



# 2017 ANIMAL SHELTER STATISTICS



# INTRODUCTION

Dogs and cats are by far Canada's most popular companion animals. In 2017, there were an estimated 7.4 million owned dogs and 9.3 million owned cats living in Canadian households (Humane Canada, 2017). The situation of dogs and cats is an important indication of how Canadian society is meeting its responsibilities to our animal companions.

In this country, animal shelters take on the role of facilitating the return of lost companion animals to their homes and caring for and rehoming unwanted animals. Thus, some aspects of companion animal welfare in society can be inferred from an understanding of the situation homeless animals in shelters face.

While there are no compiled statistics that include data from all animal shelters in Canada, Humane Canada (also known as the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies) has been collecting data about shelter animals from humane societies and SPCAs across the country for 25 years. Humane Canada compiles these nationwide statistics and monitors trends. As a result, this annual collection provides the best available indicators of the situation of shelter animals in Canada.

This report presents the results of Humane Canada's national animal shelter survey for 2017, comparing statistics from past years to demonstrate ongoing positive trends and improving outcomes for homeless companion animals in Canada.

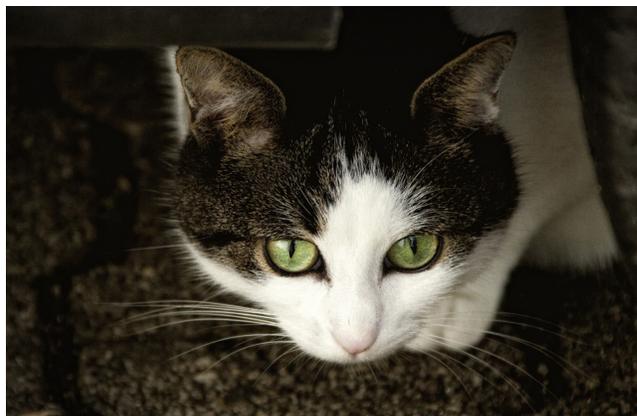


# THE DATA SET

**To collect the 2017 data, Humane Canada conducted a** survey between February and April 2018. Requests to complete the survey were sent to Canadian humane societies and SPCAs that operate 164 animal shelters in the ten provinces (Figure 1). At least one organization in each province responded. Data was received for 93 locations, including 86 shelter facilities and 7 foster-based branches, (2 operated by BC SPCA and 5 by the Nova Scotia SPCA). These foster-based branches were included since operations are integrated across these provincial organizations and include transfers of animals across all locations. Animals at these foster locations made up less than 1% of the animals accounted for in the 2017 data.

Throughout this report, the term “shelter” is used to refer to humane societies and SPCAs operating facilities for transitional housing of homeless animals. While the term may more generally encompass other establishments that also shelter homeless animals, such as private shelters, rescue and foster groups, as well as municipal animal services, these establishments were not included in the Humane Canada survey. Therefore, the data in this report represent only a fraction of homeless companion animals in Canada. That said, the animal data from humane societies and SPCAs mirror data from a broader segment of animal organizations supporting homeless animals (Humane Canada, 2017), indicating that Humane Canada’s annual statistics are a good barometer of what’s happening within the sheltering system across Canada.

In this report, statistics for 2017 are sometimes compared to those for 2015, the last year for which all data points were collected. For 2016, a smaller set of data points were reported for humane societies and SPCAs within the larger *Cats in Canada* report (Humane Canada, 2017).



**Figure 1.** Number of humane society and SPCA shelters in Canada, by province or territory.

Province or Territory	Number
Alberta	18
British Columbia	37
Manitoba	7
New Brunswick	10
Newfoundland and Labrador	7
Northwest Territories	1
Nova Scotia	6
Nunavut	1
Ontario	47
Prince Edward Island	1
Quebec	18
Saskatchewan	13
Yukon	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>

# INTAKE

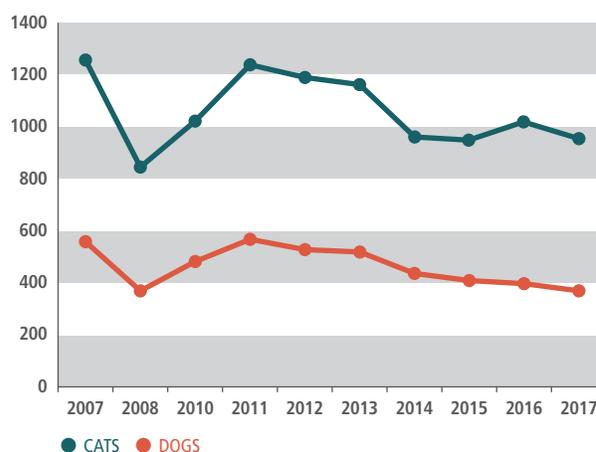
**Intake refers to the total number of cats and dogs received** by participating shelters. In 2017, Canadian shelters took in more than 87,000 cats and 33,000 dogs (Appendix, Figure 2). To correct for the different number of organizations that have responded to the survey over the years, the average number of animals taken in per organization can be compared from year to year. Fewer cats and dogs were taken in per organization in 2017 compared to 2016 (Figure 3), continuing a slowly declining trend in intake. As observed in previous years, the number of cats taken in to Canadian shelters in 2017 was more than twice the number of dogs.

The declining trend in cat and dog intake to humane societies and SPCAs in recent years may be an indication that there are fewer homeless animals in Canada. However, it is also likely that agencies that are not accounted for in the Humane Canada survey, such as rescue organizations, are increasingly providing care for this group of animals. Another factor is that more humane societies and SPCAs are implementing alternatives to intake, such as those included in the Capacity for Care model (Humane Canada, 2018; see “Intake Management” box).

**Figure 2.** Total intake of cats and dogs to shelters.



**Figure 3.** Average intake per reporting organization.



# INTAKE (CONTINUED)

Figure 4 presents the various sources of cats and dogs as a percentage of total intake by Canadian shelters in 2017. The distribution of the major intake categories is similar to previous years. The majority of animals were taken in as stray (41% of dog intake and 48% of cat intake). The second-largest

category is animals surrendered by their guardians (34% of intake for both species). Transfers continue to make up the third-largest category. Juvenile intake is similar to previous years, with 15% of canines taken in as puppies and 37% of felines taken in as kittens.

**Figure 4.** Sources of intake of dogs and cats in 2017.



## INTAKE MANAGEMENT

More and more humane societies and SPCAs are recognizing that, in order to prevent the number of cats in care from overtaking the shelter’s capacity to provide for cats’ basic needs, they must manage intake. Rather than accepting any guardian-surrendered cat at any time, appointments may be scheduled for a time when the shelter’s capacity will better allow cats to be admitted and adequately cared for, ensuring the needs of all cats in the shelter can be met. When setting up such appointments, organizations often provide guardians who wish to surrender their pet with information, resources and support to help them address the issues that are prompting them to consider surrender. In many cases, by the time of the appointment date, the guardian has found another option, such as a new home from their own network, or a solution to

a behavioural issue they were experiencing – which often means better outcomes for these animals.

Similarly, shelters may opt not to accept all healthy, unowned stray cats when they are brought to the shelter, if taking them in at that time would result in overcrowding and stressful conditions for the overall shelter population. It is now understood to be a better practice to manage the shelter population by allowing healthy, unowned outdoor cats to be returned to their original location if they are thriving. Not only does this reduce the risk of overcrowding in the shelter, it also helps maintain the number of cats available at the shelter to a level that promotes speedier adoption, rather than prolonging their length of stay (Humane Canada, 2018).

# OUTCOMES



**The different categories of outcomes for cats and dogs** relative to total shelter population are presented in Figure 5. Subsequent figures present the percentage of animals with specific outcomes in comparison to previous years, and the Appendix lists the absolute numbers of animals by category. As with the intake categories, the relative proportions of these categories remain quite similar to those observed in recent years.

### RECLAIMED BY GUARDIAN

The proportion of total shelter population reclaimed by guardian in 2017 was 28% for dogs and 5% for cats, once

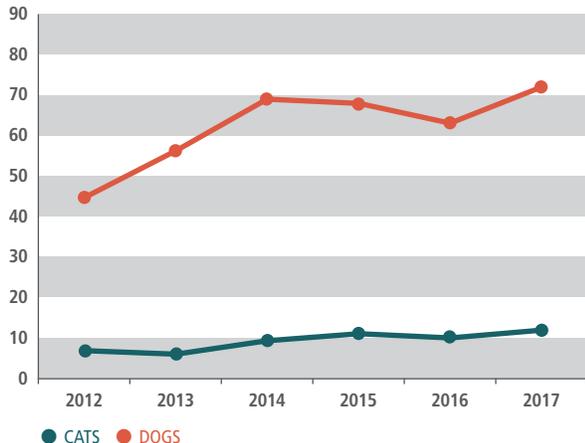
again consistent with the general range observed in previous years of 25-30% for dogs and 5% or less for cats. Comparing the number reclaimed to those coming in as stray is a better measure than the above because animals who are surrendered or transferred would not be expected to be returned to a home. The proportion of animals reclaimed to stray was 72% for dogs and 12% for cats in 2017. These rates are slightly higher than what has been observed in recent years. The percentage reclaimed relative to stray in 2015 and 2016 was 68% and 63%, respectively, for dogs and 11% and 10%, respectively, for cats (Figure 6).

**Figure 5.** Outcomes of dogs and cats in 2017, relative to total shelter population.



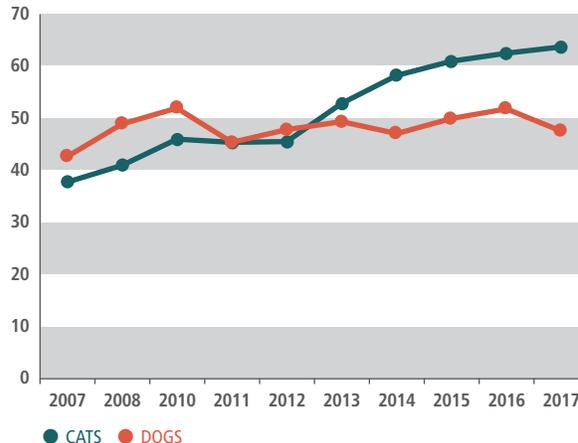
# OUTCOMES (CONTINUED)

**Figure 6.** Percent of stray cats and dogs reclaimed by guardian.



The strong divergence between the proportion of stray cats reclaimed by their guardians compared to dogs is often used to describe the perceived value of cats versus dogs in Canadian society. For example, these differences could indicate that the rate of abandonment of cats is higher than that of dogs, or that less effort may be made to provide cats with identification or to search for lost cats. Other factors could also be at work, such as a poor understanding of the behaviour of lost felines or community cats being taken in under the category “stray”, despite not having a single home or guardian. In the latter case,

**Figure 7.** Percent of cats and dogs adopted relative to total intake.



such cats may be fed or cared for by a number of individuals, none of whom considers themselves the guardian of the cat. As a result, no one would search for them at an animal shelter.

## ADOPTION

Adoption is the largest outcome category, with 45% of shelter dogs and 60% of shelter cats having been placed in a new home in 2017 (Figure 5). The proportion of shelter cats adopted was slightly higher in 2017 than in 2016, continuing the upward trend seen in recent years (Figure 7).



# OUTCOMES (CONTINUED)

## EUTHANASIA

The proportion of dogs and cats taken in who were euthanized is similar to what has been reported in the last few years but is much lower than rates from five years ago or earlier, particularly for cats (Figure 8). In terms of the euthanasia of healthy animals, the fraction of dogs euthanized who were deemed healthy, treatable or adoptable was 9% in 2017, an increase relative to 2015, while the fraction of cats was 6%, down slightly to a level similar to what was reported in 2013 and 2014 (Figure 9). A greater number of organizations reported this data for 2017 than for previous years.

The number of juvenile animals euthanized was much greater for cats than dogs: 5% of canines euthanized were puppies, while 25% of all felines euthanized were kittens. This was the case even for healthy, adoptable kittens, indicating a high number of unwanted litters of kittens being born.

## TRANSFERS

In order to increase the likelihood of adoption, many humane society and SPCA shelters transfer animals to other facilities or partnering organizations in areas where there is higher demand for a certain breed or species. Both the fraction of animals coming into the shelter who arrived via transfer and the fraction of those leaving the shelter who were transferred out is similar to previous years. Proportionately more puppies were transferred to shelters from outside the region than adult dogs, and proportionately more puppies and kittens were transferred out to other organizations within the region compared to adult dogs and cats.

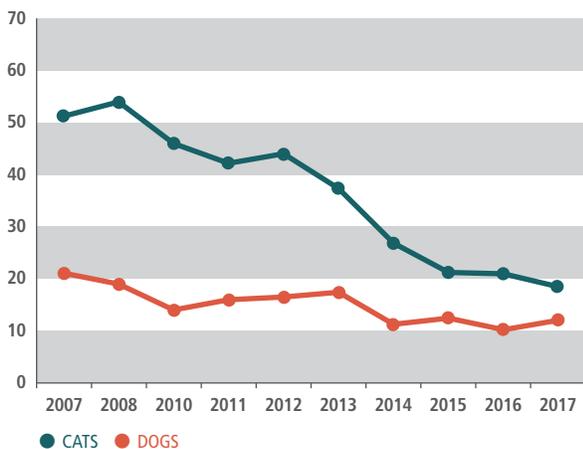
## RETURN TO FIELD

As noted above, many organizations that shelter cats recognize that, in order to prevent the number of cats in care from overtaking the shelter's capacity to provide conditions



that meet the cats' basic needs, they must manage feline intake. More shelters are adopting the practice of allowing healthy, unowned outdoor cats to remain in their home location if they are thriving rather than bringing them into a shelter that risks becoming overcrowded (see "Intake Management" box). To address the causes of overpopulation, these organizations implement programs to sterilize such cats and then "return them to the field". During this time, vaccinations and any required medical treatment are also provided. Fewer shelters reported the numbers of cats they returned to the field in 2017 compared to 2015 (65% of responding organizations for 2017 versus 78% for 2015). However, 5%-6% of felines taken in to the shelter in 2017 were returned to the field compared to 2% in 2015, suggesting that this practice is being used more.

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



**Figure 9.** Percent of cats and dogs euthanized who were healthy, treatable or adoptable.

Year	Cats	N*	Dogs	N*
2013	6%	40	3%	43
2014	6%	34	2%	36
2015	9%	71	2%	72
2017	6%	81	9%	81

\* Number of locations reporting data



## LENGTH OF STAY AND SHELTER CAPACITY

If animals remain in a shelter for long periods, their health, welfare and behaviour may become compromised. Thus, in order to improve the welfare and outcomes of shelter animals, it is better for them to have short stays and move through the shelter and into their adoptive homes without delay. The average length of stay in shelter for dogs and cats in 2017 was 19 and 30 days, respectively, down from 26 and 44 days in 2015. Similarly, median length of stay for dogs and cats was 11 and 17 days, respectively, down from 14 and 24 days. These values do not include time in foster homes. The downward shift in length of stay suggests that shelters are making an effort to move animals through their facilities more rapidly in order to improve the outcomes for the animals in their care.

The percent of a shelter's capacity in use, that is to say occupied by homeless animals in the organization's care, is another key indicator of the flow of animals through a shelter. In 2017, the average shelter capacity in use was 43%, down from values in the 80%-90% range in recent years (Figure 10), suggesting the situation of overcrowding in shelters is improving. For 2017, 69 organizations reported the percent of their shelter's capacity in use, compared to 50 or fewer in previous years in which this question was posed.

**Figure 10.** Percent of shelter capacity in use.

Year	mean	median	N*
2013	94%	90%	50
2014	84%	90%	45
2015	81%	80%	39
2017	43%	41%	69

\* Number of locations reporting data

## SPAY/NEUTER

In 2017, 84% of responding shelters reported that they spay or neuter animals in their care before adoption as a matter of policy, while 13% were unsure and 3% indicated they do not. In 2017, 72 of the 86 responding shelters spayed or neutered a total of 31,906 cats and 7,374 dogs in their care. By ensuring that as many shelter animals as possible are sterilized prior to adoption, these organizations are taking responsibility for addressing companion animal overpopulation. Another 15,087 owned cats and 2,834 owned dogs were sterilized in 2017 through spay/neuter programs offered by humane societies and SPCAs.

# CONCLUSION

**Statistics compiled from 86 shelters and 7 foster-based** branches operated by Canadian humane societies and SPCAs continue to inspire optimism about the improving situation for Canadian shelter animals. Overall, humane societies and SPCAs are seeing better outcomes for animals in recent years.

The number of animals taken in to shelters is slowly trending downward. This may be an indication that there are fewer homeless animals in Canada. However, it is also likely that agencies that are not accounted for in the Humane Canada survey are increasingly providing care for this group of animals. As well, more humane societies and SPCAs are implementing alternatives to intake. Unfortunately, more than twice as many cats are entering shelters compared to dogs.

In terms of outcomes, the proportion of stray animals reclaimed is slightly higher than what has been observed in previous years, although there continues to be a strong divergence between cats and dogs, with only 12% of stray cats being reclaimed, compared to 72% of stray dogs. This would indicate differences in our society's value and

understanding of cats compared to dogs. There is also a need to reconsider whether bringing any roaming cat to a shelter is the best course of action.

The proportion of shelter cats being adopted has continued to increase in recent years, and is once again at the highest rate yet observed.

A number of findings suggest more and more humane societies and SPCAs are adopting best practices for the management of cats in shelters, as outlined in the Capacity for Care approach:

- There has been a further decline in the proportion of shelter cats euthanized.
- For both cats and dogs, length of stay in shelters in 2017 was shorter than it had been in recent years. For cats, length of stay decreased by almost a third since 2015.
- The average percent of a shelter's capacity in use has continued to decline. While there has been a fluctuation in the number of organizations reporting this value in recent



## CONCLUSION (CONTINUED)



years, more shelters provided this data than in the past and collectively reported an average capacity in use of approximately 40% compared to 80%-90% previously.

Humane Canada is grateful for the continued participation of leading humane societies and SPCAs in the annual survey. This has allowed for ongoing tracking of trends regarding homeless, sheltered animals in Canada. Thanks to these ongoing and consistent contributions, an evidence-based picture of the situation in Canadian shelters can be elucidated and used for evaluation, benchmarking, improvements and advocacy. However, there is a need for more organizations to collect and share data through Humane Canada's national survey in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of this segment of Canadian animals and the issues they face.

Humane Canada encourages every humane society and SPCA in Canada to contribute data to this initiative and looks forward to extending participation to other segments of the

sheltering community so as to create an accurate and relevant picture of homeless companion animal welfare and the value that animal sheltering organizations provide in Canadian society. In particular, Humane Canada recommends that Canadian organizations adopt the *Basic Data Matrix* as the standardized, minimum data set for regular collection (Shelter Animals Count, 2018). This matrix forms the basis for Humane Canada's annual data collection and is used by Shelter Animals Count, a growing American initiative with 4,942 participating US shelters at the time of writing.

Responsible sheltering organizations must demonstrate best practices and professionalism as an industry, and this includes evidence-based decision-making and advocacy. Humane Canada's national survey provides the tool to gather evidence on animal shelters. Only through widespread participation of the sheltering community can a full picture of homeless sheltered animals and this facet of companion animal welfare in Canada be known.

# REFERENCES

Humane Canada (2018) *Capacity for Care (C4C) Case Studies: Final Report*. Retrieved from [https://www.humanecanada.ca/capacity\\_for\\_care](https://www.humanecanada.ca/capacity_for_care)

Humane Canada (2017) *Cats in Canada 2017: A Five-Year Review of Cat Overpopulation*. Retrieved from [https://www.humanecanada.ca/cats\\_in\\_canada\\_2017](https://www.humanecanada.ca/cats_in_canada_2017)

Shelter Animals Count (2018). *The Data Matrix*. Retrieved from <http://shelteranimalscount.org/data>

## ABOUT HUMANE CANADA

Humane Canada is the national federation of SPCAs and humane societies. As Canada's voice for animal welfare, we drive positive, progressive change to end animal cruelty, improve animal protection and promote the humane treatment of all animals. We work to advance the welfare of Canada's animals with the federal government, policy makers, industry and the public, driving sector-wide initiatives to put in place evidence-based, innovative practices and national standards. Humane Canada facilitates a community of like-minded organizations to work strategically toward collective goals that improve the lives of animals and address the root causes of the issues that individual humane societies and SPCAs face on a daily basis. We advocate for legislative improvements to protect animals, advance and strengthen animal cruelty case law through the National Centre for the Prosecution of Animal Cruelty, conduct research on issues of national importance to provide a foundation for policy development and convene the annual National Animal Welfare Conference, which brings together stakeholders with an interest in animal welfare from across the spectrum, including international, national and regional animal welfare organizations, academic researchers, government, enforcement personnel, the veterinary community and industry. To learn more, go to [www.humanecanada.ca](http://www.humanecanada.ca).

# APPENDIX

Aggregate total number of animals reported by survey respondents from 86 humane society and SPCA shelters and 7 foster-based branches.

	CATS	DOGS	OTHER SPECIES	TOTAL
Beginning Count	5,491	1,780	1,639	8,910
<b>2017 Intake</b>				
Total*	87,737	33,740	12,060	133,537
Fraction Juvenile	37%	15%		
Stray	42,483	13,880	2,990	59,353
Guardian Surrender	27,461	10,327	4,910	42,698
Cases of Abuse	1,285	1,238	539	3,062
Transfers	10,048	5,066	1,527	16,641
Born	1,309	195	286	1,790
<b>Outcomes - Live Releases</b>				
Adopted	55,874	16,042	6,833	78,749
Transferred	5,818	2,728	1,916	10,462
Returned to Guardian	5,067	10,022	339	15,428
Returned to Guardian / Stray	12%	72%		
Feline Returned to Field	1,471			
<b>Outcomes - Euthanasia</b>				
Total Shelter Euthanasia*	14,346	2,839	2,066	19,251
Healthy / Treatable / Adoptable	570	105	113	788
Unhealthy and Untreatable	11,093	2,099	1,701	14,893
Guardian-requested**	1,920	1,236	126	3,282
<b>Outcomes - Other</b>				
Died in care	1,054	174	534	1,762
Lost in care	84	17	25	126
End count	5,676	1,766	1,157	8,599
<b>Spay / Neuter</b>				
Number of animals spayed / neutered while in care	31,906	7,374	1,059	40,339
Number of owned animals spayed / neutered	15,087	2,834	31	17,952

\* Note that the totals reported may not necessarily be the exact sum of the other categories \*\* Guardian-requested euthanasia is not included in total shelter euthanasia