

Position Statement on Dangerous Dogs and Breed Neutral Legislation

At Toronto Humane Society, we are committed to creating safe, vibrant communities where the human-animal bond is protected, and both dogs and humans thrive. We recognize that some dogs can pose a risk to public safety due to various circumstances, including past behaviour, lack of training, or socialization challenges. However, we firmly believe that breed-specific legislation (BSL) is not the answer and has not been proven to work.

Our organization takes the position that each dog must be regarded as an individual and assessed on its behaviour rather than its breed. We advocate for breed-neutral legislation that focuses on safe dog ownership and the actions of the dog and its owner, rather than imposing blanket restrictions on specific breeds. To achieve a harmonious safe community, Toronto Humane Society recommends measures such as proper training, socialization, pet identification, and early intervention for behavioural issues.

Our Vision for Safer Communities

Our goal is to foster communities where humans and dogs coexist harmoniously, enriching each other's lives. We aim to build a society where both people and dogs can live safely, and where the strong, positive bond between them is nurtured and preserved. To achieve this, we must address dangerous dog behaviour proactively and constructively.

We acknowledge that incidents involving dangerous dogs must be addressed. At Toronto Humane Society, we commit to helping both dogs and their guardians by providing accessible veterinary and behavioural care. The greatest indicator of whether a dog might bite or show aggression is its past behaviour, and we are committed to helping those experiencing challenges through early intervention and responsible ownership programs.

Inspiration From A Proven Approach

The City of Calgary has implemented a model for effective, breed-neutral dangerous dog legislation.

Calgary's strategy includes comprehensive licensing and identification, community education, early intervention and support, and strong enforcement. This multifaceted strategy has been associated with a reduction in medium- and high-severity dog bite incidents, as evidenced by a study analyzing data from 2012 to 2017.



Our Recommendations

1. **Repeal of Breed-Specific Elements:** Eliminate breed-specific legislation elements in the Dog Owner's Liability Act (DOLA) and encourage all levels of government to promote breed neutral legislation.
2. **Implement stronger licensing, education, and early intervention programs:** A focus on community programs that emphasize pet identification, puppy socialization, education on bite prevention, and proactive behavioural intervention.
3. **Continuous Collaboration on Community Safety:** Collaboration with government and relevant organizations to develop robust research-backed strategies for keeping communities safe, including fair assessments of dogs based on their individual behaviours, not their breed.
4. **Support for Dangerous Dog Protocols:** Develop clear protocols and allocate appropriate resources to manage dogs that have been professionally assessed as dangerous.

Our Role in the Community

Toronto Humane Society is a leader in advocating for animal welfare and public safety. We will continue to promote education, support, and intervention programs that foster safer, more compassionate communities. We are committed to protecting and promoting the Five Domains of each dog and ensuring that every pet guardian is empowered with the tools and knowledge to be a safe pet owner.

As leaders in animal welfare, we are committed to continuous research and community collaboration to assess and improve strategies for reducing the risk of dangerous dog incidents. Additionally, we encourage community partners to join us in our efforts.

Looking to The Future

Together, through education, safe pet ownership, and humane policies, we can create communities where humans and dogs coexist harmoniously, and where the human-animal bond continues to flourish.

Supporting Resources

1. Toronto Humane Society. (2024) *DOLA and BSL Taskforce Report and Recommendations*. [Private Archives](#).
2. Government of Ontario. (1990). *Dog Owners' Liability Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. D.16*. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90d16>
3. Mellor, D. J., Beausoleil, N.J., Littlewood, K.E., McLean, A.N, McGreevy, P.D., Jones, B., Wilkins, C. (2020). *The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human–Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare*. *Animals*, 10(10), 1870. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10101870>



4. City of Calgary. (n.d.). *Responsible pet ownership: Dogs*. Calgary.ca. Retrieved January 10, 2025, from <https://www.calgary.ca/bylaws/dogs.html>
5. Caffrey, N., Rock, M., Schmitz, O., Anderson, D., Parkinson, M., & Checkley, S. L. (2019). Insights about the Epidemiology of Dog Bites in a Canadian City Using a Dog Aggression Scale and Administrative Data. *Animals : an open access journal from MDPI*, 9(6), 324. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani9060324>

