



CANADA

State of Pet Homelessness Project

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the State of Pet Homelessness Project market report for Canada. This is a global data project undertaken by Mars alongside leading animal welfare experts and organizations across 20 countries. It seeks to help gather data and insights to better understand the number of dogs and cats who do not have regular access to the care they need, within a loving home or a community – and the factors that may contribute to solving the related challenges.

OBJECTIVE

Our aim is that the data collected can help identify the points in the cycle where pets are most at risk for becoming or remaining homeless and inform actions that reduce its prevalence. Pets that don’t receive the sustained human care they need are at risk of poor health and compromised welfare. Tackling pet homelessness helps both animals and people – bringing the benefits of the human-animal bond to more people and ensuring every pet gets the sustained care and nutrition they need to thrive. Until now, there was no common way of looking at the issue. It is our hope that sharing this work and the collected data, will create conversations, drive action, and make a difference in the lives of millions of homeless cats and dogs.

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

Measuring the scale of pet homelessness is a complex task, as the homeless pet population fluctuates constantly due to its many interconnected contributing factors. Stray pet numbers are difficult to count and increasing every day due to the rapid reproduction rates of unsterilized strays, and, in most countries, there is no single source of information on the shelter pet population at any given point in time.

The State of Pet Homelessness Project provides a wealth of data and uncovered insights into areas of action critical to tackling the pet homelessness challenge. Three areas were identified where we believe concerted effort and focus could make the biggest impact:

PREVENT UNWANTED PETS. ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE. KEEP PETS IN HOMES.

This report contains a small set of that data for Canada. The full data sets from all 20 markets are available online at stateofpethomelessness.com.



This global data project across 20 countries consisted of:

930 SOURCES REVIEWED	44 ANALYST INTERVIEWS	~30,000 PUBLIC SURVEYS	9+ MONTHS OF FIELDWORK
7,700+ HOURS GATHERING DATA	180 DATA POINTS	200 PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS	



4.18M
TOTAL HOMELESS CATS AND DOGS

Canada has a below average level of overall pet homelessness of the 20 markets this project looked at. The opportunity is to understand how to prevent homelessness increasing and tackle the challenges that are present.

20.18M TOTAL CATS AND DOGS IN CANADA

8.66M TOTAL DOGS

11.52M TOTAL CATS

16M
TOTAL OWNED
CATS AND DOGS

156K
TOTAL SHELTER
CATS AND DOGS

4.03M
TOTAL STRAY
CATS AND DOGS



1.15M (13%)

DOGS ARE HOMELESS



3.03M (26%)

CATS ARE HOMELESS

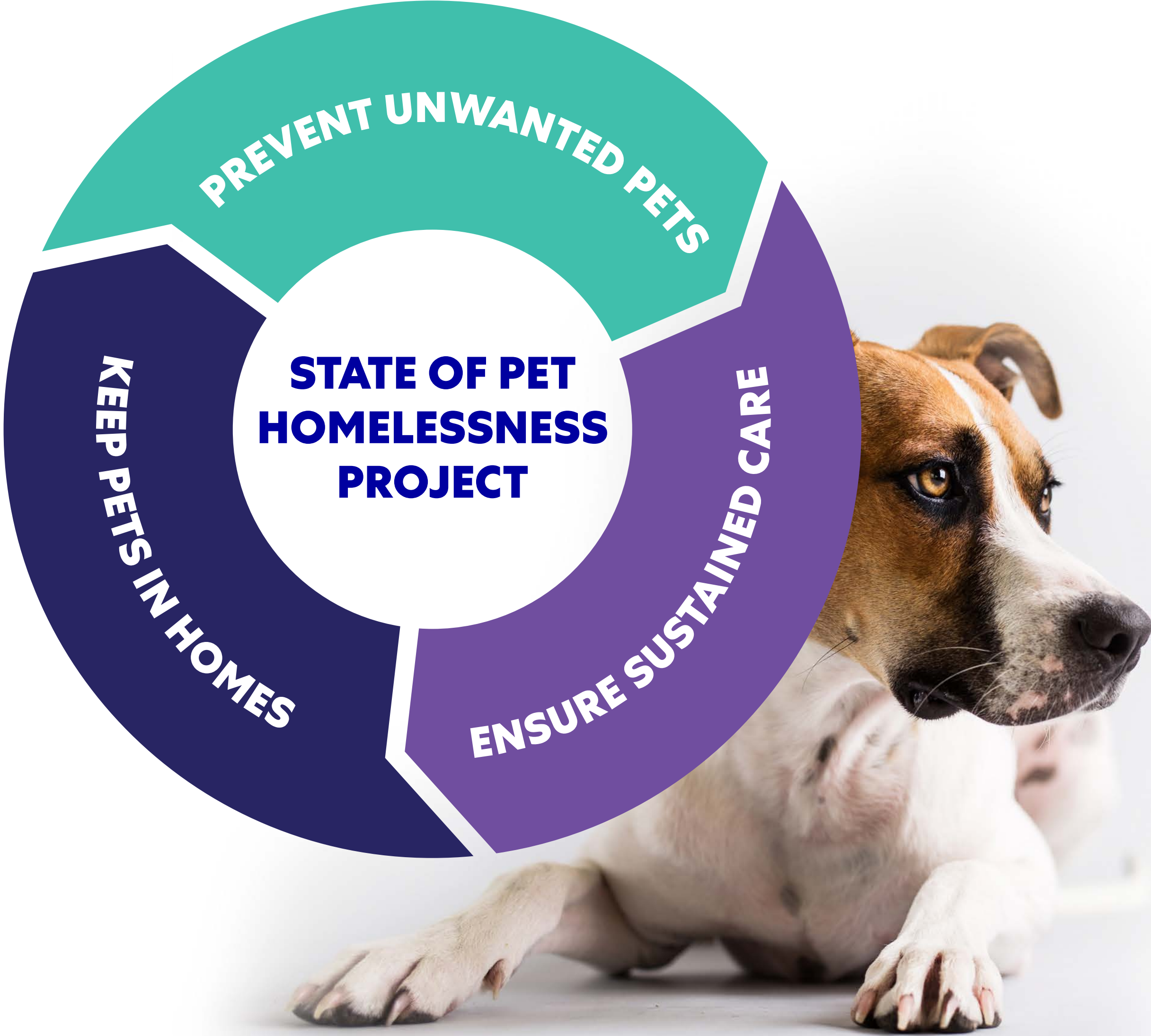
39K
IN SHELTERS

1.12M
STRAYS

116.6K
IN SHELTERS

2.91M
STRAYS

Pet Homelessness estimates based on primary and secondary research conducted by Euromonitor International (EMI) in 2022-2023, and owned pet estimates collected by Mars Consumer & Marketing Insights (CMI). Additional interviews were conducted with local expert organizations.



To bring transparency, awareness and insight to the challenge of pet homelessness, we have set out to build a data set that can offer insights into a range of attitudes and behaviors that impact the issue. Three interconnected themes emerged from the data, highlighting where interventions could help reduce pet homelessness.

PREVENT UNWANTED PETS

Large populations of stray pets which can breed at a rapid rate are a huge part of the problem. This, coupled with irresponsible breeding practices, e.g. those that do not pay enough attention to health, temperament, positive early socialization, or to ensuring a good fit with the pet owner, can result in increasing numbers of homeless pets and groups of pets that are difficult to provide sustained care to or match with a home. Our data looks at this significant and critical piece of the challenge.

ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE

Helping to provide more homeless pets with responsible loving homes, or the sustained human care they need in the community, is a foundational step in tackling pet homelessness. Achieving it requires an understanding of the key barriers to acquiring or adopting a pet, or accessing veterinary care, as well as facilitating pathways to ownership, and provision of care for community animals, whose home may not be a conventional house but still need access to sustained care. Shelters may provide care for cats and dogs, but resources are often strained and, if pets are not adopted to new homes, demand may exceed capacity.

KEEP PETS IN HOMES

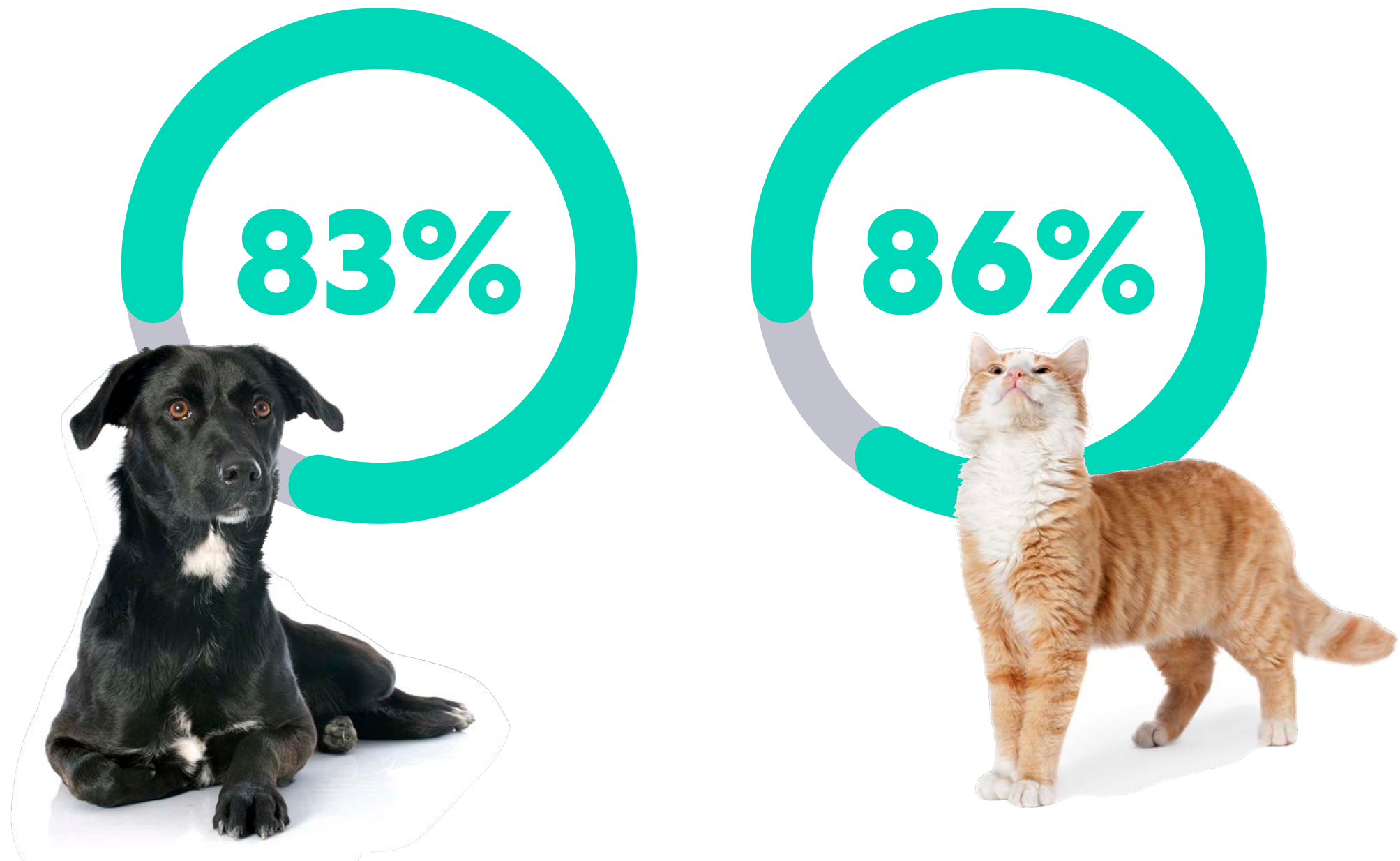
Keeping pets in homes is vital for both pet and owner to benefit from a longstanding bond. Pets are at risk of becoming homeless through being relinquished or abandoned if the pet ownership experience is difficult, or a pet owner can't access the advice and support they need. Pet owning practices which easily allow pets to stray or become lost can also result in owned pets becoming homeless. Our data looks at issues such as the cost of caring for a pet, common pet care practices and the incidence of lost pets.



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One unsterilized homeless pet can quickly create many more. Reducing uncontrolled or unplanned breeding is a critical approach to decreasing pet homelessness.

IS YOUR PET NEUTERED/STERILIZED?¹



¹Sample definition: 277 current dog owners / 241 current cat owners who could identify if their pet was sterilized

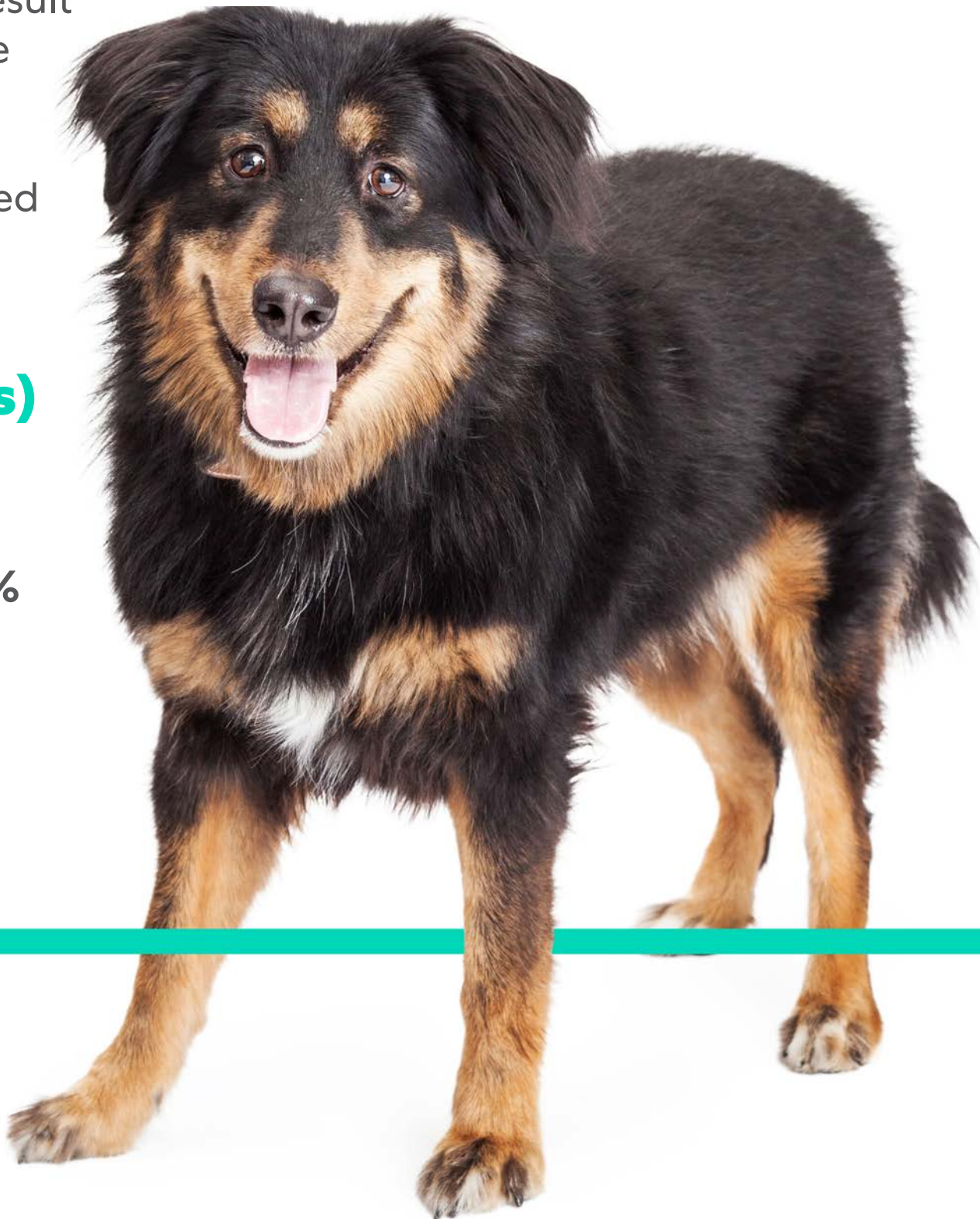
WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

The number of strays has improved enormously because we've been running a very active spay/neuter program for 20 years.”

– Managing Trustee, Shelter/charity (cats)

WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR PET?¹

Where people get their pets reveals important insights about the pathways to pet ownership and the proportion of people making a direct impact on homeless pet numbers through adoption of shelter pets or strays. Pet breeders are also key. While responsibly bred pets are more likely to be matched to lifelong homes, irresponsible breeding practices, e.g. those that neglect health and temperament issues, or fail to ensure a good fit with the pet owner can result in unwanted pets. These behaviors increase the numbers of pets for which a home cannot be found, or pets which may find a home but later be relinquished or rehomed due to problems.

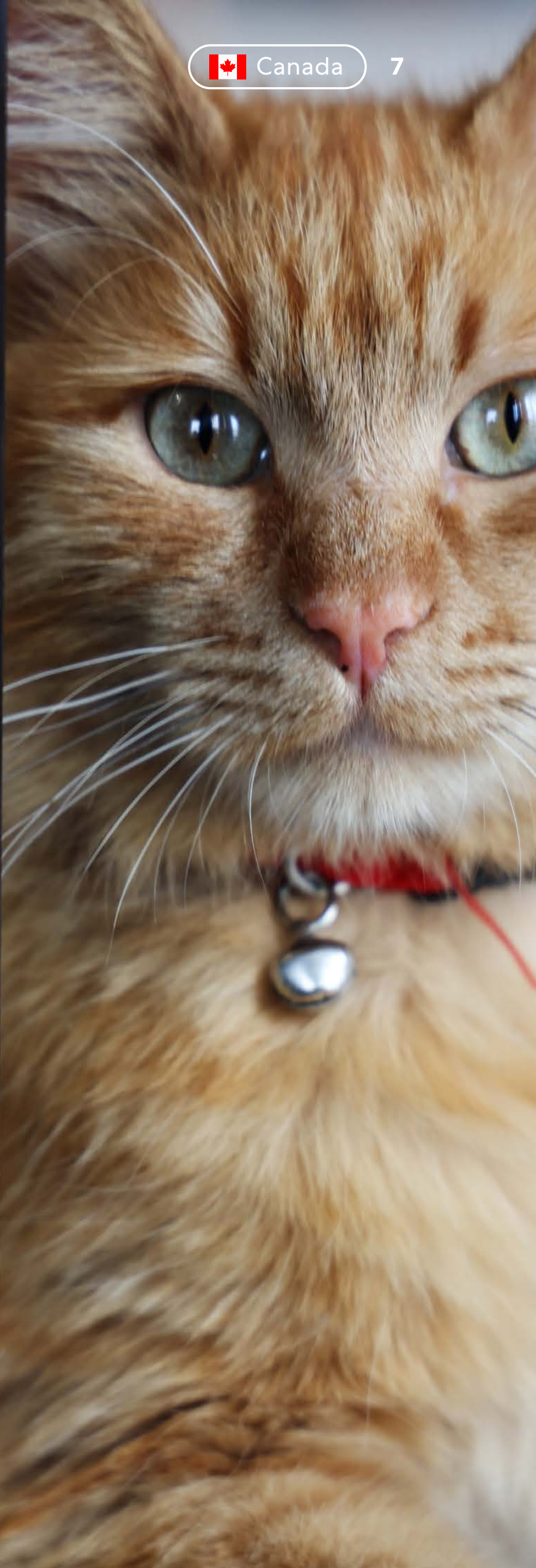


DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

- 1. BREEDER: 27%
- 2. Rescue center/shelter: 21%
- 3. Friend/relative: 20%
- 4. Private individual: 13%
- 5. Pet shop: 8%

CATS (Top 5 Responses)

- 1. RESCUE CENTER/SHELTER: 30%
- 2. Friend/relative: 25%
- 3. Private individual: 13%
- 4. Pet shop: 10%
- 5. Stray/I found it: 10%



¹Sample definition: 277 current dog owners / 241 current cat owners



WHAT ACTIONS DO YOU TAKE IF YOU ENCOUNTER A STRAY?¹

Stray pets may interact with humans or remain hidden. Encouraging people to learn about appropriate ways to interact with different types of stray pets can help pets who would benefit from human care get access to what they need.

DOG

33% ACT OF KINDNESS



9% CHASE IT AWAY



24% DO NOTHING



CAT

28% ACT OF KINDNESS



8% CHASE IT AWAY



48% DO NOTHING



¹Sample definition: 210 has seen a stray dog / 200 has seen a stray cat

WHICH MEASURES DO YOU THINK WOULD BEST REDUCE PET HOMELESSNESS?²

Gathering opinions about potential solutions from a wide range of pet owners suggests solutions that can be quickly scaled.

DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

- 1. BANNING PUPPY MILLS/FARMS: 44%
- 2. Sterilization: 42%
- 3. Fighting animal cruelty: 38%
- 4. Microchipping: 36%
- 5. Providing subsidized vet services: 35%

CATS (Top 5 Responses)

- 1. BANNING KITTEN MILLS/FARMS: 46%
- 2. Sterilization: 46%
- 3. Providing subsidized vet services: 43%
- 4. Fighting animal cruelty: 40%
- 5. (Tie) Microchipping and promoting programs so people know where to adopt: 39%

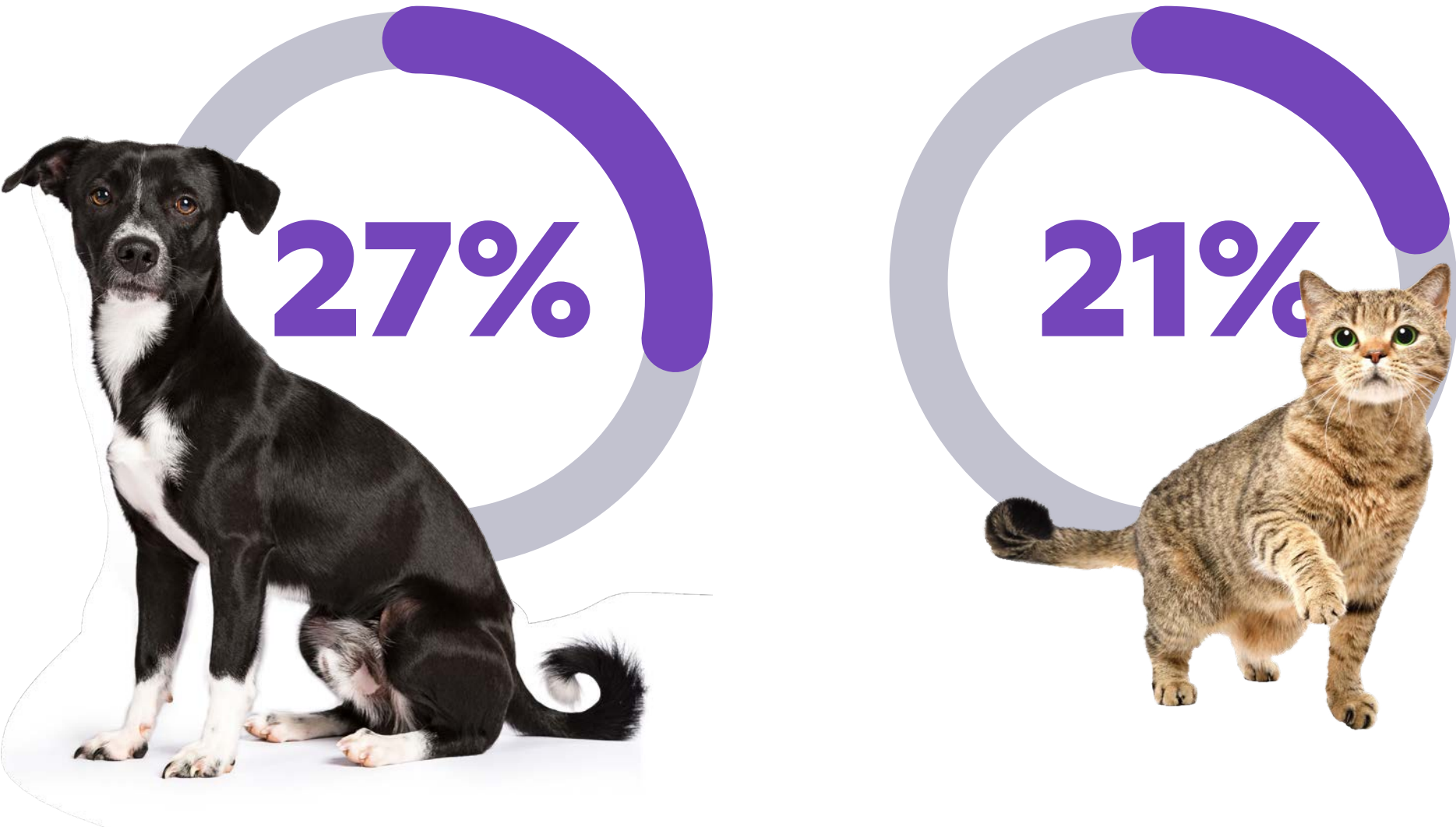
²Sample definition: 324 current or previous dog owners / 319 current or previous cat owners



Helping to provide more homeless pets with responsible loving homes, or the sustained human care they need in the community, is a foundational step in tackling pet homelessness. Achieving it requires an understanding of the key barriers to acquiring or adopting a pet, or accessing veterinary care, as well as facilitating pathways to ownership, and provision of care for community animals, whose home may not be a conventional house but still need access to sustained care. Shelters may provide care for cats and dogs, but resources are often strained and, if pets are not adopted to new homes, demand may exceed capacity.

Getting more people interested in pet ownership and turning that interest into action creates more loving homes for pets.

ARE YOU THINKING OF GETTING A PET IN THE NEAR FUTURE?¹



¹Sample definition: 1000 owners and non-owners

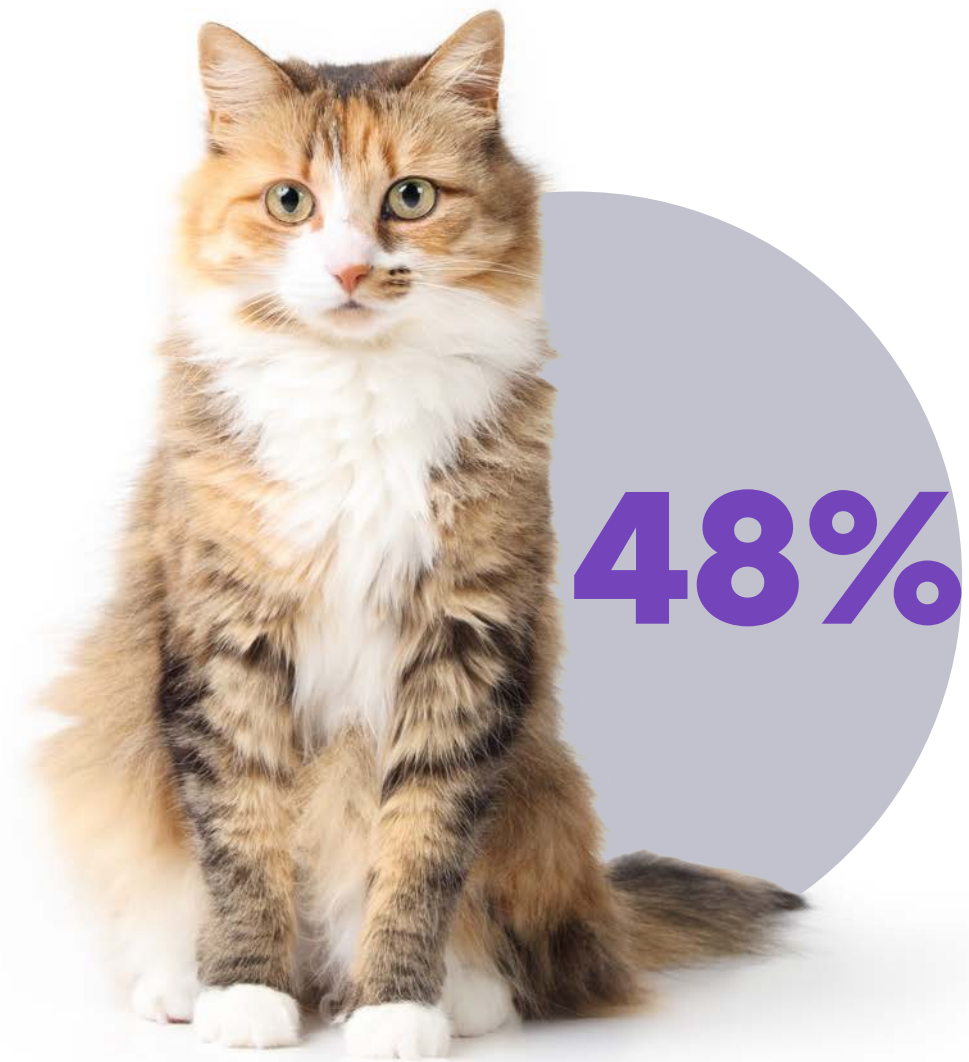


WHAT’S PREVENTING YOU FROM OWNING A PET?¹

Reducing the initial barriers to pet ownership makes it easier for more people to become pet parents.



¹Sample definition: 676 non-dog owners / 681 non-cat owners



Changing the perception of rescued animals can get far more pets out of shelters and into loving homes.

**IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING GETTING A PET,
DO YOU PLAN ON ADOPTING FROM A SHELTER?¹**

39%
**CONSIDERING
GETTING A DOG
FROM A SHELTER**

48%
**CONSIDERING
GETTING A CAT
FROM A SHELTER**

¹Sample definition: 186 dog considerers / 172 cat considerers

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

“It’s not easy to adopt a pet. And people that adopt will confirm it’s not. It’s very frustrating for a lot of people. But you know, it’s a process that ensures that a pet is going into a home so it doesn’t become homeless and is abandoned or returned.”

– Founder, Foster-based charity (cats and dogs)”



Keeping pets in homes is vital for both pet and owner to benefit from a longstanding bond. Pets are at risk of becoming homeless through being relinquished or abandoned if the pet ownership experience is difficult, or a pet owner can't access the advice and support they need. Pet owning practices which easily allow pets to stray or become lost can also result in owned pets becoming homeless. Our data looks at issues such as the cost of caring for a pet, common pet care practices and the incidence of lost pets.

Pets are lost more frequently than many may realize, leading to an unintended yet noteworthy increase in homeless pets. Keeping pets from straying is a beneficial objective for pets and the people who care for them.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A PET GO MISSING?¹

DOGS
24% (1.8M)

52% (936K) of those who lost their dog got them back.

CATS
27% (2.3M)

50% (1.15M) of those who lost their cat got them back.

HAVE YOU HAD A PET GO MISSING IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?¹

DOGS
3%



CATS
4%

¹Sample definition: 815 has or had a pet



WHAT ARE THE BEST METHODS TO HELP LOST PETS?¹

Understanding public perceptions of lost pet prevention techniques and how to help find lost pets can focus community efforts and increase utilization.

DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

- 1. MICROCHIPPING: 68%
- 2. Tags with contact details: 65%
- 3. Updates in social networks: 36%
- 4. Communication from shelters when the pet turns up in their shelter: 36%
- 5. Communication from shelters when pets are lost by an owner: 30%

CATS (Top 5 Responses)

- 1. MICROCHIPPING: 63%
- 2. Tags with contact details: 58%
- 3. Updates in social networks: 36%
- 3. Communication from shelters when the pet turns up in their shelter: 29%
- 4. Signs in local community: 29%

IS YOUR PET MICROCHIPPED?²

Microchipping is considered an effective way to permanently identify pets but, crucially, reuniting lost pets with owners via this method relies on owner contact details being registered and kept up to date on the microchip database.

DOGS

54%

CATS

33%

¹Sample definition: 180 has lost a dog / 159 has lost a cat

²Sample definition: 277 current dog owners / 241 current cat owners

WHY MIGHT YOU CONSIDER REHOMING YOUR PET?¹

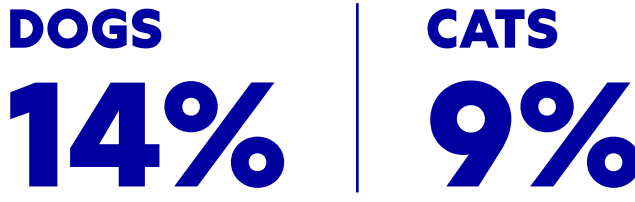
Caring for a pet is a significant commitment of time, energy and money. Understanding the potential causes for rehoming can guide the efforts of organizations and businesses in supporting current pet owners to continue to care for their cat or dog.



¹Sample definition: 324 current or previous dog owners / 379 current or previous cat owners

ARE YOU CONSIDERING GIVING UP YOUR PET IN THE NEXT YEAR²

The benefits of pet ownership are numerous, but when confronted with significant challenges, giving up or rehoming might seem like the only option.



²Sample definition: 277 current dog owners / 241 current cat owners

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

The government has done nothing about the fact that housing is a real problem for people with pets. So, a lot of pets are being abandoned or turned into the SPCA or whatever because people cannot get housing that will allow pets.”

– Operations Manager, Shelter (cats and dogs)



TAKEAWAYS

Canada is below the global average¹ of 35% homeless cats and dogs. However, there are still significant opportunities to address the stray pet population and help more pets find the sustained human care and nutrition they need to thrive.



PREVENT UNWANTED PETS

Most cats and dogs in Canada are sterilized (83% of dogs and 86% of cats), which is higher than the global average of 49% and 63%. However, large numbers of pets remain unsterilized which may result in unplanned litters.

The top preference for getting a dog is a breeder (27%) suggesting that there may be a gap between intentions and actions, or significant barriers to adopting shelter dogs.

ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE

Nearly half of those surveyed said they would consider a shelter/rescue when adopting a pet (39% for dogs and 48% for cats). This appears to be true for cats where shelter/rescue is the number one place to acquire a cat (30%).

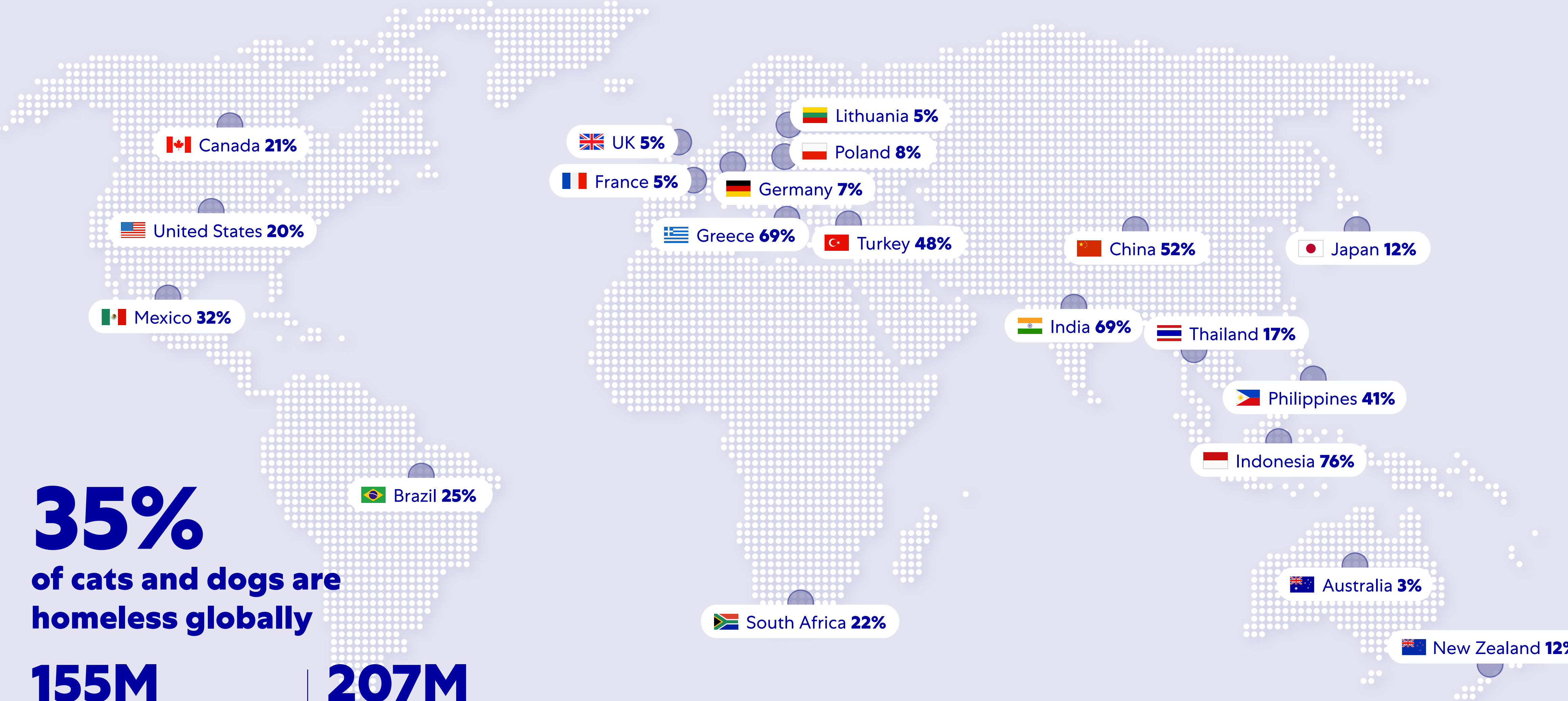
KEEP PETS IN HOMES

The survey reported only 54% of cats and 33% of dogs have microchips. Raising levels of microchipping to help get lost pets back home could be an opportunity in Canada.

While a low percentage of dogs and cats are lost in a year, 3% of dogs and 4% of cats, this represents a large number of dogs and cats (225,000 dogs and 339,000 cats) as only half of cats and dogs are ever found.

¹“average” or “global average” refers to the average of the 20 countries included in this project

20 COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY



35%
of cats and dogs are
homeless globally

155M
HOMELESS DOGS

207M
HOMELESS CATS



At Mars, we have worked for many years to play our part in tackling pet homelessness issues around the world, with a wide range of programs, partnerships and donations to support vulnerable pets.

WE ADVOCATE FOR:

- Organizations and individuals to get involved in recognizing, measuring and acting to change the issue of pet homelessness; helping to improve the accuracy and availability of data around the number of homeless pets.
- Pet-friendly government legislation and policies to keep pets and people together and enable more people to benefit from the companionship of pets.
- Pet owner and prospective pet owner education to promote and support responsible pet ownership.
- Programs to help homeless pets find a loving home or receive sustained care.
- Programs to limit the uncontrolled breeding of stray and street pets.
- Programs to reduce the number of pets at risk of becoming homeless.

WHERE DID THE DATA COME FROM:

The data in this report is drawn from three sources:

1. Pet Homelessness estimates based on primary and secondary research conducted by EMI in 2022-2023, and owned pet estimates collected by Mars CMI.
2. Public sample surveys (online and in the field) of pet owners and non-pet owners conducted by Kantar in 2022-2023.
3. Pet Professional interviews, such as shelters and NGOs working in the pet homelessness space.

To find out more about the State of Pet Homelessness Project and the actions that we are taking alongside partners and stakeholders please visit: stateofpethomelessness.com.

The following partner organizations are among those working to drive the efforts to end pet homelessness and are members of the advisory panel of the State of Pet Homelessness Project. Please continue to support them and the local resources in Canada.





Disclaimer

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this research study are solely the beliefs and personal opinions of the individuals who participated in the interviews or surveys. These perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of Mars or any affiliated organizations. The purpose of this research is to gather varied viewpoints and insights from different individuals and these should not be interpreted as endorsed or supported by Mars.