



Hill's Pet Nutrition

2024 State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report



Supporting Shelters Amid Crisis

Animal shelters and rescues across the country serve as a lifeline for pets and people in need. Every day, these organizations face a variety of challenges — intakes outpacing outcomes, slowing transfers and declining pet adoptions — oftentimes driven by complex financial and housing situations for pet owners. We extend our appreciation and support to the dedicated animal welfare community who works tirelessly to support millions of pets in need as they navigate these difficult times.

The *Hill's Pet Nutrition 2024 State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report* is an example of our ongoing commitment to the individuals and organizations who work every day to support homeless pets. We are honored to partner with key thought leaders and leading organizations in the animal welfare community. We work hand-in-hand with them to help end pet homelessness by providing nutrition, resources and ongoing support to hundreds of shelters through our [Hill's Food, Shelter & Love Program](#), which has led to 14 million pets being fed and adopted since 2002.

The *Hill's State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report* features some of the innovative approaches shelters implement to support their communities. The highlighted case studies and insights from key leaders provide a direct look into the crucial work shelters do every day.

Our key findings shed light on misconceptions and barriers that contribute to lower adoptions. We hope this information supports animal shelters in building data-driven, actionable strategies that encourage pet adoption, supports the removal of barriers to pet care and ultimately helps keep pets and families together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Karen Shenoy
US Chief Veterinary Officer
Hill's Pet Nutrition





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Highlights at a glance

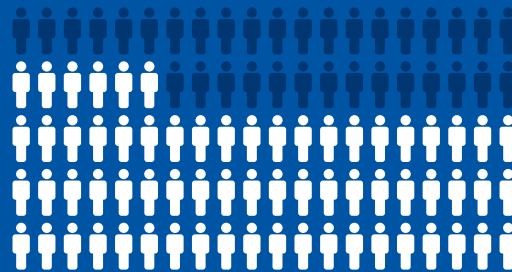
This year marks the fourth consecutive year shelters across the nation are facing levels at or over capacity. [Shelter Animals Count](#) estimates that 6.5 million cats and dogs entered shelters and rescues in 2023 alone. The population of animals in the nation's shelters and rescues has increased by 900,000 animals since January 2021. This surplus is on top of the population already residing within shelters, resulting in an ongoing capacity crisis.

The animal welfare community needs further data-driven insights to understand the consumer beliefs and behaviors driving this increase. The second annual *Hill's State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report* fills this need, presenting findings from a proprietary single-blind survey of 2,500 Americans with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The results reveal insights into the barriers keeping people from adopting a pet. Namely, economic concerns, especially around the cost of pet care, are impacting people's ability to adopt pets.

The report also sheds light on opportunities to optimize pet adoptions and increase foster participation, as well as other potential means to keep people and pets together. Despite the challenges, most people are open to welcoming a shelter pet into their families.

America still believes in the underdog



66%

of people are likely to adopt shelter pets

Concerns about the cost of pet ownership are the top barrier to adoption



84%

of respondents said veterinary care is the most expensive part of owning a pet

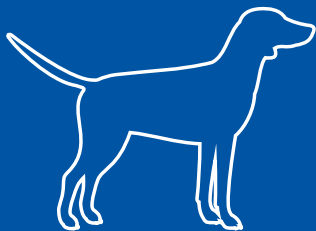


Owning a pet is less accessible for people who earn less than \$75,000 per year

Those making less than \$75,000 per year are statistically more likely to say that the cost of pet ownership exceeded their expectations, which is driven by the cost of acquiring a pet and the cost of pet food

Those making less than \$75,000 per year are more likely to surrender a pet due to financial difficulties

While large dogs may be staying in shelters longer, Gen Z is more likely to adopt a large dog than any other age group



37%

of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 said they're likely to adopt a large dog (55+ pounds), as compared to 24% of the general population

People with lower income levels report greater barriers to adoption due to experiencing pet-related housing restrictions

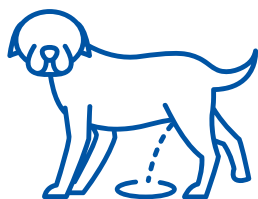


56%

of respondents making under \$50,000 are significantly more likely to have experienced at least one pet restriction in their housing



Behavior issues continue to be a leading cause of post-adoption anxiety



46%

Nearly half of pet parents who experience post-adoption anxiety say behavior issues are the top cause

While fostering is viewed favorably, the fear of adopting the pet and the misperception that the foster parent has to cover all costs for their shelter pet may be limiting broader participation

40%

of prospective fosters are afraid of adopting their foster pet



64%

of prospective fosters say that if pet care costs were covered during the experience, they'd be likely to foster

Offering post-adoption support is a powerful tool to reducing owner surrender



94%

of pet owners considering relinquishment kept their pet after receiving support



Section 1

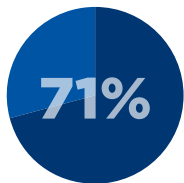
Shelter Perceptions and Adoption Experiences

The positive impact of shelters

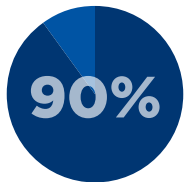


Consumers agree that animal shelters are working tirelessly to ensure the pets in their care are as happy and healthy as possible. With previous adopters being more likely to adopt again, the data suggests welcoming first-time adopters through shelter doors is crucial.

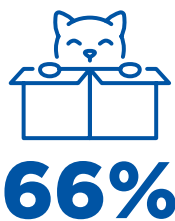
The data also show areas of opportunity with Gen Z and Millennials, regardless of whether they've previously adopted. These two groups are statistically more likely to adopt from a shelter than the total population.



71% of people agree that animal shelters do everything they can to ensure pets available for adoption are healthy



90% of those who adopted a pet had a positive shelter adoption experience



Similar to last year's shelter adoption report data, interest in adoption remains strong, with 66% of all people likely to adopt from a shelter or rescue in the future

Adoption likelihood

(by age & previous adoption experience)

Previous shelter adopter

General Population	82%
Gen Z (18-24)	90%
Millennials (25-34)	94%
Gen X (35-54)	90%
Baby Boomers (55-74)	72%
Silent Generation (75+)	58%

Never adopted from shelter

General Population	59%
Gen Z (18-24)	75%
Millennials (25-34)	77%
Gen X (35-54)	68%
Baby Boomers (55-74)	47%
Silent Generation (75+)	31%

Reasons for not adopting

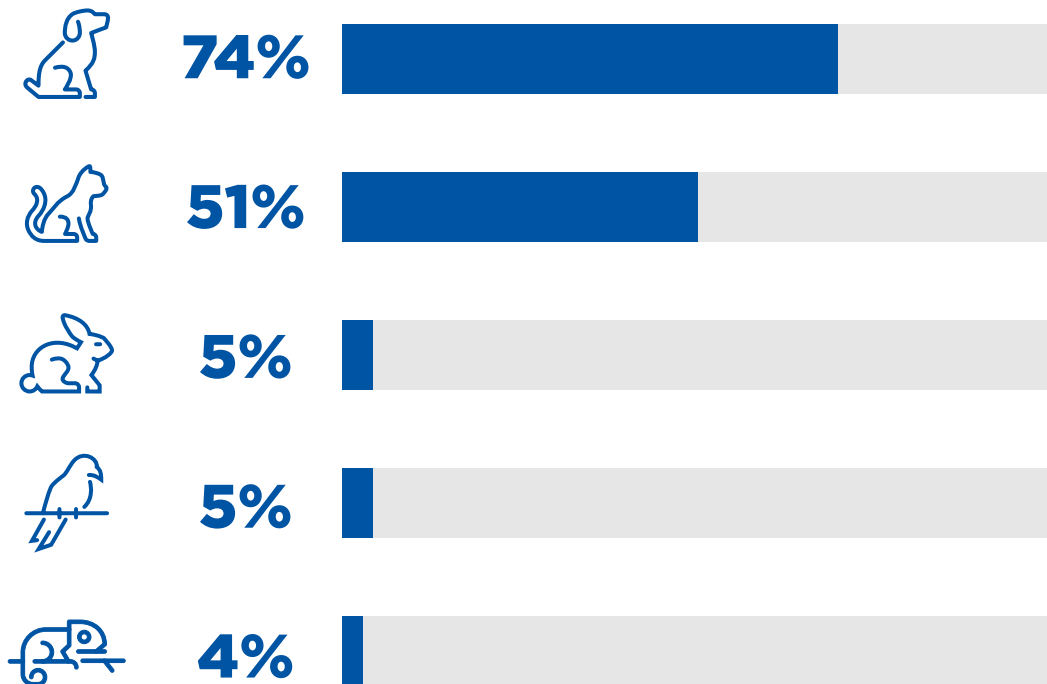
39%

of people who have not adopted a shelter pet cite reasons unrelated to animal shelters, such as cost and maintenance of pets.


However, other top reasons include:



Current pets in family



Pet acquisition by income level

	Total population		Earn > \$100K annually		Earn < \$50K annually	
						
Got from a family or friend	31%	23%	27%	18%	35%	27%
Adopted from a shelter or rescue	23%	17%	21%	19%	21%	15%
Adopted from shelter at pet store	10%	9%	10%	8%	11%	10%
Got from a breeder	23%	3%	29%	4%	17%	2%
Purchased from a pet store	8%	5%	10%	5%	6%	5%

Hope on the horizon

The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement believes strongly that everyone benefits from the unconditional love offered by animal companions. Animal welfare professionals, veterinarians and our partners in the pet industry are committed to working together to remove barriers to pet ownership. Equitable access to care along with post-adoption support are critical in building families and preserving the human-animal bond.



— Jim Tedford, CAWA,
President and CEO of The Association
for Animal Welfare Advancement

The rise in cat adoptions

According to Shelter Animals Count, cats are experiencing a hopeful trend with 2.6 million cats adopted in 2023, 14% more (+319,000 cats) than 2019. In comparison, dogs saw a 5% decrease (-108,000 dogs) in adoptions from 2019 to 2023.

According to this study, nearly 40% of respondents said they're likely to adopt a cat. When asked to select the top three reasons why cats are their preferred adoption choice, respondents overwhelmingly said that cats require less maintenance, followed by personal preference and cats groom themselves.

Top reasons to adopt a cat

Belief that cats require less maintenance	62%
Personal preference	56%
Cats groom themselves	38%
Cats don't require outdoor space	37%
Cats require less space	32%



Some of the success we're seeing in cats finding homes quickly is because the general cost of care, as well as the cost of veterinary care, are typically less than those associated with dogs. Adopters looking to add a companion to their family may find that companionship in a feline friend who is more 'affordable' is less subject to housing restrictions as well.



— Allison Fotsch Kleibor, CAWA,
President and CEO of
Wisconsin Humane Society



Adoption applications

Once a prospective adopter has been matched with their ideal pet, the adoption application may be the next step in the process.

When asked which application process would improve their likelihood to adopt, the top preferred adoption process, for both previous and new adopters, was application free. While filling out an application isn't a large deterrent for those who want to adopt, people of color and those at a lower income level tend to agree at a higher rate that the application process can be difficult.

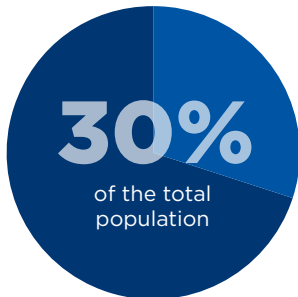
Preferred application processes to improve adoption likelihood	Previous shelter adopters	Never adopted from shelter
Application Free Defined as: Adoptions with no application that use interviews to ensure a good fit between pets and adopters	32%	35%
Foster-to-Adopt Defined as: The opportunity to foster a pet for a trial period before finalizing an adoption	29%	28%
Streamlined Application Defined as: No background checks or home visits visits, with a single application applicable at any animal shelter	21%	16%
Virtual Adoption Defined as: Virtual adoptions where potential adopters can view pets online and complete the adoption process remotely	7%	8%
Transportation/Out-of-Town Pets Defined as: Availability to get a pet you want in another part of the country transported to you/your local shelter to adopt	7%	8%
Some other adoption process	3%	5%

Application viewed as more difficult among minorities and low-income groups

The time and effort put into designing and producing adoption applications is no longer applicable to our work of listening to what people are interested in and matchmaking them to the appropriate animal. Putting too much emphasis on testing our potential adopters can be a waste of precious time, could unintentionally bring out biases or judgements and doesn't produce the results that a conversational approach does.



— Nancy McKenney, MNPL, CAWA, President and CEO of Marin Humane



Believe the application process is difficult

36% of those who make less than \$50,000

36% of those who identify as Black

38% of those who identify as Hispanic



Pathways to adoption: Pasadena Humane's Trial Adoption Program

Elfie was one of the most overlooked dogs at Pasadena Humane in 2023. A 5-year-old charismatic pitbull mix, Elfie was in Pasadena Humane's care for over 250 days. He was overlooked during several adoption events and passed on by prospective adopters dozens of times over. After months of waiting, Elfie finally hit the jackpot. A wonderful family came in looking for a friend for their resident dog, Tofu, who had been adopted from Pasadena Humane two years prior. They took Elfie home on a Trial Adoption to ensure he was a perfect match for their family. Trial Adoption is a program that provides extra resources and support to adopters, allowing families to ensure a new pet is a perfect match before officially adopting. Before long, Elfie's adoption became official. He had finally found his home!



— Dia DuVernet, CFRE, CAWA, MSW, President and CEO of Pasadena Humane

Outlook on fostering

More than two-thirds of people (68%) have a positive view on fostering. Additionally, nearly 1 in 3 people say they'd be more likely to adopt if foster-to-adopt were an option at their shelter.

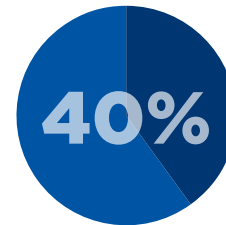
Despite the clear benefits of fostering, the data suggests that there are various factors deterring a person from fostering. For the second consecutive year, the top reason is the fear they will end up adopting their foster pet.

Every year, our foster community helps us care for hundreds of vulnerable animals who would be at risk of illness or decline if they were forced to remain at the shelter. In addition to opening up space at the shelter so we can rescue even more animals and save more lives, our foster community helps to rehabilitate sick and injured animals, socialize shy and scared animals, and provide safety, stability and love for sensitive animals who desperately need a break from the shelter environment.

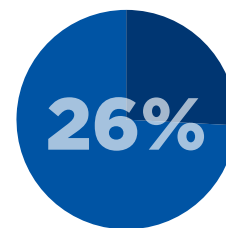


— Melissa Treuman, Senior Director of Development and Communications of Bideawee

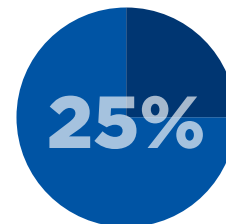
Reasons for not fostering



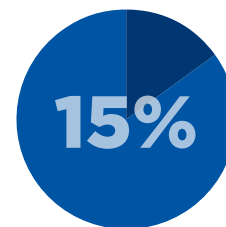
of prospective fosters are afraid they will end up adopting their foster pet



of prospective fosters don't have time for a foster pet



of prospective fosters already have pets/don't have space



of prospective fosters are unaware of what shelters provide for foster pet parents

Foster awareness needed

More than half of respondents are familiar with the concept of fostering (52%), but 48% of the respondents report that they were unsure if a nearby shelter offered fostering for people interested in adopting. In fact, compared to the *2023 Hill's State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report*, there's been a small decrease in awareness of fostering programs. The data also suggests there could be gains in continuing to promote foster opportunities with clearer information on what is required of a foster family and what materials, supplies and support shelters provide.



Pet owners who are familiar with fostering programs

2023

54%

2024

52%

There is also a misconception that foster families must take on all associated expenses with the pet. Many shelters with foster programs provide participants with all necessary supplies, often greatly reducing the cost for the families caring for the pet, but prospective fosters may need more communication about the programs before they will take action.

Fostering is an essential part of animal welfare and can be a beacon of hope for those with no voice. Not only does it save the life of the pet going into a foster home, but it also saves the life of another animal that needs placement by opening up space in the shelter.



— Tam Singer,
CEO of Great
Plains SPCA



Misconceptions about fostering

64%

say that if pet care costs were covered during the foster experience, they'd be likely to foster

20%

of potential adopters (one in five) don't foster because they believe they cannot afford a foster pet



Section 2

Barriers to Adoption

Financial obstacles hinder adoption

Consumers' overall outlook on their family's current financial situation has been steadily declining since 2022, according to the Consumer Confidence Survey. Income impacts multiple aspects of pet adoption, from how people acquire their pets to whether they live in pet-friendly housing to their access to veterinary care.

Cost of pet ownership is still a top concern; pet ownership is less accessible for lower income levels

When asked to choose the biggest challenges to pet ownership, overall cost of pet ownership was the top concern of nearly half of all respondents (43%).

Potential adopters face significant hurdles to owning a pet. The rising cost of living, breed restrictions, fewer pet-friendly spaces, limited access to affordable veterinary and behavioral care create barriers to pet ownership.



— Shelly Moore, CAWA,
CEO of the Humane
Society of Charlotte



Other concerns included:

Time and maintenance required	38%
Cost to adopt/acquire a pet	28%
Cost of pet food	26%
Access to pet-friendly housing	15%

The data showed adopting a pet is less accessible for people who earn less than \$75,000 per year.

The data further suggests that regardless of income level, respondents view veterinary care as the most expensive part of owning a pet, followed by pet nutrition. However, those earning less than \$50,000 are more likely than the general population to stress over some of the smaller costs like insurance, training and toys.

Cost of pet ownership still top concern

Most expensive part of pet care	General population	Those earning less than \$50K annually
Veterinary care	84%	79%
Pet food/nutrition	67%	65%
Pet insurance	35%	42%
Training	22%	25%
Toys and enrichment	9%	12%

Shows top two and bottom three selections from available options to reflect the most significant responses

One can argue that potential adopters seem to be heeding our age-old pleas to consider whether they can take on the added responsibility and expense of a new family member. While certainly a positive development, shelters are left with a surplus of pets who need homes.



— Sharon Harvey, President and CEO of Cleveland Animal Protective League

In Boston, there are neighborhoods that are considered animal care deserts. Even if cost was not a factor, there are simply no resources available, including veterinary care. We have also seen a steady increase in the number of requests from pet owners asking for help with pet food and supplies — from January through April this year we have seen a 15% increase in requests, and the number of pet meals distributed has increased by 96% since we began our pet food pantry in 2020.



— Edward Schettino, DVM, PhD, MBA, CAWA, President and CEO of the Animal Rescue League of Boston

Cost of pet ownership still top concern



1 in 2 people

are unsure if a food pantry is offered by a nearby shelter

From offering low cost veterinary care to pet food pantries, shelters across the country are working to keep pets and families together. Programs like the Pet Food Bank offered by the Humane Society of Charlotte are helping increase awareness of resources.

Addressing pet food insecurity

The Humane Society of Charlotte's Pet Food Bank delivers pet food directly to families in need, right to their doorsteps. This not only ensures food reaches those who need it most, but also allows us to visit clients in their home environment. These home visits are valuable for several reasons. They allow us to assess specific pet needs and offer additional resources if needed. More importantly, they foster trust and understanding as we connect with pet owners on a personal level. This human connection strengthens our bond with the community, allowing us to identify areas of need and build stronger relationships with our neighbors. Ultimately, our Pet Food Bank program is about more than just food. It's about keeping families together with their pets, improving animal welfare, and creating a more compassionate community for all.



— K.C. Thompson, Shelter Operations Manager of the Humane Society of Charlotte

Economic and physical access to veterinary care

Concerns about access to veterinary care undoubtedly have an impact on the public's decision to adopt according to the data. For people making less than \$100,000 per year, that impact is even greater.

Factors influencing decision to adopt pets (by income)

Cost of veterinary care

Impacts

63%

of total population
decision to adopt

Greater concern
for those earning

< \$100K

per year

Availability of preventative, sick or urgent care vet visits

Impacts

49%

of total population
decision to adopt

Greater concern
for those earning

< \$100K

per year

Proximity of veterinary offices

Impacts

42%

of total population
decision to adopt

Greater concern
for those earning

< \$75K

per year

Availability of reliable transit to veterinary office

Impacts

39%

of total population
decision to adopt

Greater concern
for those earning

< \$50K

per year



Improving access to care: Arizona Humane Society's state-of-the-art trauma hospitals

Arizona Humane Society's first trauma hospital was established nearly 70 years ago. Over time, the formerly named "Second Chance Animal Trauma Hospital," evolved to provide veterinary care for more than 75% of the homeless animals coming through AHS' door, including 14,000 pets in 2023 alone. A feat far beyond the initial capacity of their existing facility.

Despite the incredible work accomplished in the aging hospital, the facility had become obsolete and was no longer sufficient for the needs of the surrounding community and its growth. There weren't enough kennels, isolation areas were limited, and veterinary teams worked in tight, cramped quarters performing life-saving surgeries and more than 10,000 spays and neuters annually.

Recognizing the need for a state-of-the-art facility, the Arizona Humane Society recently unveiled one of the largest in the country.

The Lazin Animal Foundation Trauma Hospital sits within their new 72,000-square-foot Rob & Melani Walton Papago Park Campus where they expect to intake 20,000 animals in their first year. Home to a complete trauma triage unit, spay and neuter surgery center, and expanded Parvo and critical care ICUs, this advanced regional facility is also a teaching hospital for future veterinarians.

The Arizona Humane Society's innovative approach to veterinary care has already saved thousands of homeless pets since opening their doors in February of 2024. Today, 4 out of 5 pets who enter their facility will be treated at their new trauma hospital. Together with their public veterinary clinics, more than 17,000 spay and neuter surgeries will be performed in the coming year. Learn more about the heroic work happening at [Arizona Humane's Animal Trauma Hospitals here](#).

Housing restrictions

According to the latest housing study conducted by the [Michelson Found Animals Foundation's Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative](#), 72% of residents reported that affordable housing was hard to find and nearly 60% said pet-friendly housing is too expensive.

According to this study, those who earn less than \$100,000 a year are significantly less likely to live in pet-friendly housing.

In fact, 56% of respondents making under \$50,000 are significantly more likely to have experienced at least one pet restriction in their housing.

Of those who surrendered a pet, 23% cited housing restrictions as a reason for relinquishing. And of people who weren't likely to adopt a large breed dog, 26% said their housing would not have allowed them to adopt.

Pet housing restrictions

(includes homeowners)

	<\$50K	\$50K-\$100K	\$100K+	Total population
Breed bans	13%	8%	7%	9%
Size restrictions	19%	10%	11%	13%
Weight restrictions	14%	8%	6%	9%
Species restrictions	12%	7%	5%	8%
Number of pets allowed in household	20%	11%	11%	14%
Pet deposit	27%	15%	12%	18%
Monthly pet fees	22%	13%	9%	15%
No pets allowed	19%	12%	9%	13%
There are no pet restrictions in my housing	44%	62%	70%	59%

Lack of affordable housing greatly impacts the people in our community, and their ability to have pets. Many pet-friendly rentals require a pet deposit, and some even require additional rent for pets. These barriers make it very difficult for many families in our area to adopt, and even keep pets they already own.



— Dia DuVernet, CFRE, CAWA, MSW, President and CEO of Pasadena Humane

Large dogs: staying in shelters longer but Gen Z may be the key



Fewer than 1 in 4 people are open to adopting a large dog

According to Shelter Animals Count, the median length of stay (LOS) for all dogs has increased since 2019, but large dogs are experiencing the highest impact — their length of stay has doubled.

100% increase in large dogs LOS

80% increase in medium dogs LOS

50% increase in small dogs LOS

More than half of respondents who prefer a small or medium dog chose personal preference as one of the reasons; however, they also cited specific challenges that deter them from adopting a large dog.

Pets of all sizes and ages are experiencing increases in lengths of stay. From cats to small, medium and large dogs, animals are lingering in shelters longer. Ciara, a 6-year-old cat, was at Charlottesville-Albemarle SPCA for 750 days with a skin condition that required Hill's Prescription Diet z/d Cat Food. Knowing cost is a barrier for some to adopt, we worked with Hill's to provide food for Ciara for a full year after her adoption, which led to her being adopted in just 12 hours.

Challenges adopting a large breed dog

27% say it's difficult to travel with large breed dogs

26% say their housing doesn't allow large breed dogs

25% say large breed dogs take up too much space

The data also suggests opportunities exist among different age groups for adopting certain types of pets. Gen Z is statistically more likely to adopt a large dog than any other age group. Though, pet restrictions may keep them from doing so, as only 26% of Gen Z are homeowners, according to [Redfin](#).



— Libby Jones, Executive Director of the Charlottesville-Albemarle SPCA

Adopter age influences animal preference

When asked to select the top three types of pets they would be likely to adopt from a shelter, respondents said:

Shelter adoption pet type	General population	Ages 18-24	Ages 25-34	Ages 35-44	Ages 45-54	Ages 55-64
Large dog (55+ lbs.)	24%	37%	31%	26%	28%	19%
Medium dog (26 - 54 lbs.)	45%	58%	53%	52%	47%	38%
Small dog (Up to 25 lbs.)	46%	37%	50%	51%	45%	47%
Cat	39%	47%	43%	38%	34%	36%

We have seen hopeful, positive trends for cat adoptions in recent years, but there is still work to be done. In contrast, low adoption rates for dogs — especially for large dogs — combined with the increasing number of days that dogs of all sizes are awaiting to be adopted, has contributed to a swell of dogs in the sheltering system throughout the country every year since the end of the height of the pandemic.



— Stephanie Filer,
Executive Director
of Shelter Animals Count





Increasing visibility:

Arizona Humane Society's Dog Field Trip volunteer program

We know better than anyone just how much dogs can benefit from time out of their kennels. Through our new Dog Field Trip volunteer program, an adoptable dog (who has been with Arizona Humane Society for more than 15 days) is taken out on a fun excursion, such as a hike, a coffee date or a meal at a pet-friendly location. The dogs benefit tremendously from a change of scenery, extra socialization and a chance to have some straight-up fun. Thanks to a very cute “Adopt Me” vest, this is also an awesome opportunity to show off a sweet pup in a more natural environment.

During the program's first weekend, five of our long-time dog residents were adopted within one day of their outing. Athletic dogs came back tuckered out after a hike or long walk in the park. Mellow canines socialized at brunches or shopped at local pet-friendly stores. And two shy dogs were taken into homes (without other dogs) and relaxed with a long nap on the couch.



— Dr. Steven Hansen,
President and CEO of
Arizona Humane Society



Section 3

Post-Adoption Experiences and Surrender Circumstances

Post-adoption experiences and sentiment

Keeping pets and families together starts before the adoption ever occurs. Data shows that adoption counselors and shelter staff play an integral role in improving post-adoption owner confidence and pet retention.

According to consumers, shelter staff are hitting the mark. Of those who adopted a pet:



78%

agree that the shelter staff and/or adoption counselor set realistic expectations about what they would experience with their adopted pet

74%

agree that the shelter staff and/or adoption counselor spent enough time with them to understand their wants and needs

73%

agree that shelter staff and/or adoption counselors were able to match them with the right pet

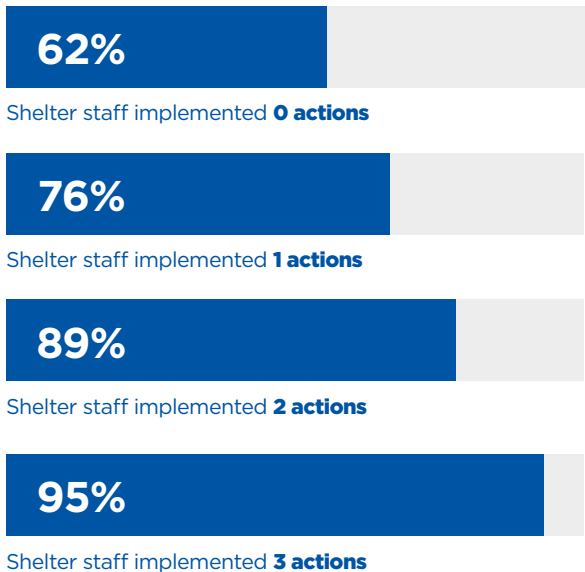


According to respondents, when shelter staff and adoption counselors set realistic expectations, took time to understand their wants and needs and matched them with the right pet, they were confident in their decision to adopt a pet at a much higher rate than those who did not experience the same level of staff involvement.

Each action taken has a cumulative effect, steadily increasing the adopter's confidence level.

Confidence with decision to adopt

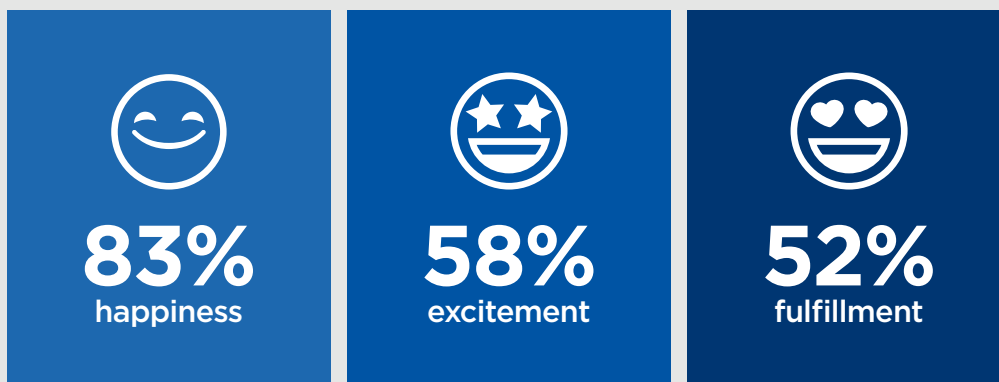
Among those who have adopted a pet, showing % Completely confident/Fairly confident



Post-adoption experiences: adoption is tied to feelings of happiness, then can be followed by anxiety if issues arise

While the majority of adopters (84%) feel happy and fulfilled when they go home with their new pet, challenges may emerge after the initial 'adoption high' begins to wear off.

When asked about the top three emotions adopters experience, joyful feelings came out on top:



Despite the initial feelings of happiness and excitement following adoption, feelings can change if issues arise. Of adopters who experienced negative feelings in the first month after adoption (16%), anxiety was the top emotion, followed by frustration, fear, regret and sadness.

Nearly half of all post-adoption anxiety is triggered by concerns about pet behavior

Behavior issues were cited by nearly half of respondents as the top reason they felt post-adoption anxiety.

Sources of post-adoption anxiety





How shelter environments improve outcomes

While pet behavior is impacted by numerous factors, shelters have an opportunity to learn from each other in terms of how to help these pets, starting with the shelter environment. Further, many shelters today aim to save pets with common medical or behavioral challenges that would have simply been euthanized a decade ago.

We've seen a rise in complex medical and behavioral cases which underscores the need to re-evaluate shelter design and operations from the animals' perspective. While creating a welcoming environment for visitors is important, our primary focus must remain on the animals' well-being. By prioritizing low-stress environments, enrichment opportunities, staying within operational capacity, using low-stress handling, and looking at everything we do through an animal's eyes, we can truly ensure their welfare.



— Katie FASTER, RVT, Shelter
Veterinary Medical Manager of
the Humane Society of Charlotte

Access to post-adoption services increase likelihood of adoption

While 1 in 2 survey respondents said they were unsure if shelters offered post-adoption support for behavioral or health issues, more than one-third of respondents said they would be more likely to adopt certain types of pets if they knew they would have access to post-adoption services.

To understand the impact of service offerings on pet adoption, survey respondents were asked to select which of the services listed, if any, would make them more likely to adopt a certain kind of pet.

Increased likelihood to adopt certain pet types based on access to services

	Access to post-adoption behavioral support	Access to post-adoption veterinary care support	Access to free or discounted pet health insurance
Pets with known behavior issue	35%	23%	17%
Pets with known health issues	19%	37%	38%
Senior pets	15%	37%	35%
Pets with no known history	30%	39%	30%

While more than 75% of survey respondents recognize that many shelter pets are happy and healthy, nearly a quarter believe that most shelter pets are challenged with behavior or medical issues.



22%

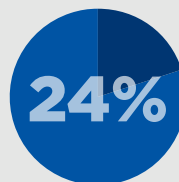
of people believe most shelter pets have **behavioral** issues



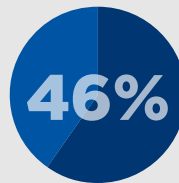
23%

of people believe most shelter pets have **health** issues

Interestingly, respondents rated post-adoption behavioral services more likely to influence adoption (34%) than pre-adoption behavioral services (30%).



Of individuals who had relinquished a pet, 24% said behavioral/training issues were the top reason for surrendering



Of respondents who experienced post-adoption anxiety, 46% said behavioral issues were the top driving force



Commitment to behavior: Wayside Waifs' Canine Behavior Center

Knowing a pet had pre-adoption behavioral training would make 30% of people more likely to adopt pets with known behavioral issues. Wayside Waifs, based in Kansas City, Mo., has taken on that challenge.

Wayside Waifs is the home to one of the most innovative behavior centers in the nation. The Canine Behavior Center is a 9,000-square-foot building dedicated to dogs needing behavioral care. The center employs 10 staff, five of which are behavior trainers. The trainers at Wayside Waifs work one-on-one with dogs who have identified behavioral concerns, also known as “behavior dogs,” to improve their adoptability. The state-of-the-art center, funded by private philanthropic dollars, boasts positive outcomes day-in and day-out, overall elevating canine behavior work regionally and beyond.

- Lowering length of stay for behavior dogs
- Ability to serve shy, fearful and high-arousal dogs that exhibit more extreme behavior challenges in a fear-free environment
- Significant increase in staff and volunteer canine behavior training, experiences and skill set building

Rex and Fiona, a bonded pair of Husky mixes, were rescued from a puppy mill in 2021. The two pups went through the Canine Behavior Center as young dogs and were adopted shortly after graduation from the program in 2023. Adoptability was significantly improved through their custom behavior modification program and the dogs are now happy, healthy and in their new home.

Wayside Waifs invests in the behavior of dogs before, during and after adoption. Through an ongoing research study, Wayside Waifs is working to understand the nuances of adoption for dogs with behavioral challenges, and how shelters can better navigate the complexities of behavior dogs and improve their overall adoptability from a consumer lens.



Pet relinquishment: diversion strategies are king in keeping people and pets together



Shelter Animals Count states that 25% of all shelter intakes in 2023 were owner surrenders. Survey respondents who have surrendered a pet cited behavior issues as the top reason for relinquishment.

Behavior issues are the most common reason people surrender a pet

Reasons people have surrendered a pet:

24%	behavioral or training issues
23%	housing restrictions
19%	financial difficulties
12%	pet was a threat to others in the home
10%	medical issues owner could not care for

While 55% of people work through these challenges on their own, those who engage with support resources tend to lean on veterinarians. Among those who received support or resources, 94% kept their pet.

Establishing a relationship with a veterinarian as soon as possible in the pet adoption process not only benefits the pet's health but also helps build pet parents' confidence, especially in the first few months after adoption. An open line of dialogue allows pet parents to ask questions and receive advice through the normal ups and downs that come with welcoming a new pet into the family.



— Karen Shenoy, DVM,
US Chief Veterinary Officer
of Hill's Pet Nutrition



2 out of 3 people

who surrendered a pet said intervention could have prevented the surrender

We offer financial assistance for veterinary costs that overwhelm the pet owner. In addition, we offer a food bank for pet owners in financial distress, behavioral consultations/tips, and at times subsidize dog training for behavioral issues, along with care and treatment in some cases. Despite those programs, the pet owner has little recourse for severe behavioral issues and landlord restrictions or eviction.



— Joe Elmore, CAWA, CFRE, President and CEO of Charleston Animal Society

Overall, adoptions have been down, and our team has shifted a lot of our energy towards pet retention. Talking with pet owners about what it would take to keep their pet in their home is the first step. Then, we link them to resources, such as our pet food pantry, low-cost wellness, vaccination, spay/neuter, special surgery services, behavior training, etc.



— Patrick J. Carroll, CEO of Humane Animal Partners Delaware

When asked to select the interventions that would have helped them keep their pet, respondents' top choices included:

25%	affordable/free veterinary services
21%	access to free behavioral trainings
20%	financial support for medical issues
18%	support from family or friends nearby
17%	access to a pet food pantry



Section 4

Hill's Support of Animal Welfare



Hill's Pet Nutrition (Hill's), a division of Colgate-Palmolive, is a caring company that is working to create a healthier and happier future for pets and the people who care for them. For decades, Hill's has been on a mission to help end pet homelessness and support the animal welfare community.

Created in 2002, the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love (HFSL) Program was formed in partnership with animal shelters across the country to address many of the challenges facing animal welfare organizations, including providing high-quality nutrition to support the cats and dogs in the care of shelters. But, nutrition is just one piece of the puzzle. Hill's also supports animal welfare organizations through a variety of initiatives.

FOOD: feeding pets who enrich our lives

Since its inception, the program has provided more than \$300 million of science-led nutrition to more than 1,000 animal shelters across North America. The right nutrition can transform how a pet feels, looks and acts, helping make pets happy, healthy and more adoptable.

Hill's is also the official feeding sponsor of PetSmart Charities, providing food to all the Adoption Centers in PetSmart stores across the United States.

SHELTER: removing barriers to support more adoptions and end pet homelessness

Over the past 22 years, Hill's has supported more than 14 million shelter pet adoptions, the largest number of adoptions supported by any pet food manufacturer, and plans to reach 15 million pets saved by 2025.

Outside of the adoptions directly supported by our shelter program, Hill's also collaborates with non-profits and industry and media partners to bring relief via adoption and fundraising to more shelters as a means to place more pets in loving homes.





Clear The Shelters

As the longest running national sponsor, Hill's works with NBCUniversal Local and more than 1,000 shelters each year for the Clear The Shelters adoption and donation campaign; together, we've reached a record milestone of 1 million pets adopted since the program's inception and raised \$4.5 million in donations to the Clear The Shelters Fund.

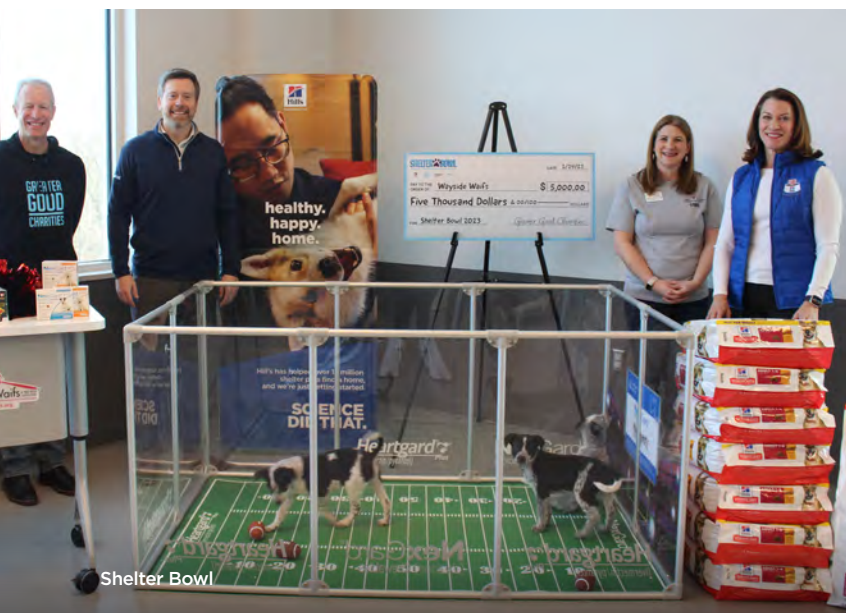
Shelter Bowl

For the second year, we partnered with Greater Good Charities and Boehringer Ingelheim to provide nutritional support for animal shelters and rescues across the country through the Shelter Bowl campaign. This year, our combined efforts enabled 3.7 million meals to be donated to pets in need, in addition to 2 million meals Hill's directly donated to participating shelter partners.



Good Flights

Since 2021, we have partnered with Greater Good Charities to help transport hundreds of at-risk shelter pets to geographic locations to increase their chances of adoption.





Rose Parade

Rose Parade

New pet is a top Google search each New Year. To help infuse interest in adopting a shelter pet — or supporting local shelters across the country through donations or volunteering — Hill's partnered with Pasadena Humane to create the *Feed The Love* float that was featured in the 2024 Rose Bowl Parade, reaching and engaging millions of people across the world in our mission to help end pet homelessness.

The Wagsies

In a longstanding partnership with The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement, Hill's created [The Wagsies](#), a unique recognition program for shelters that honors the most creative and outstanding storytelling campaigns created by animal welfare organizations each year to engage and educate their local communities and drive greater support of animal welfare efforts overall.

National Adoption Week

Hill's is proud to be PetSmart Charities' first partner for its annual National Adoption Week campaign this March. Together, the initiative helped 19,000 pets find new homes as part of our shared mission to help pets find loving families and to strengthen the bond between pets and their people.

Senior Pet Adoption

Senior-aged pets represent the population in shelters with the lowest adoption rates. To raise awareness about the need to accelerate senior pet adoption, we partnered with PetSmart Charities to donate \$100,000 to support 5,000 pet adoptions this May. Hill's also provided incremental financial incentives for adoption groups to help increase senior pet adoptions.

On A Mission KC

Supporting its hometown community is a core priority of Hill's, which is why we work with local animal welfare advocate Scott Poore on many initiatives including a partnership with his foundation, [On A Mission KC](#) where we distributed more than 8,000 dog beds this winter to rural shelters to use in their kennels.

LOVE: keeping people and pets together and supporting the people who care for pets

There is nothing more rewarding — or impactful to shelters — than finding ways to support keeping people together with the pets they love while they navigate challenging times. The following are three examples of our work in this area:

1 Leveraging the Hill's disaster relief network to help in times of need

For more than a decade, the [Hill's Disaster Relief Network](#) has been on the ready to provide support in times of need. Since its inception, the Hill's team has supported more than 900 shelters, veterinary clinics and other municipal organizations in response to more than 180 disasters or animal neglect cases. In total, we've donated nearly 4 million pounds of food to help care for the pets impacted in each of these events. For disaster relief requests, reach out to disasterrelief@hillspet.com.



Hill's Disaster Relief Network



The Street Dog Coalition

2 Providing access to care via new partnership with The Street Dog Coalition

Keeping people together with their pets starts with finding ways to support both ends of the leash. Together with Colgate-Palmolive, Hill's is furthering its support of The Street Dog Coalition, which provides veterinary care and related services to pets of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. The Street Dog Coalition uses a One Health approach to street medicine and pop-up street clinics, which includes the deployment of a new mobile unit that will provide access to care for people and pets in rural communities across the country.

3 Helping domestic violence survivors seek aid for themselves and pets faster

To explore how innovative partnerships between the private sector, veterinarians, animal welfare and community domestic violence agencies could greatly benefit both human and animal survivors of domestic violence, we partnered with YWCA Northeast Kansas' Center for Safety and Empowerment in Topeka, Kan. to establish a temporary housing program to provide short-notice, full-service care for pets of domestic violence survivors. Domestic violence survivors with pets are more likely to delay leaving an abusive situation due to lack of safe housing options for their pets, who are often at risk of victimization themselves. Hill's also provided extensive resources and access to our animal-care network and volunteers to support the program. This year, Hill's published the program's organizational protocols and initial outcomes as an open access publication in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, in the hope that this program can serve as a model for similar programs to be established nationwide.

We are relentlessly committed to supporting shelter and veterinary professionals who work tirelessly to care for our pets.



Closing the gap

With the gap in the number of veterinarians and animal health professionals needed to care for our nation's pets continuing to grow toward a crisis, we are working two-fold to support the next generation of animal professionals.

Providing shelter externships funding

In addition to broad veterinary student support efforts of the Hill's Professional Veterinary Affairs team, the Hill's shelter team is also focused on supporting the training of future veterinarians through the unique partnerships between Hill's and shelter partners, such as Houston SPCA and Dumb Friends League, to offer veterinary externship programs. These programs provide valuable, hands-on experience in caring for pets under the expert supervision of the shelter's veterinary healthcare teams. To date, Hill's has supported more than 1,470 students through this initiative.



Supporting the next generation through Vet For A Day

In collaboration with our partners Dr. Vernard Hodges and Terrance Ferguson of Nat Geo's *Critter Fixers*, Hill's proudly supports their mission to inspire and mentor the next generation of veterinarians and animal health professionals. To date, the Vet For A Day program has reached more than 1,500 students at 26 events spanning 14 states across the country.

Training and support for animal welfare professionals

We believe that we can do more together than what we can achieve alone. Because of this, Hill's is continuing to invest in programming, resources, training and support for animal welfare professionals. Two examples of this support include:

1 Cat Superhighway

Many shelters are experiencing increasing levels of intake pressure and crowding just as adoptions, staffing and veterinary care capacity are decreasing. Shelters need practical and scalable solutions to assure the best outcome for every cat. Free-roaming community cats make up a large percentage of feline admissions in most shelters. The Community Cat Superhighways concept provides a streamlined decision tree to help shelters, clinics, and community programs make consistent, transparent, and scalable decisions leading to the right outcome for every cat.



— Dr. Julie Levy



— Dr. Christine Wilford

Hill's is proud to support Dr. Julie Levy, the director of the Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida and founder of Operation Catnip, and Dr. Christine Wilford, founder of the Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project, in the development and distribution of a free and complete toolkit of plug and play action plans against major pathways of the Superhighways that Shelters can use/adapt as applicable based on their specific needs.

2 AAWA Industry Training

For more than 20 years, Hill's has been the lead partner and sponsor of The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement. The Association's mission is to champion, advance, and unify the animal welfare profession. Through a robust suite of networking and engagement opportunities, marketing campaigns, conferences, continuing education and certification programs, The Association champions the development and training of animal welfare professionals.

Hill's is proud to partner with The Association in providing pathways for animal welfare professionals to develop their careers and share model practices that help move the whole community forward.

Together, we share a focus on working towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive animal welfare profession that directly reflects the communities we serve.

For more information on these programs, access to the data and more, visit hillspet.com/shelter or email shelters@hillspet.com.





Methodology

Hill's Pet Nutrition and VML partnered with PSB Insights to field a 15-minute online survey in April 2024 of 2,500 general population consumers. The sample is representative of the U.S. general population (based on best available data*) on the following characteristics:

- Pet Owners vs. Non-Pet Owners**
- Race/ethnicity**
- Household Income Bands**
- Gender**
- Region**
- Age

* Quotas and weights based on Census ACS data, except for Pet Ownership, which came from *Forbes Advisor - Pet Ownership Statistics 2024*

** Post-stratification weights applied