

AnimalShelterStatistics



Canadian Federation
of Humane Societies

Fédération des sociétés
canadiennes d'assistance
aux animaux

2012

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INTRODUCTION

Humane societies and Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCAs) are a pillar of the animal welfare movement in Canada. The Canadian SPCA, the first in the country, was formed in Montreal in 1869 to provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the dominion. The next three decades saw the formation of the Ontario SPCA (known then as the Ontario Humane Society), the Nova Scotia Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Toronto Humane Society, and the British Columbia SPCA. Today there are 186 humane societies and SPCAs located across the country (Table 1).

In their early years, humane societies and SPCAs were charged with protecting, not only animals, but also children and women. Their mandate included investigating cruelty complaints, education about and promotion of humane treatment, as well as proposing and enforcing legislation for the protection of animals. The focus of these societies was often the welfare of workhorses, who were common victims of cruelty and neglect, along with farm animals, such as cattle and cocks used for fighting. Gradually their purview extended to companion animals and wildlife.

With time these charitable organizations took on the role of sheltering and providing direct care for stray and unwanted companion animals, returning stray animals to their guardians, and finding homes for those in need. In recent years, societies have also implemented programs

to provide veterinary services and support for animal care in the community at large. Through their role in ending animal cruelty, advancing animal protection, and promoting the humane treatment of animals, humane societies and SPCAs play a vital role in building a humane Canada.

This report presents the results of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) survey of humane societies and SPCAs for the year 2012, which demonstrate the scale of cats and dogs being taken in to shelters across Canada as well as their fate. A comparison of the 2012 figures to those from shelter surveys conducted by the CFHS in previous years suggests slowly improving trends in the homeless companion animal population in Canada.

Individual shelters and communities collect and analyze data about the animals under their care to fulfill essential functions, such as evaluating the effectiveness of their programs (for example, those targeting increased adoption or spay/neuter), prioritizing program resource allocation, and for accountability. The aggregation of this shelter data at a national level is critical to provide indicators of companion animal welfare and responsible guardianship in Canadian society. National data also affords indicators of the scale of work being undertaken by Canadian shelters as an industry. Finally, it permits individual organizations to benchmark themselves against national averages.



THE DATA SET

The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS), the only national organization representing humane societies and SPCAs in Canada, has been collecting statistics from animal shelters since 1993. To collect the 2012 data, the CFHS conducted an online survey between April and August 2013. Requests were sent to the 186 Canadian humane societies and SPCAs to complete the survey, and 113 societies responded. Of the responses, 100 were complete and 2 others included data regarding the intake of animals only. The remaining 11 responses were not complete enough to include in the analysis. This corresponds to a response rate of 55%. Of the 102 responding organizations, 59 are members of the CFHS (Figure 1). The CFHS included intake data from the 2 partial responses but used only the 100 complete responses when calculating percentage outcomes relative to intake.

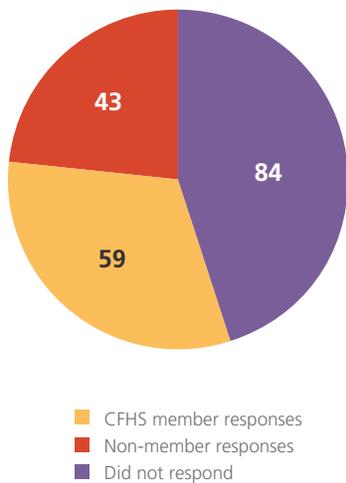


Figure 1. Responses to the CFHS 2012 shelter survey from 186 humane societies and SPCAs in Canada

Throughout this report the term “shelter” is used as a short form to refer to humane societies and SPCAs. While the term more generally encompasses other establishments that also shelter homeless animals, such as individual private shelters, rescue and foster groups, and municipal animal services, these establishments were not targeted by the CFHS survey. Therefore, the data in this report represents only a fraction of homeless companion animals in Canada.

Table 1: Humane societies and SPCAs in Canada by province or territory

Province or Territory	Number of humane societies and SPCAs
Alberta	20
British Columbia	41
Manitoba	6
New Brunswick	10
Newfoundland and Labrador	8
Northwest Territories	3
Nova Scotia	10
Nunavut	1
Ontario	53
Prince Edward Island	1
Quebec	17
Saskatchewan	14
Yukon	2
Total	186

Who is the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies?

The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) is the only national organization representing humane societies and SPCAs in Canada. Founded in 1957, the CFHS works toward positive, progressive change to end animal cruelty, improve animal protection, and promote the humane treatment of all animals. As the convener and representative of the largest animal welfare community in Canada, the CFHS advances the welfare of companion animals, farm animals, wildlife, and animals in research with a strong national voice promoting the interests and concerns of animal welfare to government, policy makers, industry, and the public.

INTAKE

Intake represents the total number of cats and dogs received by the shelters who responded to the 2012 survey. Shelters in Canada took in over 119,000 cats and over 53,000 dogs in 2012 (Appendix, Figure 2). These values are similar to and slightly lower than those reported for 2011 (CFHS, 2012). Total intake levels were higher in 2011 and 2012 relative to recent previous years. The intake of cats has consistently been greater than dogs: shelter surveys conducted by the CFHS indicate that since 2001 Canadian shelters have taken in approximately twice as many cats in a given year as dogs.

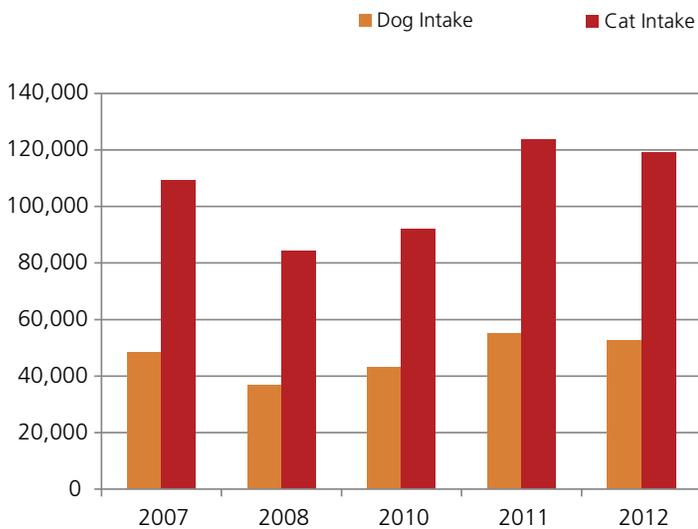


Figure 2. Total intake of cats and dogs to shelters

The increase in animal intake since 2008, as shown in Figure 2, may be related to the economic recession in Canada. Food bank use, unemployment, and poverty in Canada all increased in 2008 and have not declined to previous levels (Food Banks Canada, 2013). An increasing number of Canadians in financially unstable circumstances may not have had the means to care for their companion animals and as a result relinquished or abandoned them. Alternatively, fewer Canadians may have spent resources to have their animals sterilized, resulting in higher intake of puppies, kittens, and their mothers. Future surveys will request animals taken in be categorized by age (juvenile versus adult), which will help to address the latter possibility.

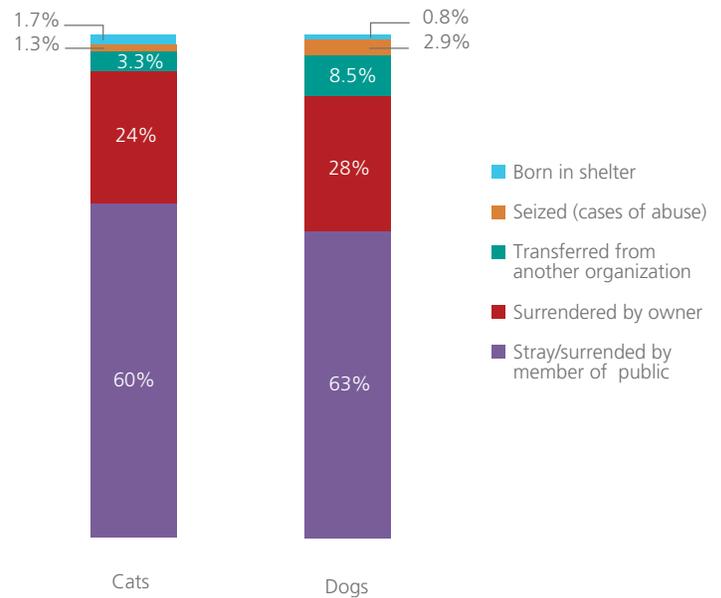


Figure 3. Sources of intake of cats and dogs in 2012

Figure 3 presents the sources of cats and dogs brought to Canadian shelters in 2012. The majority of animals were taken in as stray (60% of cat intake and 63% of dog intake). Animals surrendered by their guardians make up the second largest category (24% of cat intake and 28% of dog intake). Although twice as many cats entered shelters as dogs, it is important to note the similar proportions of the intake categories.

OUTCOMES

Figure 4 presents the outcomes of cats and dogs from responding shelters in 2012 as a percentage of total shelter population. Figures 5 to 7 show the specific outcomes as rates relative to total intake and provide comparisons to previous data collected since 2007. Finally, the Appendix lists the absolute numbers of animals by category.

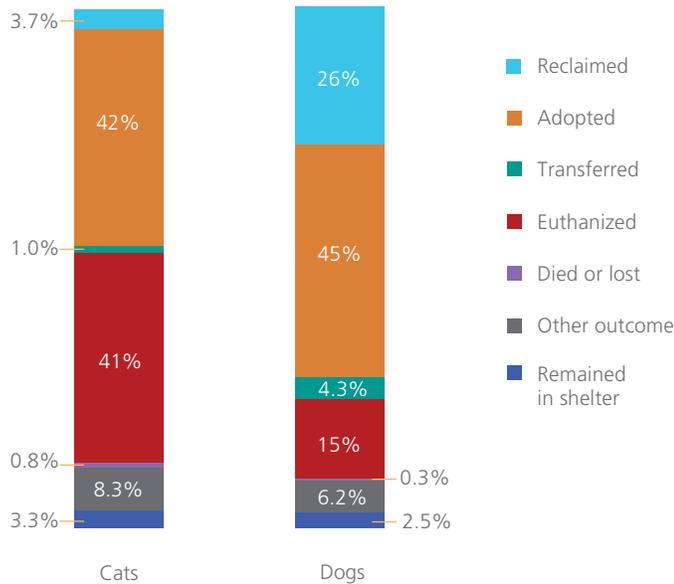


Figure 4. Outcomes of animals in 2012 relative to total shelter population

Reclaim by Guardian

More than a quarter of dogs taken in by shelters are reclaimed by their guardians, a significantly higher fraction than for cats (Figure 4). Figure 5 shows that this difference in reclaim rates for cats and dogs has been fairly consistent since 2007. Generally, 25 to 30% of dogs are reclaimed by their guardians compared to less than 5% of cats.

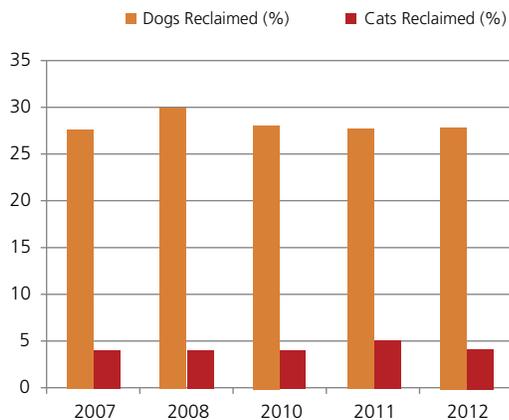


Figure 5. Percentage of cats and dogs reclaimed relative to total intake

Comparing the number of animals reclaimed to the number of stray animals taken in to shelters provides a gauge of the number of lost animals that are returned to their guardians. In 2012 the reclaim to stray rate was only 7% for cats and 45% for dogs. One approach to improving reclaim rates may be to provide permanent identification prior to adoption. Of the organizations surveyed in 2012, 17% do not have a policy of microchipping prior to adoption. Some organizations indicated they only microchip dogs, not cats. If widespread, the practice of offering permanent identification preferentially for dogs over cats could in part explain the difference in the reclaim rates. Other explanations for this difference are that a subset of cats could be mischaracterized as “stray” when they actually have no guardians; the rate of abandonment (in the street) could be higher for cats than dogs; and the value of cats could generally be lower than that of dogs, such that less effort is made to find stray cats compared to stray dogs.

Adoption

In 2012 adoption rates were very similar for cats and dogs at 42% and 45%, respectively (Figure 4). Adoption rates of dogs appear to have decreased slightly in 2011 and 2012 relative to previous years, while cat adoption rates have increased since 2010 (Figure 6). Figure 6 does not include data going back to 1993 because the number of respondents in these earlier surveys is not currently known. However, the percentage of cats and dogs adopted from 1993 to 2000 was consistently less than 35% and less than 40%, respectively, suggesting an improvement in adoption rates relative to the 1990s. Nevertheless, adoptions have typically made up less than 50% of the possible outcomes.

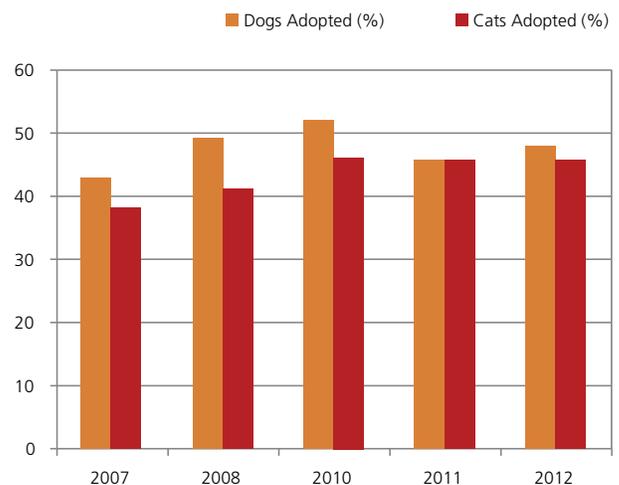


Figure 6. Percentage of cats and dogs adopted relative to total intake

OUTCOMES

Euthanasia

Euthanasia numbers for cats and dogs differed markedly in 2012. Six times as many cats were euthanized as dogs (Appendix). This corresponds to 41% of cats in shelters euthanized compared to 15% of dogs (Figure 4). The 2012 euthanasia rates are similar to those in 2011 and in general appear to be decreasing relative to 2007 and 2008 (Figure 7). Figure 7 does not include data from surveys going back to 1993 as the number of respondents in these earlier surveys is not currently known. However, the earlier data suggests an overall decreasing trend in euthanasia rates from 60% and 30% for cats and dogs, respectively, through the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, the euthanasia rates for cats have been consistently twice as high as those for dogs over the last 20 years. This dire situation reflects the cat overpopulation crisis in Canada, which is described extensively in CFHS's Cats in Canada report (CFHS, 2012).

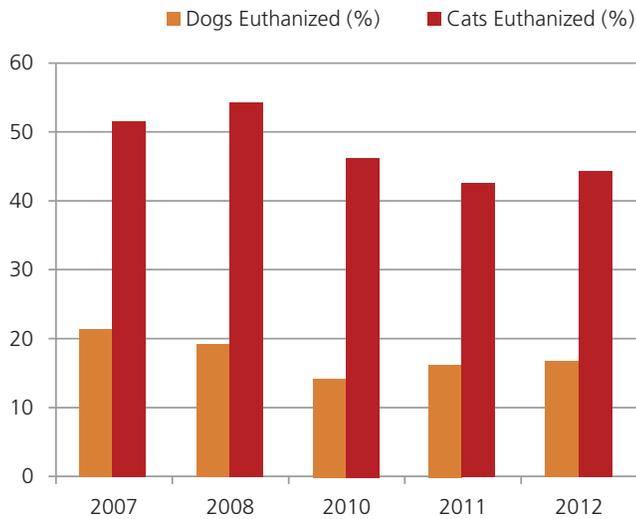


Figure 7. Percentage of cats and dogs euthanized relative to total intake

The number of healthy cats euthanized has been higher than the number of healthy dogs euthanized since 2008, when the CFHS first reported results of that survey category. While a decreasing percentage of healthy animals euthanized for both cats and dogs is a positive trend (Table 2), it is important to note one caveat. Animals in shelters often become ill due to stress and crowded conditions; therefore, a decrease in the number of healthy animals euthanized could also mean that fewer animals remain healthy during their stay in a shelter.

Year	Cats	Dogs
2008	9%	6%
2010	8%	3%
2012	3%	1%

Table 2. Percentage of healthy cats and dogs euthanized relative to total intake

Remaining in Shelter

Figure 4 includes the percentage of incoming cats and dogs that remained in the shelter, which corresponds to 3.3% and 2.5%, respectively. The welfare and healthy socialization of animals that remain in shelter for long periods of time may be compromised. Therefore, this category could anticipate a less satisfactory outcome. Technically, the category "Remained in shelter" includes animals in foster care that are still under the responsibility of a shelter; conditions for animals in foster care might be healthier or less stressful than in busy shelters.

SPAY/NEUTER



In 2012 96% of responding shelters spay or neuter animals in their care before adoption as a matter of policy. This percentage is much improved relative to 62% of shelters that responded to the 2010 shelter survey. Over 22,000 cats and over 10,000 dogs were spayed or neutered while at shelters in 2012.

The spay/neuter status of animals that are taken in to shelters is an interesting indicator of the level of sterilization of companion animals nationally. In 2012 only 11% of cats and 12% of dogs that were surrendered by their guardians were already sterilized, and just 4% of cats and 5% of dogs taken in as strays were already sterilized.

The high proportion of intact animals that were surrendered or taken in as stray could be interpreted in a number of ways. These categories could represent populations of animals whose guardians are less informed about responsible pet guardianship or who value their animals less and, as a result, did not invest in spay/neuter surgery. Alternatively, being intact may have resulted in behaviours leading to the animal roaming or being abandoned. In all cases, more widespread education and accessible spay/neuter initiatives are needed.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in the 2012 shelter survey was collected from humane societies and SPCAs and thus represents only a fraction of establishments that shelter animals in Canada. Nevertheless, this data set represents the best information about companion animals in Canadian shelters the CFHS is aware of.

Based on responses received from 102 humane societies and SPCAs, **the situation in shelters in Canada may be on a gradually improving trend. Unfortunately, the situation of cats in shelters in Canada is far worse than that of dogs.** More than twice as many cats enter shelters than dogs, and though adoption rates for cats are similar to those for dogs, fewer cats are reclaimed and many more are euthanized. **This situation is reflective of the feline overpopulation crisis addressed comprehensively in CFHS's Cats in Canada report (CFHS, 2012). The report outlines an extensive list of recommendations for different stakeholders to address this grave problem.**

Almost all of the responding organizations sterilize animals prior to adoption. Although this is good news, many animals coming in to shelters are not already spayed or neutered and may be contributing to companion animal overpopulation. The CFHS recommends that all shelters, SPCAs, humane societies, and rescue organizations incorporate a mandatory spay/neuter program as part of their companion animal adoption procedures. Furthermore, **widespread education**

and accessible spay/neuter initiatives must be implemented across the country, targeting specific segments of communities that are the source of unsterilized animals to address their particular barriers, such as cost and geographic factors.

There is significant room for improvement with regard to shelters' policies to provide permanent identification before adoption. **The CFHS encourages shelters to offer permanent identification, such as microchipping, as a method of improving the number of stray animals that are returned to their guardians. If shelters only provide permanent identification for dogs prior to adoption, the CFHS recommends this policy be extended to cats.**

Finally, **the CFHS strongly encourages more organizations to collect data regarding the animals under their care and to share this data by participating in CFHS national shelter surveys.** With only 55% of the 186 humane societies and SPCAs in Canada responding to the survey, the picture of homeless companion animals' situation in Canada is incomplete. An accurate and relevant national picture of companion animal welfare and of the value of humane societies and SPCAs in safeguarding it requires extensive participation of the sheltering community. The heartrending crisis of companion animal overpopulation will never be solved without recognition that it is a community-wide problem whose solution entails open communication on the basis of solid evidence.

References

- Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (2012). Cats in Canada: A comprehensive report on the cat overpopulation crisis. Retrieved from http://cfhs.ca/athome/cat_overpopulation_crisis/
- Food Banks Canada (2013). HungerCount 2013: A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada, and recommendations for change. Retrieved from <http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/>

Considerations for Future Surveys

The CFHS will be providing more detailed guidance for future shelter surveys on the different categories of information collected so as to improve the consistency of data. For example, adoptions returned within 30 days should not be considered new intake, owner-requested euthanasia will be tracked separately, and transfers will be defined.

Starting with next year's survey the CFHS will request shelters to provide the information in the US National Federation of Humane Society's Basic Animal Statistics Matrix (www.humanefederation.org/DataMetricsIntro.cfm), recently adopted by the Shelter Animals Count US national database project, as a minimum data set. Additional survey questions will address the shelter's budget and resources, broader services offered by the shelter, and the population or the region served by the shelter. In this way, the shelter survey will be able to provide a clearer picture of the role of humane societies and SPCAs as an industry in addressing companion animal welfare in Canada. For further information and comments about the CFHS shelter survey, please contact info@cfhs.ca.

APPENDIX

Aggregate total number of animals reported by survey respondents

	CATS	DOGS	CATS AND DOGS	OTHER SPECIES	TOTAL
Beginning Count	10,398	3,907	14,305	1,067	15,308
2012 Intake					
Stray/Public-surrender	71,233	33,542	104,775	8,136	120,475
Owner-surrender	28,096	14,944	43,040	3,476	49,311
Cases of Abuse	1,522	1,550	3,072	305	3,375
Transfers	3,898	4,506	8,404	464	8,962
Born	1,997	439	2,436	207	2,789
Total	119,198	53,085	172,283	15,779	188,049
Outcomes - Live Releases					
Adopted	54,270	25,379	79,649	5,727	85,336
Reclaimed	4,823	14,879	19,702	253	19,769
Transfers	1,629	2,402	4,031	1,878	5,919
Outcomes - Euthanasia					
Healthy	1,815	107	1,922	27	1,949
Unhealthy and Untreatable	13,774	3,865	17,639	2,614	20,264
Owner Requested	3,451	2,212	5,663	236	5,899
Total	52,547	8,741	61,288	4,124	65,423
Outcomes - Other					
Died or Lost in Shelter	1,077	185	1,262	323	1,585
End count	6,060	2,486	8,546	615	10,276
Spay/Neuter					
Number of animals spayed/neutered while at the shelter	22,233	10,701	32,934	403	41,717