



The Case for Accessible Spay / Neuter in Canada

Executive Summary & Recommendations



Canadian Federation
of Humane Societies
Fédération des sociétés
canadiennes d'assistance
aux animaux

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Executive Summary

Companion animal overpopulation is one of the most pressing animal welfare issues of our time. Overpopulation manifests in crowded shelters overflowing with homeless animals as well as countless stray and feral animals surviving outside of shelters. Animal welfare organizations and veterinarians widely agree that a key solution to this overpopulation crisis is accessible spay/neuter surgery, which includes low-cost (subsidized) services, high-quality/high-volume spay/neuter clinics, mobile services, and transportation assistance.

Cat and dog overpopulation results in many costs to communities – from extensive spending by local government agencies responding to animal complaints such as dog bites, nuisances, and livestock death; to the costs of impounding, sheltering, and euthanizing stray, homeless or abandoned animals; to costs required to address risks to public health. Costs that are more difficult to measure include the tremendous loss of animal life and the associated animal and human suffering.

Many communities across North America have implemented accessible spay/neuter programs and are experiencing positive outcomes as a result. These outcomes include:

- reduced shelter intake and euthanasia levels;
- fewer stray and feral animals;
- fewer animal complaints; and
- increased adoptions in local shelters and rescue agencies.

These outcomes translate to reduced public spending. In spite of these benefits, many communities in Canada still do not have accessible spay/neuter programs.

Barriers that prevent more animals from being spay/neutered include:

- the cost of surgery;
- lack of clear and accurate information;
- lack of proximity of veterinary services; and
- corresponding issues of transportation.

To address these barriers and facilitate higher spay/neuter rates, accessible spay/neuter programs may provide:

- low-cost (subsidized) services;
- high-quality/high-volume spay/neuter clinics;
- mobile services and transportation assistance; and
- public awareness and education.

Accessible spay/neuter programs may also be supported by legislation and financial incentives.

While accessible spay/neuter is a straight-forward and proven solution that benefits society, the burden of current approaches is predominantly being borne by animal welfare agencies and veterinarians who donate their time and resources. Contrary to perceptions that accessible spay/neuter programs result in decreased business at nearby private veterinary practices, these initiatives have been proven to attract clients who are not yet in a relationship with a veterinarian and promote the use of non-subsidized veterinary services.

Working collaboratively as a community to identify and target specific challenges and to develop accessible spay/neuter solutions amenable to all implicated stakeholders – including

the veterinary community and animal welfare organizations – is a successful approach that should be replicated in establishing new initiatives.

CFHS Recommendations

FOR ANIMAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS

- ▶ As historical leaders in addressing issues of companion animal overpopulation, the animal welfare community engage collaboratively with other stakeholders and advocate for accessible spay/neuter programs locally, provincially, and nationally. Shelters, SPCAs, humane societies, and rescue organizations incorporate a mandatory spay/neuter program as part of their companion animal adoption procedures.
- ▶ Be innovative in creating public outreach activities that engage specific communities and build trust.

FOR THE VETERINARY COMMUNITY

- ▶ Schools of veterinary medicine and private practice veterinarians collaborate with the animal welfare community to address this critical animal welfare issue.
- ▶ Veterinary medical associations work with community stakeholders to identify elements within their current regulations and policies that limit accessible spay/neuter and remove these elements without delay.
- ▶ The veterinary community support high-quality/high-volume and subsidized spay/neuter initiatives.

FOR GOVERNMENTS

- ▶ Each municipality review the current state of companion animal overpopulation and spay/neuter needs in its jurisdiction and establish positive working relationships with local animal welfare and veterinary stakeholders to devise a well-funded accessible spay/neuter program.
- ▶ Municipalities establish and enforce companion animal licensing for both cats and dogs that set significantly higher fees for unsterilized versus sterilized animals.
- ▶ Revenue from animal control programs (such as licensing fees) be invested directly in accessible spay/neuter initiatives.
- ▶ Municipalities recognize the important, long-term benefits of establishing their own accessible spay/neuter clinics and employ veterinarians on staff that are specialized in high-quality/high-volume spay/neuter surgery.
- ▶ Local and provincial governments demonstrate leadership and engage the community (including veterinarians, animal welfare organizations, other charitable organizations, concerned citizens) to develop accessible spay/neuter solutions.

- ▶ Public authorities implement consistent, coordinated spay/neuter communication as well as education/outreach programming to promote the importance of companion animal sterilization.

IN GENERAL

- ▶ High-quality/high-volume and mobile spay/neuter programs be implemented to target segments of the population that currently have few accessible options.
- ▶ Specific spay/neuter initiatives be established to support small rescue organizations and Trap-Neuter-Return initiatives for feral cat colonies.
- ▶ All organizations or establishments that offer animals for sale or adoption incorporate mandatory spay/neuter into their procedures.

