



# UNITED STATES

State of Pet Homelessness Project

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the State of Pet Homelessness Project market report for the United States. 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 the United States. The full data sets from all 20 markets are available online at [stateofpethomelessness.com](https://stateofpethomelessness.com).



This global data project across 20 countries consisted of:

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

The United States 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.

### 231.8M TOTAL CATS AND DOGS IN THE U.S.

102.9M TOTAL DOGS

128.9M TOTAL CATS

186.5M  
TOTAL OWNED  
CATS AND DOGS

4.4M  
TOTAL SHELTER  
CATS AND DOGS

40.9M  
TOTAL STRAY  
CATS AND DOGS



8.23M (8%)

DOGS ARE HOMELESS



37.1M (29%)

CATS ARE HOMELESS

2.3M  
IN SHELTERS

5.9M  
STRAYS

2.1M  
IN SHELTERS

35M  
STRAYS

United States  
**20%**  
of cats and dogs  
are homeless

45.33M  
TOTAL HOMELESS CATS AND DOGS

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**

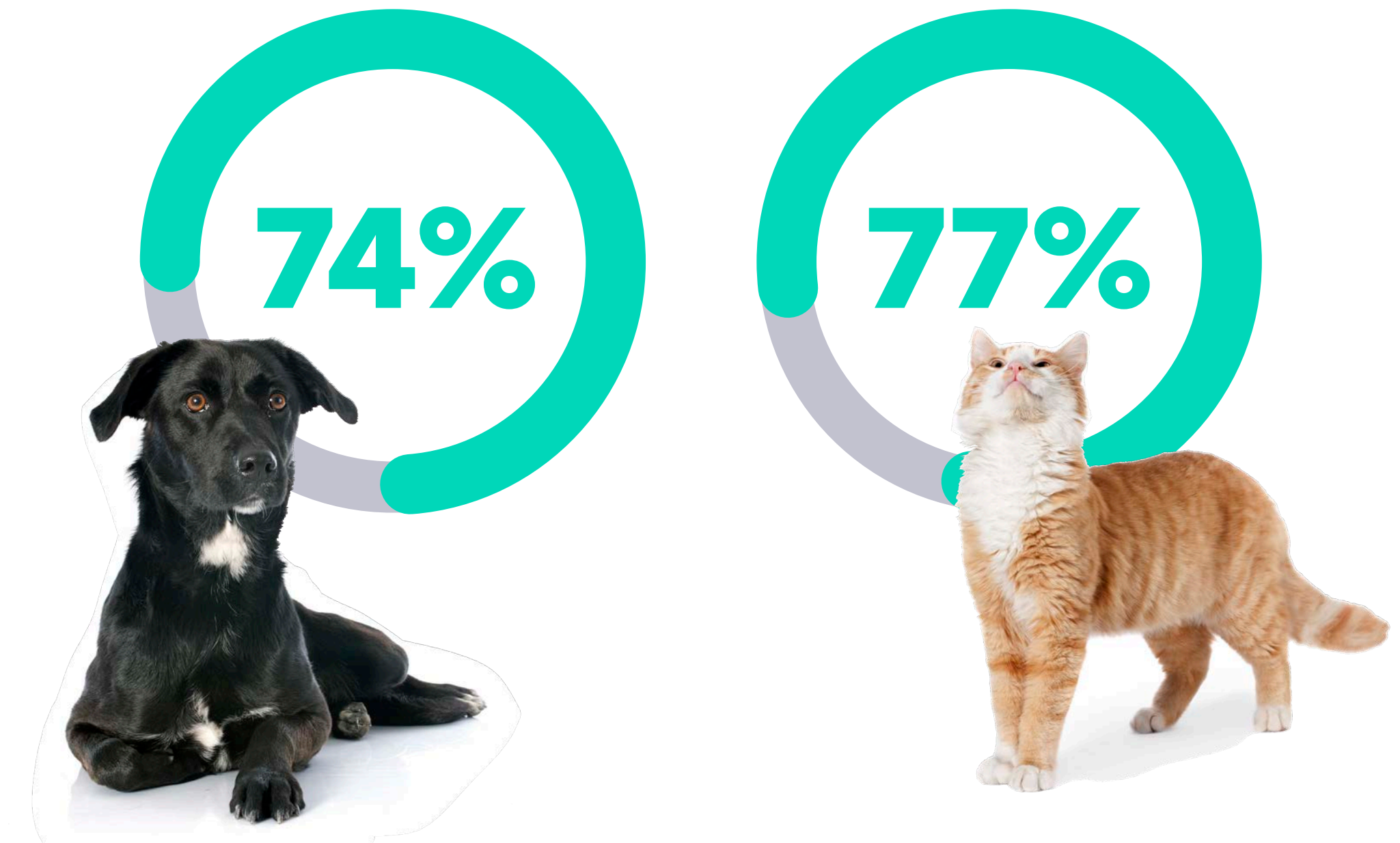
Keeping pets in homes is vital for both pet and owner to benefit from a longstanding bond. Pets are at risk of becoming homeless through being relinquished or abandoned if the pet ownership experience is difficult, or a pet owner can't access the advice and support they need. Pet owning practices which 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?<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 342 current dog owners / 345 current cat owners who could identify if their pet was sterilized

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

**During COVID, spays and neuters were put on pause so that we could focus on human health. And there's a vet shortage and so it's taking longer, more expensive and it's more difficult for folks to get their animals sterilized. We're definitely feeling that in the shelter level of unwanted puppy litters, not so much on the kitten end because we've always had cat problems."**

- Director of Operations, Shelter (cats and dogs)



## 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.

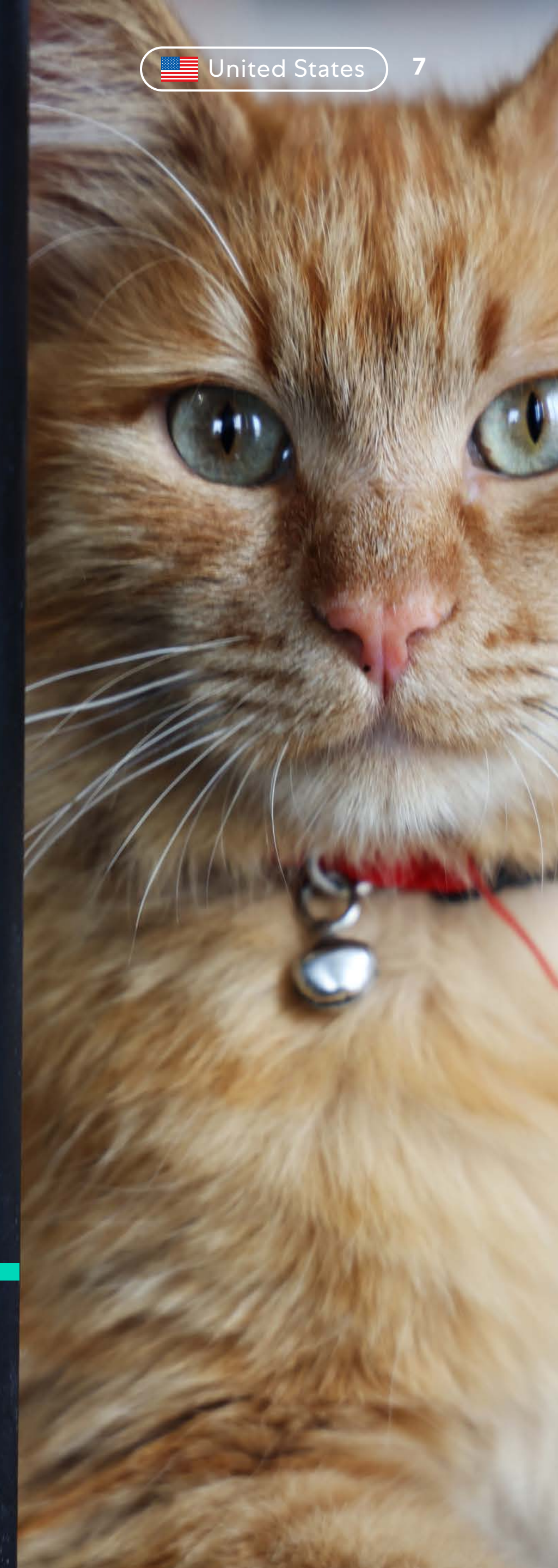


### DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. RESCUE CENTER/SHELTER: 20%
2. Friend/Relative: 18%
3. Breeder: 15%
4. Private Individual: 15%
5. Pet shop: 13%

### CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. FRIEND/RELATIVE: 22%
2. Rescue Center/Shelter: 19%
3. Stray/I found it: 18%
4. Pet Shop: 13%
5. Private Individual: 9%



¹Sample definition: 342 current dog owners / 345 current cat owners



## WHAT ACTIONS DO YOU TAKE IF YOU ENCOUNTER A STRAY?<sup>1</sup>

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

45% ACT OF KINDNESS



8% CHASE IT AWAY



28% DO NOTHING



### CAT

38% ACT OF KINDNESS



12% CHASE IT AWAY



43% DO NOTHING



<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 313 has seen a stray dog / 314 has seen a stray cat

## WHICH MEASURES DO YOU THINK WOULD BEST REDUCE PET HOMELESSNESS?<sup>2</sup>

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

### DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. STERILIZATION: 38%
2. Microchipping: 31%
3. Fighting animal cruelty: 29%
4. Providing subsidized vet services: 29%
5. Promoting programs so people know where to adopt: 29%

### CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. STERILIZATION: 38%
2. Fighting animal cruelty: 33%
3. Providing subsidized vet services: 33%
4. Banning kitten mills/farms: 31%
5. (Tie) Microchipping and Promoting programs so people know where to adopt: 28%

<sup>2</sup>Sample definition: 507 current or previous dog owners / 413 current or previous cat owners

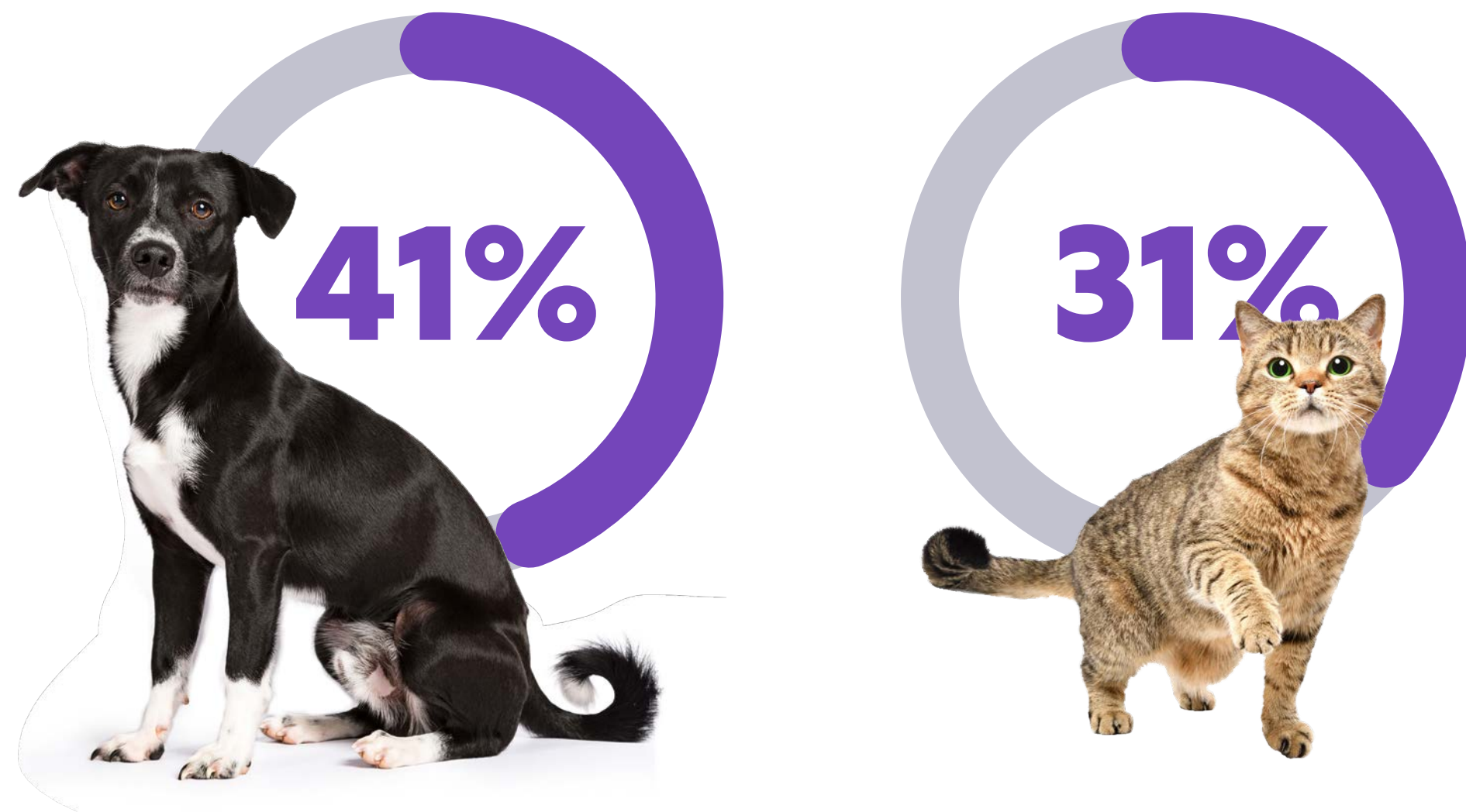




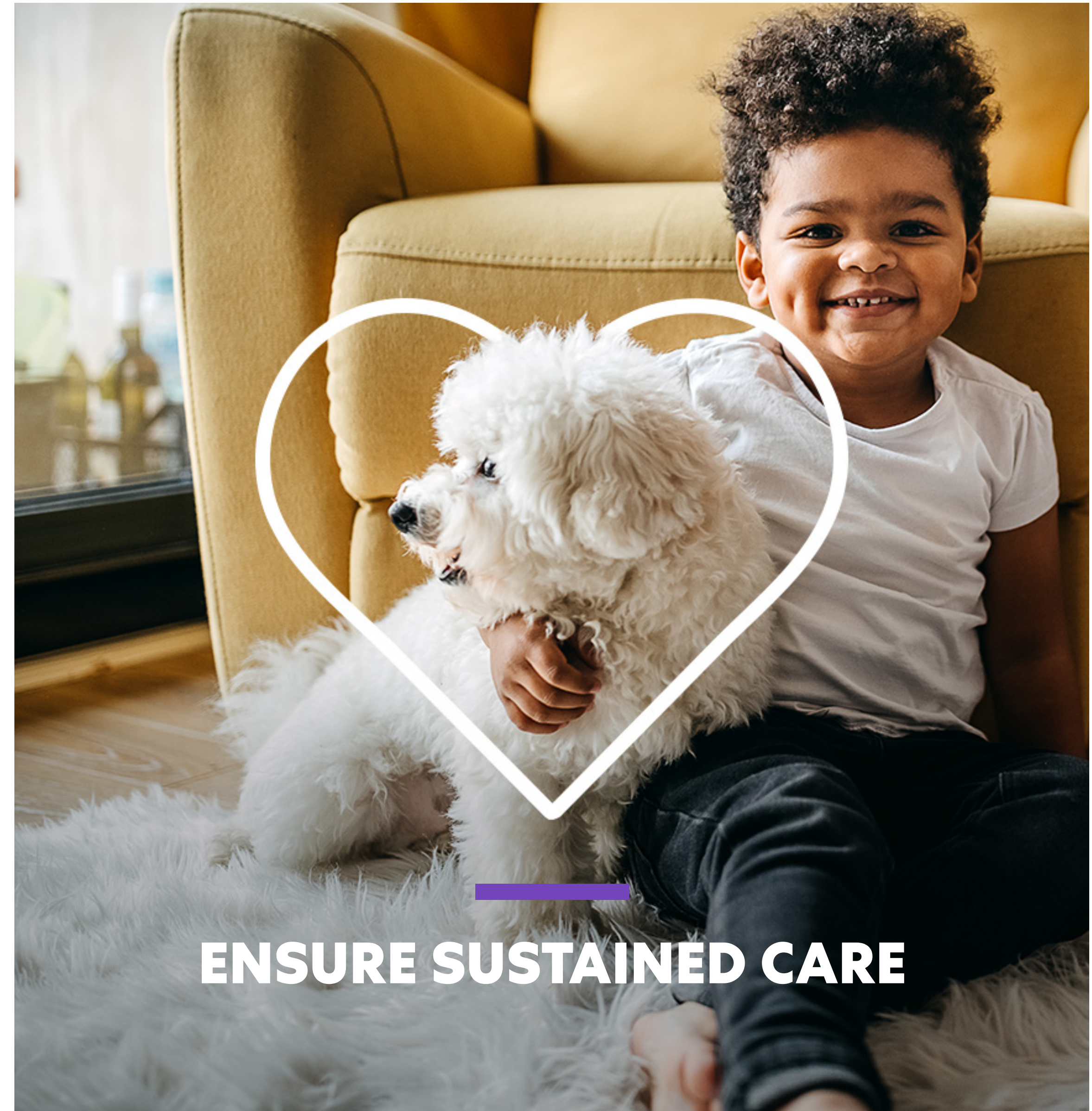
Helping to provide more homeless pets with responsible loving homes, or the sustained human care they need in the community, is a foundational step in tackling pet homelessness. Achieving it requires an understanding of the key barriers to acquiring or adopting a pet, or accessing veterinary care, as 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?<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 1005 owners and non-owners



## WHAT'S PREVENTING YOU FROM OWNING A PET?<sup>1</sup>

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

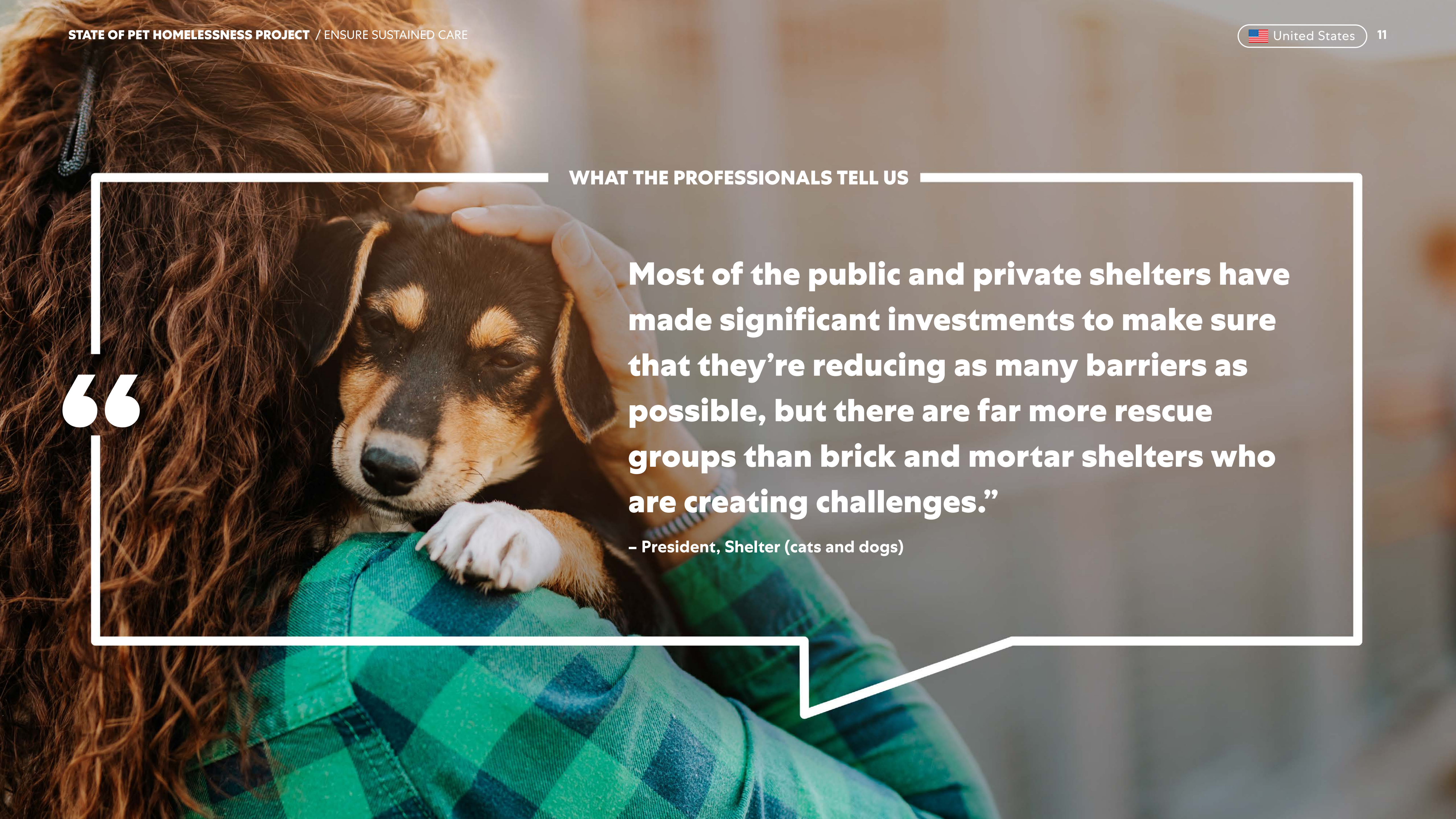


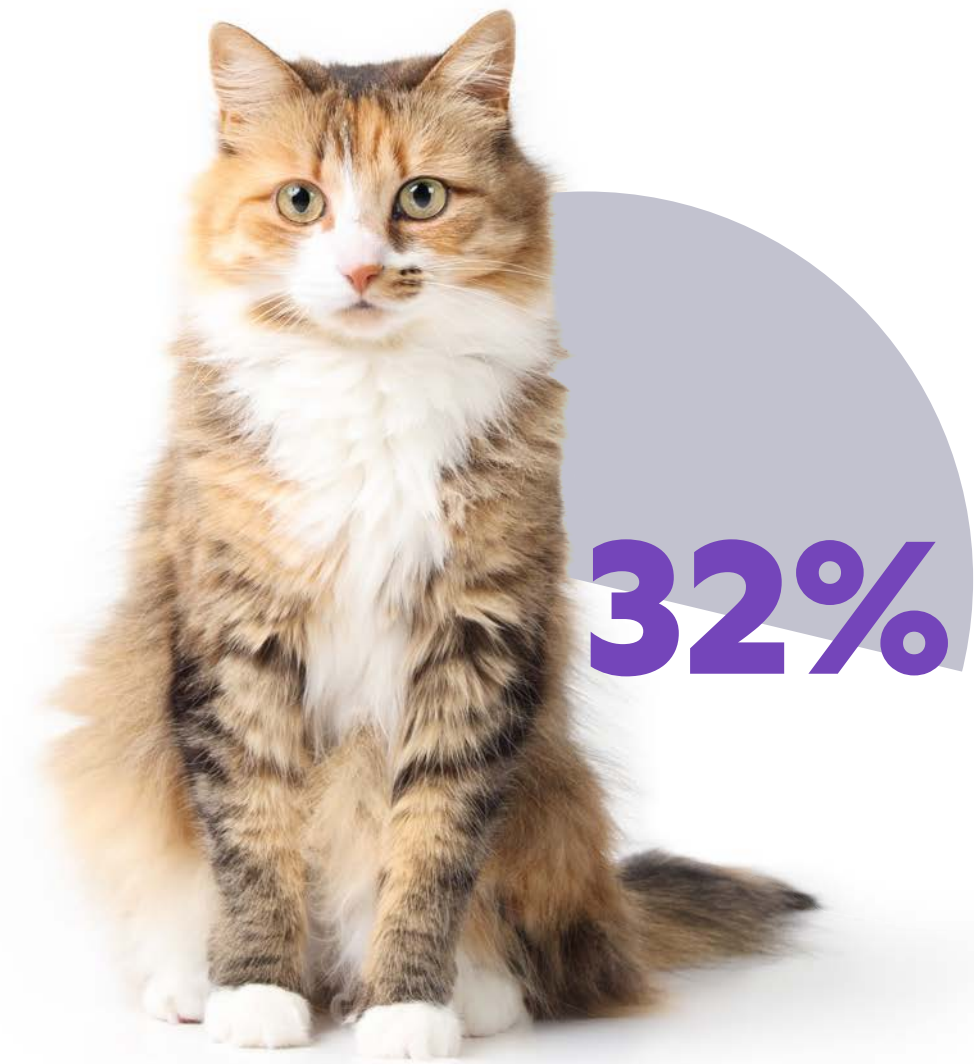
<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 498 non-dog owners / 592 non-cat owners

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

**Most of the public and private shelters have made significant investments to make sure that they're reducing as many barriers as possible, but there are far more rescue groups than brick and mortar shelters who are creating challenges.”**

– President, Shelter (cats and dogs)





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?<sup>1</sup>**

**42%**  
**CONSIDERING  
GETTING A DOG  
FROM A SHELTER**

**32%**  
**CONSIDERING  
GETTING A CAT  
FROM A SHELTER**

<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 243 dog considerers / 244 cat considerers



**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.

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**  
**30% (28.4M)**

54% (15.3M) of those who lost their dog got them back.

**CATS**  
**27% (24.8M)**

54% (13.4M) of those who lost their cat got them back.

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

**DOGS**  
**6%**



**CATS**  
**5%**

¹Sample definition: 873 has or had a pet



## WHAT ARE THE BEST METHODS TO HELP LOST PETS?<sup>1</sup>

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: 61%
2. Tags with contact details: 61%
3. Updates in social networks: 35%
4. Communication from shelters when pets are lost by an owner: 33%
5. Communication from shelters when the pet turns up in their shelter: 31%

### CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. MICROCHIPPING: 60%
2. Tags with contact details: 49%
3. Updates in social networks: 36%
4. Communication from shelters when pets are lost by an owner: 33%
5. Communication from shelters when the pet turns up in their shelter: 30%

### IS YOUR PET MICROCHIPPED?<sup>2</sup>

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  
**48%**

CATS  
**39%**

<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 209 has lost a dog / 209 has lost a cat

<sup>2</sup>Sample definition: 466 current dog owners / 394 current cat owners

## WHY MIGHT YOU CONSIDER REHOMING YOUR PET?<sup>1</sup>

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.



### DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

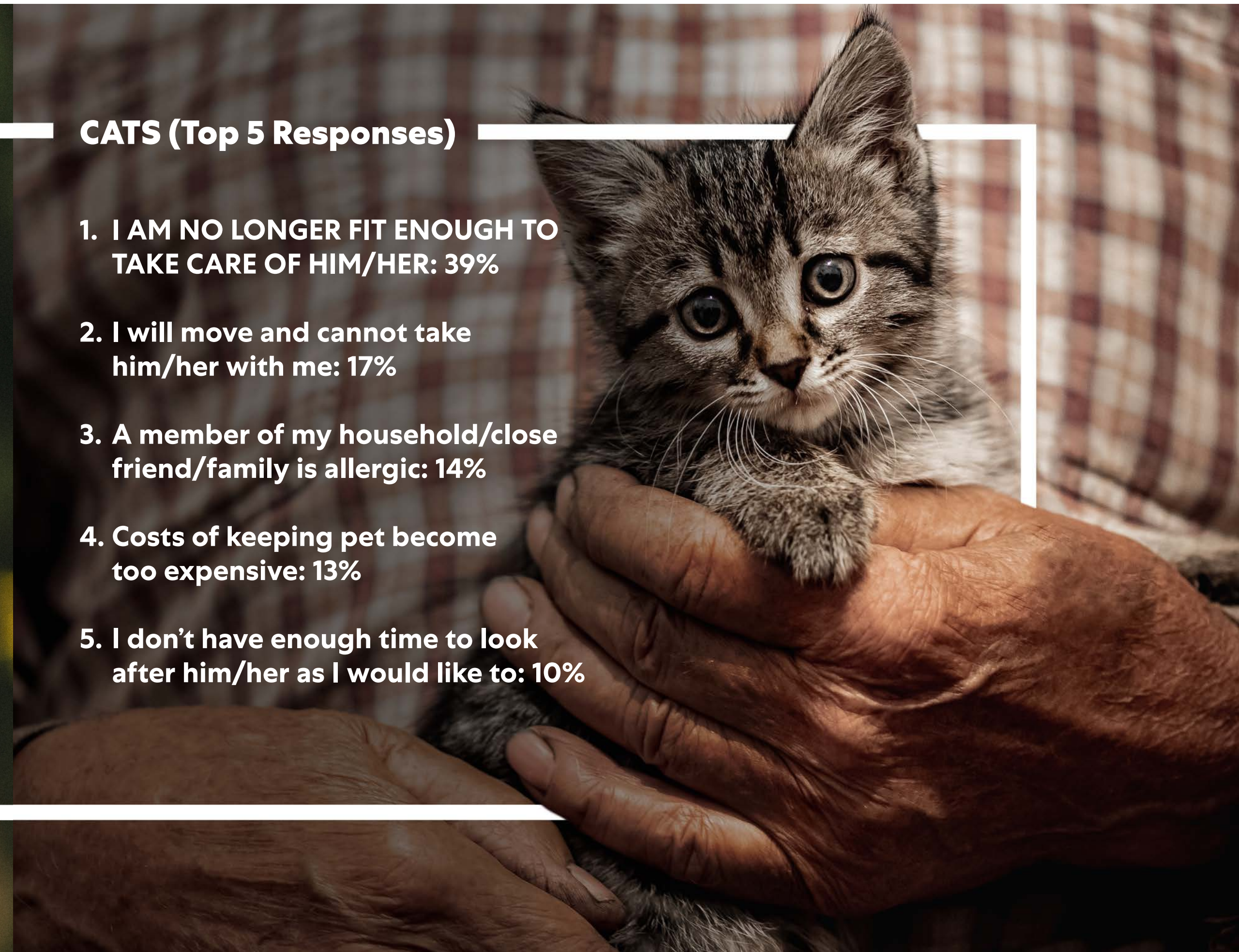
1. I AM NO LONGER FIT ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF HIM/HER: 30%
2. I will move and cannot take him/her with me: 18%
3. I don't have enough time to look after him/her as I would like to: 16%
4. Costs of keeping pet become too expensive: 14%
5. A member of my household/close friend/family is allergic: 13%

## ARE YOU CONSIDERING GIVING UP YOUR PET IN THE NEXT YEAR<sup>2</sup>

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

**DOGS**  
**23%**

**CATS**  
**22%**



### CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. I AM NO LONGER FIT ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF HIM/HER: 39%
2. I will move and cannot take him/her with me: 17%
3. A member of my household/close friend/family is allergic: 14%
4. Costs of keeping pet become too expensive: 13%
5. I don't have enough time to look after him/her as I would like to: 10%

<sup>1</sup>Sample definition: 507 current or previous dog owners / 413 current or previous cat owners

<sup>2</sup>Sample definition: 466 current dog owners / 394 current cat owners

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

**The narrative for so long was we want to take away your pet, we want to find you. And now in the past five to ten years, it's changed to what can we do to help you keep your pet? We have a plethora of services to help your pet stay in a loving home.”**

– Executive Director, Shelter (cats and dogs)





## TAKEAWAYS

The United States is below the global average<sup>1</sup> of 35% homeless cats and dogs. There are significant opportunities to address the stray pet population, help more pets find the sustained human care and nutrition they need to thrive, and prevent pets from being rehomed.



## PREVENT UNWANTED PETS

The sterilization rates are 74% for dogs and 77% for cats, which is well above the global averages of 49% for dogs and 63% for cats.

Stray cats account for 77% of the homeless pet population in the US. Reducing these populations through breeding prevention could have a significant impact.

## ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE

42% would consider adopting a dog from a shelter and 32% would consider adopting a cat from a shelter. When comparing that to actual acquisition of current-owned pets, rescue center/shelter was the top place of origin for dogs and second place for cats.

## KEEP PETS IN HOMES

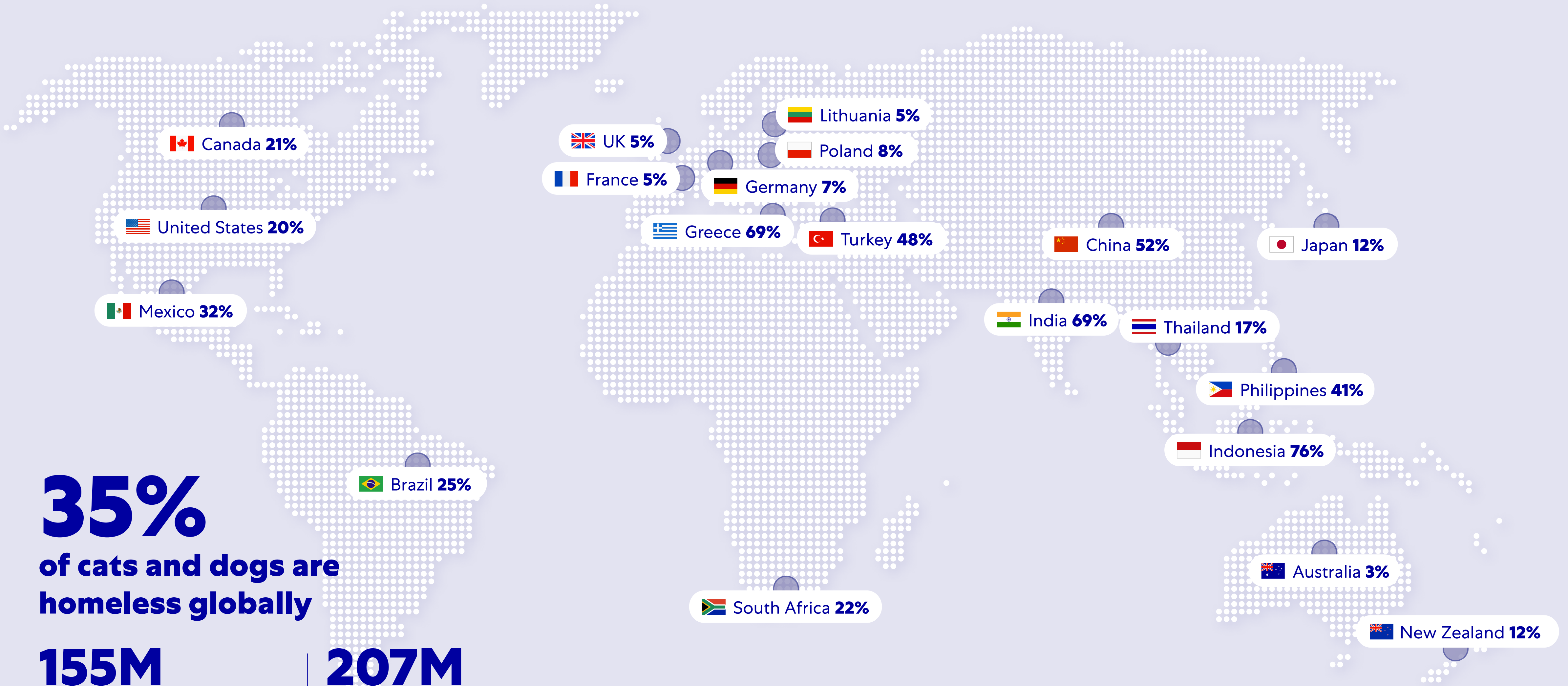
While a low percentage of dogs and cats were lost in the past year (6% of dogs and 5% of cats) this represents a large number of dogs and cats (4.59M dogs, 5.68M cats), and only half of cats and dogs are ever found.

48% of dogs and 39% of cats have microchips, which is just above the global average, however the public ranks this as the top way to help reunite lost pets with their owners (61% for dogs, 60% for cats).

Keeping owned dogs and cats in homes for the long term could have a significant impact on homelessness in the US. The proportion of owners stating they may have to rehome their pet in the next 12 months is above the global average for both dogs (23%) and cats (22%). Not being fit enough to care for them and moving and can't bring them are cited as the top reasons to consider rehoming both dogs and cats.

<sup>1</sup>“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](https://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 the United States.





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.