shelters navigate through challenging times. Our strength is in our network.



The current state of pet ownership

In the United States, overall pet ownership has remained consistent year-over-year, with dogs continuing to be the most common pet. However, recent trends suggest a shifting landscape. According to *Packaged Facts' 2025 Pet Population & Ownership Report*, the majority of pet-owning households still have dogs, but the percentage of households with dogs has dropped 3% since 2019, while the percentage of cat-owning households has remained stable. Data from *Shelter Animals Count* further supports this trend, showing increased cat adoptions since 2019, with the number of households owning cats remaining steady. This data suggests several possible trends: current cat owners may be adopting additional feline companions, some households might be shifting their preference from dogs to cats or fewer people overall may be adopting pets, with the decline primarily affecting dog adoptions.





How people get their pets

Americans report they are increasingly more likely to rely on informal networks for acquiring their canines, primarily obtaining dogs from family or friends than through shelter adoptions or breeder purchases, which share equal popularity as secondary sources.

For cats, we see a similar pattern of informal acquisition, with family or friend transfers as a top method, followed by finding a stray and shelter adoptions.

Most common acquisition methods for dogs and cats

		
Got from family/friend	33%	23%
Adopted from shelter/rescue	24%	16%
Got from breeder	24%	3%
Adopted from shelter at pet store	10%	7%
Found as stray	10%	22%
Purchased from pet store	8%	3%

Acquiring pets from family or friends is becoming increasingly popular among Americans. The data suggests several reasons for this trend, though these inferences are not exhaustive:

- **Cost considerations:** Acquiring a pet from family or friends might be perceived as more affordable, as there may be no adoption fees or purchase costs involved.
- **Trust and familiarity:** People often feel more comfortable obtaining a pet from someone they know and trust, who may have firsthand knowledge of the pet’s history, temperament and health.
- **Shelter capacity constraints:** The increasing capacity challenges faced by shelters have prompted some organizations to encourage direct rehoming by pet owners. This shift may lead individuals to acquire pets from family or friends who are seeking to rehome pets, or through dedicated online rehoming platforms. This approach can be perceived as a more accessible alternative when traditional shelter intake is limited.



Insider Bites



Stephanie Filer
Executive Director of
Shelter Animals Count

Regional adoption trends show us where progress is being made and where challenges remain. While it’s encouraging to see stable adoption rates, we must continue working to ensure more pets have the opportunity to find and stay in loving homes and look at the data to increase support where needed. ”

A view of future adoption intentions

Likelihood to adopt from a shelter remains high, though there has been a slight directional decline from 66% in 2024 to 63% in 2025. The data continues to prove that getting first-time adopters to engage with shelters is crucial, as previous shelter adopters are significantly more likely to adopt from a shelter again as compared to those who have not adopted from a shelter before.

It is equally important to recognize and actively address the barriers preventing potential adopters from entering shelters in the first place. By reducing operational obstacles and increasing access, shelters can tap into a wider pool of potential adopters and create repeat customers — leading to improved outcomes.

Likelihood to adopt from a shelter/rescue in the future by past adoption experience:

63%

of Americans would adopt from a shelter

80%

of previous shelter adopters would adopt again from a shelter

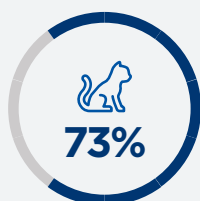
56%

of non-shelter adopters would adopt from a shelter

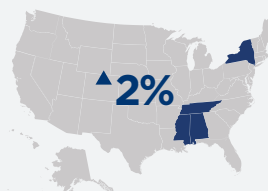


Unlocking Animal Data with Shelter Animals Count

The data highlights that cat adoption rates (adoptions as a percentage of intakes) continue to surpass dog adoption rates across nearly all regions, with the exception of the West South Central region. New England leads with the highest cat adoption rate at 73%, while dog adoption rates are strongest in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions. Overall, adoption trends held steady in most regions. However, New England experienced a slight decline, contrasting with a 2% rise in adoptions for both the Mid-Atlantic and West South Central areas.



New England has the highest cat adoption rate at 73%



Mid-Atlantic and West South Central regions increase by 2% in adoptions



**Insider
Bites**

As someone who has chosen adoption for all three of my current pets, I've personally experienced the power of pet adoption and the mutually beneficial cascade of positive effects it creates. Shelters find renewed capacity to rescue and care for more animals and each adoption boosts community awareness and support. Adopters discover the joy of companionship, experience improved well-being and receive the unconditional love a pet can offer. Choosing adoption creates a brighter future for pets and people together. ”



Yvonne Hsu
President of Hill's Pet Nutrition

The largest opportunity exists with younger individuals, as Gen Z and Millennials show significantly higher likelihood to adopt from shelters or rescues in the future compared to older generations regardless of their previous adoption experience.



**63% of Americans
would adopt from a shelter**

Gen X and Baby Boomers represent potential too, with nearly 3 in 4 previous shelter adopters indicating willingness to adopt again, suggesting they may need incentives or encouragement to return to pet ownership.

Adoption likelihood

(by age & previous adoption experience)

	Total population	Previous shelter adopter	Non-shelter adopter
Total population	63%	80%	56%
Gen Z & Millennials	75%	90%	67%
Gen X & Baby Boomers	55%	72%	47%



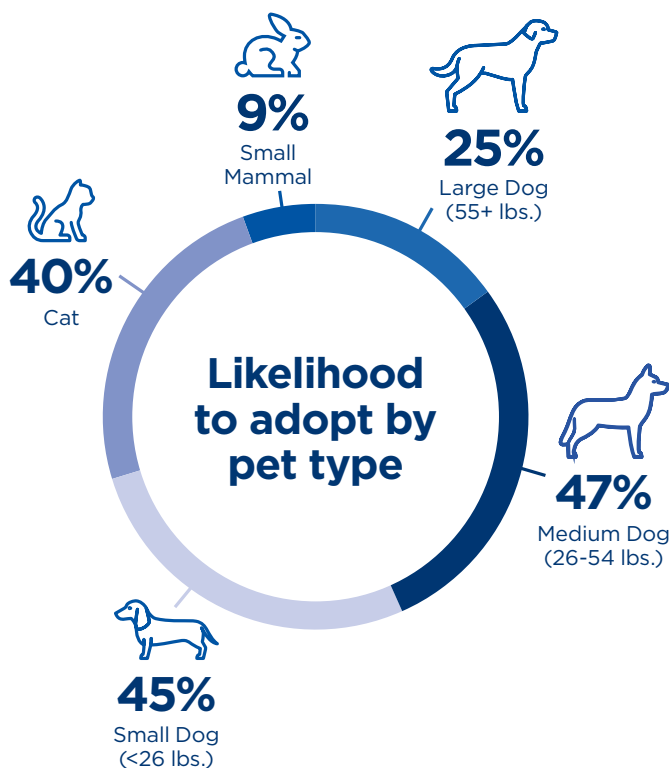
Dr. Steven Hansen, MBA, CAWA
Diplomate, American College of Animal Welfare
President & CEO of Arizona Humane Society

In 2024, we cared for over 22,000 pets, the highest number in over a decade. Population growth, rising home prices, evictions and a shortage of affordable pet care are all factors. As pet owners face ongoing challenges, our team is committed to adapting and meeting these new demands. We've focused on placing large dogs in homes with \$0 adoption fees for those over 50 pounds and have made an effort to get more dogs out of the shelter and into the community where they are much more likely to meet their new family. Our Foster Heroes, Field Trips and adoption events have been instrumental, helping reduce the average length of stay for all dogs from 12.18 to 8.75 days year-over-year.

”

Preferred pets for future adoption

Consistent with 2024, Americans lean toward medium dogs, small dogs and cats for their future shelter pets.



Generational differences in positive perceptions of shelters

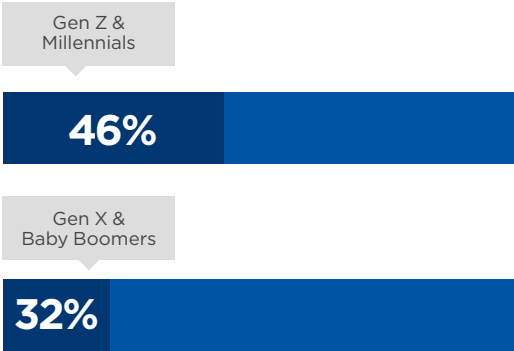
Americans have favorable attitudes toward shelters when it comes to keeping pets healthy before and after adoption. However, there are differences in attitudes when split generationally. Based on generalized Gen Z and Millennial behavior, they tend to be passionate about social issues and happenings, and may evaluate shelters with a more critical eye than older generations.

	Total population agrees	Gen Z & Millennials agree	Gen X & Baby Boomers agree
Shelters do everything they can to make sure pets are vaccinated before adoption	76%	71%	80%
Shelters do everything they can to ensure adoptable pets are healthy	72%	66%	77%
Shelters provide all the necessary information to keep adopted pets healthy	62%	61%	63%

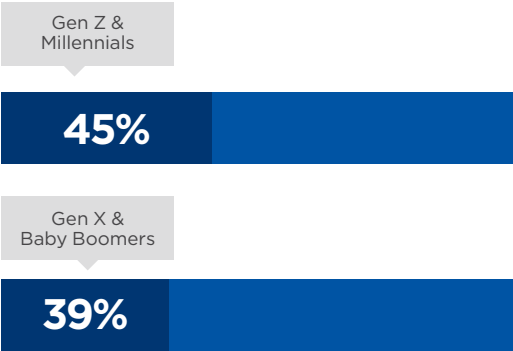
Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to be skeptical about the care pets receive before adoption compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers. While younger Americans are more likely to be wary of pre-adoption care, they are significantly more likely to agree that shelters provide post-adoption support for housing restrictions, health issues, behavioral problems, veterinary care and pet food insecurity.

Generational perceptions of shelter support:

Agree that shelters help navigate housing restrictions



Agree that shelters offer post-adoption health support



Generational perceptions of shelter support:

Agree that shelters offer post-adoption behavioral support

Gen Z & Millennials

44%

Gen X & Baby Boomers

35%

Agree that shelters provide financial assistance for adoption fees & vet care

Gen Z & Millennials

41%

Gen X & Baby Boomers

27%

Agree that shelters provide food pantry support

Gen Z & Millennials

38%

Gen X & Baby Boomers

26%





Chelsie Estey, MSc, DVM, DACVIM
(Neurology)
U.S. Chief Veterinary Officer of
Hill's Pet Nutrition

As an industry, we can work to help bust the myth that all shelter pets have behavioral issues. Oftentimes, shelter pets leave the familiar shelter environment, and enter their new homes with stress about the unknown. This can lead to GI upset, which may result in accidents in the home. These 'behaviors' are often ones that adopters may label as unfixable, when they could be supported with veterinary care and consistent nutrition. This is why Hill's is proud to provide food to shelters through the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love Program to help pets through the transition from shelter to home.



Beyond financial concerns: Reasons behind not choosing shelters for pet acquisition

Breed preference has remained the leading non-financial barrier to shelter adoption, showing a significant increase from last year. Following closely are concerns about perceived behavioral issues, which present an actionable opportunity for shelters. Enhancing and promoting both pre-adoption and post-adoption behavioral support programs could effectively address this barrier and encourage more potential adopters to choose shelter pets.

Reasons for not adopting from shelter

	2024	2025
Wanted a specific breed not at shelter	18%	22%
Concerned about behavioral issues of shelter pets	14%	19%
Not aware of any shelters/rescues nearby	14%	15%
Concerned about the health of shelter pets	12%	11%
Wanted a specific size of pet not at shelter	11%	11%

Shelter awareness presents a significant challenge, particularly among younger Americans. While 10% of Gen X and Baby Boomer respondents stated they were not aware of any nearby shelters or rescues, this figure jumps by 11 percentage points among Gen Z and Millennials.



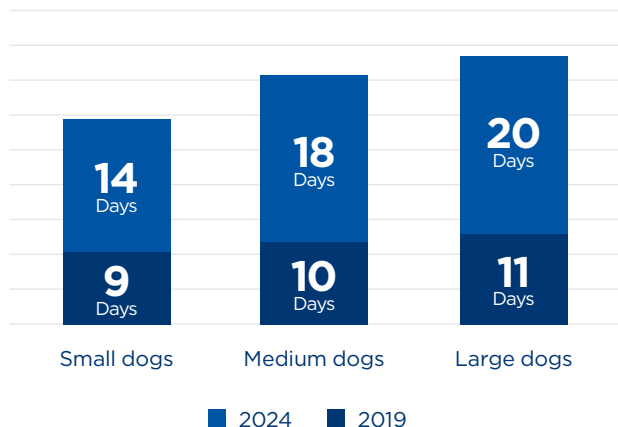
1 in 5 Gen Z & Millennial Americans are unaware of shelters nearby



Large dog adoptions continue to lag behind the pack

Data from Shelter Animals Count shows us that large dogs are experiencing longer median lengths of stay as opposed to small dogs, medium dogs and cats. In fact, it has nearly doubled since 2019.

Median length of stay increases for dogs until adoption*



*Data provided by Shelter Animals Count



Unlocking Animal Data with Shelter Animals Count

The median length of stay for dogs until adoption has significantly increased since 2019, highlighting growing challenges in the sheltering system. Small dogs now stay in shelters five days longer on average, while medium and large dogs are experiencing length-of-stay increases of eight and nine days, respectively. These trends indicate that shelters and rescues are facing ongoing capacity issues, making it more critical than ever to focus on adoption efforts, foster programs and community support to move dogs into homes faster.



Stephanie Filer
Executive Director
of Shelter Animals Count

“

This extended length of stay puts additional strain on already-full shelters and delays lifesaving outcomes. To help more pets find homes faster, we must focus on reducing barriers to adoption and fostering, making it easier for families to welcome a pet into their lives.



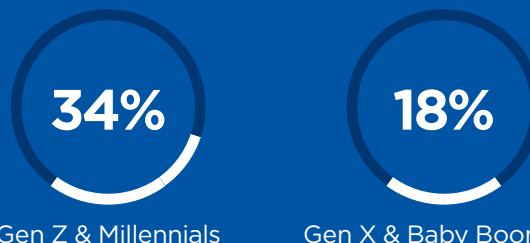
Sharon A. Harvey
President & CEO of
Cleveland Animal
Protective League

Large dogs continue to spend more time in our care, but there's no one reason why. Between difficulty getting veterinary appointments, especially for new patients, rental barriers caused by housing restrictions related to large dogs, and the influence of current economic factors on the affordability of caring for large dogs — food, veterinary care, pet-friendly housing, daycare, pet sitting costs — it all adds up to the likelihood that adopters are thinking long and hard before adding a large dog to their family.



While only a quarter of Americans are likely to adopt a large dog, there's encouraging news among younger generations. One in three Gen Z and Millennials are likely to adopt a large dog, significantly outpacing the adoption interest shown by Gen X and Baby Boomers.

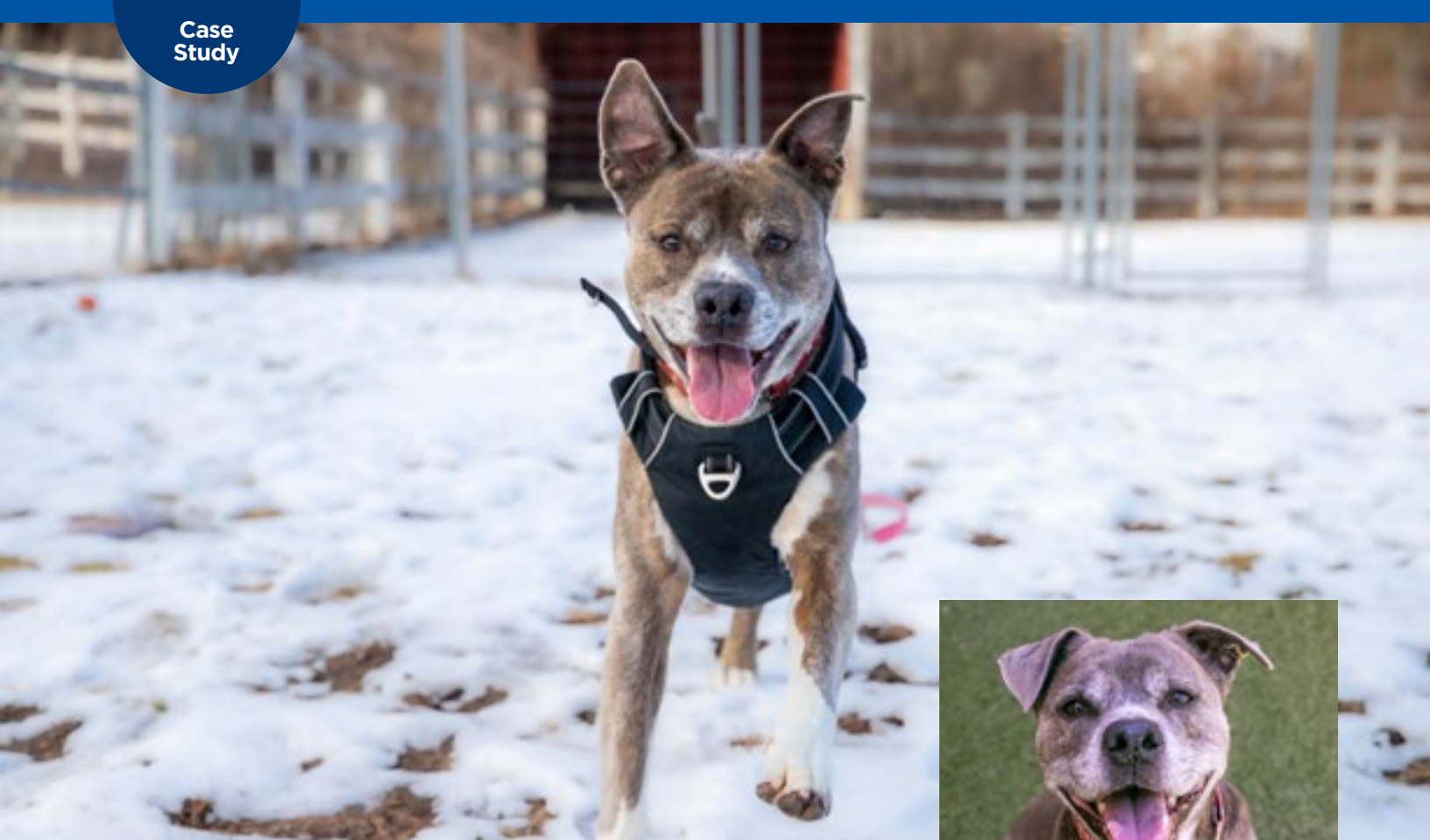
Likelihood to adopt a large dog by age



Unpacking the drivers of the large dog crisis

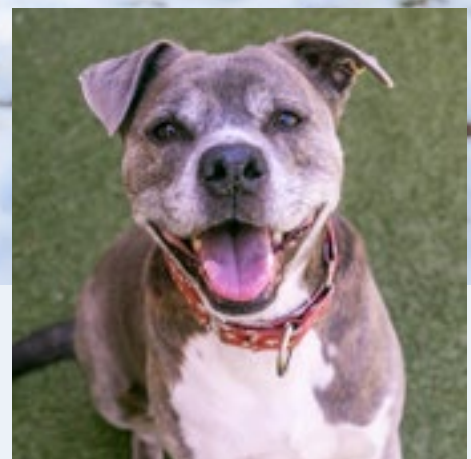
The majority of Americans say that their likelihood to adopt a small or medium dog is a matter of personal preference. Other chief concerns revolve around space concerns, travel difficulties, housing restrictions, cost implications and behavioral perceptions.

Personal preference for small/medium dog	60%
Large dogs take up too much space	27%
It is difficult to travel with large dogs	27%
Housing doesn't allow large dogs	24%
Large dogs are too expensive to feed	18%
Large dogs require expensive veterinary care	13%
Large dogs are too energetic	12%
Large dogs are more difficult to train	8%
Large dogs are hard to manage	5%



Jeff's Fund: Removing Barriers for Harder-to-Place Animals

Recognizing the challenges of finding homes for harder-to-place animals, particularly large dogs with behavioral quirks, The Animal Rescue League of Boston established Jeff's Fund in 2024. Named in honor of Jeff (seen above), a large mixed-breed dog who faced his own adoption challenges, this “pay it forward” program sponsors adoption fees, removing a key financial barrier for potential adopters. Since its inception, Jeff's Fund has helped over 40 animals find loving homes, demonstrating its effectiveness in giving deserving dogs like Jeff a second chance.



Large dogs experience a longer length of stay at our shelters due to several factors. Housing restrictions are the biggest barrier. Breed restrictions, weight restrictions, landlord policies and insurance restrictions often target larger dogs.



Edward Schettino DVM, PhD, CAWA
President & CEO of Animal Rescue
League of Boston

Drivers of the surge in cat adoptions

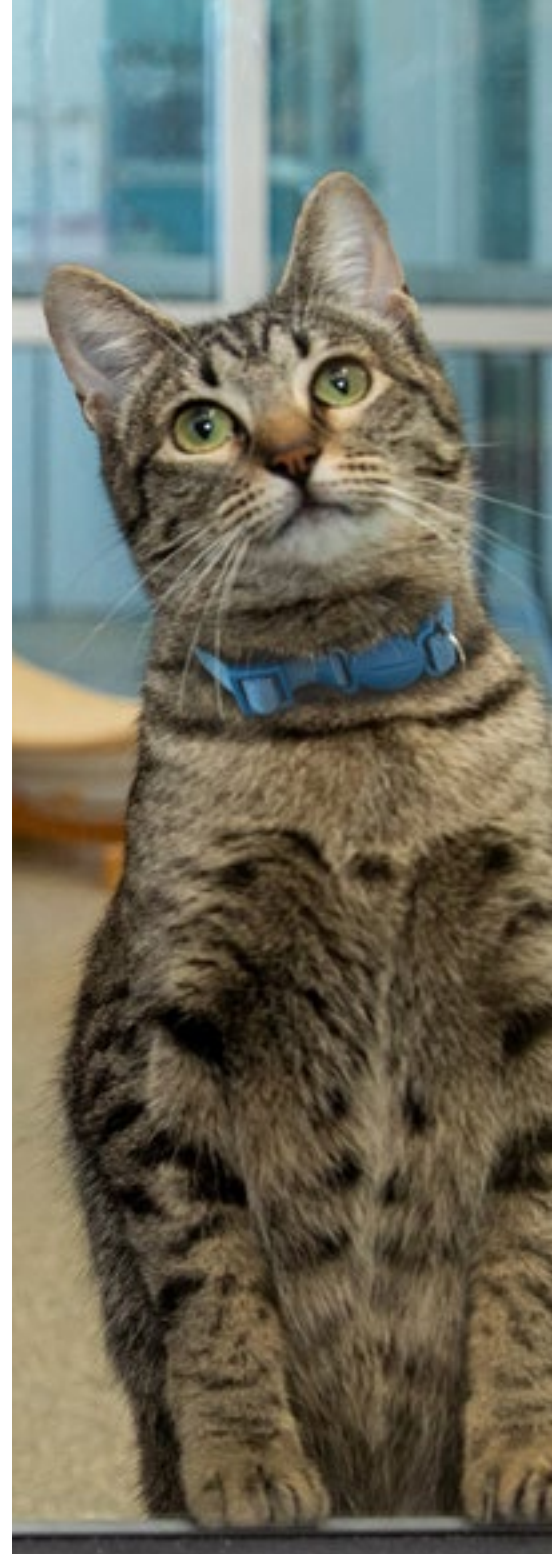
Cats are gaining popularity, with Shelter Animals Count data revealing a 2% increase in adoption rates since 2023 and a 7% increase since 2019, suggesting cats entering shelters in 2024 have improved chances of finding homes compared to previous years.



Unlocking Animal Data with Shelter Animals Count

Since 2019, median length of stay for cats of all ages in shelters has decreased, with juvenile and adult cats moving into homes slightly faster. While senior cats still face the longest shelter stays, their reduced time spent in care signals progress. These trends indicate more effective placement strategies by shelters, though continued efforts are needed to support the adoption prospects for older felines.

In shelters across the U.S., cats have been moving faster than ever. There has been a slight directional increase in the likelihood of cat adoption year-over-year, with 40% of respondents reporting that they'd be likely to adopt a cat (from 39% in 2024). When looking at age groups, Gen X and Baby Boomers are significantly less likely to adopt a cat compared to younger generations.

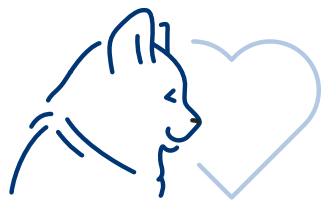


Insider Bites

Our cat adoptions in FY2023-2024 more than doubled the number of dogs and puppy adoptions (1,844 vs 859). We surmise that adopters may feel that felines require less attention, space and care compared to dogs. Also, renters seem to have more luck in finding pet-friendly housing with cats rather than dogs. ”



Nancy B. McKenney, MNPL, CAWA
President & CEO of Marin Humane



Unlike dogs, the primary appeal of cats lies in their self-sufficiency, followed by personal preference. Their indoor lifestyle, minimal space requirements, self-grooming habits and perceived lower ownership costs further contribute to their popularity.

Year-over-year, when asked to select all that apply, reasons for preferring cats have stayed consistent.

Reasons for preferring cats in 2025

Cats are self-sufficient	62%
Personal preference	58%
Cats don't require an outdoor area	36%
Cats require less space	33%
Cats groom themselves	33%
Cats have a lower ownership cost	25%

Likelihood to adopt a cat by age

40%

Total Population

42%

Gen Z & Millennials

37%

Gen X & Baby Boomers



Section 2

Breaking Down Barriers to Adoption

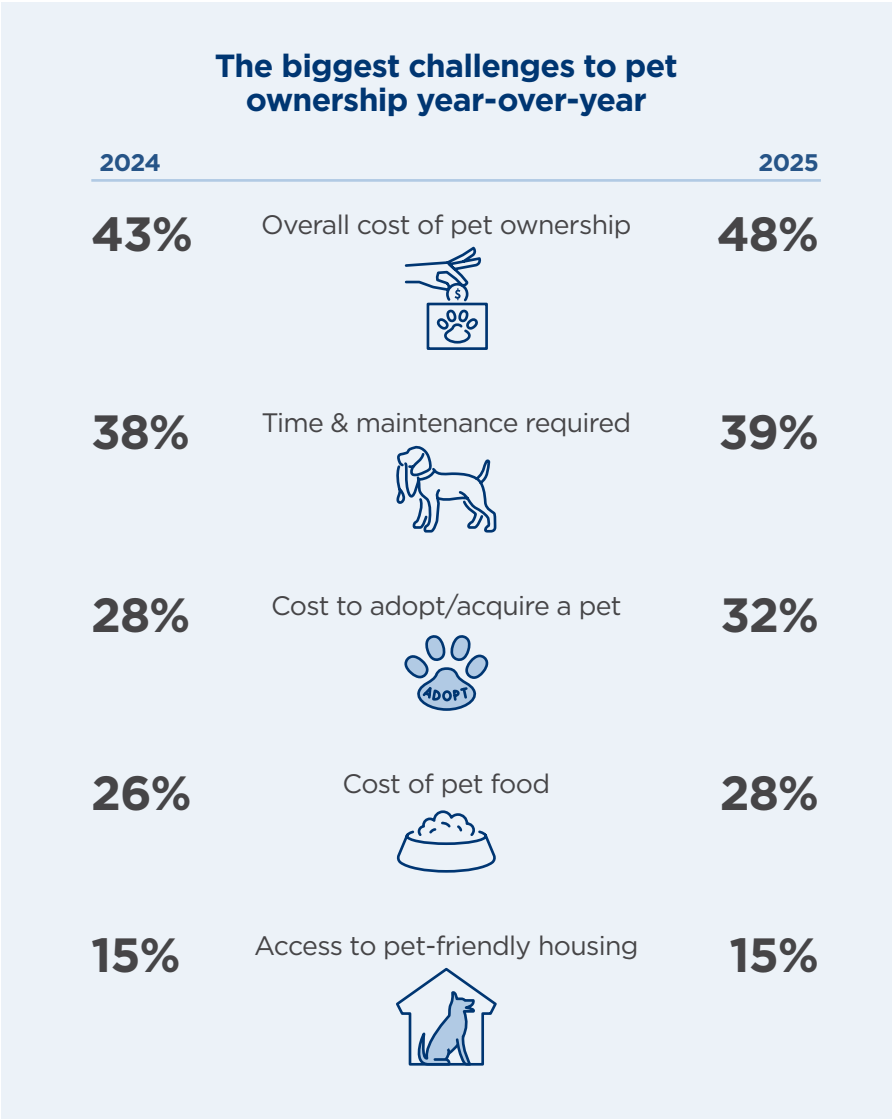
Top challenges to pet ownership

For many Americans, the dream of pet ownership is often met with significant financial and housing barriers. The rising concern over the cost of pet ownership is a significant hurdle, with younger Americans facing additional challenges related to housing and access to veterinary care.

Three of the top five barriers to pet ownership are financial

When asked to choose the biggest challenges of pet ownership, the overall cost of pet ownership was the top concern of almost half of respondents, a significant 5% increase from 2024 which could be partially attributed to the current state of the economy and inflation.

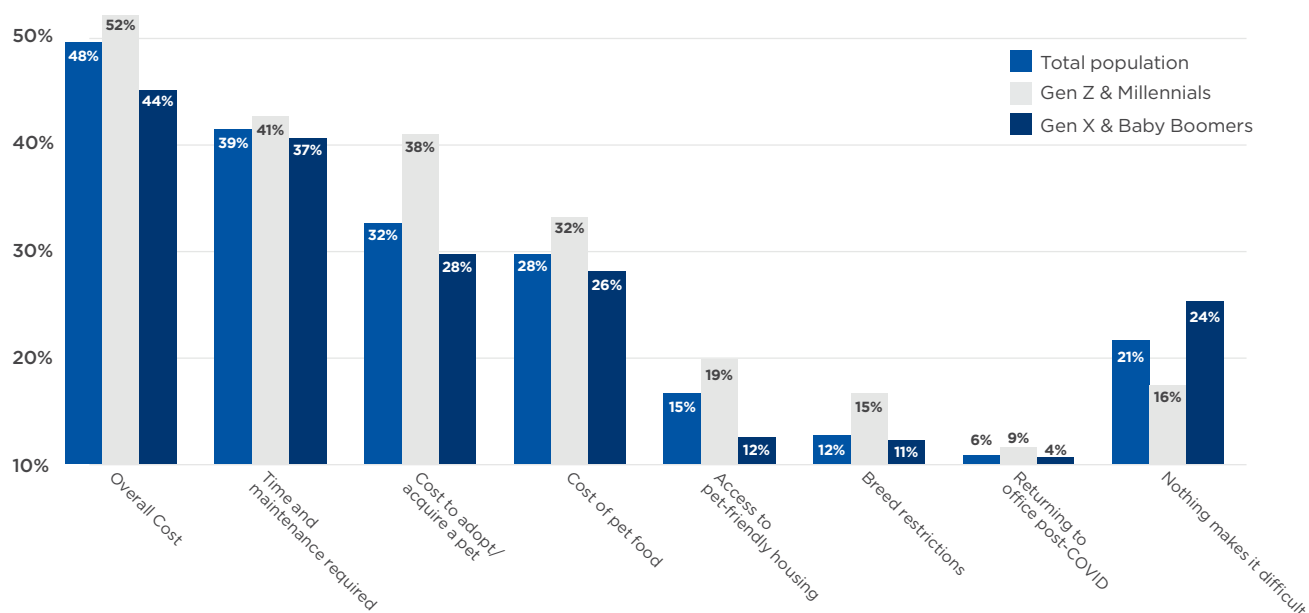
Since 2024, the time and maintenance required for pet ownership has consistently ranked as the second-highest reported challenge among respondents. This finding may reflect the pressure pet parents feel to give more love than humanly possible to their companions. Meanwhile, the cost to adopt/acquire a pet has grown increasingly worrisome for potential pet owners.



Younger generations report greater challenges with pet ownership

Overall cost, housing access and transportation are more significant barriers for younger Americans. The data reveals that access to pet-friendly housing, proximity/availability of veterinary care, breed restrictions, transportation to and from the veterinarian, and returning to office post-COVID are significantly greater concerns for Gen Z and Millennials compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers.

Biggest challenges of pet ownership by age



It is important to note that existing pet owners are more likely than non-owners to report 'nothing makes pet ownership difficult.' In fact, 25% of current pet owners agree with this statement, compared to 14% of those who have never owned a pet. This suggests that the actual experience of pet ownership can prove more manageable than anticipated, while non-pet owners may overestimate potential challenges.



Insider Bites



Ellen Taylor, CDEP, CAWA
Chief Operating Officer of
Humane Society of Charlotte

One of the biggest barriers for Charlotte residents is access to affordable veterinary care. Many pet owners delay seeking treatment due to financial concerns or fear of judgment. At HSC, we are committed to providing low-cost, high-quality veterinary services in a judgment-free environment. We launched booster vaccination appointments in 2024, which has helped hundreds of pets stay up to date on vaccinations while also allowing staff to engage with clients in a new way and develop valuable skills. It's a win for pets, owners and our team.



Veterinary care continues to be perceived as the most expensive part of pet ownership

When asked to choose the top three most expensive parts of pet ownership, year-over-year, the cost of veterinary care, pet food and pet insurance top the list. Americans in 2025 are significantly more likely to say veterinary care is the most expensive part of pet ownership compared to 2024.

Frequency of selection for the top-three pet owner expenses	2024	2025
Veterinary care	84%	87%
Pet food/nutrition	67%	68%
Pet insurance	35%	35%
Grooming	31%	30%
Pet accessories (clothes, collars, etc.)	15%	12%
Toys/enrichment	9%	9%

Shows top four and bottom two selections from available options to reflect the most significant responses.



PetSmart Charities on the Veterinary Care Gap

The [PetSmart Charities-Gallup State of Pet Care](#) study found, similar to this report, that veterinary care is out of reach for many pet owners. Just over half of pet parents — 52% — have not brought their pets to the veterinarian within the past year, even when they felt the pet needed care.



Aimee Gilbreath, MBA
President of PetSmart Charities



In our recent report, [PetSmart Charities-Gallup State of Pet Care: Pet Parents' Perspective on American Veterinary Care](#), more than half (52%) of pet parents reported skipping or declining needed veterinary care. Financial considerations were cited as the biggest deterrents, and the consequences for pets and people can be dire. Small problems get worse, compounding both the suffering and the cost. And in some cases, pet parents are forced to surrender their beloved pets. Given this urgent need for low-cost, accessible care, shelters should consider expanding offerings to include low-cost veterinary care services to meet the needs of all family members.

Housing restrictions & the importance of pet-friendly housing

An analysis of housing status shows 65% of respondents are homeowners, though this figure can be broken down to important age-related differences.

Housing breakdown by age



Single-family home

Gen Z & Millennials	64%
Gen X & Baby Boomers	71%



Apartment

Gen Z & Millennials	22%
Gen X & Baby Boomers	14%

The [Michelson Found Animals Foundation's Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative](#) study from 2021 reported that 72% of renters struggle to find pet-friendly housing. Additionally, nearly 60% reported that pet-friendly housing is too expensive.

While 91% of respondents stated they lived in housing that allowed pets, Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely to face housing restrictions on pet ownership than Gen X and Baby Boomers.



**Insider
Bites**



Daryl Sprague
Chief Development and
Marketing Officer of The
Animal Foundation

Adoption restrictions, such as showing proof of income, house checks, veterinary references and so on, not only prevent animals from finding loving homes but have also been proven to be an ineffective metric of responsible pet ownership. Such barriers lead to a negative public perception of rescues and shelters.



Pet housing restrictions by age

	Total Population	Gen Z & Millennials	Gen X & Baby Boomers
Pet deposit	17%	21%	13%
Monthly pet fees	13%	20%	10%
Number of pets allowed in the household	13%	17%	10%
Size restrictions	11%	12%	9%
Weight restrictions	8%	11%	6%
No pet restrictions	62%	51%	70%

Of those who surrendered a pet, 21% cited moving to housing that didn't allow their type of pet as a reason for relinquishing.



Of respondents who preferred small or medium dogs over large breeds, nearly 1 in 4 said their housing situation wouldn't allow large dogs.

Access to veterinary care significantly affects adoption decisions

Barriers to adoption extend beyond cost. Respondents with lower incomes often face additional hurdles, including significantly higher concerns about the availability of preventative, sick or urgent vet visits, as well as reliable transportation to vet offices.

Regardless of income, younger Americans are particularly sensitive to the accessibility of veterinary services when considering pet adoption. **Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely than Gen X and Baby Boomers to say that all factors related to access to care strongly affected their likelihood to adopt.**



The impact of access to care on the decision to adopt across income and age groups

	Total	Income < \$50K	Income \$50K+	Gen Z & Millennials	Gen X & Baby Boomers
Cost of veterinary care	64%	65%	64%	68%	62%
Availability of preventative, sick or urgent vet visits	46%	49%	45%	53%	41%
Availability of post-adoption vet visits	44%	44%	43%	51%	39%
Proximity of vet offices to me	40%	40%	40%	45%	35%
Availability of reliable transit to vet	37%	43%	34%	45%	30%
Availability of vet that speaks my first language/language of choice	35%	34%	35%	42%	29%



Humane Society of Greater Kansas City: From Gatekeepers to Bridge Builders

The Humane Society of Greater Kansas City (HSGKC) has remarkably transformed their shelter with a simple philosophy: *trust people, remove barriers and build relationships*. From a shelter that once had a 14-page adoption application and an average length of stay of 257 days, they have evolved into an organization where animals now wait 13 days on average before finding homes.

HSGKC has embraced a barrier-free, relationship-centered model for adoption and fostering, one that relies on pre-adoption counseling and honest conversations about housing restrictions and financial concerns. They prepare adopters for pet ownership realities while empowering them rather than acting as gatekeepers. Their open-door approach has yielded impressive results, with a return rate of just .05% in 2024.

HSGKC's barrier-free philosophy extends beyond adoption through accessible support systems: low-to-no cost veterinary care, vaccine clinics and behavior guidance — not just available to adopters, but to the broader community.

Their 2024 free drive-through vaccination clinic drew a mile-long line, with the first vehicle arriving five hours before opening. This overwhelming response confirmed that when barriers to care are removed, communities eagerly respond. It was not just a service but a signal to continue pursuing barrier-free care and innovative solutions to bridge the gap between need and access.



Sydney Mollentine, CNP
President and CEO of HSGKC



Adoption should be the beginning of a relationship, not the end of a transaction. We're committed to being the bridge between people and pets — not the gate.



Section 3

The Fostering Landscape

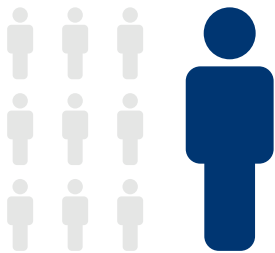
The lifesaving impact of fostering

Fostering represents a bridge in the shelter ecosystem, providing temporary homes for animals while creating capacity within shelters. Americans’ fostering relationship continues to evolve, from awareness and participation rates to barriers and motivations.

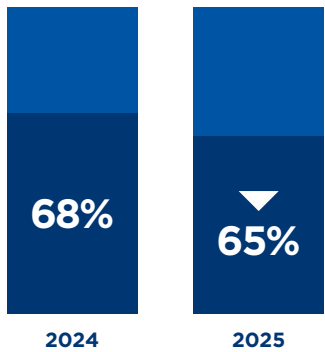
Fosters are the lifeline for shelters and rescues. Without them, shelters would fall deeper into crisis, with capacities stretching further than they already are.

While familiarity with fostering has significantly increased, there has been a notable shift in attitudes and barriers. A key concern is that the positive sentiment toward fostering as a way to try out pet ownership has slightly decreased.

Only 1 in 10 Americans have fostered



Positivity toward fostering as a way to try out pet ownership



Alongside decreased positivity, there has been a significant increase in Americans expressing worry about becoming too attached and adopting the foster pet.

Potential fosters may hesitate to open their homes due to concerns about overall pet ownership costs, fearing they may become emotionally attached and financially responsible for an animal’s care.

Low participation, increasing awareness



Americans have fostered



Americans familiar with fostering but have not fostered



47% of prospective fosters are afraid they will adopt their foster pet, an increase of 7 percentage points from 2024.

While the overall cost of pet ownership might indirectly deter fostering, shelters can help people become comfortable with the process by highlighting the unique opportunity to enjoy pet companionship without long-term commitment.

Shelters should continue to emphasize that fostering is typically cost-free, offering a risk-free way to welcome animals into one’s home. Shelters can also reassure potential foster parents that temporary care is the intended purpose of fostering, helping to alleviate concerns about future adoption expectations or financial commitments.

Attachment and affordability grow as barriers to becoming a foster parent

The largest factor holding Americans back from fostering is the fear of getting too attached and adopting the pet. However, there are other factors at play, most notably cost implications, time constraints and space concerns.

Barriers for prospective fosters

Afraid they will end up adopting their foster pet	47%
Already have pets and don’t have space for another	28%
Do not have time to spend with a foster pet	25%
Cannot afford a foster pet	21%
Already have pets and would have to keep them separate	20%
...	
Don’t know what support shelters provide for fostering	12%



Lower barriers to fostering for Gen Z and Millennials

Gen Z and Millennials face fewer fostering barriers. They are less concerned than Gen X and Baby Boomers about the fear of “foster failing” (or adopting a foster pet) and its long-term financial, emotional and time commitments.

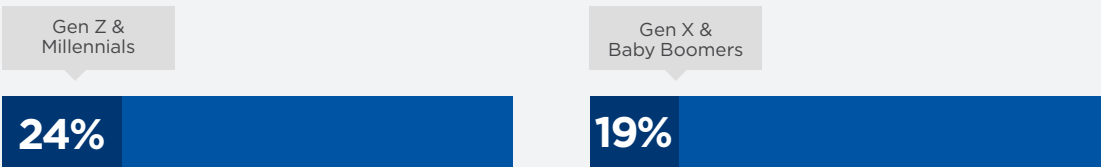
Fear of adopting foster pet by generation



Misconceptions about fostering affordability

Affordability is a concern for **one out of every five prospective fosters**. In the vast majority of cases, shelters and rescues cover the cost of foster care, which presents an opportunity for more education on the topic.

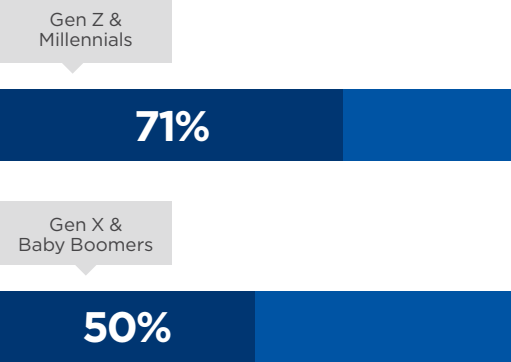
Concern about the affordability of fostering by generation



3 in 5 Americans are likely to foster if costs were covered (59%, down from 64% in 2024), underscoring that the fear of long-term commitment, not short-term cost, remains the top fostering barrier.

When splitting into age groups, Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely than older generations to foster if care costs are covered.

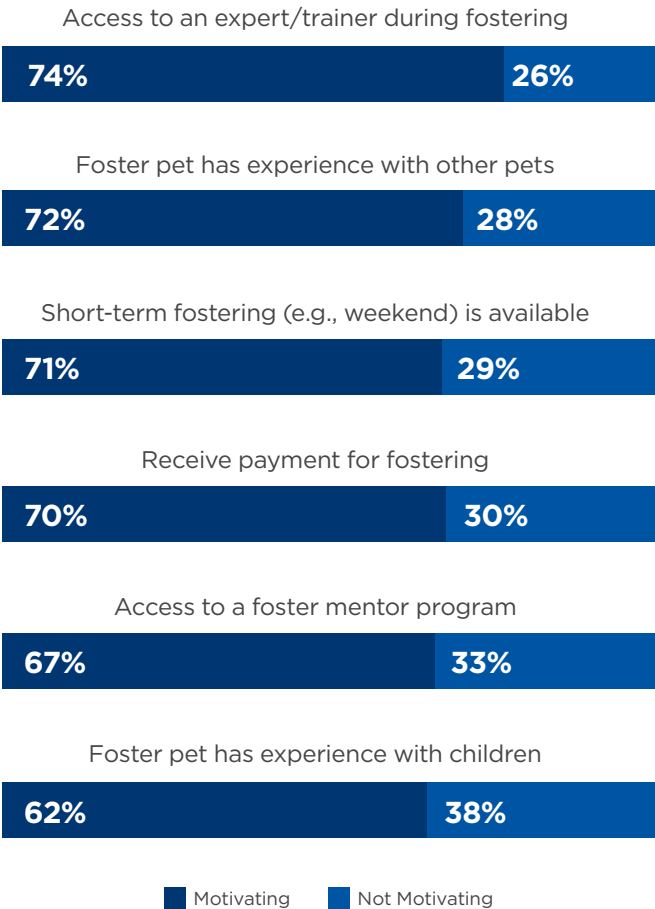
Likelihood to foster if care costs are covered



Access to foster experts & trainers is top motivator

Outside of covered costs, Americans are highly motivated by having access to a foster expert or trainer to provide guidance through the fostering process.

Motivating factors to fostering



Insider Bites



Our most successful initiative is our Borrow-A-Buddy field trip and sleepover fostering program. It’s designed to make fostering approachable and accessible, even for people who can’t commit to long-term care. Short-term fostering provides valuable insights into how pets behave outside the shelter environment — information that’s critical in finding them the right homes.



Sarah Sheek
Senior Director of Lifesaving
Operations of SPCA of Texas

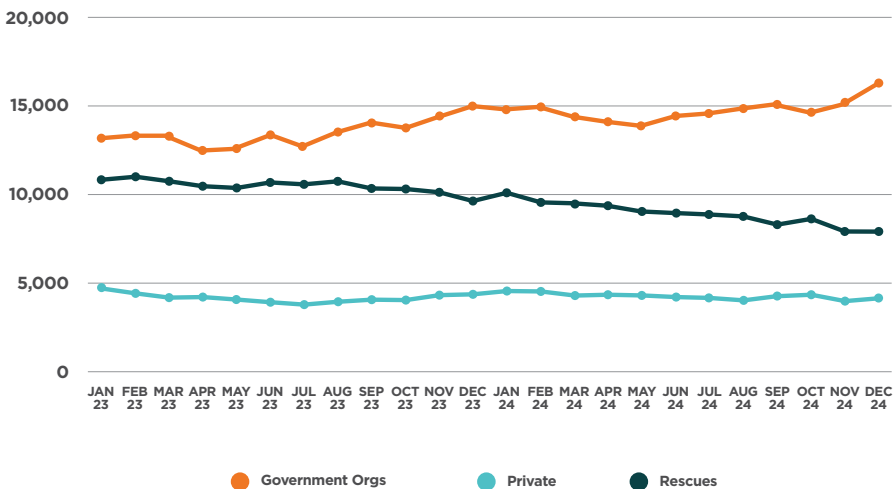


Unlocking Animal Data with Shelter Animals Count

According to Shelter Animals Count, 2024 data reveals nuanced trends across different organization types, but overall monthly dog foster counts showed a slight decline compared to 2023. The most dramatic shift occurred among rescue groups, which experienced a substantial 27% decrease in foster numbers over a two-year period — from 10,823 dogs in foster care in January 2023 to just 7,929 by December 2024. In contrast, government shelters increased their reliance on foster care, with December 2023 ending with 14,873 dogs in foster care compared to 16,148 in December 2024, a 9% increase year-over-year. This shift highlights the growing need for community-based support as shelters continue to face intake pressures and capacity challenges.



Foster analysis



Data from Shelter Animals Count shows dog foster counts at the end of each month.



Kristen Jahnke, CAVA
Vice President of Operations of
Humane Society of Silicon Valley



We run an all-volunteer Foster Animal Vaccination Station (FAVS), which provides vaccines, supplies and ongoing support for the 3,000+ animals we send to foster each year. We've seen success with open house-style fostering events, where new and current foster parents can meet a variety of animals in need of foster homes. For our behavior animals especially, it's been crucial to first help foster parents build strong relationships with our team — establishing that connection to support and resources even before the animal goes home.



Building (and retaining!) a successful foster network

By Hannah Shaw, Kitten Lady

An animal shelter is more than a building; it's a community resource that expands its impact by reaching into the living rooms and loving arms of everyday people. Some of our most vulnerable populations, like neonatal kittens, are entirely dependent on the engagement of the public. As we aim to build resources for the tiniest beings in our care, one question commonly arises: How can we recruit more foster parents?

There are certainly answers. Diversion programs show that around 30% of kitten finders will agree to foster if provided with resources. Kitten showers, media outreach and clever marketing can spark new interest. Streamlined systems can reduce barriers to entry. But as we aim to recruit, we ought to think doubly about how to retain.

Because the skills of foster parents grow through experience, it's arguably more vital to keep an existing foster than to recruit a newcomer. A 2024 survey of shelter foster parents showed two predominant answers to the question "What would help you continue fostering kittens?": timely medical care (21%) and more training and mentorship (20%.) Simply put, foster parents want to know that shelters will provide them with both the information and veterinary access needed to succeed.

In tasking the public with the care of such fragile beings as kittens — who are both more susceptible to illness and have a faster rate of decline than adults — it's essential to provide swift intervention. Shelter Animals Count's 2024 data reveals a worrying trend: over 43% of 0-8-week-old kittens who died did so unassisted (compared to 11% of adult cats), reinforcing that foster

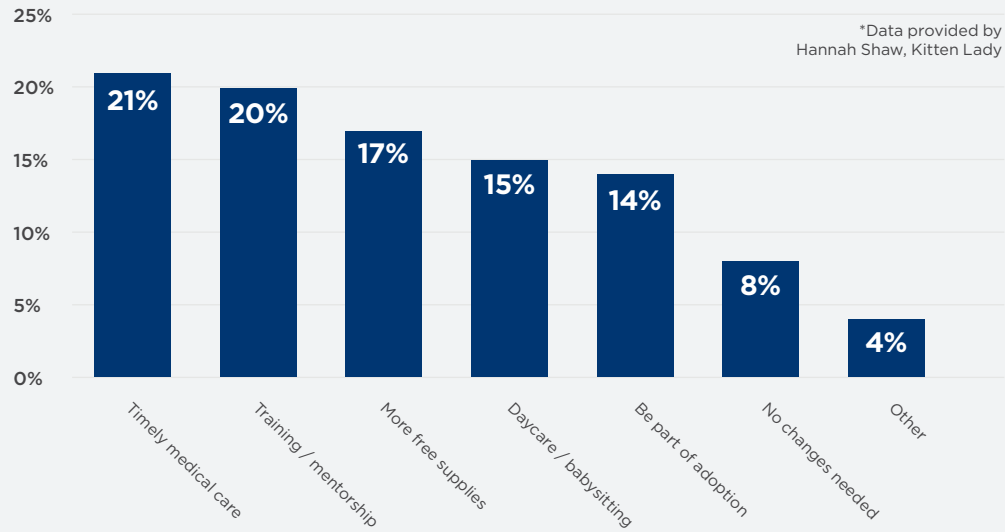
parents may struggle both with medical access and with the training to recognize signs of decline. Combined with data showing that only a third of foster parents feel they've received sufficient training, our marching orders are clear: increase education and build capacity for timely care.

Fortunately, many shelters are enhancing their foster programs like never before. Continuing education, daycare programs, online toolkits and volunteer recognition are proving to be lifesaving strategies. Kitten kits are now so common that 85% of shelter foster parents report receiving free supplies, significantly lowering financial barriers to fostering. By surveying our communities, examining our data and identifying opportunity gaps, we're moving as an industry toward evidence-based approaches that equip the public with the tools they need, and empower them to join us in saving lives!

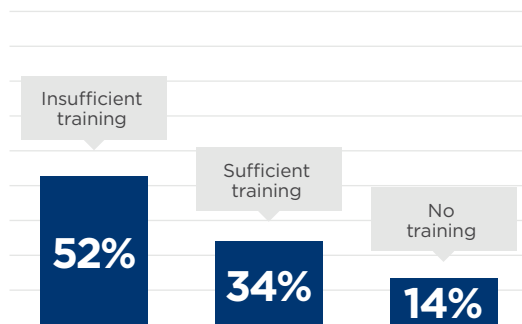


Shelter kitten foster parent survey*

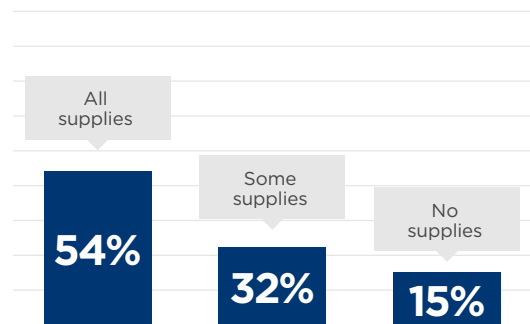
What would help you continue fostering kittens?



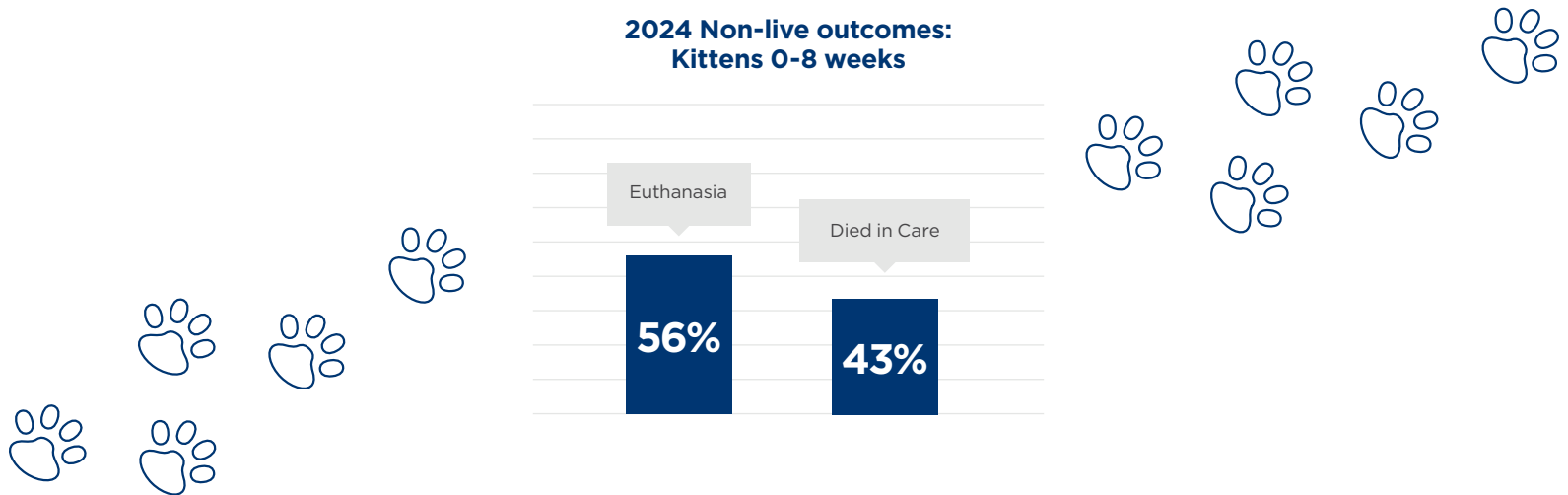
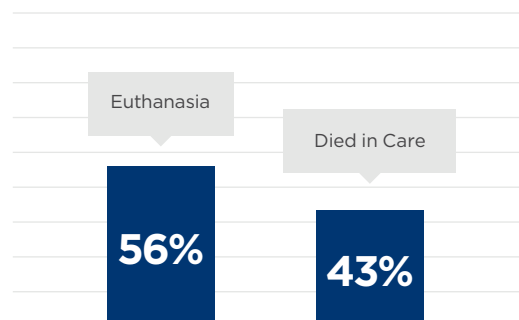
The shelter provided me with sufficient training to care for my foster kitten



The shelter provided all the supplies I needed to care for my foster kitten



2024 Non-live outcomes:
Kittens 0-8 weeks



Helping the most vulnerable population

Orphan Kitten Club is a national 501c3 non-profit on a mission to save the most vulnerable felines: neonatal kittens. We're increasing live outcomes for kittens through targeted grants and mentorship for over 100 shelter partners across America, impacting 50,000 kittens and counting!

In running a grant program focused solely on kittens, we've learned what drives maximal lifesaving. We see the greatest returns by investing not in 24-hour nurseries, but in robust foster programs backed by overnight support and kitten-focused staffing.

When supporting strong foster programs, around-the-clock assistance is proving vital. At Companion Animal Alliance, we funded an overnight hospital partnership resulting in a 62% decrease in kitten deaths. At Michigan Humane, a telehealth grant was a valuable form of support with 189 kitten fosters receiving teletriage services.

Perhaps the most transformative grants are those that fund people power. At Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter, funding for two Kitten Care Specialists helped support over 1,500 kittens in foster care. A Kitten Lifesaving Coordinator at The Runaways nearly doubled their neonatal foster network. Flexible staffing, like PRN roles and staff stipends for overnight care, has proven to create critical safety nets.

As a donor-funded organization, we take great care to ensure each dollar goes as far as it can. It's clear that strategic investment in staff and foster support may be the most critical scaffolding that makes kitten lifesaving possible. When we support the people behind the care, we build the foundation for every kitten to thrive. Learn more about Orphan Kitten Club [here](#).



At Michigan Humane, a telehealth grant was a valuable form of support; 189 kitten fosters received teletriage services, which the shelter reports significantly improved the foster experience and reduced stress on clinic staff.

Hannah Shaw
Kitten Lady & founder of Orphan Kitten Club



Section 4

The Adoption Experience & Surrender Circumstances

How adopters discover information about shelters

The adoption experience begins before an adopter walks through the doors of a shelter. It starts with how adopters get their information about local shelters and the programs they offer.

Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely than Gen X and Baby Boomers to receive their news from social media (44% vs. 27%). Word of mouth remains the most popular source of information about shelters.

With 1 in 5 Gen Z and Millennials unaware of shelters nearby, the data suggests an opportunity for targeted outreach through social media and digital platforms where younger demographics are active.

Top 5 sources of information about shelters

1	Word of mouth	41%
2	Social media	34%
3	Shelter website(s)	32%
4	Local events	19%
5	Local broadcast news	17%





Pasadena Humane's Heroic Response to the 2025 California Wildfires

Pasadena Humane's response to the Eaton Fire was a powerful reminder of what's possible when compassion meets collaboration. In the face of a natural disaster, it takes a united effort — teams working side by side, partners stepping up without hesitation and a community ready to rally behind a shared mission.

When the fire broke out on the night of January 7, no one could have predicted its scale. By morning, hundreds of animals had arrived at their doors, with more on the way. Over the following days and weeks, Pasadena Humane took in more than 1,500 animals — through emergency boarding, stray intake and owner surrender.

To make space, they had to get creative. Shelters across California stepped up to take in all the adoptable animals at the shelter before the fire. Pasadena Humane converted their public

spay/neuter clinic into kennel space and set up pop-up crates in training rooms. Volunteers, veterinary teams and national animal welfare groups arrived to help provide daily care, enrichment and medical support.

Pasadena Humane's response was swift and resulted in the lives of thousands of animals being saved. Pets, livestock and wildlife arrived in critical condition, suffering from severe burns and smoke inhalation. Their ICU became a burn ward, where staff and veterinary partners worked tirelessly to stabilize, treat and comfort the most severely injured animals.

Angel, a 4-month-old kitten, was one of them. Rescued from the ruins of a destroyed home, her tiny body was covered in ash and burns. She couldn't walk or open her eyes. But with intensive care, Angel healed — and never stopped showing affection through her daily



bandage changes. No one came forward to identify her as their pet, but once she recovered, Angel found the loving home she so deeply deserved.

A response of this scale was only possible because of the generosity of Pasadena Humane's partners, the dedication of their supporters and the incredible spirit of the California community.

Thousands of people stepped forward to foster, volunteer and donate. Phones rang nonstop. Inboxes overflowed with offers of help. Their parking lot was filled with pet food, crates, blankets and supplies from people who simply wanted to do something — anything — to help. The shelter saw local businesses organize supply drives, children collect donations and companies from across the country host fundraisers to support our response efforts.



Chris Ramon
Interim President & CEO
of Pasadena Humane

In a time of uncertainty and heartbreak, this outpouring of support is what kept Pasadena Humane going and allowed us to truly be there for the animals and people in our devastated community.



The positive impact of shelter staff

Shelter adoptions continue to be a positive experience for most adopters. In 2025, 93% of shelter adopters reported a positive experience, an increase from 90% in 2024.

Shelter adoption confidence also saw a directional increase, with 90% of adopters feeling confident in their decision to adopt, compared to 88% in the previous year.

Positive outcomes are closely linked to the actions of shelter staff. Consistent with last year, shelter adopters felt staff set realistic expectations and understood their needs, with directional positive increases across the board in 2025.



Setting realistic expectations and spending appropriate time with adopters are the strongest drivers of satisfaction

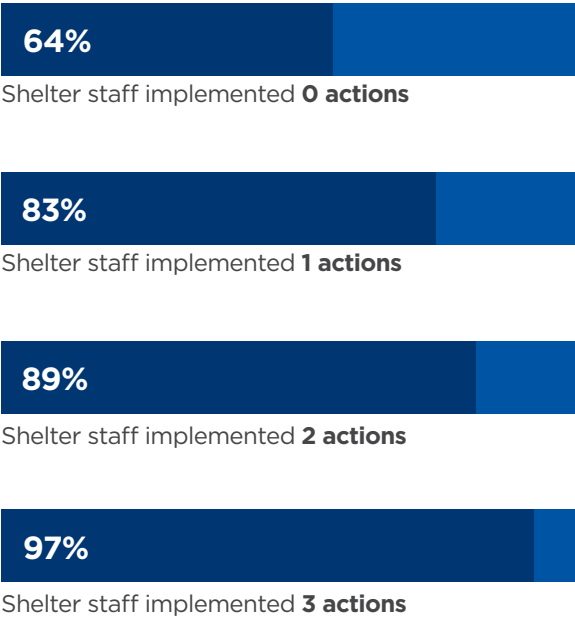
Adoption counselors...	2024	2025
Set realistic expectations about what I experienced with my adopted pet	78%	79%
Spent enough time with me to understand my wants and needs	74%	76%
Able to match me with the right pet for me	73%	75%
Checked in with me personally via email, phone or text after bringing my pet home	61%	61%
Sent me a general, non-personalized follow-up email, voicemail or text after bringing my pet home	54%	54%

The cumulative effect of adoption counselor actions

Shelter staff and adoption counselors play a vital role in shaping positive adoption outcomes and pet retention, and shelters continue to exceed expectations in their communities.

According to respondents, when shelter staff and adoption counselors 1) set realistic expectations, 2) took time to understand their wants and needs, and 3) matched them with the right pet, they were confident in their decision to adopt a pet at a much higher rate than those who did not experience the same level of staff involvement. Confidence increased progressively with each additional positive action experienced, a cumulative effect that demonstrates how each supportive interaction with shelter staff contributes to an adopter’s overall confidence and satisfaction.





Confidence with decision to adopt



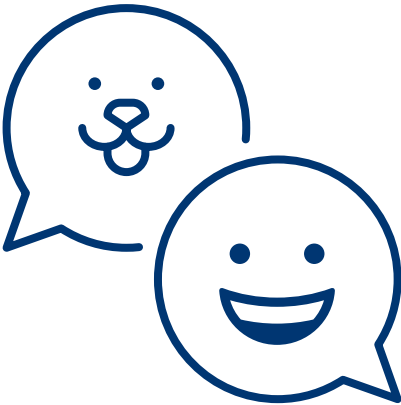
Adoption is tied to positive feelings, but anxiety can happen

Shelter adopters report increasingly positive emotions following adoption. Data reveals significant increases in feelings of happiness (87%) and fulfillment (57%) compared to 2024 levels, suggesting an enhanced emotional connection to the adoption experience.

Positive emotions among shelter adopters

		2024	2025
Happiness		84%	87%
Excitement		58%	60%
Fulfillment		52%	57%
Pride		32%	34%

Age appears to influence the emotional experience of adoption. Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely to feel excited about adoption (70% vs. 52%), though they are also more likely to feel anxious (17% vs. 9%) and fearful (5% vs. 1%) about adoption compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers.

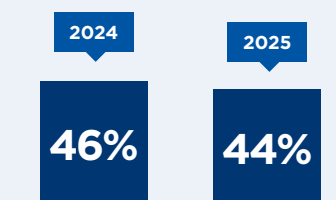




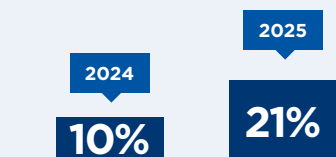
Sources of post-adoption negativity



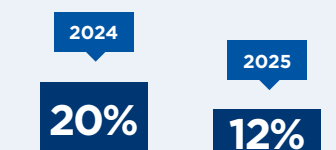
Pet had behavior issues



Time commitment exceeded expectations



Pet had health issue(s)



Sources of anxiety & other negative emotions after adoption

Despite the initial positivity of the adoption experience, negative emotions are expected and natural if challenges occur. In 2025, 18% of adopters reported experiencing at least one negative emotion in the month following adoption — a 2% increase from last year. Among these emotions, anxiety was most commonly reported, followed by frustration, regret, fear and sadness.

Behavioral issues remain the top concern of shelter adopters, cited by 44% as the primary reason for post-adoption negativity. Compared to 2024, there has been a notable increase in adopters feeling negative about the required time commitment, while concerns about pet health issues have significantly decreased. These findings highlight the importance of ongoing post-adoption support and resources for adopters, particularly in addressing behavior issues and managing time commitments.

Post-adoption services lead to increased likelihood of adoption

Nearly 1 in 2 respondents were unsure if shelters offer post-adoption support for health issues or behavior training.

Addressing this gap requires a two-pronged approach: investing in robust post-adoption support programs and ensuring widespread awareness of available resources to both help

drive more adoptions and reduce the number of returns based on initial behavioral concerns.

To understand the impact of service offerings on pet adoption, survey respondents were asked to select which of the services listed, if any, would make them more likely to adopt a certain kind of pet.

Increased likelihood to adopt pet types based on access to services

	Post-adoption behavioral support/training	Post-adoption veterinary care support	Access to a free or discounted pet health insurance plan
Senior pets	15%	33%	33%
Pets with medical conditions	16%	34%	33%
Pets with no known history	29%	36%	30%
Restricted breed	21%	17%	15%
Large pet	21%	21%	22%
Pets with behavioral issues	29%	20%	16%

Insider Bites



Lindsay Hamrick
Director of Shelter Outreach & Engagement of Humane World for Animals

The [Adopters Welcome program](#) revolutionizes animal adoptions by dismantling traditional barriers. It encourages shelters and rescues to move away from restrictive policies and lengthy applications. Instead, focusing on open conversations and accessible marketing helps create a welcoming environment for all potential adopters. This approach celebrates people’s motivation to provide safe and loving homes for pets. By breaking down barriers, shelters and rescues can connect with a wider range of adopters and increase adoptions.



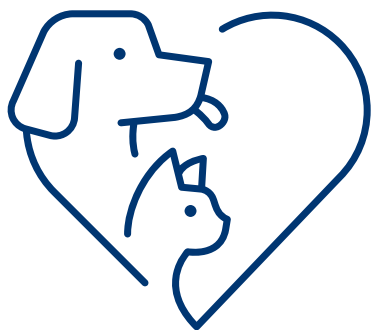
The drivers of pet relinquishment

According to Shelter Animals Count, 29% of shelter animal intakes were relinquished in 2024. This study found that among Americans who had relinquished, housing restrictions consistently remain the top reason for surrender, followed by financial hurdles and training difficulties.

Reasons behind pet relinquishment	
Moved to housing facility that did not allow my type of pet	21%
Financial difficulties	20%
Training issues	16%
Allergies or health issues with myself or cohabitants	14%
Did not get along with other pets in my household	11%

Surrender interventions & diversion strategies

Two-thirds of respondents indicate that supportive measures would help them keep their pet. Specifically, greater access to veterinary and behavioral services were frequently cited as crucial.



Resources that could have prevented relinquishment	
Affordable/free vet services	24%
Support from friends/family	22%
Access to free behavioral training	21%
Financial support for medical issues	20%
Pet sitting/daycare resources	15%

Responses to post-adoption challenges

Among Americans who cited negative feelings after adopting their shelter pets, the majority (53%) worked through issues on their own. While 15% found help with their specific issue, those who sought support also turned to a veterinarian (10%) or a local shelter (6%), who provide crucial post-adoption support.

95% of people considering surrender kept their pets when offered support or resources.



The number of people wanting to surrender their pets continues to increase. In March 2025, our team took 192 calls from owners wanting to surrender their pets. The 192 calls encompassed a total of 299 pets looking to be surrendered, which was a 30% increase from prior month. When owners call about surrendering their pets, we offer multiple resources, whether that be providing food, spay and neuter, or behavior support, to see how we can enable pets to stay in their homes versus being surrendered to a shelter.



Tam Singer
CEO of Great Plains SPCA





Keeping pets and people together through short-term fostering:

Humane Colorado's Pet Assist

Established in 2016, Humane Colorado's Pet Assist provides free, short-term foster care for animals whose owners are facing housing insecurity, domestic violence, injury or illness, and other urgent hardships.

Program participants temporarily relinquish their pet to Humane Colorado's Leslie A. Malone Center, allowing the shelter to provide any necessary medical care before placing the pet in a foster home. This arrangement allows the pet owner to seek housing, refuge or treatment with comfort. They gain peace of mind, knowing their pet is safe with the shelter and its network of foster families, and that they will soon be reunited.

Pet Assist has been praised by volunteers as a relatively easy way to foster, especially for

those with limited experience or who may worry about saying goodbye to an animal with whom they've bonded.

Pet Assist not only keeps pets and people together, but it opens the door for people to experience fostering without the fear of adopting the pet — something nearly half of Americans worry about. Learn more about [Humane Colorado's](#) heroic work.



Apryl Steele, DVM, CAWA
President & CEO of Humane Colorado



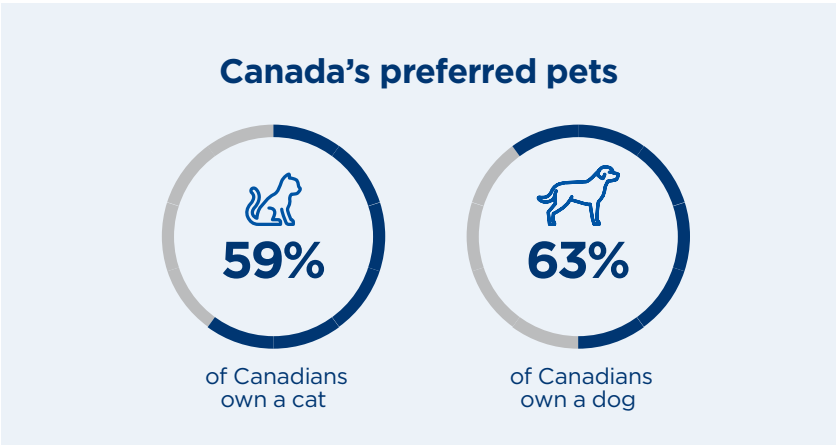
Section 5

The State of Canadian Shelter Pet Adoption

The Canadian adoption landscape



As a way to recognize and provide further support to our animal welfare partners in Canada, our 2025 report now includes new consumer data from this region, expanding our insights across North America.

While Canadians share many similarities with their U.S. counterparts, nuances in data are crucial for understanding the subtle yet meaningful differences in pet adoption patterns, shelter perceptions and overall pet ownership trends that Canadians experience.



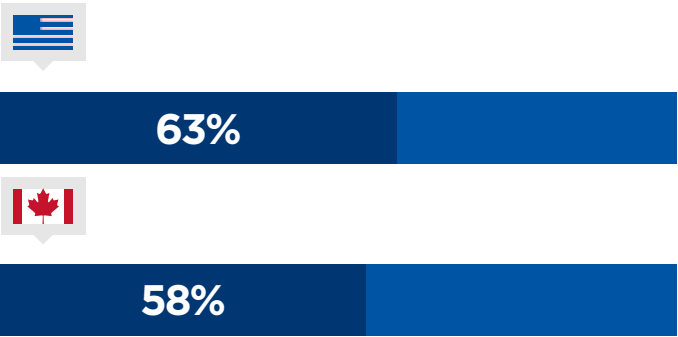
Canadians primarily acquire felines through personal connections, stray rescues and shelters. When obtaining dogs, Canadian pet acquisition shows a stronger preference for formal channels, with breeder purchases being the dominant method, followed by family/friend transfers and shelter adoptions.

Most common Canadian pet acquisition methods

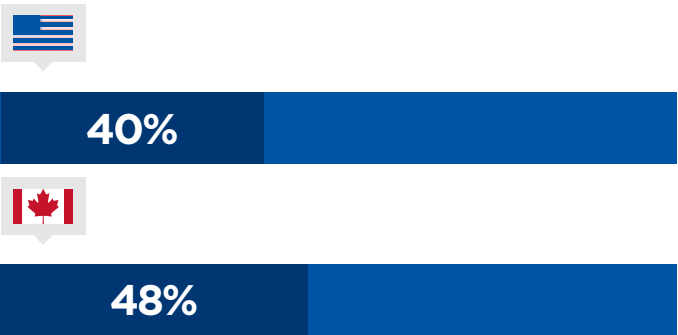
		
Got from family/friend	29%	23%
Found as stray	18%	3%
Adopted from shelter/rescue	14%	15%
Got from breeder	3%	28%
Adopted from shelter at pet store	7%	6%

Canadians' likelihood to adopt


Americans are significantly more likely than Canadians to adopt from a shelter or rescue in the future.



Canadians are more likely to adopt a cat than Americans.



Veterinary care is considered the most expensive part of pet ownership in Canada, followed by nutrition and pet insurance.

	
Veterinary care	83%
Pet food/nutrition	68%
Pet insurance	45%
Grooming	26%
Pet accessories (clothes, collars, etc.)	14%
Toys/enrichment	10%

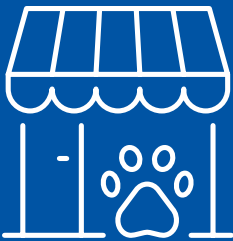
Shows top four and bottom two selections from available options to reflect the most significant responses.



Using an Adopter's Welcome approach, we no longer ask adopters about their housing situation. We alert adopters to the fact that pet policies and requirements may exist and trust them to take it from there. We do see adopters looking specifically for animals that meet their rental requirements, most often size limitations on dogs. We offer a renter's guide, which has a template for pet resumes (a document that tells people more about your pets), sample rental agreements, and answers to FAQs about renting with pets on our website to help pet guardians find pet-friendly housing.

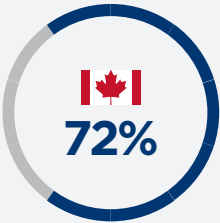
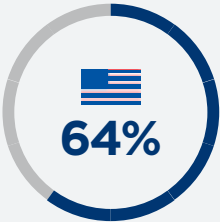


Parm Takhar
Chief of Animal Care Services
of British Columbia SPCA



Veterinary care costs pose a greater adoption barrier for Canadians than Americans.



The cost of veterinary care impacts my decision to adopt



Canadians are less likely than Americans to have faced housing restrictions, like pet deposits, weight restrictions or breed bans.



Housing restrictions by country

		
Pet Deposit	17%	8%
No Pets Allowed	14%	6%
Weight Restrictions	8%	5%
Breed Bans	7%	4%
No pet restrictions	62%	66%



59%
of Canadians feel that
fostering is a positive way to
try out pet ownership

Post-adoption
experiences in Canada

Canadian adopters report high confidence and positivity toward their shelter experiences.



Reported positivity
toward shelter
experiences



Reported
confidence
after adoption



Section 6

Hill's Support of Animal Welfare



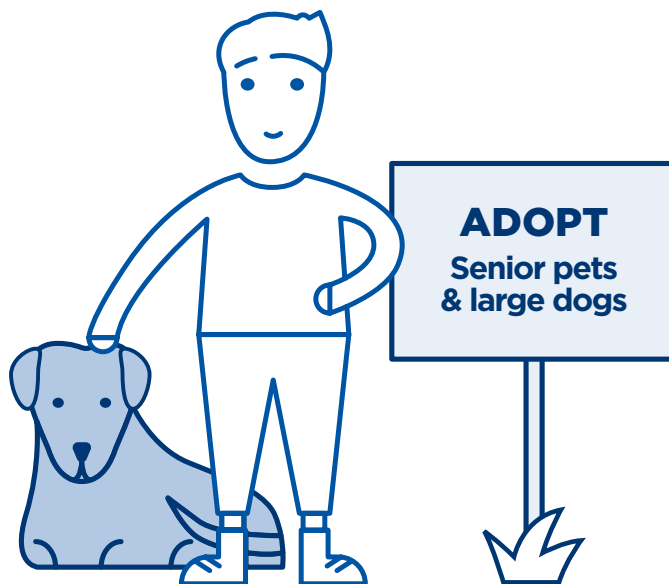
Hill's Support of Animal Welfare

Since 2002, the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love Program (HFSL) has partnered with animal shelters across the country, focusing on the three pillars through actions like: feeding shelter pets, increasing adoptions, improving outcomes, and keeping people and pets together.

The right nutrition can transform how a pet looks, feels and acts — helping make pets happy, healthy and more adoptable. Since its inception, in North America, the program has:



Beyond direct nutritional support, Hill's actively collaborates with non-profits, pet industry partners, veterinary professionals and media organizations to help more pets find loving homes through initiatives designed to help reduce capacity constraints, drive adoptions for harder-to-place animals (senior pets, large dogs, etc.) and boost awareness of critical shelter needs.



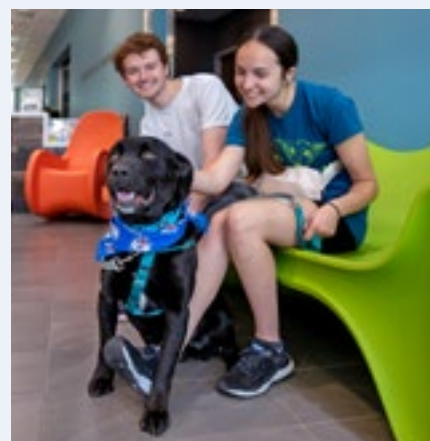


Reducing capacity constraints: Clear The Shelters

As the longest national sponsor, Hill's works with NBCUniversal Local and more than 1,600 shelters for the annual Clear The Shelters adoption and donation campaign. Since its inception, the campaign has helped nearly 1.2 million pets get adopted, raised more than \$5 million in donations to the Clear The Shelters Fund and August is now one of the highest-volume months for adoptions.

Driving adoptions for harder-to-place animals: Welcome Home Adoption Campaign

Recognizing the critical need for adoptions at the start of the year, Hill's created the "Welcome Home" adoption drive in January 2025. Partnering with 13 shelter partners nationwide, Hill's provided \$130,000 to offset adoption costs, provided nutrition and helped 1,681 pets find new homes, a 34% increase in adoptions during the same time frame in 2024.



Boosting awareness of critical shelter needs: Kitten Season with Kitten Lady Hannah Shaw

To maximize impact for shelter pets, Hill's is partnering long-term with Kitten Lady Hannah Shaw, a leading voice in kitten education and shelter advocacy. Our collaboration aims to provide critical support for shelters' most vulnerable pets and bring awareness and action to fostering. Through educational content, adoption and fostering initiatives, essential care guidance and advocacy, this partnership empowers fosters, prospective pet owners and shelter professionals alike, ensuring deserving pets receive the best possible start in life and have a pathway from shelter to home.

Encouraging adoptions beyond shelter doors: PetSmart's Everyday Adoption Centers & National Adoption Week

Hill's is proud to be the official feeding partner of PetSmart's Everyday Adoption Centers and 7-Day Adoption Centers, providing the pets in their care with high-quality, science-backed nutrition while they wait for loving homes. So far in 2025, there have been more than 113,800 pets adopted through these two adoption pathways. Hill's is also PetSmart Charities' exclusive partner for its National Adoption Week events, held three times a year. Together in 2024, Hill's and PetSmart Charities helped more than 56,000 pets find new homes in the U.S. during National Adoption Week.



Hill's Disaster Relief Network

There is nothing more rewarding or impactful to shelters than keeping people together with the pets they love during challenging times. When disaster strikes local communities, Hill's is proud to provide critical nutritional support to pets, their families and the organizations on the front lines. This commitment was exemplified as Hill's responded to all of the major U.S. natural

disasters over the past 15 months, ensuring support when and where it was needed most. Beyond immediate crisis response, Hill's also provides full-circle support during disasters by addressing critical community needs through ongoing pet food pantry donations, giving sustained assistance for pets and their families.



Hurricane Helene Support
\$1,290,000
in nutrition donated



Hurricane Milton Support
\$277,000
in nutrition donated



Los Angeles Wildfire Support
\$149,000
in nutrition donated

Donated more than
4.4M pounds
of food to help care for the
pets impacted in disasters

Supported more than **1,100**
shelters, veterinary clinics and
non-profit organizations



Over the
last 12 years, the
Hill's Disaster Relief
Network has:



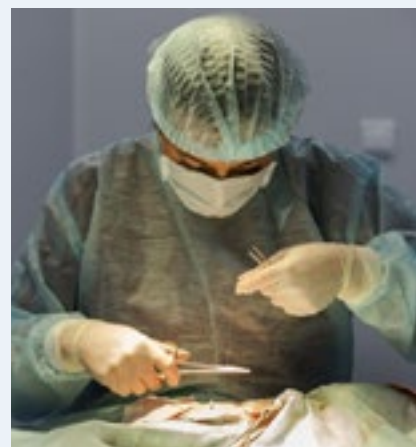
Responded to more
than **200** emergencies



Donated more than
1.5M pounds
of cat and dog food to
communities in need

Support of Animal Welfare and Veterinary Professionals

Hill's believes that we can do more together than what we can achieve alone. Because of this belief, Hill's is continuing to invest in programming, resources, education and professional development, and support for animal welfare professionals. Through the **AAWA's Industry Training**, **AAHA Community Care Guidelines** and an exclusive partnership with **Shelter Animals Count**, animal welfare and veterinary professionals have access to vital tools and data insights necessary to improve the industry.



Hill's Pet Nutrition x Colgate-Palmolive x Street Dog Coalition

Hill's and its parent company, Colgate-Palmolive, partnered with Street Dog Coalition (SDC) to distribute essential oral health and hygiene products and Hill's pet food to pet parents experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the communities SDC serves. The collaboration aims to help keep people together with their pets, no matter their situation.


Keeping pets and people together also means supporting the veterinary profession — including the next generation of professionals — through programs like **Vet for a Day with Nat Geo's Critter Fixers** and **Shelter Externships through partnerships with Houston SPCA / Texas A&M and Humane Colorado / CSU Spur** which provide valuable hands-on experience for future veterinarians and veterinary students.

To date, Hill's has supported more than:

Shelter externships


**1,500
veterinary
students**

Vet for a Day


**2,200
aspiring
veterinarians**


**30
events**


**15
states**



Methodology

Hill's Pet Nutrition partnered with PSB Insights to field a 15-minute online survey from February 24–March 12, 2025, of 2,000 general population American consumers and 500 general population Canadian consumers. The sample is representative of the U.S. and Canadian general population (based on best available data*) on the following characteristics:

- Pet Owners vs. Non-Pet Owners***
- Race/ethnicity***
- Household Income Bands**
- Gender***
- Region***
- Age

*U.S. quotas and weights based on Census ACS data, except for Pet Ownership, which came from Forbes Advisor – Pet Ownership Statistics 2024.

** Canada quotas and weights based on Canadian Census data, except for Pet Ownership, which came from a GfK survey – 61% of Canadians Own a Pet: GfK Survey.

***Post-stratification weights applied

If you are interested in joining the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love program, email shelters@hillspet.com.

Photography courtesy of: [Lawrence Humane Society](#), [The Animal Foundation](#), [Great Plains SPCA](#), [Animal Rescue League of Boston](#), [The Humane Society of Greater Kansas City](#) and [Pasadena Humane Society](#).

