



## Transpecies Care in the Margins: Interdisciplinary Support for Unhoused Pet Guardians

Dillon Dodson, RSW, MSW & Lauralee Dorst, RVT, CVPM



like no other.

# Acknowledgement

Toronto Humane Society is situated upon the traditional territories of Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. Toronto is still home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples from across Turtle Island.

This territory is governed by The Dish with One Spoon Wampum treaty, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the land and its resources. Living and working on this territory makes all people in Toronto treaty people, including those who have come as settlers, or immigrants of this generation or generations past, as well as those who were brought forcibly as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.



# Acknowledgement

"Colonialism reconfigured the categorization of, and relationships between, the land's life-forms, dismantling and re-assembling human-nonhuman relationships within a matrix of Eurocentric-anthropocentric-androcentric power" (Belcourt 2015; Zahara and Hird 2015).

- significantly impacted animals through the **introduction of new species**, often disrupting local ecosystems and **leading to the extinction or endangerment of native species**.
- **exploited animals** for economic gain, using them for agriculture, trade, and sport hunting, which depleted wildlife populations.
- imposed **Western animal husbandry and farming** techniques, which altered landscapes and animal behaviors.
- Indigenous peoples' relationships with animals, often based on sustainability and respect, were undermined by colonial practices, leading to **the loss of traditional ecological knowledge**.

Overall, colonialism contributed to habitat destruction, species displacement, and a profound shift in the balance between humans and animals in many regions.



Mo Thunder

# Dillon Dodson, RSW, MSW

Director, Social Work



# Lauralee Dorst, RVT, CVPM

## Director, Community Animal Welfare



# Session Intentions



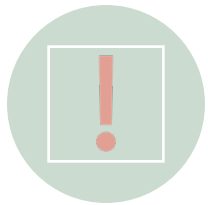
Intro to the HAB



Our “Why”: Current Realities (Human Concerns + Vet Industry Concerns)



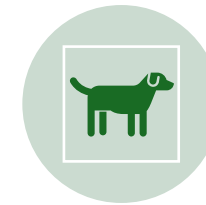
Our “What”: Clinic Objectives



Our “How”: Clinic Operations



Our “Findings”: Clinic Outputs



Discussion and Q & A



# Intro to the Human-Animal Bond

TORONTO  
**HUMANE**  
SOCIETY

like no  
other.

# Human Animal Relations in Animal Welfare

Establishment of a general humane association with the following objectives:

- Stop cruelty to children
- Put humane literature into schools and homes
- Encourage everybody to practice and teach kindness to animals & others
- Stop the beating of animals
- Provide better laws



# Human Animal Relations: Current

## Pet guardianship is increasing

- More people (homes) in Canada have pets than children
- North American children are more likely to grow up with a pet than a biological father
- More money is spent on animal food than baby food



## Impact on Children

- Particularly impacted by relationship with animals and how animals are treated within the home environment
- Children often learn a pet's name immediately following “mom/dad”
- Many children novels include or are led by animals
- First experience of loss – repeated loss throughout life

Arkow, P. Human–Animal Relationships and Social Work: Opportunities Beyond the Veterinary Environment. *Child Adolesc Soc Work J* 37, 573–588 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00697-x>

# Why are Canadians Invested in the Animals?



**Increase Emotional Support & Reduce Feelings of Loneliness**



**Improve Health**



**Increase Connection and Community**



**Support Resiliency and Recovery**

# Human-Animal Bond

“The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors considered essential to the health and well-being of both” ([AVMA, 2024](#))





**Our “Why”  
Current Realities  
(Why, Multidisciplinary Approach)**

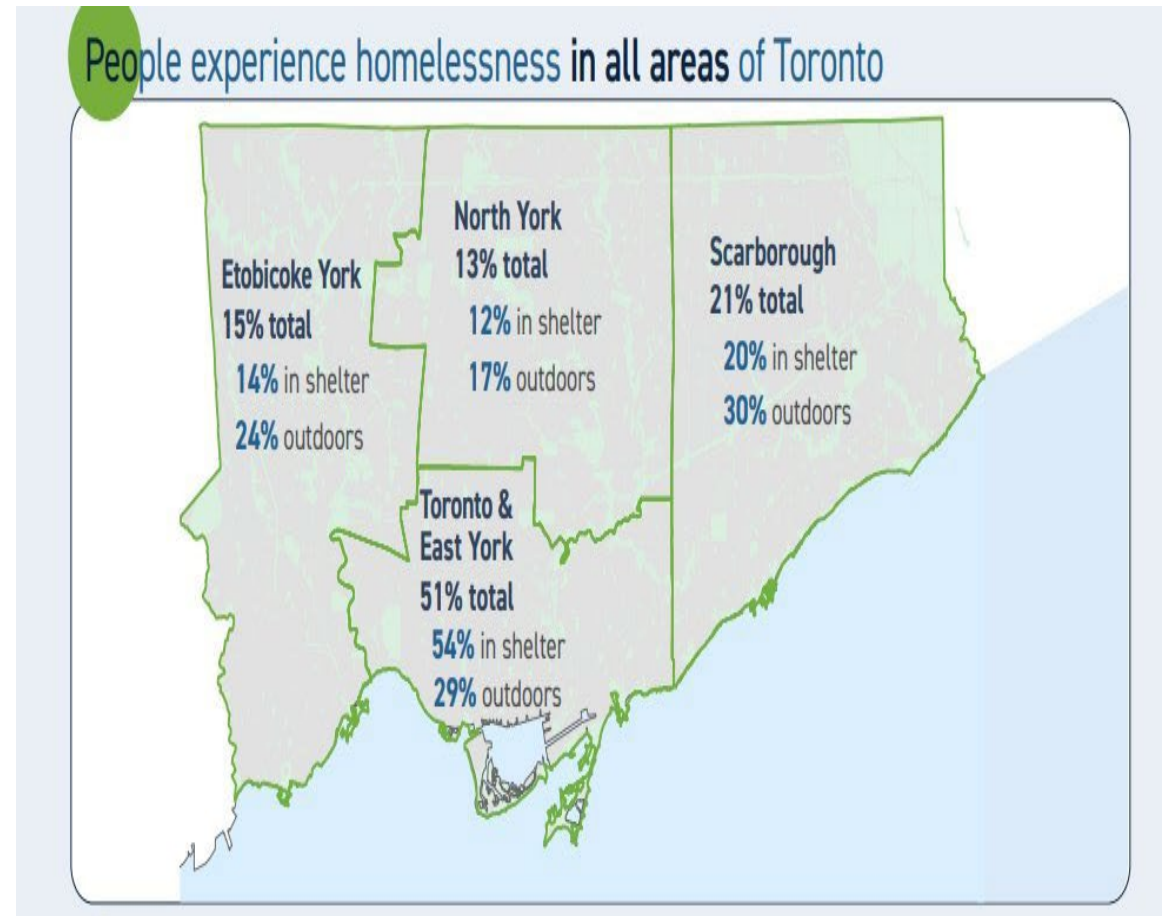


like no  
other.

Homelessness is the result of failures across multiple systems, such as housing, health care, mental health, income support, and the justice system. The shelter system is the last resort when people have nowhere else to turn.

### Human Shelter Access

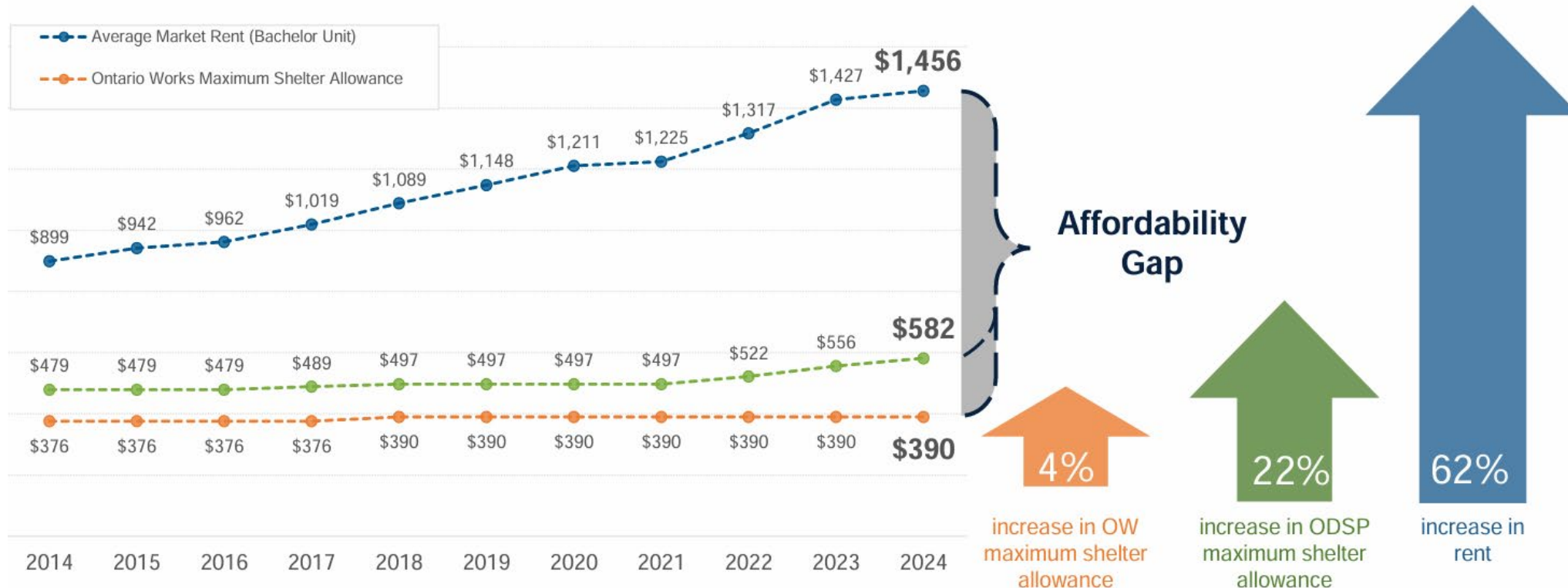
Year	~Pop	Shelter Beds	~Outdoor
2018	8,715	7,154	533
2021	7,347	5,810	742
2024	15,418	9,640	1,615



# Social Support Funding

## The growing affordability gap is a key driver of the homelessness crisis

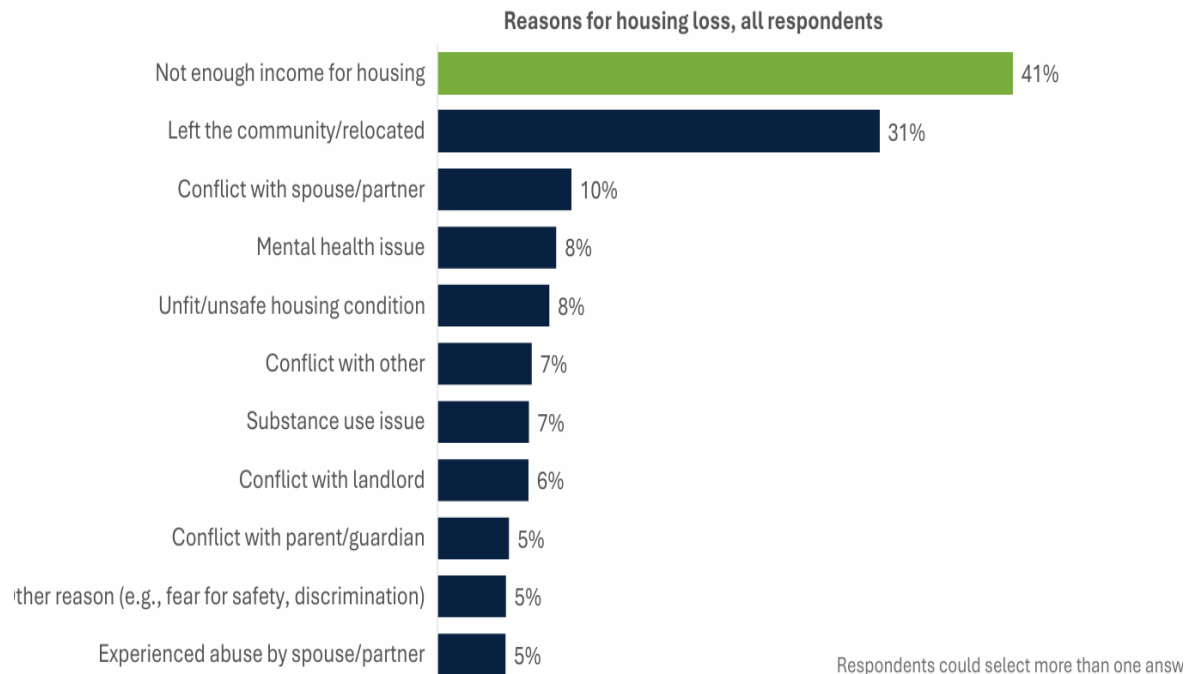
OW & ODSP Maximum Shelter Allowance (one person) & Average Market Rent Bachelor Unit, Toronto, 2014-2024



City of Toronto. (2025). Street needs assessment. <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/homeless-help/about-torontos-shelter-system/street-needs-assessment/>

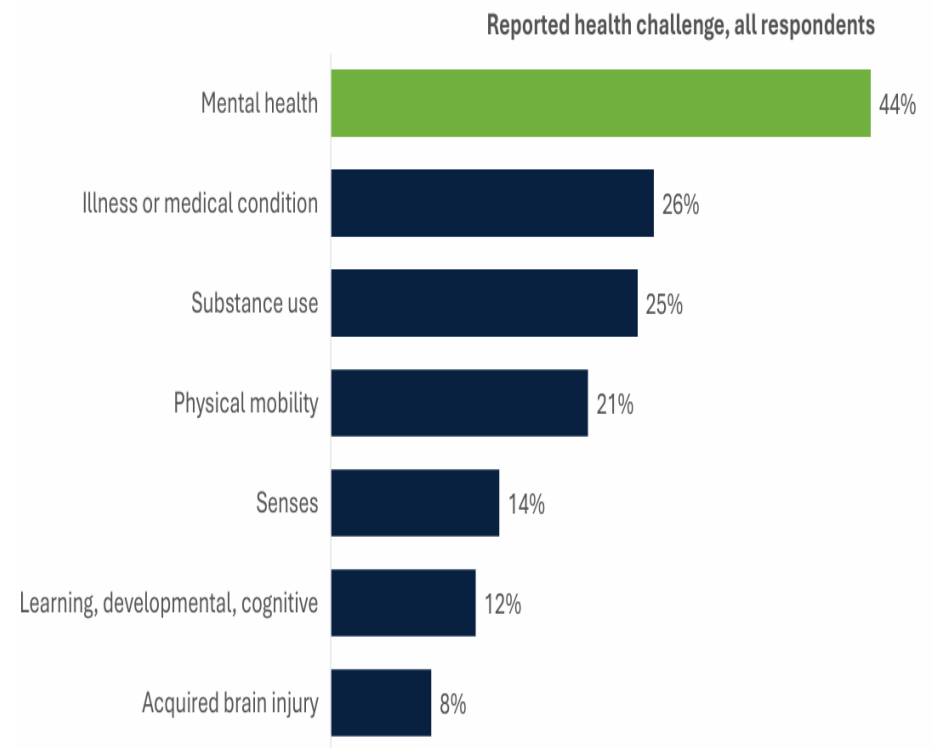
Homelessness is driven by a lack of affordable housing and unmet health needs. These unmet needs significantly impact the lives of vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.

## The most frequently identified reason for housing loss was not enough income



Source: Toronto Street Needs Assessment Survey Data, 2024

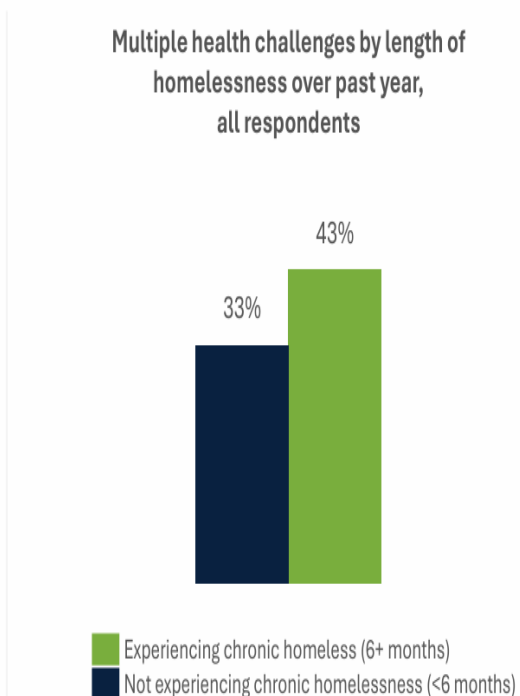
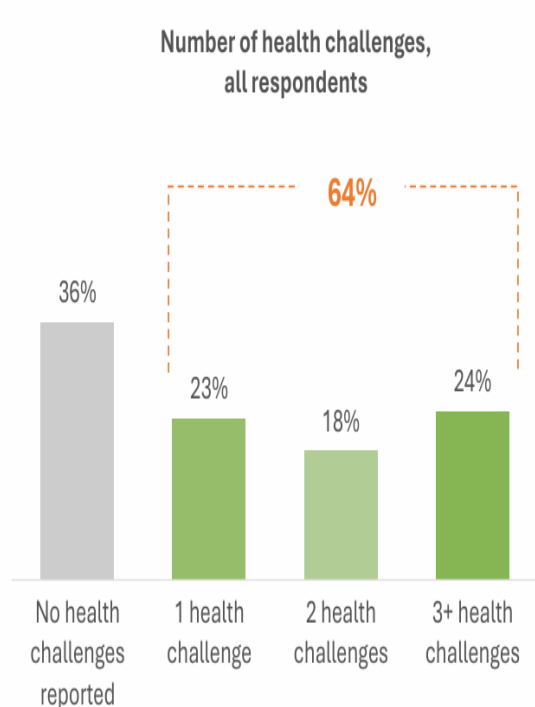
## Mental health issues was the most frequently reported health challenge



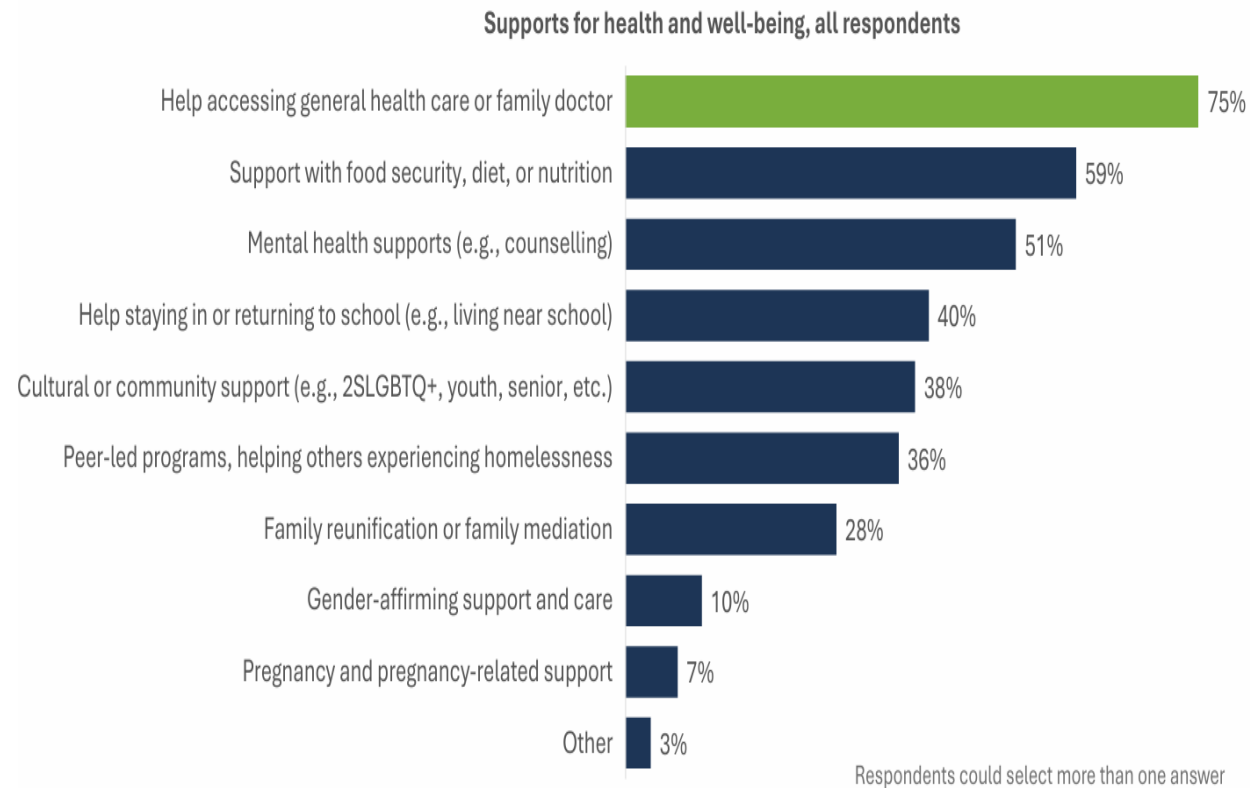
Respondents could select more than one answer

# Multiple health challenges were more prevalent amongst those experiencing chronic homelessness

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents reported having one or more health challenges



# Three-quarters of all respondents need help accessing health care to support their health and well-being



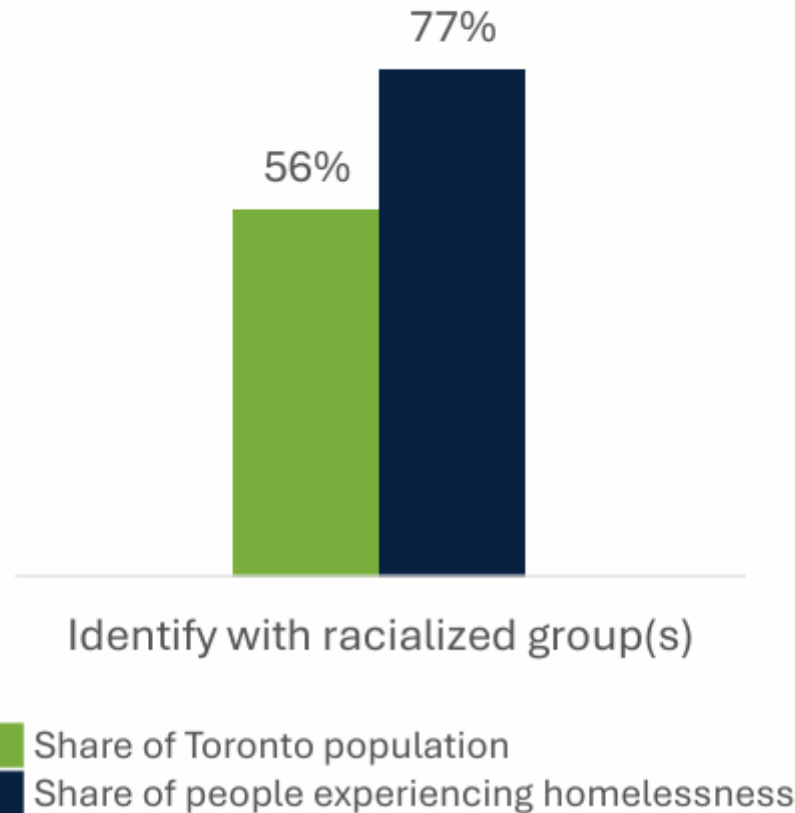
Specific groups continue to be overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness, requiring targeted investments and specialized supports.

9% Indigenous Respondents

59% Black Respondents

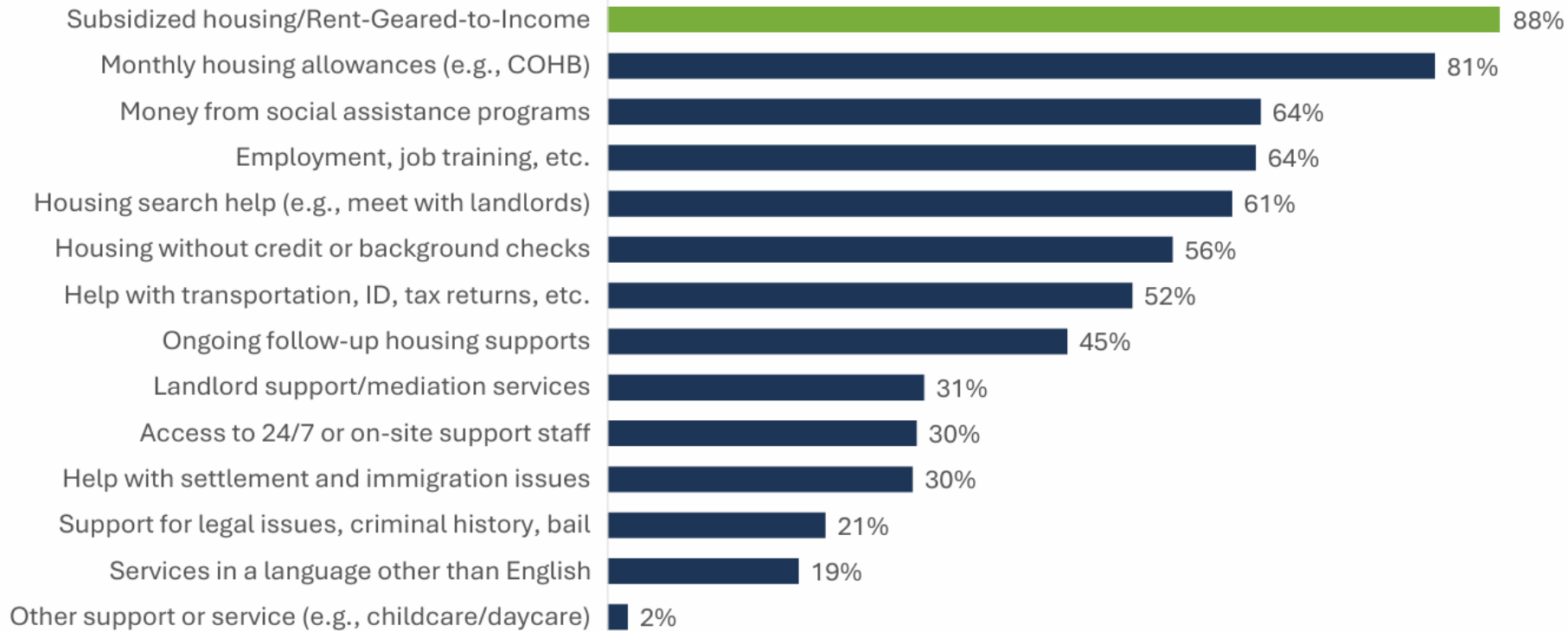
20%+ 2SLGBTQ+

Overrepresentation of racialized people



A coordinated multi-sectoral and intergovernmental approach across different service systems continues to be needed to address homelessness.

## Respondents identified increasing housing affordability and income as the top supports to end their homelessness



Respondents could select more than one answer

# PolyCrises and Systems Challenges

## Precarious Housing

**~ 1 in 10 Vulnerably Housing People are Pet Guardians**

- Attachments shown to be stronger compared to gen pop.
- Place high value on health and welfare of their pets
- Animals can pose a barrier to services

## Gender-Based Violence

**Declared an epidemic in Toronto, July 2023**

- **89%** in VAW reported animal maltreatment also occurred
- **71%** perpetrators threatened, harmed, or killed their animals
- **56%** delayed leaving due to fear of their pet's safety
- **33%** considered returning because their pet remained in the home

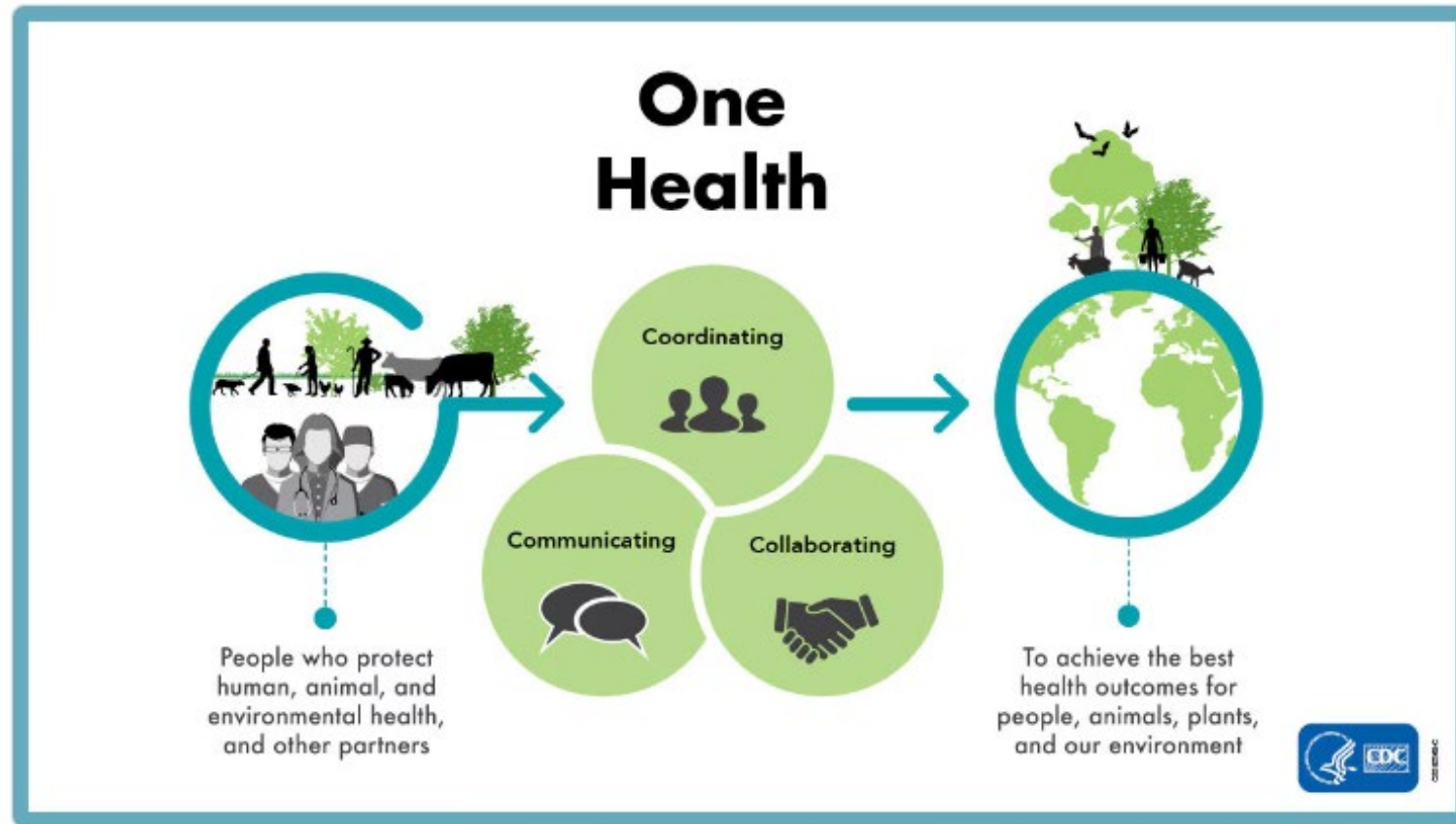
Stevenson, R., Fitzgerald, A., Barrett, B. J., & Cheung, C. 2018. Keeping pets safe in the context of intimate partner

## Aging Population

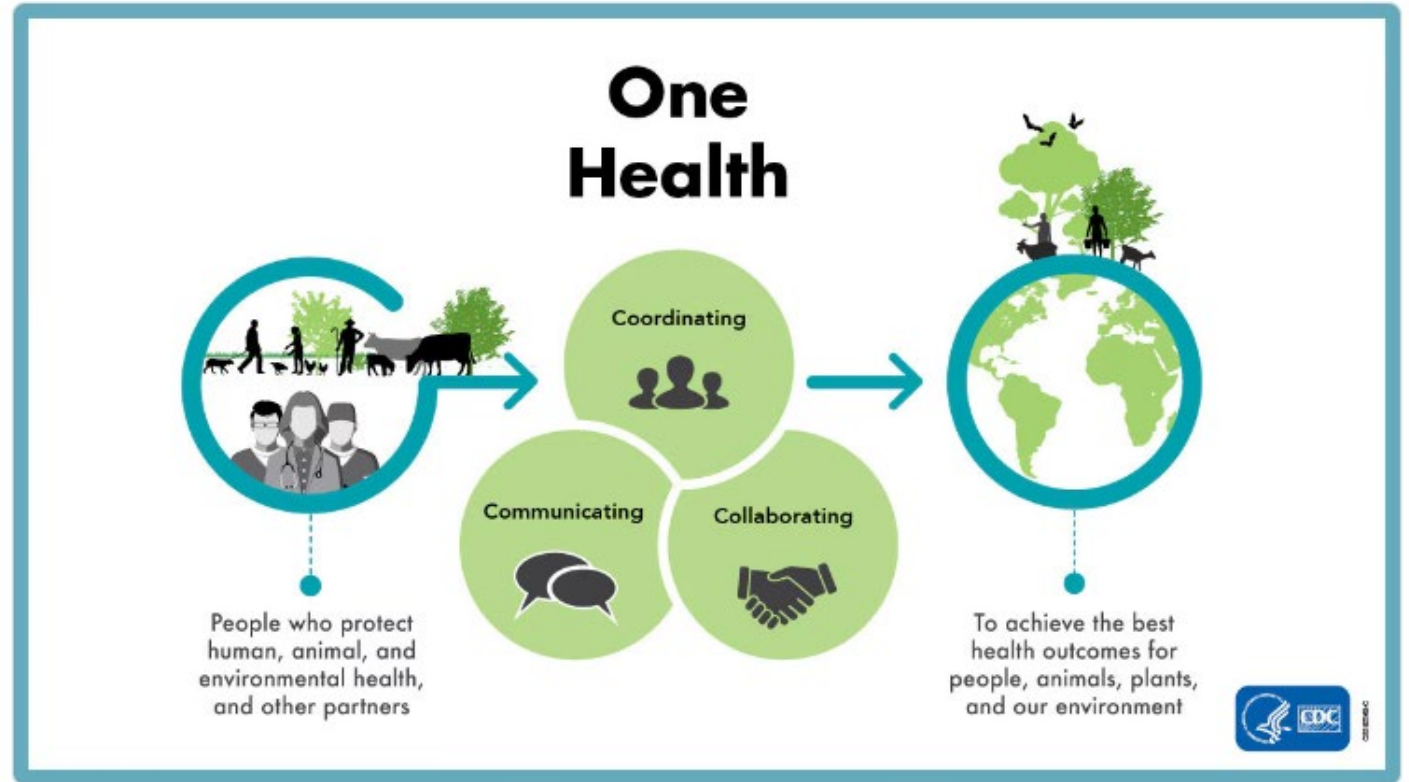
**Unique challenges relevant to older adults may include:**

- Animal neglect and self-neglect
- Bereavement
- Denial of services
- Animal hoarding

# Animal welfare is connected to larger systemic challenges for people and their pets.



**Animal welfare is connected to larger systemic challenges for people and their pets.**



# Outdoor/Communal Living Risks

## Zoonotic Risk

### Transmissible Disease

- Rabies
- Leptospirosis
- Toxoplasmosis
- Bacteria: Ringworm + Enteric Bacteria (Salmonella, Campylobacter)
- External Parasites (not all zoonotic): Fleas, Ticks, Mites
- Giardia\*

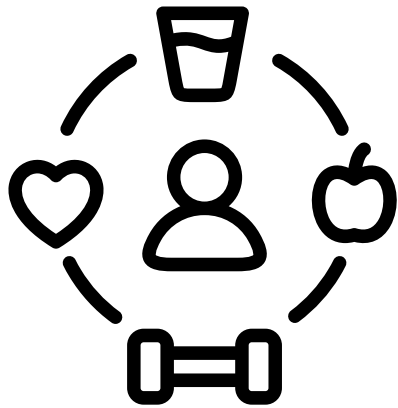
## Environmental

- Other Animals (unplanned pregnancy, unvax, bite, roaming)
- Weather
- Wildlife Exposure
- Substance Ingestion
- Theft/Harm/Stress
- Fines/Legislation
- Judgement/Oversurveillance

## Highest Risk Factors for Human Infection

- Inconsistent hygiene practices
- Immunocompromised humans
- Violence exposure
- Young children/elderly

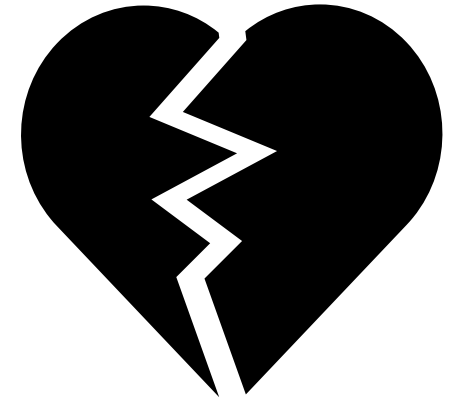
# Bonded Families Experiencing Systemic Marginalization May also be Experiencing Pet-Related Crisis



Compromise their own wellbeing



Stay in dangerous situations



Forced to surrender or economic euthanasia

Service provided by

TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY like no other. TORONTO



**FREE PET CARE FOR RESIDENTS**

We Provide Pet:  
Vaccinations | Microchips | Spay & Neuter

Ask staff to refer your pet today!



TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY like no other.

**PET FOOD BANK AND COMMUNITY DAY**



TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY like no other.

**POP-UP WELLNESS CLINICS**

**Our “Why”**  
**Current Realities**  
**Veterinary Industry / Animal Sheltering**



# Access to Veterinary Care

- 62% of Americans have a Pet
- 97% of pet parents consider their pets family
  - 51% = equal to human members

**PetSmart Charities** estimates **50 million pets** in the U.S. lack access to veterinary care!

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**PETSMART**  
**Charities**

**GALLUP**<sup>®</sup>



**HABRI** (Human Animal Bond Research Institute)

- \$23 Billion – saved on U.S. Healthcare System

[New Report Captures Data and Insights to Better Support the Human-Animal Bond for Underserved Communities | Press Room | HABRI](#)



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**HUMANE**  
**SOCIETY**

# Access to Veterinary Care

## Canada's Population (People & Pets)

- **Canada (2024)**
  - 8.3 million pet dogs
  - 8.9 million pet cats
    - ~39% families - dogs
    - ~37% families - cats
    - ~13% families - both
- **Ontario**
  - ~38% of Canada's total population
    - 14.8 million people
- **Toronto**
  - ~3 million in Toronto – 20% of the province population
    - 14.8 million in Ontario (province)
      - ~20% of Ontario's dogs and cats might reside in Toronto



# Access to Veterinary Care - Toronto

**Toronto** – estimated **400,000–500,000 cats and dogs** in Toronto do not have a consistent relationship with a veterinarian, often due to:

- **Cost**
- **Availability**
- **Location barriers.**

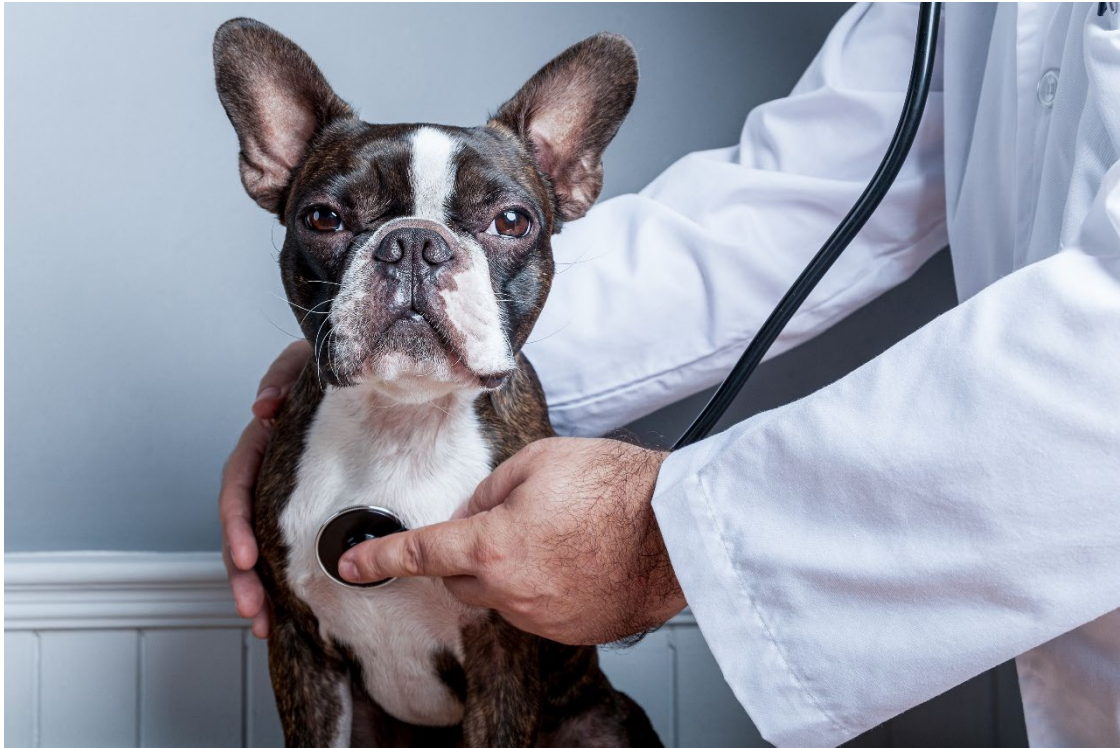


[The City of Toronto is in Crisis: Pets and Their Families are Being Torn Apart - Toronto Humane Society](#) (October 2023)

# Access to Veterinary Care

Average annual cost for pet families:

- Dog: \$2,000-\$6,500
- Cats: \$1,300 – #3,700 yearly



## 2025 All-In Annual Budget

Cost Category	Dogs (USD)	Cats (USD)
Food & Treats	\$350 → \$1,800	\$250 → \$1,500
Routine Vet Exam + Vaccines	\$250 → \$450	\$150 → \$250
<b>Flea / Tick / Heartworm Meds</b>	\$180 → \$300	\$120 → \$200
Pet Insurance (Accident & Illness)	≈ \$675	≈ \$385
Grooming	\$100 → \$650	\$0 → \$100
Litter (Cats Only)	–	\$180 → \$485
Toys, Beds, Gear Top-Ups	\$100 → \$250	\$80 → \$200
License & ID Renewals	\$15 → \$25	\$15 → \$25
Training / Enrichment Classes	\$0 → \$300	–
Boarding, Pet-Sitting or Daycare*	\$300 → \$1,000	\$150 → \$600
<b>Estimated Annual Total</b>	<b>≈ \$2,750 → \$6,375</b>	<b>≈ \$1,700 → \$4,500</b>

[The Real Cost of Owning a Pet in 2025 | CanadaVet](#)

# Access to Care – Veterinary Workforce Shortage

## The Issue

Canada is experiencing a significant shortage of veterinarians and veterinary technicians.

Attrition, limited training capacity, and rising demand are straining the profession.

Labour projections show veterinary medicine in a shortage position through at least 2031.

# Access to Care – U.S. Veterinary Workforce Shortage

## The Issue

### Causes of the Shortage

- ▶ **High education costs** and significant student debt
- ▶ **Pay disparities** between companion animal and large/food animal practice
- ▶ **Aging workforce** and demographic shifts (retirements, reduced work hours)
- ▶ **Geographic maldistribution**, especially in rural and underserved areas
- ▶ **Burnout, long hours**, and high emotional and operational stress

### Impacts of the Shortage

- ▶ **Reduced access** to veterinary care for livestock and companion animals
- ▶ **Compromised animal health** and welfare
- ▶ **Threats to agricultural productivity**, food security, and rural economies
- ▶ **Increased public health risks** (zoonotic disease, food safety)
- ▶ **Longer wait times, higher costs**, and delayed care for pet owners

# Why it Matters!!

## Animal Welfare & Equity

- Timely veterinary care prevents unnecessary pain, disease, and death
- Delayed or unavailable care turns manageable conditions into welfare crises
- Lack of access disproportionately affects low- and moderate-income households.
- Barriers to care contribute to preventable surrender and community animal suffering.

## Food Systems & Public Health

- Longer wait times, increased travel, and delayed treatment are now common.
- Urban and rural communities are both affected.
- When veterinary care disappears, costs shift to shelters, municipalities, and public systems
- Access to care is a community infrastructure issue, not an individual failure.

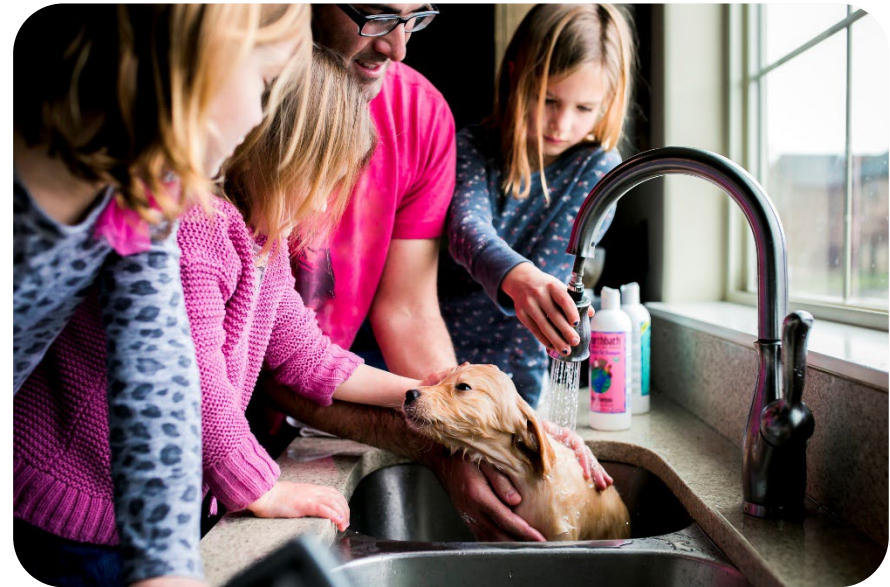
## Community Impact

- Longer wait times, increased travel, and delayed treatment are now common
- Urban and rural communities are both affected
- When veterinary care disappears, costs shift to shelters, municipalities, and public systems
- Access to care is a community infrastructure issue, not an individual failure



# Why is accessible care needed?

- The yawning divide between **rich and poor pet owners** shows no signs of abating. Those with the finances and education will manage to redirect their disposable dollars toward their pets. Those with few to speak of will continue to show me their \$40 and ask me how much that'll buy. **Heartbreaking.**
- Moreover, as we build this castle ever higher, we'll continue to face the harsh reality that this glorious standard of care we're so proud of is leaving the majority of pet owners behind.
- "The Top 7 Challenges Facing Veterinary Medicine in 2017" Dr Khuly. Veterinary Practice News - 2017



Source: Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA); Canadian Occupational Projection System

DATA DEEP DIVE

# Canadian Survey

## CVMA

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Pet ownership trends, veterinary workforce dynamics, and the economic landscape shaping access to care across Canada

### SOURCE

Sourced from data obtained through annual CVMA reports, economic surveys, and publications through the Canadian Veterinary Journal



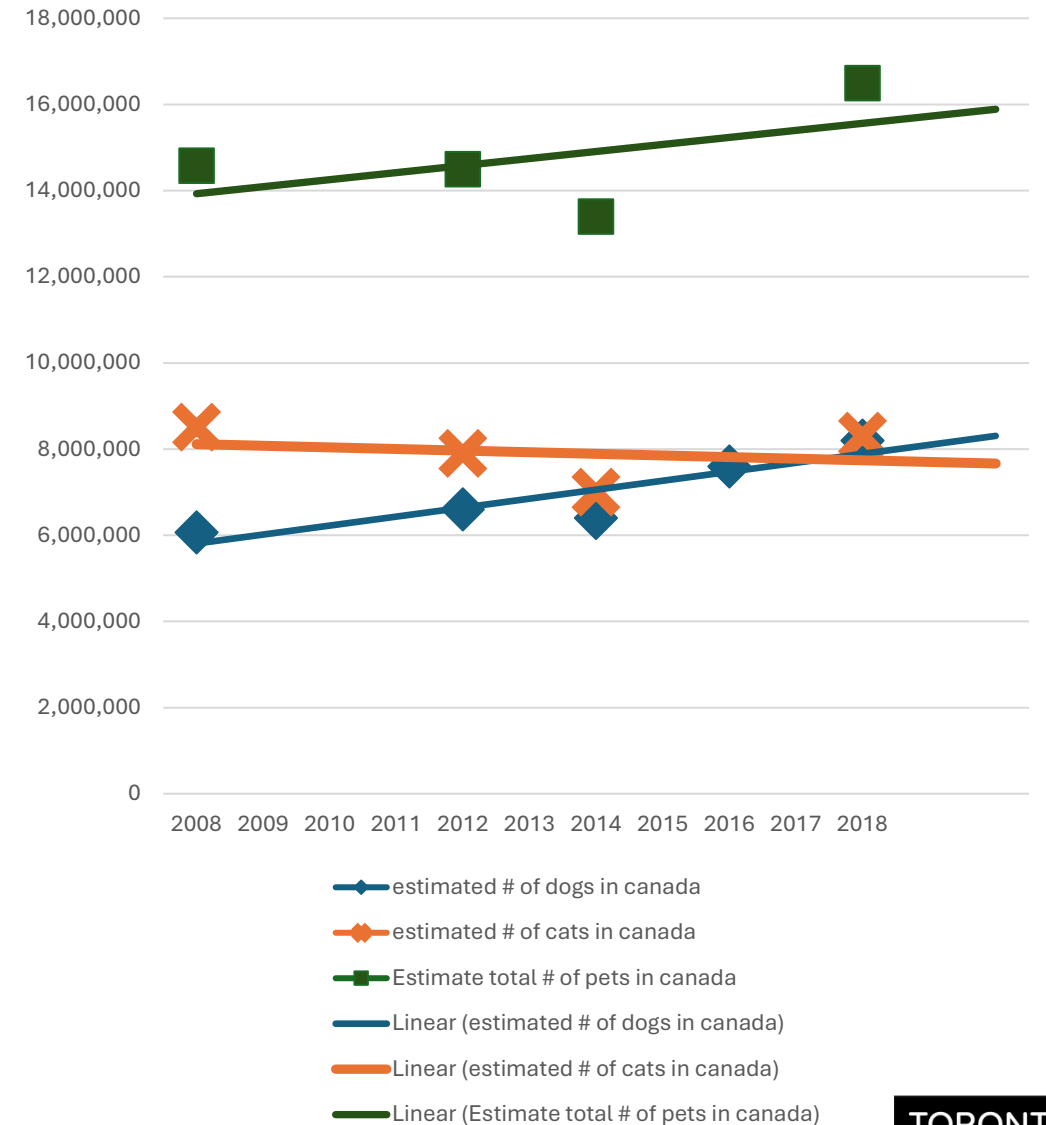
# Pet Ownership Canada

The Past Decade

Estimated Number of Cats and Dogs in Canada

 Increase of 2 million

2008-2018  
Estimated Number of Cats and Dogs in Canada



Source: Sourced from data obtained through annual CVMA reports, economic surveys, publications through the Canadian veterinary Journal

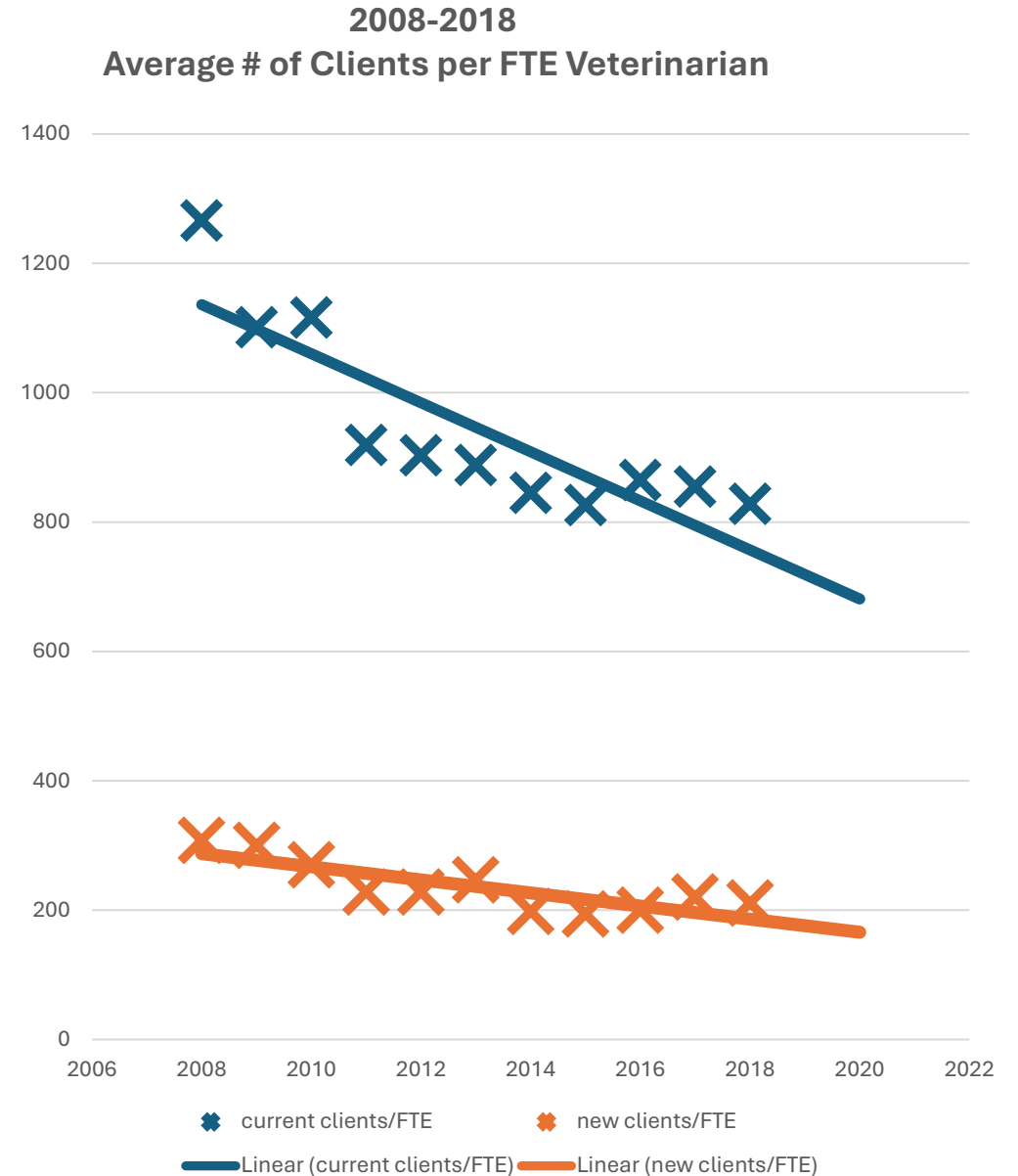
# Veterinary Clients Canada

The Past Decade in Canada

Average Annual # of Clients per DVM



Decrease of 30%



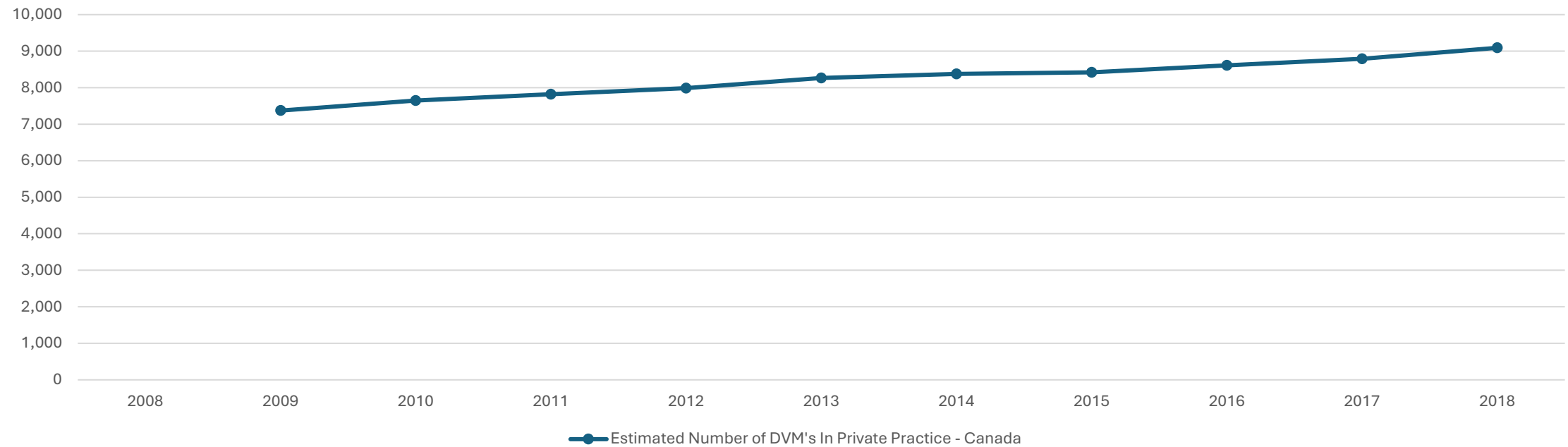
Source: Sourced from data obtained through annual CVMA reports, economic surveys, publications through the Canadian veterinary Journal.

# Private Practice Veterinarians Canada

The Past Decade in Canada

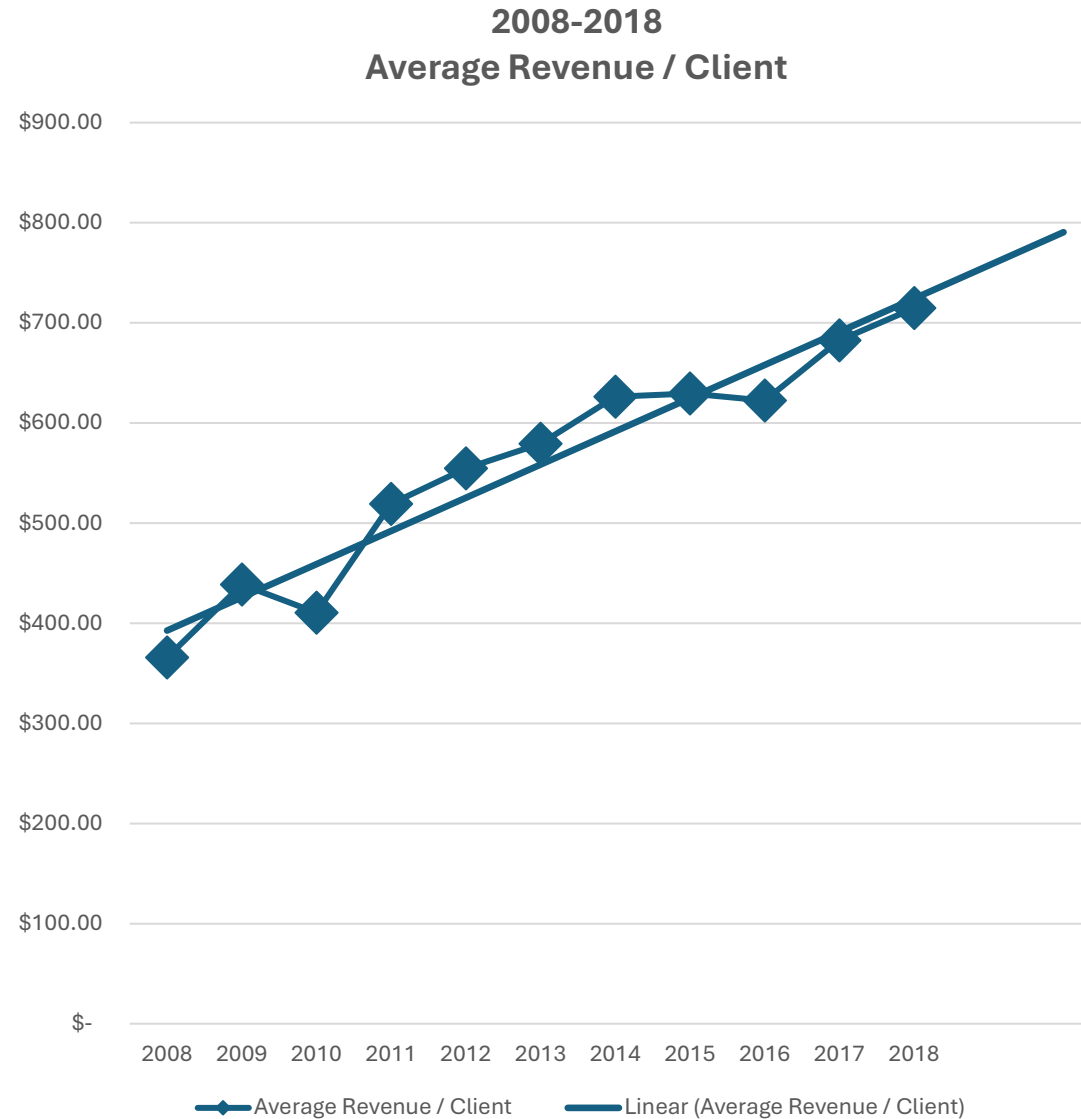
- Est. # of Private Practice DVM's
  - An average annual growth of 3%

2008-2018  
Estimated Number of DVM's in Private Practice Canada



Source: Sourced from data obtained through annual CVMA reports, economic surveys, publications through the Canadian veterinary Journal.

# Revenue / Client Canada



The Past Decade in Canada

- Average **Revenue** per client **increased by 95%**

Source: Sourced from data obtained through annual CVMA reports, economic surveys, publications through the Canadian veterinary Journal.

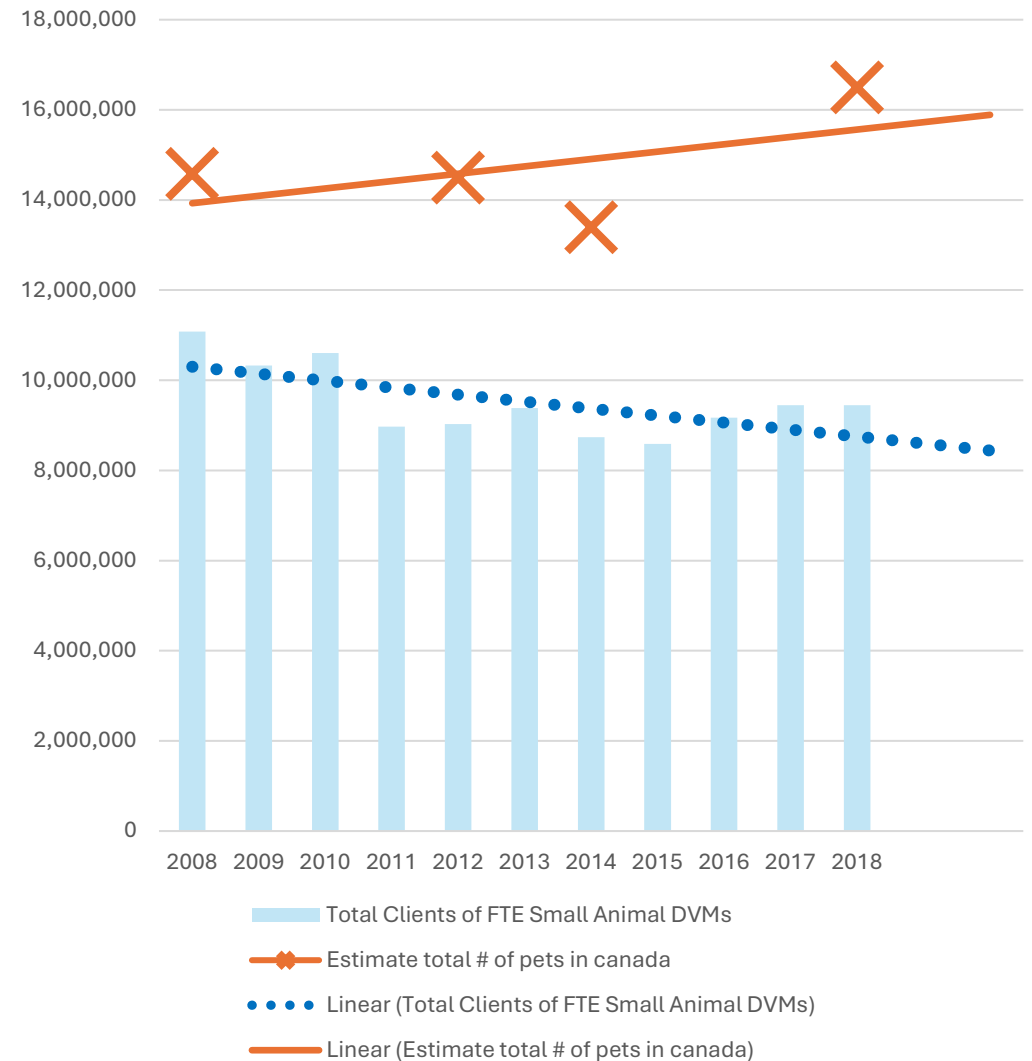
# Why is accessible care needed?

## The Past Decade in Canada

Gap growth of 20%



2008-2018  
Estimated Canadian Pet Population & Estimated # of Canadian VPCR's



Source: Sourced from data obtained through annual CVMA reports, economic surveys, publications through the Canadian veterinary Journal.

# Reported Barrier to Care

Figure 5.14 from “Access of Veterinary Care: Barriers, Current Practices and Public Policy” (2018)

Illustrating the variation in the reasons given for not securing care between the three types of care explored in this study.

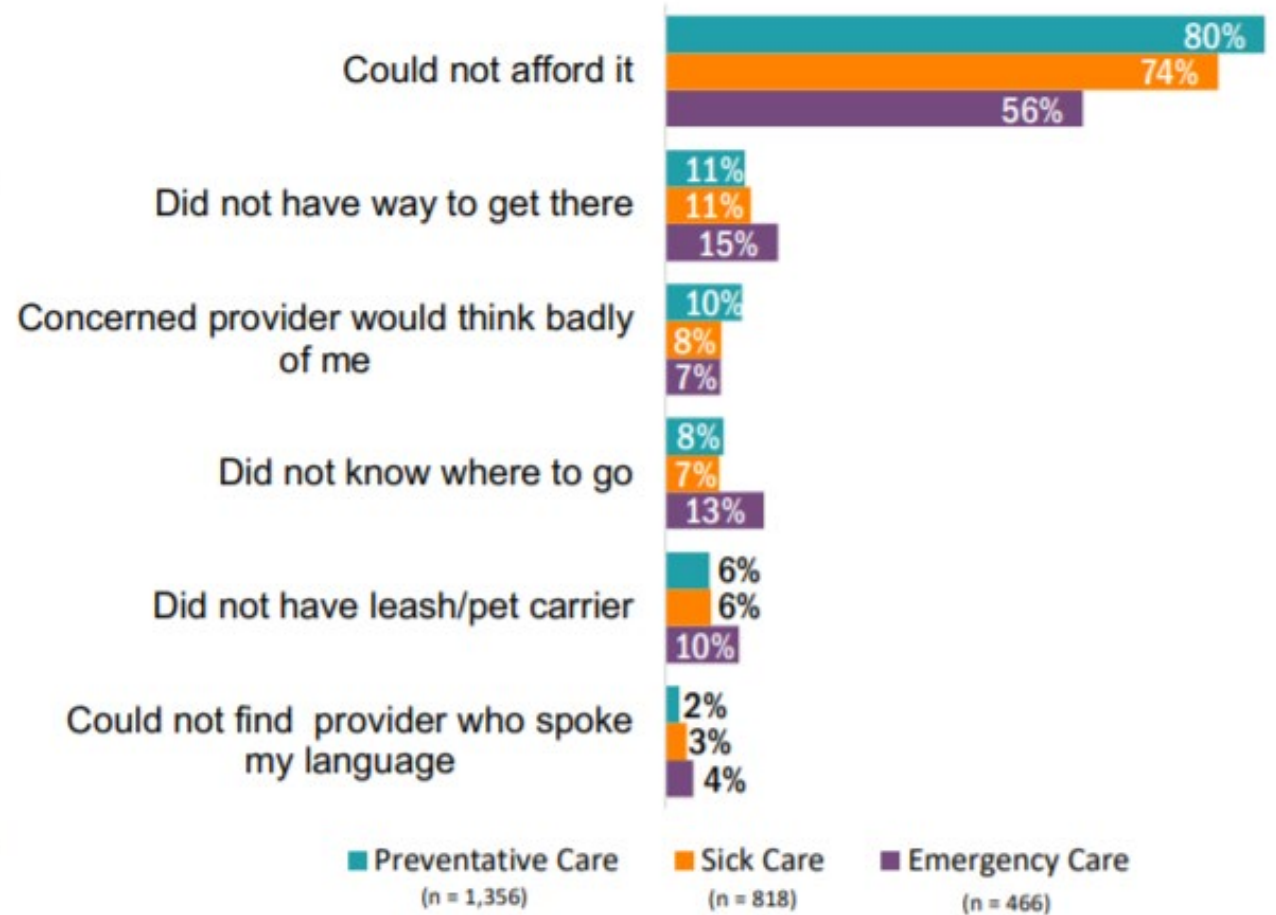


Figure 5.16: Pet Owner’s Reasons for Not Receiving the Desired Treatment for Their Pet

## Toronto Humane Society Leads the Way in Canada's First-Ever National Analysis of Veterinary Care Access



**Phil Nichols, RVT, CAWA, CEO  
at Toronto Humane Society,  
publishes the nation's first-  
ever comprehensive analysis  
of access to veterinary care**

*Trends in companion animal access to  
veterinary care in Canada, 2007 to 2020*

[Toronto Humane Society Leads the Way in Canada's First-Ever National Analysis of Veterinary Care Access - Toronto Humane Society](#)



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# Key Findings

Phil Nichols' study on the state of veterinary care across Canada

## 500K+

### UNMET PET HEALTHCARE NEEDS

A substantial number of pets did not receive veterinary care annually, highlighting an area of concern that warrants further investigation.

## ↓ 30%

### CLIENTS PER VETERINARIAN (2007–2020)

Signaling potential shifts in the dynamics of veterinarian-client relationships over the past decade.

## ↑ CPI+

### SURGE IN VETERINARY COSTS

Veterinary costs surpassed the inflation rate, prompting closer examination of the economic factors impacting access to care.

## Relative

### SHORTAGE IN VETERINARIANS

Not an absolute shortage, but a relative one — possibly due to increased time spent per animal and shorter average working hours.



## 2025 - 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

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# Plan into Action

## REIMAGINING ANIMAL WELFARE LIKE NO OTHER.

*Leadership Message*

In Toronto today, access to animal care—and to the full spectrum of animal support—remains deeply unequal. If a family can find and afford care in the private sector, their pet receives what they need. If not, the options narrow. And too often, the result is heartbreaking: economic euthanasia, forced surrender, fractured families.

This is not a failure of compassion. It's a failure of current animal welfare systems. And it's time to change that.

Toronto Humane Society is advancing a bold new model of animal welfare. One that does not begin—or end—at the doors of a shelter. A model where sheltering is repositioned as part of a broader care system that works to prevent crisis while always ensuring a safe haven, a shelter, exists for those left with nowhere else to turn.

Over the next five years, we will begin the development of a community-wide network of care: a collection of clinics, hospitals, programs, and partnerships that bring support directly into the places people and animals in need live.

This isn't just about access, it's about challenging the status quo and building a new system. Our goal is to reduce crisis before it starts—and build systems that keep animals where they belong: home. We will do this by expanding beyond the traditional sheltering model through offering animal care counselling, pet food support, temporary fostering, student training and leading edge, evidence-based research.

This requires preserving and operating high-

quality sheltering in Toronto, because when animals are in crisis, the need for safety, stability and respite remains, and so does our responsibility to provide it.

We are also scaling what we know works. Since 2019, we've grown our veterinary services from a \$1.5 million program to a \$4 million self-sustaining system. Now, we are extending that work—through new facilities, deeper partnerships, and a unified vision: to create a more humane Toronto, and in doing so, shaping the future of animal care in Canada.

We want to build Toronto into the most humane city in Canada. One that invests in community. One that lifts professional standards. One that proves compassion and excellence belong in the same sentence—and in every neighbourhood.

This plan is not only a roadmap. It's a call to action. We invite our donors, partners, colleagues, and policymakers to help us build what's never been built before.

Together, we can reimagine what animal welfare looks like in this city. And we can show the world what's possible.

Phil Nichols, RVT, CAWA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Toronto Humane Society



*"We are not just imagining  
a better future for animals.  
We're building it."*

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SOCIETY**

# Access to Care

## How Toronto Humane Society is Responding

### Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation Pet Wellness Clinic

On April 4, 2026, Toronto Humane Society and a host of dedicated volunteers held a community pet wellness clinic with our partners at Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Here's a summary of the impact we made together.



69

#### Dogs Examined

All dogs received a physical exam, and vaccinations, heartworm, flea & tick prevention, and heartworm & tick disease testing if needed



0

#### Dogs Tested Positive for Exposure to Ehrlichia Canis

Ehrlichia canis infection is spread by the bite of the brown dog tick, and is a worldwide disease.



1,254 Lbs  
Of Pet Food Donated



69

#### 4Dx Test Performed

Blood test that screens for four diseases which affect dogs: Heartworm, Lyme, Anaplasma and Ehrlichia



1

#### Dog Tested Positive for Exposure to Lyme Disease

Ticks carrying Lyme disease can infect humans and dogs. Prevention is key.



0

#### Dogs Tested Positive for Heartworm

Difficult and expensive to treat, prevention is essential in areas where heartworm is common.



0

#### Dogs Tested Positive for Exposure to Anaplasma

As tick populations grow and spread, prevalence of anaplasmosis in humans and dogs are increasing.

### Pop-Up Wellness Clinic at Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

On September 16, 2025, Toronto Humane Society worked alongside Parkdale Queen West Community Centre to support community pets and their families. Our interdisciplinary team was on-site at 1229 Queen West offering veterinary care, social work support, and training and behaviour guidance—helping prevent crises and keep families together.



9

#### Families

Received wellness veterinary care.



8

#### DHPP Vaccines

DHPP vaccines are a combination vaccine designed to protect dogs from four viral diseases that can cause serious illness or even death.



4

#### Referrals

Provided a referral for follow-up care through Toronto Humane Society.



8

#### Dogs Examined

All dogs received a physical exam. Vaccinations, deworming, flea treatment and microchips were provided if needed.



1

#### FVRCP Vaccines

FVRCP is a core vaccine for cats that protects against feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and panleukopenia.



3

#### Added to Spay/Neuter List

Placed on the spay/neuter list as a proactive step toward healthy pets and strong families.



1

#### Cats Examined

All cats received a physical exam, and vaccinations, and heartworm, flea & tick prevention if needed.



9

#### Deworming Treatments

Deworming pets can be important for both animal and human health.



9

#### Rabies Vaccines

Rabies can infect any mammal, including humans, pets, wildlife and livestock.



3

#### Pets Microchipped

Microchips are small implants that help lost pets find their way back home.



**VACCINE POP-UP CLINIC**

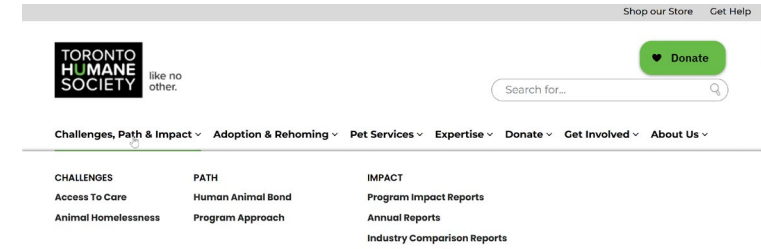
Toronto Humane Society is hosting a pop-up vaccine clinic for DOGS!

If your dog is unvaccinated, please drop by for free vaccines.

APRIL 4  
12:00 - 4:00pm  
Last appointment will be taken at 3:45pm.

**LOCATION:**  
155 Sherbourne Street

No appointments needed—just drop in, first come, first served.



# Parvovirus Outbreak Response

Parvo spreads from dog to dog and can cause **lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and fever, becoming fatal** if left untreated. Symptoms usually appear within a week.

Can be prevented almost 100% of time with routine *vaccinations*.



CBC News  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/aws-dogs-parvo-virus-health-animals-outbreak-illness-spread-1.7423032>

CBC  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor>

## 18 dogs have now died after parvovirus outbreak in ...

Dec 19, 2024 · A parvovirus outbreak in downtown Windsor, Ont., has claimed the lives of 18 dogs that Animal Welfare Services is aware of, while a dozen others are ...



Windsor Star  
<https://windsorstar.com/news/local-news/dynamic-situa...>

## Death toll climbs as dog virus spreads - Windsor Star

Dec 22, 2024 · The highly contagious canine parvovirus outbreak continues escalating in Windsor, with at least 18 dogs dead and another 34 infected — but ...



CP24  
<https://www.cp24.com/local/province-warns-dog-owners...>

## Ontario warns dog owners in Windsor of deadly virus

Dec 18, 2024 · Ontario is warning dog owners in Windsor about a viral outbreak that has left more than a dozen pets dead.



Windsor's Chris Campbell has details.

CBC.ca · 1y

### **18 dogs have now died after parvovirus outbreak in downtown Windsor**

A parvovirus outbreak in Windsor has now claimed the lives of at least 18 dogs, Animal Welfare Services (AWS) reports. Fifteen of those dogs were euthanized under AWS care due to the progress of the ...

Winnipeg Free Press · 1y

### **Province warns dog owners in Windsor, Ont., of deadly parvovirus**

TORONTO - Ontario is warning dog owners in Windsor about a viral outbreak that has left more than a dozen pets dead. \*Billed as \$4 plus GST every four weeks. Offer only available to new and qualified ...

Yahoo News Canada · 1y

### **14 dogs have died of parvovirus in downtown Windsor. Here's what you need to know**

Add Yahoo as a preferred source to see more of our stories on Google. A pug is shown in a stock photo. Amid an outbreak of a ...

# When Intervention Fails Sheltering

## Stray

- 42% dog
- 50% cats

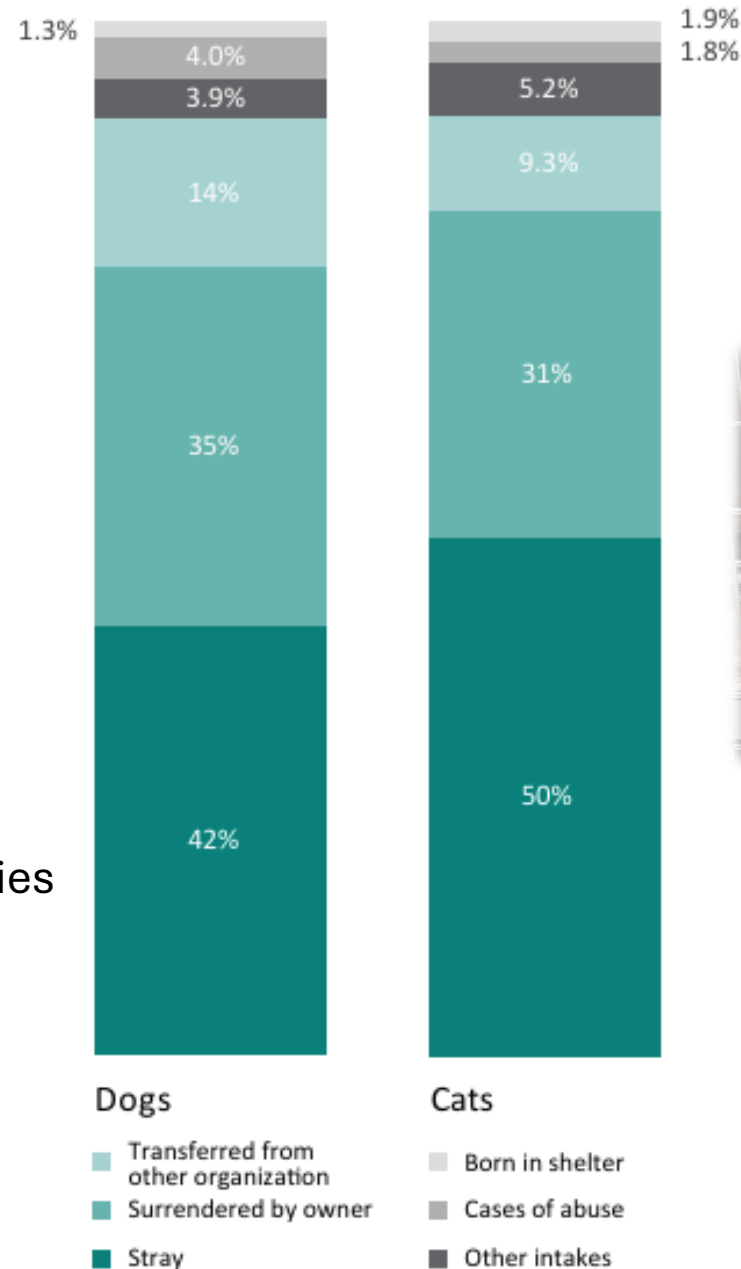
## Pet Guardian Relinquishment

- 35% dogs
- 31% cats

## Transfers

- Juveniles – 16% canine taking in as puppies
- 33% felines taking in as kittens

Figure 4. Sources of intake of dogs and cats in 2019.



# When Intervention Fails Sheltering Outcome

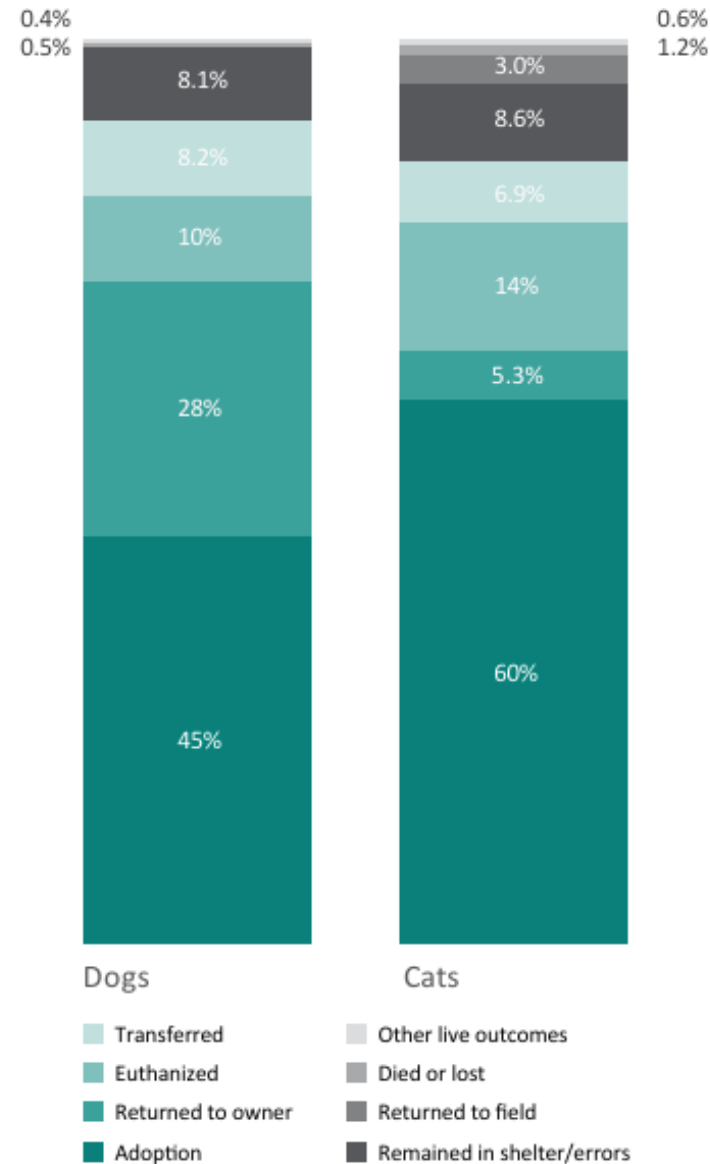
## Adoptions:

- 45% dog
- 60% cats

- **Pet Reclaims**
  - 28% dogs
  - 5% cats

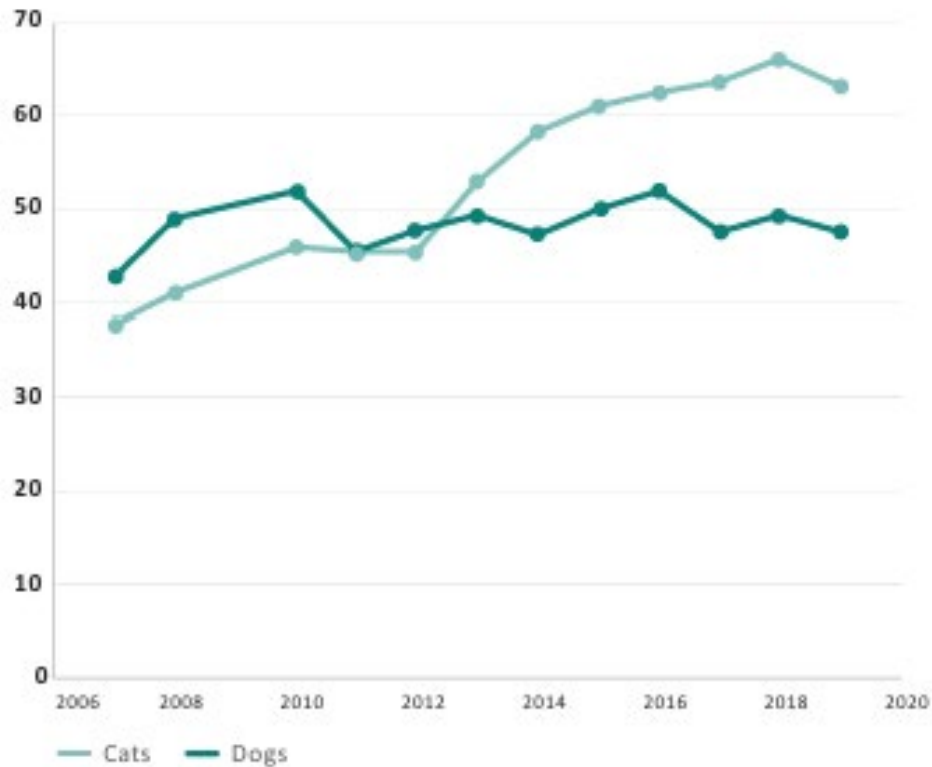
[2019 Animal Shelter Statistics](#) – Humane Canada

Figure 5. Outcomes of dogs and cats in 2019, relative to total shelter population.

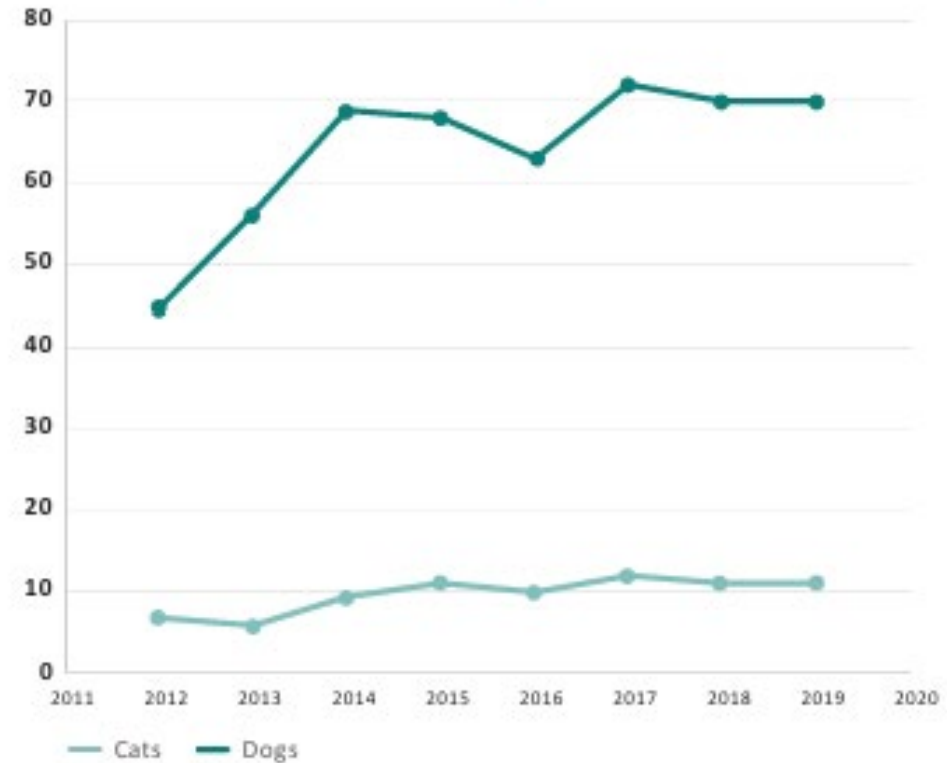


# Sheltering Outcome Stats Canada

**Figure 6.** Percent of cats and dogs adopted relative to total intake.



**Figure 7.** Percent of stray cats and dogs reclaimed by owner.

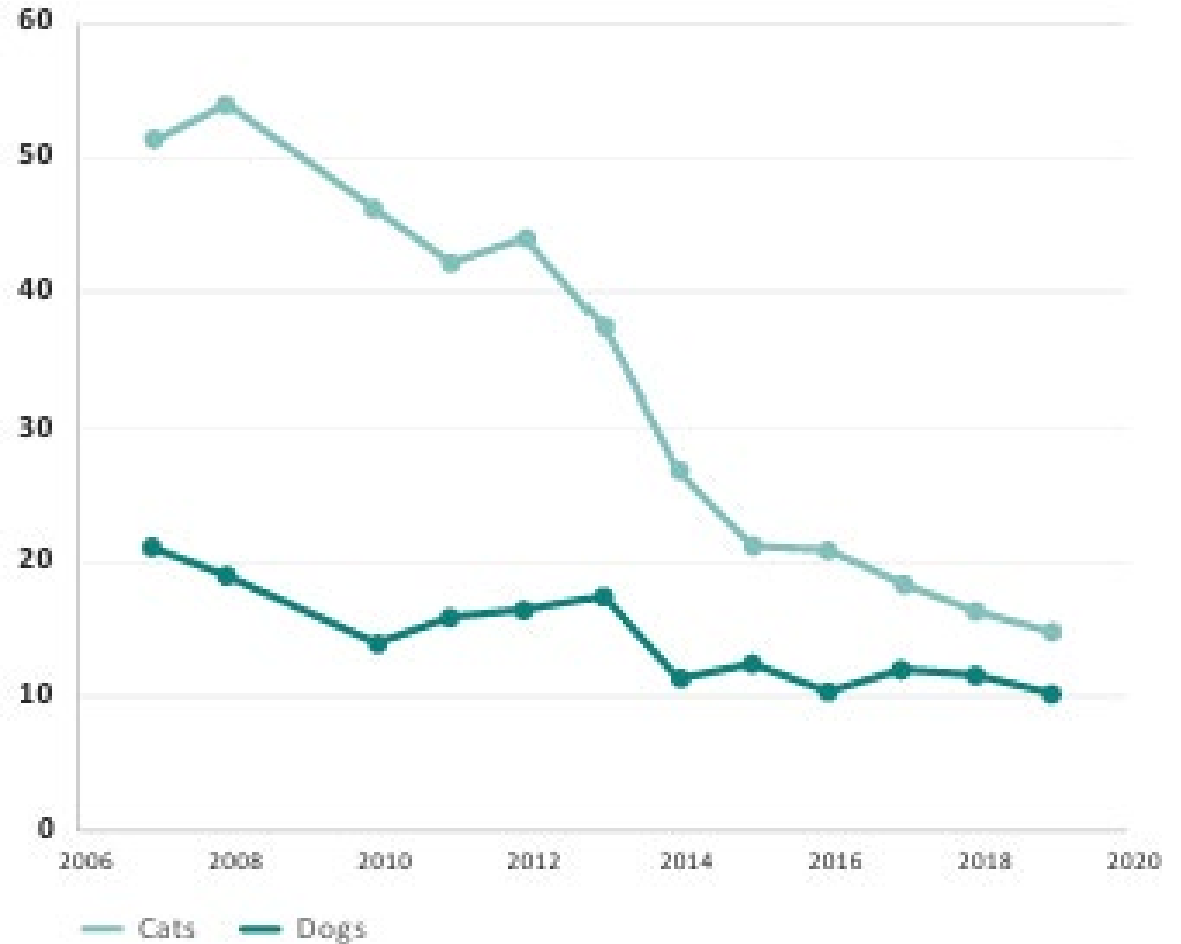


# Sheltering Outcome

## Humane Euthanasia

- 15% Cats
- 10% Dogs
- 2% of animals – who were deemed healthy, treatable or adoptable

Figure 8. Percent of cats and dogs euthanized relative to total intake.



# Length of Stay & Shelter Capacity

## Average Length of Stay (2019)

**24 days** Dogs | **29 days** Cats

Median LOS: 12–15 days

## Shelter Capacity in Use

**68%** average (2019)

Down from **94%** in 2013, reflecting improved throughput and rising adoption rates across reporting shelters.

Figure 9. Percent of shelter capacity in use.

Year	Mean	Median	N*
2013	94%	90%	50
2014	84%	90%	45
2015	81%	40%	39
2017	43%	41%	69
2018	70%	75%	79
2019	68%	70%	69

\* Number of locations reporting data



# How We Define Animal Welfare

## From the Five Freedoms to a Modern Understanding of Welfare

**The Five Freedoms** have long guided animal welfare practice and policy.

They focus on protecting animals from harm by ensuring freedom from:

- Hunger and thirst
- Discomfort
- Pain, injury, or disease
- Fear and distress
- Inability to express normal behaviour

**Meeting basic needs is necessary — but not sufficient — for wellbeing.**



# How We Assess Welfare Today

## The Five Domains Model: Promoting a Life Worth Living

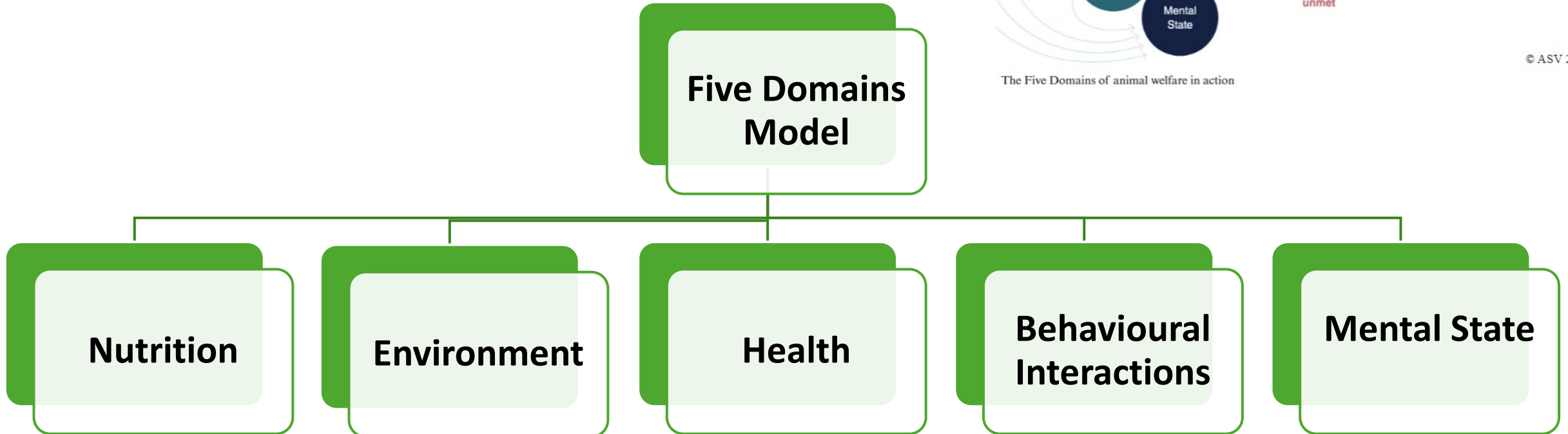
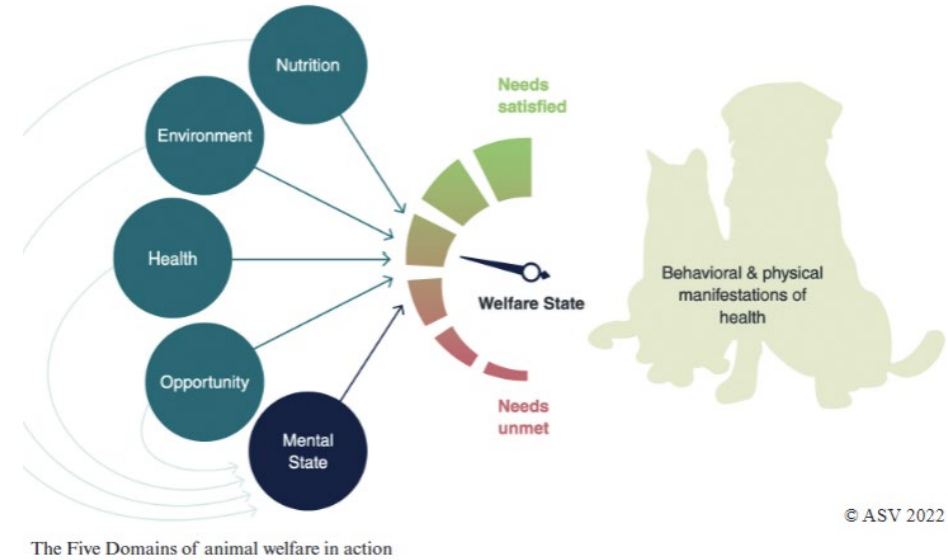


Table 1. The Five Domains that contribute to an animal's welfare status

	<b>1. Nutrition</b>	<b>2. Environment</b>	<b>3. Health</b>	<b>4. Opportunity</b>	<b>5. Mental state</b>
Positive experiences	Enough food and water Fresh clean water Balanced, variety of food	Comfortable Temperate Routine Clean Interest/variety	Physical health Good function Good body condition Restful sleep	Choice of environment Choice of interaction Behavioral variety (play, hunt, forage, engage, rest) Novelty	Satisfied Engaged Comfortable Affectionate Playful Confident Calm Encouraged
Negative experiences	Restricted water Restricted food Poor quality Monotonous	Too cold or hot Too dark or bright Too loud or quiet Unpredictable Malodorous Soiled Monotonous Uncomfortable	Body dysfunction or impairment Disease Pain Poor fitness	Barren cage Confined space Separation from people or species Restraint Unavoidable sensory inputs	Fearful or anxious Frustrated Bored, lonely Exhausted Ill, painful Uncomfortable Hungry, thirsty

Adapted from Mellor<sup>6</sup>

# Toronto Humane Society Programs




**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. PUBLIC VETERINARY SERVICES



**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. PET FOOD BANK AND COMMUNITY DAY



**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. URGENT CARE




**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. Animal Safety and Wellbeing for Human-Serving Organizations

Practical training to help human-service staff safely support clients with pets.




**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. GRIEF SUPPORT AFTER REHOMING A BELOVED PET

UNDERSTANDING. COMPASSION. HEALING.



**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. NAVIGATING PET LOSS

End of Life and Pet Loss Support at Toronto Humane Society



**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. PET SUPPLIES FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS



**TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. POP-UP WELLNESS CLINICS



SERVICE PROVIDED BY **TORONTO HUMANE SOCIETY** like no other. **TORONTO**

**FREE PET CARE FOR RESIDENTS**

We Provide Pet: Vaccinations | Microchips | Spay & Neuter

Ask staff to refer your pet today!



# Our “What/How” Clinic Objectives + Operations

TORONTO  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY

like no  
other.

# Objectives

**Launch:** pop-up clinics for unhoused and vulnerably housed pet guardians

**Apply:** multidisciplinary approach by incorporating veterinary social work, veterinary medical, and behaviour & training expertise

**Promote:** ethical, culturally-informed, non-judgmental, compassionate, and accessible services, acknowledging that many have experienced trauma and/or violence.

**Enhance:** staff skill and awareness of systemic challenges faced by pet families.

**Contribute:** to public health and safety to prevent the spread of diseases.



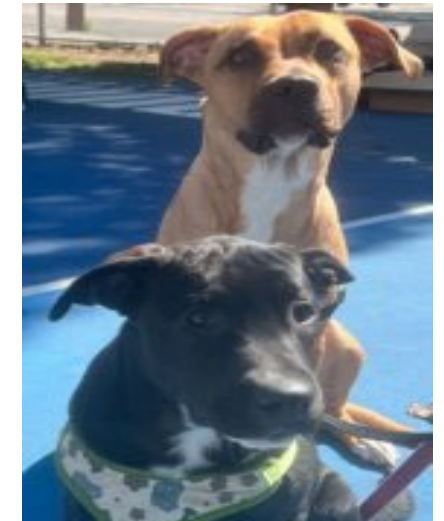
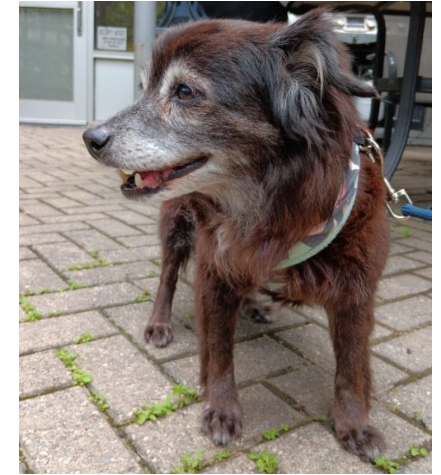
**TORONTO  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY**

like no  
other.

# Theoretical Underpinnings

Engagement strategies were informed by an understanding:

- **Trauma-informed approach** (foundation for building trust, fosters a supportive environment for pet guardians who have experienced trauma and/or violence)
- **Humane Hierarchy approach** (promotes humane, positive reinforcement-based training, and reduces use of aversive equipment)
- **Contextualized care** (considers evidence-based medicine while remaining responsive to client expectations and needs)
- **Veterinary social work + SW students** (bridges gap between human and animal care, offers holistic view of health by addressing interpersonal trauma)
- **Multidisciplinary collaboration** (cross disciplines + partner with community organizations + private to operate the clinics with donated medications)
- Responsibility for **Reconciliation and ReconciliACTION**





# Offerings

- **Engage community partners** in the homelessness and allied sectors  
→Community-led
- THS team composition:
  - **veterinary health care team**, licensed **social workers**, and **certified animal trainers**
  - Core group of staff + additional staff rotate in to build competency skills.

## Services:

- **Free veterinary services:** wellness examinations, vaccinations, microchipping, heartworm, flea, and tick prevention in addition to ad hoc medical concerns (eg: QOL, acute, chronic).
  - Case-by-case provisions for post-clinic services provided to those in need. Services included spay/neuter, vaccine boosters, urgent fostering + humane euthanasia.
- **Free behavioural counselling.**
- **Free social service support.**
- **Pet food and supplies available.**
- **Funding:** Two-year funding via a private donation grant + donated treatments



## WELLNESS POP-UP CLINIC

Toronto Humane Society is hosting a free pop-up wellness clinic for **DOGS** and **CATS!**



Please register with your worker to attend.

**LOCATION:**  
1011 Lansdowne

**DATE:**  
June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**TIME:**  
10:00am - 2:00pm



Please register with your worker to attend.  
Physical exam, vaccines, microchips, and behavioural training.





# Our “Findings”

# Clinic Outputs



like no other.

Year	Type of Facility	Total Animals	Total Guardians	Behavioural Consults (/ animal)	Social Work HAB Support (/human)
2023	Encampment	15	11	N/A	27% (3)
	Shelter (x3)	71	66	28% (20)	60% (40)
	<b>Total (4 sites)</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>23% (20)</b>	<b>55% (43)</b>
2024	Encampment	50	40	N/A	N/A
	Drop-ins (x3)	57	49	52% (30)	81% (40)
	Health centre (x2)	43	36	95% (41)	91% (33)
	<b>Total (6 sites)</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>71% (71)</b>	<b>85% (73)</b>
2025	Drop-ins (x3)	40	32	75% (30)	93% (30)
	Shelters (x4)	62	48	70% (31*)	83% (40)
	Health centre (x2)	56	46	83% (47)	89% (41)
	<b>Total (9 sites)</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>82% (108*)</b>	<b>70% (111)</b>
2026	Drop-ins	13	11	10	11
	Shelter	9	8	9 +1	4 (+3)
	<b>Total to Date (2 sites)</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>82%</b>

# Medical Findings



Chronic/acute medical conditions - required additional or ongoing care

- Standoffish around Spay and neuter
- Microchips – were implants or GP's trackers

# Behavioural Findings

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like no other.

- Common behavioural challenges frequently discussed included **leash pulling, unruly behaviour, reactivity, anxiety and fear** for dogs.
  - While some issues related to lack of training or socialization, many issues related to FAS (Fear/Anxiety/Stress) in animals finding themselves in new environments
- Behaviour training solutions were tailored to the realities of the environment with a goal of **minimizing aversive solutions and working with tools available** to create outside of the box management solutions
  - focus on incremental care solutions to provide workable solutions for the environmental
- Careful analysis of policies and rules pertaining to animals on site considered in tandem with realistic training goals to ensure resident compliance and minimize animal stress
- Compliance likely when owners provided with collaboration, choice and agency in developing solutions
- Additionally, **~4,500 lbs of dog food** and **~450 lbs of cat food** were distributed, along with essential items including **leashes, collars, and enrichment toys.**





# Our Invitation to You



like no other.

# Human Animal Relations

"A pet is a communication waiting to happen."

## Pets Provide Valuable Insights

- Builds rapport and trust

## Pets may be Vital Member's of Your Client's Support System

- Relationship may mirror others in their life or highlight gaps
- Achieve a more full understanding of clients attachments

## Pet Can be Health Promoting or Barriers to Wellbeing

- Can improve health and wellbeing; impact on child development
- Can create distress (bereavement, lack of resources, violence)

## Ask About Their Family

- What kinds of needs does your pet have? How can I best assist you?
- What can you tell me about your pet's typical day....
- How is your pet doing since we met last? Has anything changed?
- Has having your pet ever prevented you from accessing supports/services?
  - Social support gaps
  - Behavioural gaps
  - Medical gaps
- How does your pet help you? What would happen if you no longer had your pet?



# Considerations

## Operational Considerations

- What support needs would your community benefit from as it relates to pets? Can you ask them?
- What info do you required?
- Who can you partner with?
- How can you look for funding?
- How can you prepare you/your staff to participate in transspecies care
  
- **Are you aware of your land and peoples history and the impact that remains today?**

## Legislation


- Be transparent about any regulatory obligations
- Bylaws: # animals, species of animals, Dangerous Dogs, BSL (“mixed breeds”)
- Divergence in mandatory reporting depending on disciplines
  - Animal Cruelty/Neglect
  - Vulnerable Populations
  - Safety Planning

## Reflexive Exercises

- Recognize and address personal biases
- What are your motivations/interests for participating?
- What do you know you don't know, and what do you think you know
- **What do you need to learn about other systems**
- Consider caring for self

# Reflection





It's making the heart hurt to see that. The human race is composed of 90% of evil beings. How good that the 10% of good beings are acting to save these wonderful beings. I hate people. I can't help but just hate people. As a protector of animals in my country, I am very grateful, very moved.

Like · Reply



Some ppl do not deserve a dog. Some ppl are so cruel. I want to give her a forever home and make up for the crappy treatment she has gotten. I would treat her like a princess.

Like · Reply



Good god - I really am not too thrilled with the human race right now, except for the dedicated folks who rescue.

Like · Reply

POS people need to die. Either in jail or by double crossing someone. Abusers are living and the abused are barely living or dying. Prayers for you sweet baby. You will find the best forever home.

Like · Reply



That's disgusting. They should be locked away with no food until they are near death (or dead). Ah, but the scum have rights but the dogs don't.

Like · Reply





# Contact Information

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- Vice President, International Association of Veterinary Social Workers



- CoChair, Canadian Violence Link Coalition



- Multidisciplinary Popups Continued Reading



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- 2019 Animal Shelter Statistics
- View of The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters
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