Distribution by province of 174 shelters operated by humane societies and SPCAs in Canada

83 shelters completed the survey for 2020, for a response rate of 48%
With the emergence of a highly infectious human virus that resulted in the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, society at large was shuttered in an unprecedented way. This included animal shelters, that had to close their doors to the public and find new ways to support their communities, including the animals in care. Reducing human to human contact meant organizations shifted their services, for example by increasing the use of foster homes to keep animals out of a central shelter facility, empowering community members to directly reunite stray animals with their families, and supporting pet owners to find solutions to care for and prevent relinquishment of their companion animals.

The positive results of this shift are evident in the 2020 statistics, with historically low shelter intake and increased live outcome rates, particularly for cats. This is likely because the reduced intake and lower in-shelter population during the pandemic meant organizations were closer to their Capacity for Care, enabling them to optimize outcomes for animals in care.

The result has prompted an evolution in the model of animal services toward a more community-centred approach. This new model has the potential to radically improve outcomes and more holistically support humans and animals in potentially vulnerable situations. Please see Humane Canada’s Community-Supported Animal Sheltering Policy Platform to learn more.
In 2020, there was a **28% decrease in dog intake** and a **25% decrease in cat intake** compared to the previous year.
Overall, the proportions of sources of intake remained consistent with previous years.
In 2020 there were historically high rates of stray animals returned to their owners:

80% dogs

17% cats

Outcomes of cats and dogs in 2020

Percent stray dogs and cats reclaimed by owner

Dogs

Cats

Remained in shelter/errors
Died or lost
Other live outcomes
Returned to Field
Transferred
Euthanized
Returned to owner
Adopted


Dogs

Cats

0 20 40 60 80 100

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Percent stray dogs and cats reclaimed by owner
Historically high levels of adoption and low rates of euthanasia for cats. This may be because fewer animals were in care and shelters could remain at their capacity for care, optimizing outcomes and moving animals to new homes more quickly.

37% median shelter capacity in use in 2020 compared to 70% in 2019

“Shelter capacity in use was abnormally low due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We increased our foster program so that a large portion of animals were housed outside of the shelter.”

“Due to COVID-19, in March 2020, the majority of animals went into foster care and were adopted from there.”

“Once the pandemic began other groups were taking in animals, particularly dogs.”

cats: 12 days   dogs: 9 days
median length of stay at a historic low in 2020 compared to 15 for cats and 12 for dogs in 2019.

“These numbers are atypical due to the large number of animals placed in foster care throughout 2020.”
ABOUT HUMANE CANADA
Humane Canada is the federation of Humane Societies and SPCAs. 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. Humane Canada convenes and represents the largest animal welfare community in the country. Together with our Members and Associates in every province and two territories, we advance the welfare of animals with a strong national voice, promoting animal welfare interests and concerns to government, policymakers, industry, and the public.