



2018 ANIMAL SHELTER STATISTICS

INTRODUCTION

Humane Canada, the federation of SPCAs and humane societies, brings together the largest community of animal welfare organizations in Canada, including 45 humane societies and SPCAs that operate animal shelters.

These organizations facilitate the return of lost companion animals to their homes, and care for and rehome unwanted animals. In addition, they may offer veterinary services, including spay-neuter services, and serve as the first point of contact for animal welfare concerns, questions and expertise in their communities. Increasingly, humane societies and SPCAs are taking on a greater role in raising awareness and public education regarding broad animal welfare issues.

Humane Canada has been collecting data about shelter animals from humane societies and SPCAs across the country, including both member and non-member organizations, for twenty-five years. Since there are no compiled statistics elsewhere that include data from all animal shelters in Canada, this annual collection provides the best available picture of the situation of shelter animals in Canada.

This report presents the results of Humane Canada's national animal shelter survey for 2018, 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 2018 data, Humane Canada conducted a survey between February and July 2019. Requests to complete the survey were sent to Canadian humane societies and SPCAs that operate 172 animal shelters in the provinces and territories (Figure 1). At least one organization in each province and one territory responded. Data was received for 94 locations, including 87 shelter facilities and seven foster-based branches (two operated by BC SPCA and five by the Nova Scotia SPCA). The 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 2018 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 shelters, 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 tend to mirror data from a broader segment of animal organizations supporting homeless animals, indicating that Humane Canada’s annual statistics are a good barometer of what’s happening within the sheltering system across Canada.

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

Province or Territory	Number
Alberta	19
British Columbia	37
Manitoba	7
New Brunswick	11
Newfoundland and Labrador	8
Northwest Territories	1
Nova Scotia	6
Nunavut	1
Ontario	47
Prince Edward Island	1
Quebec	19
Saskatchewan	13
Yukon	2
Total	172



INTAKE

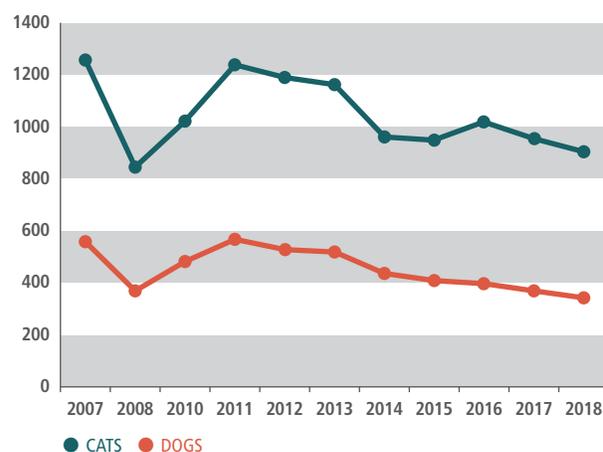
Intake refers to the total number of cats and dogs received by participating shelters. In 2018, Canadian shelters took in more than 81,000 cats and just less than 30,000 dogs (Figure 2). To address the different number of organizations that have responded to the survey over the years, the average number of animals taken in per organization can be compared from year to year. Fewer cats and dogs were taken in per organization in 2018 compared to past years (Figure 3).

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



At 907 cats and 337 dogs per organization, these numbers represent the fewest average number of dogs and the second fewest average number of cats taken in since Humane Canada began surveying humane societies and SPCAs, demonstrating the continuing slow decline in intake. As observed in previous years, the number of cats taken in to Canadian shelters in 2018 was more than twice the number of dogs.

Figure 3. Average intake per reporting organization.

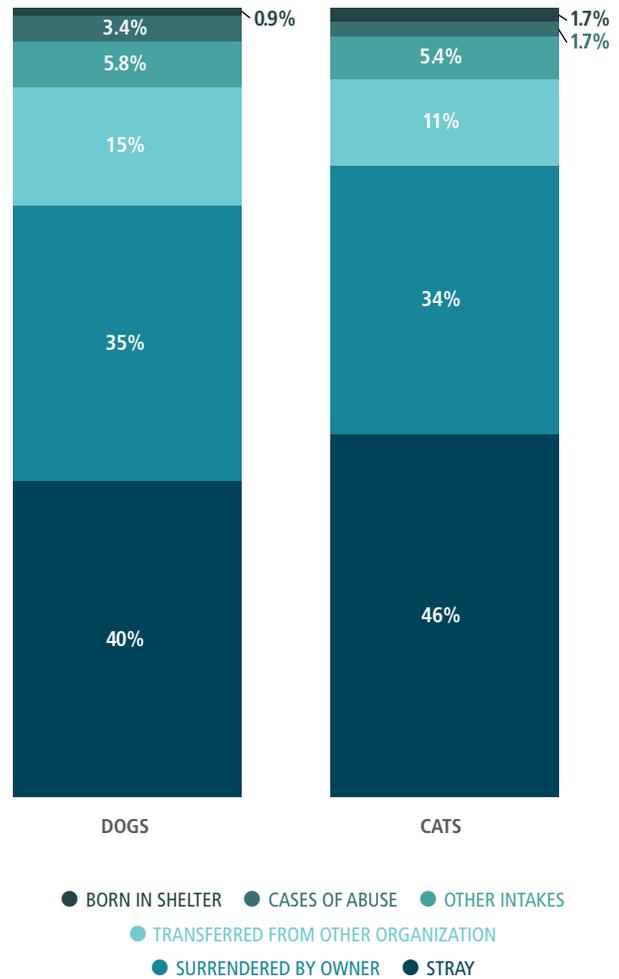


INTAKE (CONTINUED)

Animals enter shelters through various sources. Figure 4 shows these sources as a percentage of total intake by Canadian shelters in 2018. The distribution of the major intake categories is similar to previous years. The majority of animals were taken in as stray (40% of dog intake and 46% of cat intake). The second-largest category is animals surrendered by their owners (35% of intake for dogs and 34% for cats). Transfers continue to make up the third-largest category. Juvenile intake is similar to previous years, with 16% of canines taken in as puppies and 37% of felines taken in as kittens.



Figure 4. Sources of intake of dogs and cats in 2018.



OUTCOMES

The different categories of outcomes for cats and dogs relative to total shelter population are presented in Figure 5. As with the intake categories, the relative proportions of these categories remain similar to those observed in recent years.

ADOPTION

Adoption is the largest outcome category, with 47% of shelter dogs and 62% of shelter cats placed in a new home in 2018 (Figure 5). The proportion of both cats and dogs adopted was slightly higher in 2018 than in 2017, continuing the upward trend seen in recent years (Figure 6).

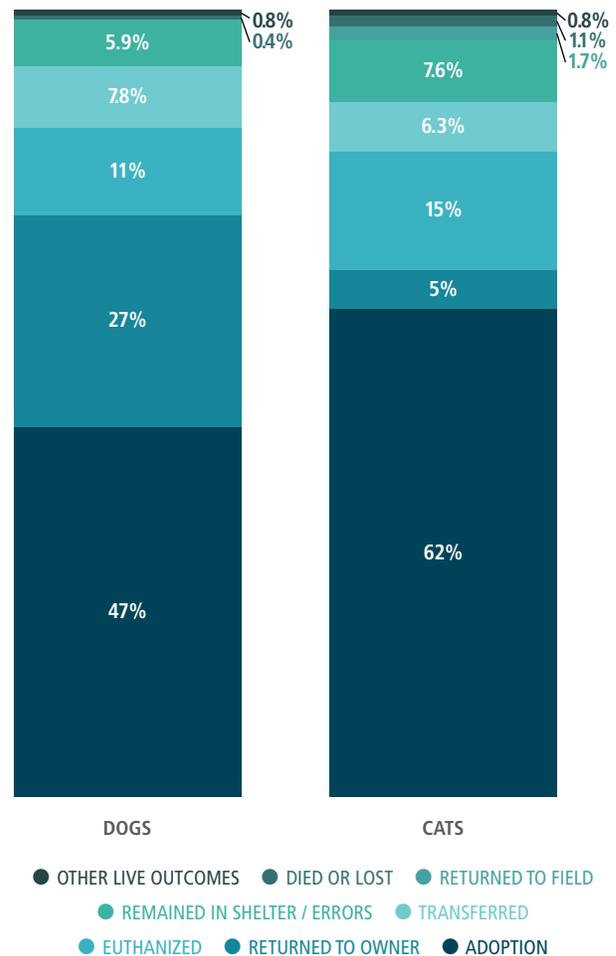
RECLAIMED BY OWNER

The proportion of the total shelter population reclaimed by owners in 2018 was 27% 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 compared to stray was 70% for dogs and 11% for cats in 2018, very similar to the values in 2017 (Figure 7).

EUTHANASIA

The proportion of dogs and cats taken in who were euthanized is similar to what was reported in recent years and 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 2% in 2018, while the fraction of cats was 7%.

Figure 5. Outcomes of dogs and cats in 2018, relative to total shelter population.



OUTCOMES (CONTINUED)



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

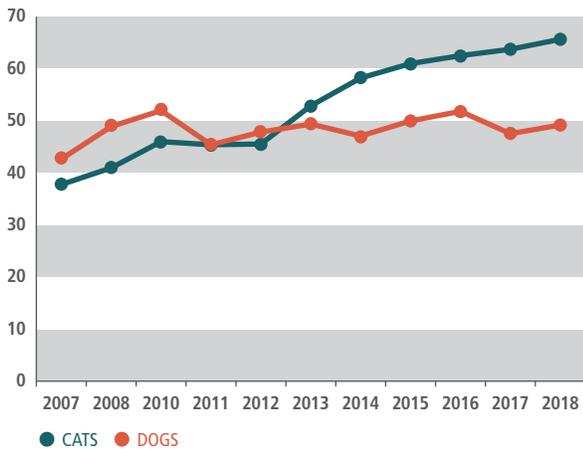
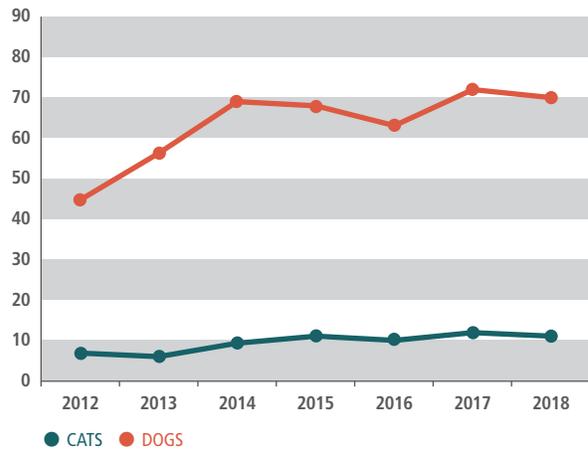


Figure 7. Percent of stray cats and dogs reclaimed by owner.



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.

RETURN TO FIELD

As a component of managing feline intake, many shelters are adopting the practice of allowing healthy, unidentified outdoor cats to be returned to their home location if they are thriving, rather than admitting them to a shelter that risks becoming overcrowded. These organizations implement programs to sterilize such cats who are brought to them and then “return them to the field”. As part of the program, vaccinations and any required medical treatment are also provided. In 2018, almost 2% of felines taken into the shelter were returned to field.

OUTCOMES (CONTINUED)



LENGTH OF STAY AND SHELTER CAPACITY

If animals remain in a shelter for long periods, their health, welfare and behaviour may become compromised. Therefore, 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 2018 was 21 and 32 days, respectively. Median length of stay for dogs and cats was 11 and 16 days, respectively. These values do not include time in foster homes.

The percent of a shelter’s capacity in use, that is to say occupied by homeless animals in the organization’s care, is a key indicator of the flow of animals through a shelter. In 2018, the average shelter capacity in use was 70%, lower than values in recent years, which were in the 80 to 90% range (Figure 9), though greater than the 43% reported in 2017, which was remarkable in that year.

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

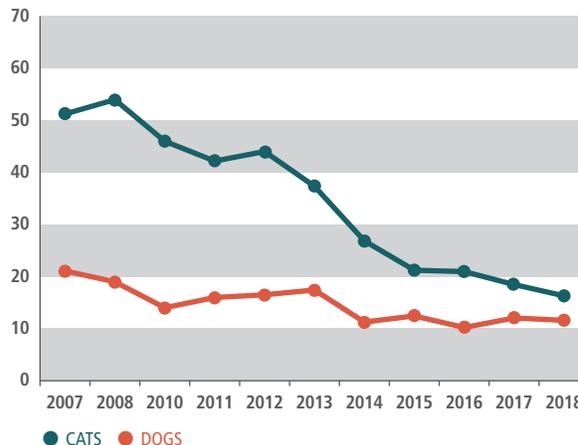


Figure 9. Percent of shelter capacity in use.

Year	mean	median	N*
2013	94%	90%	50
2014	84%	90%	45
2015	81%	80%	39
2017	43%	41%	69
2018	70%	75%	79

* Number of locations reporting data

SPAY/NEUTER

In 2018, 94% of responding shelters reported that they spay or neuter animals in their care before adoption as a matter of policy, while 2% were unsure and 3% indicated they do not. Responding shelters spayed or neutered a total of 27,611 cats and 7,317 dogs in their care. Another 21,057 owned cats and 4,112 owned dogs were sterilized in 2018 through spay/neuter programs offered to members of the public by responding humane societies and SPCAs – an increase of 40% for cats and 45% for dogs, compared to the previous year.

CONCLUSION

Statistics compiled from 87 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 have been seeing better outcomes for animals in recent years.

The number of animals taken in to shelters continues to slowly trend downward. Fewer cats and dogs were taken in per organization in 2018 compared to past years. These numbers represent the fewest average number of dogs and the second fewest average number of cats, since Humane Canada began surveying humane societies and SPCAs. While the overall numbers are decreasing, the distribution of the major intake and outcome categories remains similar to previous years.

The proportion of stray animals who were reclaimed increased relative to previous years, although there continues to be a strong divergence between cats and dogs, with the cat reclaim rate being much lower than the rate for dogs. The proportion of both cats and dogs adopted increased in 2018, and the proportion of shelter cats adopted is once again at the highest rate yet observed: a cause for celebration.

Almost all responding shelters spay or neuter animals in their care before adoption as a matter of policy, and the number of owned animals who were spayed or neutered through programs offered by these organizations increased 40 to 45%, relative to the previous year.

The 2018 data and analysis of trends support the impression of a national animal welfare movement that is slowly overcoming the challenges of the homeless companion animal overpopulation crisis, as characterized by overburdened shelters and high euthanasia rates. The Canadian community is slowly approaching a balance of lower intake and euthanasia and higher adoption, likely due to many factors, including bylaws and the promotion of responsible ownership, changes in spay/neuter and shelter practices, and the changing value of animals in our society. Evolving challenges in companion animal welfare present opportunities for a changing role of humane societies and SPCAs in Canadian society. Given the current statistics, we are at a critical time to reflect about what that future role could be.

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 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.

