



2019 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 43 humane societies and SPCAs that operate animal shelters. These organizations take on the role of facilitating the return of lost companion animals to their homes and caring for and rehoming 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. Their engagement with and support of community members is becoming more and more vital to providing the best outcomes for companion animals.

For over twenty-five years, Humane Canada™ has been collecting data about shelter animals from humane societies and SPCAs across the country, including both member and non-member organizations. 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 trends in Canada.

This report presents the results from the national animal shelter survey for 2019, comparing statistics from past years to demonstrate continuing positive trends for homeless companion animals in Canada.



THE DATA SET

To collect the 2019 data, Humane Canada™ conducted a survey between March and July 2020. Requests to complete the survey were sent to Canadian humane societies and SPCAs that operate 170 animal shelters in the provinces and territories (Figure 1). At least one organization in each province and one territory responded. Data was received for 87 locations, including 81 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 typically make up less than 1% of the animals accounted for in the data.

Compared to past years, fewer organizations responded to the annual survey in 2020, due to reduced staffing and resources, as well as other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those organizations that did submit their data represent 48% of Humane Society or SPCA-operated shelters in Canada, just slightly less than the 50% which is the typical response rate.

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 represents only a fraction of homeless companion animals in Canada. That said, the animal data from humane societies and SPCAs tends to mirror data from a broader segment of animal organizations supporting homeless animals, indicating that the annual statistics collected by Humane Canada™ are a good barometer of the state of 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	38
Manitoba	7
New Brunswick	11
Newfoundland and Labrador	8
Northwest Territories	1
Nova Scotia	6
Nunavut	1
Ontario	46
Prince Edward Island	1
Quebec	17
Saskatchewan	13
Yukon	2
Total	170



INTAKE

Intake refers to the total number of cats and dogs received by participating shelters. In 2019, Canadian shelters took in more than 78,000 cats and just less than 28,000 dogs (Figure 2). In addition, these organizations reported taking in more than 11,000 animals of other species, including domestic companion animals, exotic animals and wildlife. The remainder of the report will describe the results for cats and dogs, for which data is most consistent across organizations.

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. A similar average number of cats and dogs were taken in per organization in 2019 compared to 2018 (Figure 3). The number of cats taken into Canadian shelters in 2019 was more than twice the number of dogs, a trend that has been observed for many years

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

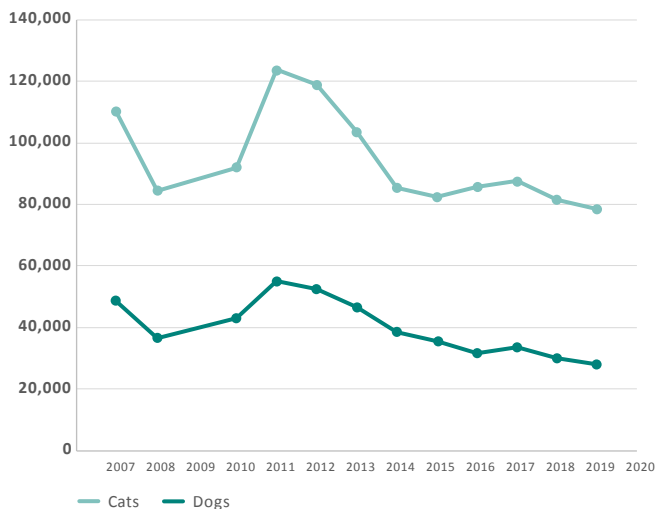
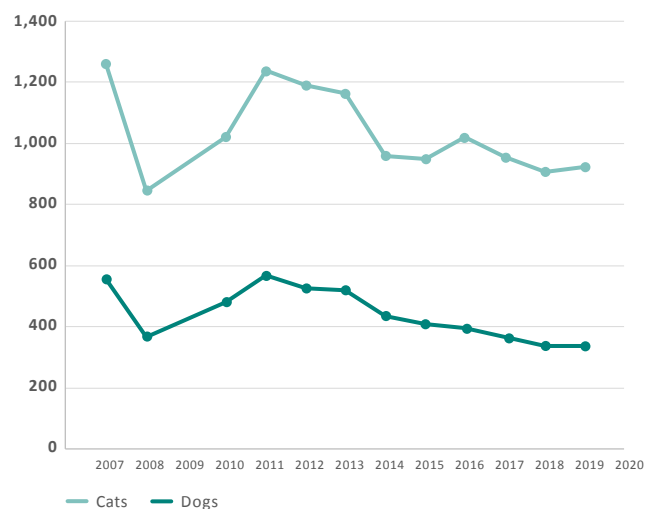


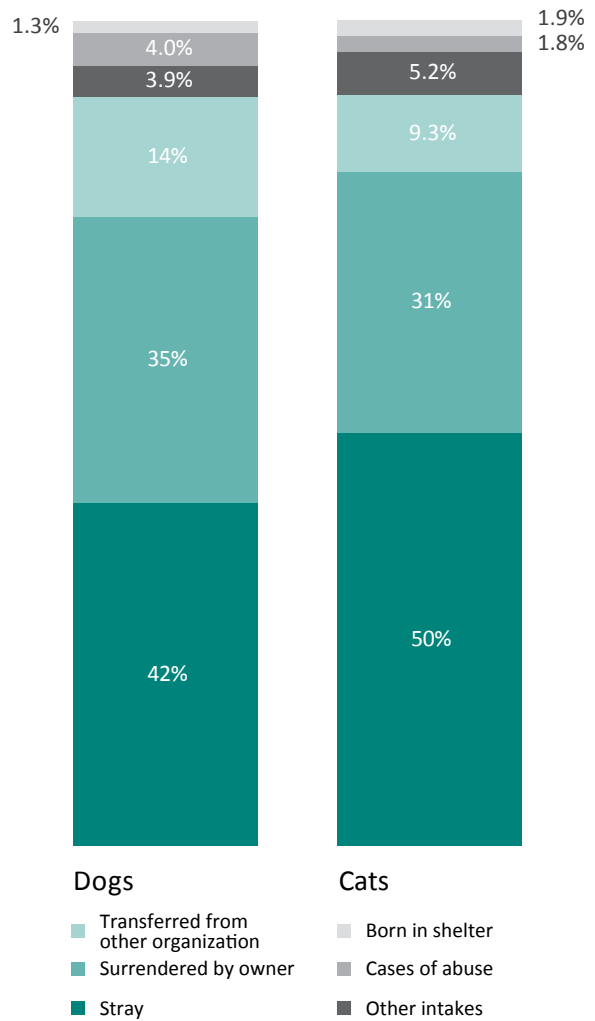
Figure 3. Average intake per reporting organization.





Animals enter shelters through various sources. Figure 4 shows these sources as a percentage of total intake by Canadian shelters in 2019. The distribution of the major intake categories is very similar to previous years. The majority of animals were admitted as stray animals (42% of dog intake and 50% of cat intake). The second-largest category is animals surrendered by their owners (35% of intake for dogs and 31% for cats). Transfers continue to make up the third-largest category. Juvenile intake is also similar to previous years, with 16% of canines taken in as puppies and 33% of felines taken in as kittens.

Figure 4. Sources of intake of dogs and cats in 2019.





OUTCOMES

The different categories of outcomes for cats and dogs relative to the 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.

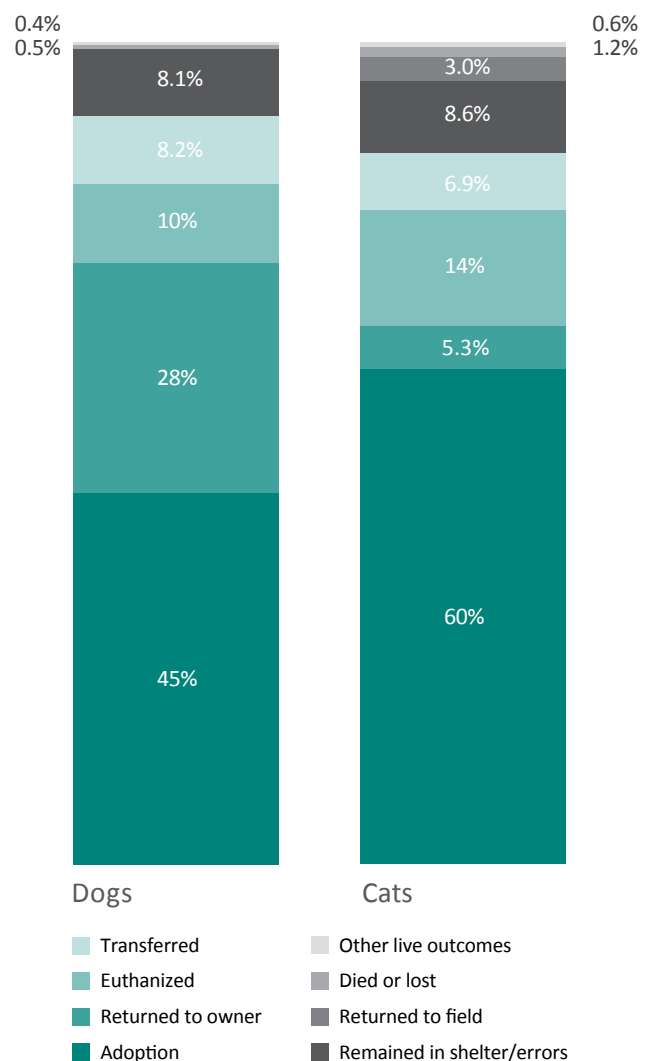
Adoption

Adoption is the largest outcome category, with 45% of shelter dogs and 60% of shelter cats having been placed in a new home in 2019 (Figure 6).

Reclaimed by Owner

The proportion of the total shelter population reclaimed by owners in 2019 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 compared to stray was 70% for dogs and 11% for cats in 2019 (Figure 7), very similar to the values in the last two years.

Figure 5. Outcomes of dogs and cats in 2019, relative to total shelter population.



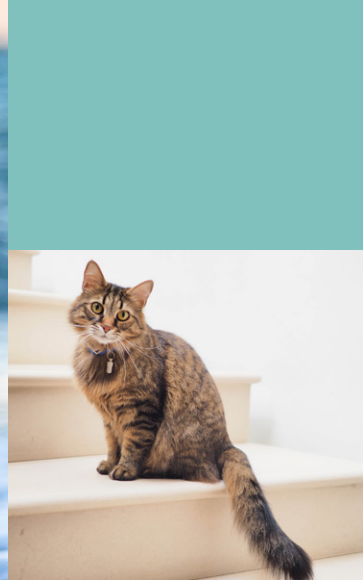


Figure 6. Percent of cats and dogs adopted relative to total intake.

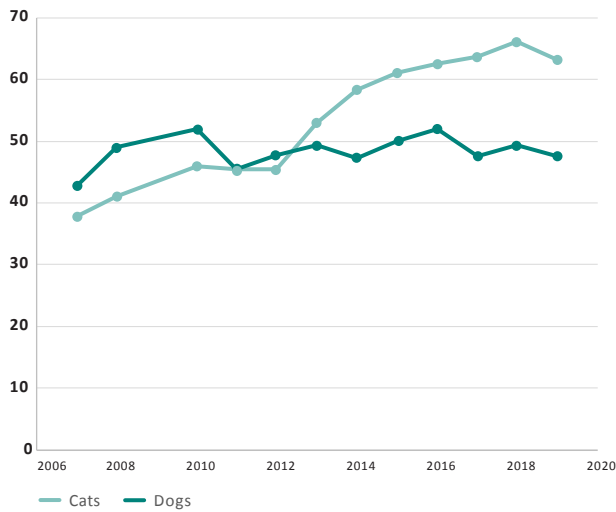
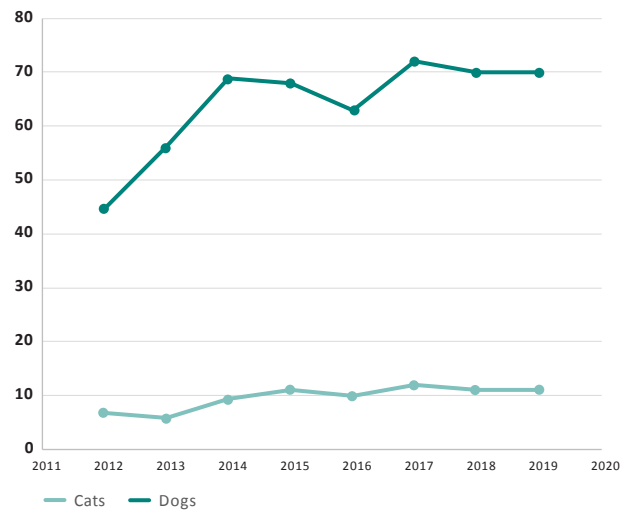


Figure 7. Percent of stray cats and dogs reclaimed by owner.



Euthanasia

The proportion of dogs and cats taken in who were euthanized is amongst the lowest seen in recent years. Indeed, at less than 15%, the proportion of cats taken in who were euthanized is once again at the lowest level recorded by Humane Canada™, and is approaching the situation for dogs at 10% (Figure 8). In terms of the euthanasia of healthy animals, the fraction of both dogs and cats euthanized who were deemed healthy, treatable or adoptable was 2%. However, a smaller number of organizations submitted reliable data about this measure for 2019 compared to previous years.

Transfers

In order to increase the likelihood of adoption and reduce the time animals spend in care, many humane society and SPCA shelters transfer animals to other facilities or

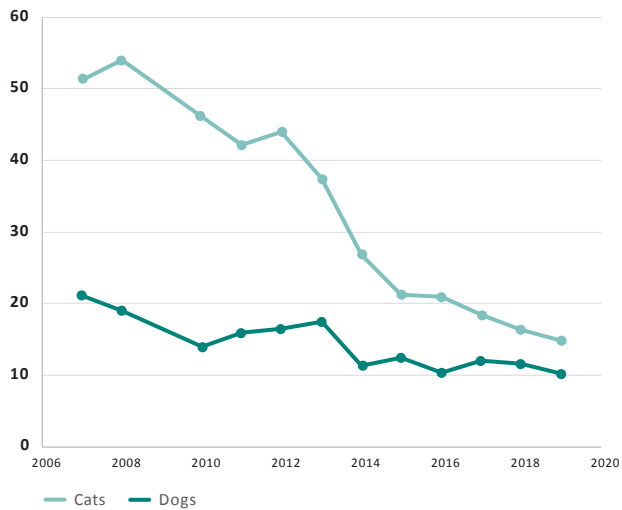
partnering organizations in areas where there is higher demand for a certain breed or species. Both the fraction of animals coming into the shelter who arrived via transfer and the fraction of those leaving the shelter who were transferred out is similar to previous years.

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 2019, 3% of felines taken into the shelter were returned to the field.



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



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. Alternatively, the foster home environment may provide better conditions for animals who need longer stays. The average length of stay in shelter for dogs and cats in 2019 was 24 and 29 days, respectively, and the median length of stay for dogs and cats was 12 and 15 days, respectively. These values do not include time in foster homes. For cats, these are the shortest length of stay figures reported by Humane Canada™, which is testament to the efforts of organizations to move cats more rapidly through the shelter to improve life-saving outcomes for cats.



Figure 9. Percent of shelter capacity in use.

Year	Mean	Median	N*
2013	94%	90%	50
2014	84%	90%	45
2015	81%	40%	39
2017	43%	41%	69
2018	70%	75%	79
2019	68%	70%	69

* Number of locations reporting data

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 2019, the average shelter capacity in use was 68%, very similar to what was reported in 2018 (Figure 9).

Spay/Neuter

Responding shelters spayed or neutered 37,929 cats and 7,802 dogs in their care. This represents an increase of 37% spay/neuter surgeries for shelter cats, relative to the previous year, while the number of shelter dogs sterilized was relatively consistent with 2018 levels. Another 21,675 owned cats and 4,528 owned dogs were sterilized in 2019 through spay/neuter programs offered to members of the public by responding humane societies and SPCAs. These numbers were at a similarly high level for cats and increased by 10% for dogs, relative to the previous year.

CONCLUSION

Statistics compiled from 81 shelters and 7 foster-based branches operated by Canadian humane societies and SPCAs for 2019 were very similar to those collected for 2018. While a slightly smaller number of organizations contributed data this year compared to last as a result of resource and staffing challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings were remarkably similar. Humane Canada™ is grateful to organizations who made efforts to collect and contribute their data to the national survey, despite unprecedented challenges. Overall, it is encouraging to see that humane societies and SPCAs have been achieving better outcomes for animals in recent years.

The number of animals taken into shelters continues to be on the low end of the trendline in recent years. The distribution of the major intake and outcome categories also remains similar to previous years. Given the steady breakdown of outcomes, it seems further animal welfare advances will come from continuing to reduce shelter intake, which may require innovative approaches.

The proportion of stray animals who were reclaimed held steady. Unfortunately, this means that the strong divergence between cats and dogs persists, with the cat reclaim rate being much lower than the rate for dogs. The proportion of both cats and dogs adopted showed a mild decrease in 2019, relative to the previous year, but was in line with 2017, and could simply reflect slight year-to-year variability.

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 was at a similarly high level for cats and increased by 10% for dogs, relative to the previous year.

Overall, the statistics for 2019 demonstrate relatively stable trends in sheltering within Canadian humane societies and SPCAs, which begs the question of what further disruption is needed in the sector to further advance homeless animal outcomes. The impact of COVID-19 on animal shelters in 2020 is an interesting possibility. The pandemic has compelled organizations to reflect on a different way of supporting the community through a time when fewer animals could be housed in a shelter, due to the risk of human infectious disease. Many organizations are taking the opportunity to think outside the box and consider radical shifts to the model of animal sheltering they have offered for decades. Such shifts may include engaging and partnering more with members of the community to keep animals out of shelters, for example by increasing the use of foster homes, by supporting families to find solutions that don't require them to relinquish their animals, and by empowering community members so they don't need to rely on a central shelter facility to return lost pets. Ultimately, relying less on shelters and more on the family environment is better for the welfare and behaviour of companion animals and promotes the human-animal bond.

The changes brought about in response to the pandemic present an opportunity to accelerate the evolution animal welfare organizations have been envisaging for years toward a new model that can further improve the lives of both animals and the humans with whom they live. Humane Canada™ has produced a policy platform¹ about community-supported animal sheltering that captures the changes that are needed in animal and community services. Please reflect on it and consider how your organizations can contribute to achieving this transformation.

1 Humane Canada™ (2020) Community-Supported Animal Sheltering Policy Platform <https://humanecanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Community-Supported-Sheltering-Policy-Platform-FINAL.pdf>

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.





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