

# Marketing Guidance and Materials for Promoting Accessible Spay/Neuter Initiatives



## Accessible Spay/Neuter Toolkit

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Once you have accessible spay/neuter services that you are ready to promote, there are many ways to spread the word. Because accessible options do not exist in many communities in Canada, word of mouth is often sufficient to bring in clients to a new program. Until a spay/neuter initiative has adequate capacity to accommodate all interested potential clients, it may be better to limit promotional campaigns or to focus them to your specific target area. Asking specific community groups and animal welfare organization partners to raise awareness among their stakeholders is an excellent way to reach a target demographic. Posting signs in a neighbourhood of interest is another way. As your surgery capacity is established and grows, you can expand your marketing audience.

Whether promotion is focused or broad, educational aspects about the benefits of spay/neuter, including in reducing overpopulation, should be incorporated, since there is evidence that promoting accessible initiatives helps to increase the use of traditional (non-subsidized) services, resulting in more animals sterilized.

Provincial colleges of veterinarians have regulations on advertising of services, including specific language usage. Consult the regulations in your province as you consider how to promote your spay/neuter initiative.

The Ontario SPCA has an educational website [www.fixyourpet.ca](http://www.fixyourpet.ca) that is an excellent resource and includes sample marketing materials that can be downloaded, including posters, public service announcements, and social media ads. Humane Alliance provides myriad marketing ideas and materials, organized on the basis of their cost, time needed to produce them, technical knowledge required, and type of medium.

[www.humanealliance.org/open-a-clinic/marketing-options](http://www.humanealliance.org/open-a-clinic/marketing-options)

Recent research has found the top reasons given by Canadian pet guardians for not altering their animals are: (1) the animal is too young, too old, or has a health issue; (2) it costs too much; and (3) guardians “have not gotten around to it”<sup>1</sup>. This suggests that education about early spay/neuter is an important element to include in promotional material. The Humane Alliance’s When to Spay campaign [www.whentospay.org](http://www.whentospay.org) focuses on promoting pediatric spay/neuter (performed as early as 6-14 weeks of age). One can register on the When to Spay website to gain access to marketing materials for print and internet, promotion strategies, media talking points, sample press releases, PSAs, social media posts, and letters. One can also download signs, flyers, posters, ads, as well as social media products to share from

[www.whentospay.org/get-involved/download](http://www.whentospay.org/get-involved/download)

The Humane Society United States’ (HSUS) Spay/Neuter Messaging report provides guidance on how to market accessible spay/neuter initiatives based on work in Louisiana and Mississippi and suggests findings can be applied more broadly. HSUS found the most effective messages were those that addressed euthanasia. The second most effective messages addressed companion animal overpopulation, while issues related to cost or health were not as influential. They found it important to make the message personal; the most effective message relayed the concept that *“Your pet’s puppies and kittens could end up euthanized or suffering in the streets.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Campbell, PetSmart Charities of Canada (2014, April). *Pet Acquisition and Spay/Neuter in Canada: Understanding the beliefs that drive pet owner behaviors*. Presented at the 2014 National Animal Welfare Conference, Toronto, Canada.

In designing communications, HSUS offers the following guidance:

- use local statistics (e.g. provincial or regional data)
- respect animal guardians;
- be serious and professional;
- use clear accepted language;
- be aware that using the “cute” factor can backfire; and
- use credible spokespeople. Veterinarians, directors of local humane societies or shelters, and animal control officers were seen by target audiences to be credible, while celebrities were not as influential.

The report is accessible at [www.animalsheltering.org/how-we-help/work-for-change/spay-neuter-campaign-materials/messaging-spayneuter.pdf](http://www.animalsheltering.org/how-we-help/work-for-change/spay-neuter-campaign-materials/messaging-spayneuter.pdf)

HSUS’s Spay/Neuter Messaging webpage provides sample materials, including television, radio, and print ads, as well as billboards and posters that are customizable.

[www.animalsheltering.org/how-we-help/work-for-change/spay-neuter-campaign-materials/#television](http://www.animalsheltering.org/how-we-help/work-for-change/spay-neuter-campaign-materials/#television)

A more dynamic approach to marketing that is likely to lead to cultural change involves creating an educational outreach program. One such program is Regina Humane Society’s Pet S.T.O.P. (Supply, Training and Outreach Program) [www.reginahumanesociety.ca/page.aspx?pid=368](http://www.reginahumanesociety.ca/page.aspx?pid=368) Pet S.T.O.P. engages adults and children about responsible pet ownership throughout the year and culminates in the annual Animal Well-Fair [www.reginahumanesociety.ca/animal-well-fair-2012](http://www.reginahumanesociety.ca/animal-well-fair-2012). Run by Regina Humane Society in partnership with the North Central Regina Community Association, the program also serves as a distribution centre for pet supplies and services that help with responsible pet ownership, including applications for subsidized sterilization services. Through this innovative initiative, community members are directly engaged to improve the welfare of companion animals.

Guidance for other outreach initiatives is provided in this interesting webinar from ASPCA [www.aspcapro.org/webinar/2012-09-26-000000/does-spayneuter-have-people-problem](http://www.aspcapro.org/webinar/2012-09-26-000000/does-spayneuter-have-people-problem)