



To stem the tide of abandoned, unwanted and euthanized animals, American Humane Association unveils major new research study on pet ownership and retention

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WASHINGTON, D.C., August 8 – A staggering three to four million healthy, adoptable pets are euthanized every year at shelters across the country. Still others wander the streets, sick and hungry, given up by the families that once loved them. What are the reasons behind the alarming number of animals who are abandoned, unwanted, and euthanized each year, and how can we better ensure they find their way to warm, loving homes?

To help provide answers, American Humane Association's Animal Welfare Research Institute today released the results of the first phase of a three-part study to better understand pet ownership and retention and discover the most effective strategies to ensure animals find their forever homes. Phase I of the "Keeping Pets (Dogs and Cats) in Homes Retention Study," funded through a generous grant from PetSmart Charities®, examines why so many American households don't have a furry friend at home.

Research indicates that of the 117.5 million households in the U.S., only 46.3 million have a dog in their family and only 38.9 million own a cat. Understanding the reasons why people choose whether or not to own a pet is the first step towards developing effective strategies to increase pet ownership and reduce the alarming number of homeless pets and resulting euthanasia rates.



In the first phase, "Reasons for Not Owning a Dog or Cat," American Humane Association interviewed 1,500 previous pet owners and non-pet owners to determine the reasons behind their pet ownership decisions. Respondents who had owned a cat or dog in the past provided insights about their previous experience with pets; how they obtained them and what happened to those companions. Phase II, which is also being funded by PetSmart Charities, will research how many dogs and cats acquired from a sampling of shelters and animal control agencies still remain in their new homes six months following adoption, and what happened to pets who are no longer in those homes. Phase III will test practical interventional strategies for improving retention rates following the acquisition of a new pet.

Phase I Findings: Promising Trends, Daunting Challenges

The study found that there are multiple major barriers – some suspected, some surprising – to pet ownership including the associated costs, perceived lack of time to care for an animal, outright dislike of companion animals, especially cats (more than a third of non-pet-owners said they dislike cats), and, in a poignant, double-edged twist highlighting the emotional intricacies of the human-animal bond, lasting grief over the loss of a previous pet, which was cited as a significant obstacle to procuring a new pet by one in five (20%) of previous dog owners and one in six (17%) of previous cat owners. Overall, almost half (49%) of respondents who have never owned a pet as an adult had a dog or cat as a child.

Some of the data was disheartening but pointed the way to future improvements and interventions. Despite massive public education campaigns encouraging people to adopt from shelters, fewer than one quarter of previous dog owners (22%) and one fifth of cat owners (18%) obtained their prior pet from a shelter or rescue organization. Fortunately, 64 percent of prospective owners who previously owned dogs indicated that they would adopt a dog from a shelter or rescue organization, and 56 percent of prospective owners who previously owned a cat indicated they would adopt a cat from a shelter or rescue organization. And in spite of the widely discussed physical and emotional benefits of pet ownership for older people, seniors citizens were among the least likely to consider a pet.

Among those 65 or older nearly six in 10 previous dog owners would not consider getting another dog, and 66 percent of previous cat owners would not consider another cat. Among those who had never owned an animal, the figures were even bleaker: An overwhelming 90 percent of seniors said they would not consider getting a dog. Ninety-four percent are not open to owning a cat. The study also details numerous demographic, societal and economic issues affecting pet ownership in the United States.

Lowering Barriers to Ownership

The findings suggest that some of the more promising avenues warranting additional work include supporting younger future cat owners and continuing to assess negative attitudes toward cats, understanding that ongoing grief is a barrier to new pet ownership and identify methods to help people work through grief, celebrate the prior pet, and reenter the ownership pool, understanding that more future owners may be adopting pets from shelters and rescue agencies and offering support at this point of acquisition, and working with broad and diverse segments of society to reduce existing barriers to ownership, such as housing restrictions and veterinary/general expenses.

"There are still significant hurdles to overcome in helping to keep more of these healthy, adoptable animals out of the nation's shelters," said Dr. Patricia Olson, chief veterinary advisor for American Humane Association and head of its Animal Welfare Research

Institute. "Using the data gathered and the work to be done in future phases of this study, we hope over time to decrease pet homelessness and relinquishment."

"We're proud to fund this critical research on pet ownership and retention," said Susana Della Maddalena, executive director, PetSmart Charities, Inc. "The information uncovered in this and future studies is sure to help us achieve our goal of finding a lifelong, loving home for every pet."

"By understanding the reasons why so many Americans do not own a pet, and learning what we can do to increase lifelong retention of those that do," said Dr. Robin Ganzert, President and CEO of the American Humane Association, "we can take the necessary steps to change minds, change policies and change activities to help get more of these beautiful animals out of shelters and into the arms of loving families."

The complete study can be found at: <http://www.americanhumane.org/aha-petsmart-retention-study-phase-1.pdf>.

Methodology

An online survey was created and administered to 1,500 respondents in February 2012. Surveys were created and fielded for three groups of consumers who:

1. Never owned a dog or cat as an adult, "non-pet owners" (n=500)
2. Previously owned a cat but not within past 12 months (n=500)
3. Previously owned a dog but not within past 12 months (n=500)

Age categories for previous owners combined 18-34 year olds in order to have enough of a sample to perform significance testing.

No non-owner age categories were combined. Respondents completed each survey with a margin of error +/- 4.4 percent.

About PetSmart Charities®

Established in 1994, PetSmart Charities, Inc. is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that creates and supports programs that save the lives of homeless pets, raise awareness of companion animal welfare issues and promote healthy relationships between people and pets. The largest funder of animal-welfare efforts in North America, PetSmart Charities has provided more than \$165 million in grants and programs benefiting animal-welfare organizations and has helped save the lives of more than 5 million pets through its in-store adoption program. To learn more about how PetSmart Charities is working toward its vision of a lifelong, loving home for every pet, visit petsmartcharities.org or call 1-800-423-PETS (7387).

About American Humane Association

Since 1877 American Humane Association has been at the forefront of virtually every major advance in protecting children, pets and farm animals. Today we're also leading the way in understanding the human-animal bond and its role in therapy, medicine and society. American Humane Association reaches millions of people every day through groundbreaking research, education, training and services that span a wide network of organizations, agencies and businesses. You can help make a difference, too. Visit American Humane Association at www.americanhumane.org today.

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