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Factors associated with live release of cats & dogs admitted to Victorian municipal pounds:

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National data 2012-2013: Welfare agencies & Councils

Intake 9 dogs/1000 residents, 1.8 deaths/1000

Intake: Dogs	Reclaimed %	% Rehomed of intake	% rehomed of animals not reclaimed	Transfer %	Live Release %	Euthanased%
210,990	48	19	37	6.7	77	21

Intake 7 cats/1000 residents, 3.8 deaths/1000

Intake: Cats	Reclaimed %	% Rehomed of intake	% rehomed of animals not reclaimed	Transfer %	Live Release %	Euthanased%
163,491	4.5	27	28	6.1	45	56



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Why Victorian municipalities?

- Each Victorian municipality is bound by Section 68A of the Victorian Domestic Animals Act 1994
- Every 4 years must prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan outlining how council intends to manage over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs & cats
- Most report the number of cats & dogs managed, and their outcomes (but not mandated)

Domestic Animal Act 1994





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Big difference in outcome for animals across councils

- Some municipalities have euthanasia:
- Dogs: $\leq 5\%$ but others $\geq 40-55\%$
- Cats: 12% but **others 80-95%**





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Question?

- What are councils with low euthanasia & high live release rates doing compared to those with poorer outcomes for animals?





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Aims of Study

- To identify factors associated with high live release & low euthanasia in Victorian municipalities



Materials and Methods

- Contacted all 62 of 79 Victorian councils with sufficient analyzable data on DAM Plan by telephone & invited to participate in survey
- Participants were an Animal Management Team member who had a sound knowledge of council pound protocol & operations.
- Participation rate 38/62 but 3 excluded as completed <20% of questions
- Final participation 56% (35/62)

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Materials & Methods:

Questionnaire covered various areas:

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- Strategies to reduce intake
 - eg. desexing programs
- Strategies to increase reclaiming & rehoming
 - registration compliance monitoring, microchipping
 - adoption and fostering programs
 - promotion of responsible ownership
- Attitudes & beliefs about TNR & getting to zero euthanasia of adoptable & treatable animals



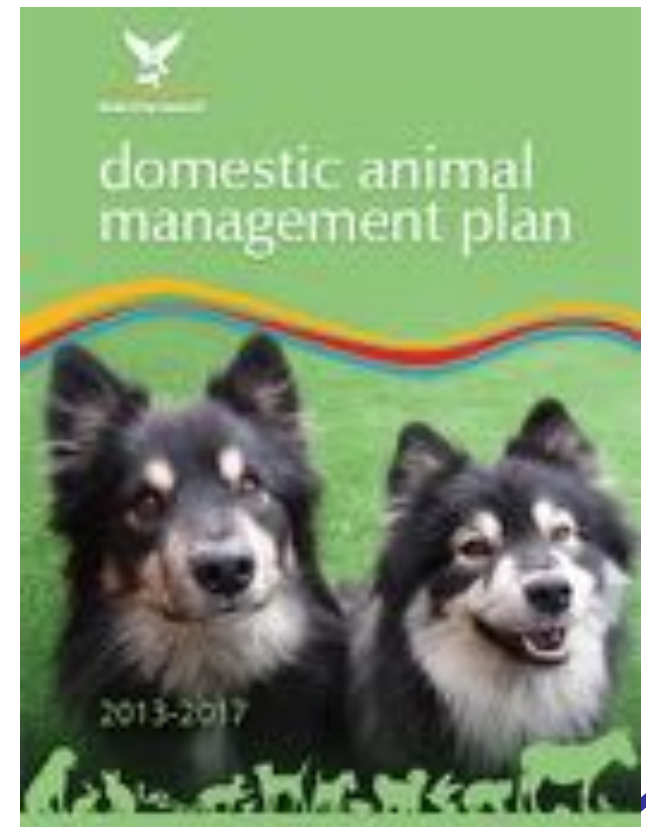


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Data Collection

- Data for intake, reclaim, rehome & euthanasia were obtained from each council's Domestic Animal Management Plan
- 62 of 79 had analysable statistics





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RESULTS



Demographics (ABS)

	City (n=16)	Rural City (n=6)	Shire (n=13)
Human Pop	128,050	25,141	52,140
Dogs registered/1000 human pop	124	169	232
Cats registered/1000 population	52	53	57



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Good news: Dogs

- 39% (24/62) of councils
 - euthanasia \leq 10%
 - live release \geq 90%
 - quoted as representing zero euthanasia of treatable & releasable animals



- Top quartile (25%) of pounds have achieved \leq 7% euthanasia & \geq 93% live release

And not so good news

- Bottom quartile euthanasia rates \geq 25-55%



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Not such good news: Cats

- Top quartile (25%) of performers
- $\leq 43\%$ euthanasia & $\geq 57\%$ for live release

And bad news

- Bottom quartile have euthanasia rates $\geq 85-95\%$, with only 5-15% released alive





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Operation type



- Immediate transfer 66% (22/35)
- Full service: 20% (7/35, 6/35 cats)
- Hold only: 14% (6/35)
- Only 21% (6/28) who transferred had KPI's in contract
- 3 relating to meeting rehoming/DAM/ euthanasia targets, 1 vaccinate/desex, 2 unspecified)





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Partners



- Immediate transfer 66% (22/35)
 - Lost Dogs Home: 41% (9/22)
 - RSPCA: 36% (8/22)
 - Animal Aid: 14% (3/22)
 - GAWS: 9% (2/22)
 - County Kennels 1/22



Partners

- **Hold only (6/36)**
 - 1 x RSPCA, SAD, Sunraisia, Blue Cross, Wodonga Dog rescue
- **Full service 7/35**
 - Horsham PAWS, Blue Cross, Maneki Neko, Animal Aid, multiple other rescue groups





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Admissions

Dogs

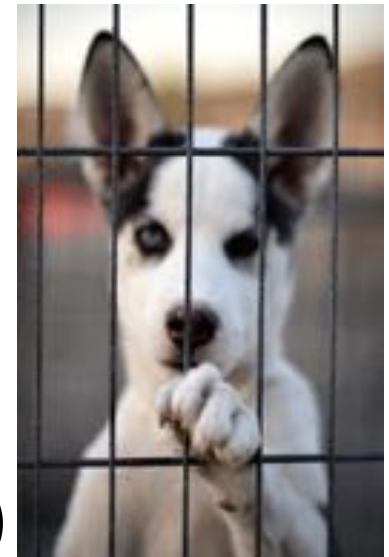
- Average intake 9.3 dogs/1000 residents
- Range 1.4 to 20.3

Cats

- Average 6.9 cats/1000 resident
- Range 0.5 to 19.5

Impact of type operation on % dogs euthanased:

- **Small differences between type of operation for percent of dogs euthanased:**
 - Immediate transfer: 12%
 - Hold only: 9%
 - Full service: 13%
- **Small differences between demographics**
 - Rural City -17% (but 3/6 <10%)
 - Shire 9%
 - City 11%



Impact of operation on % euthanased: cats

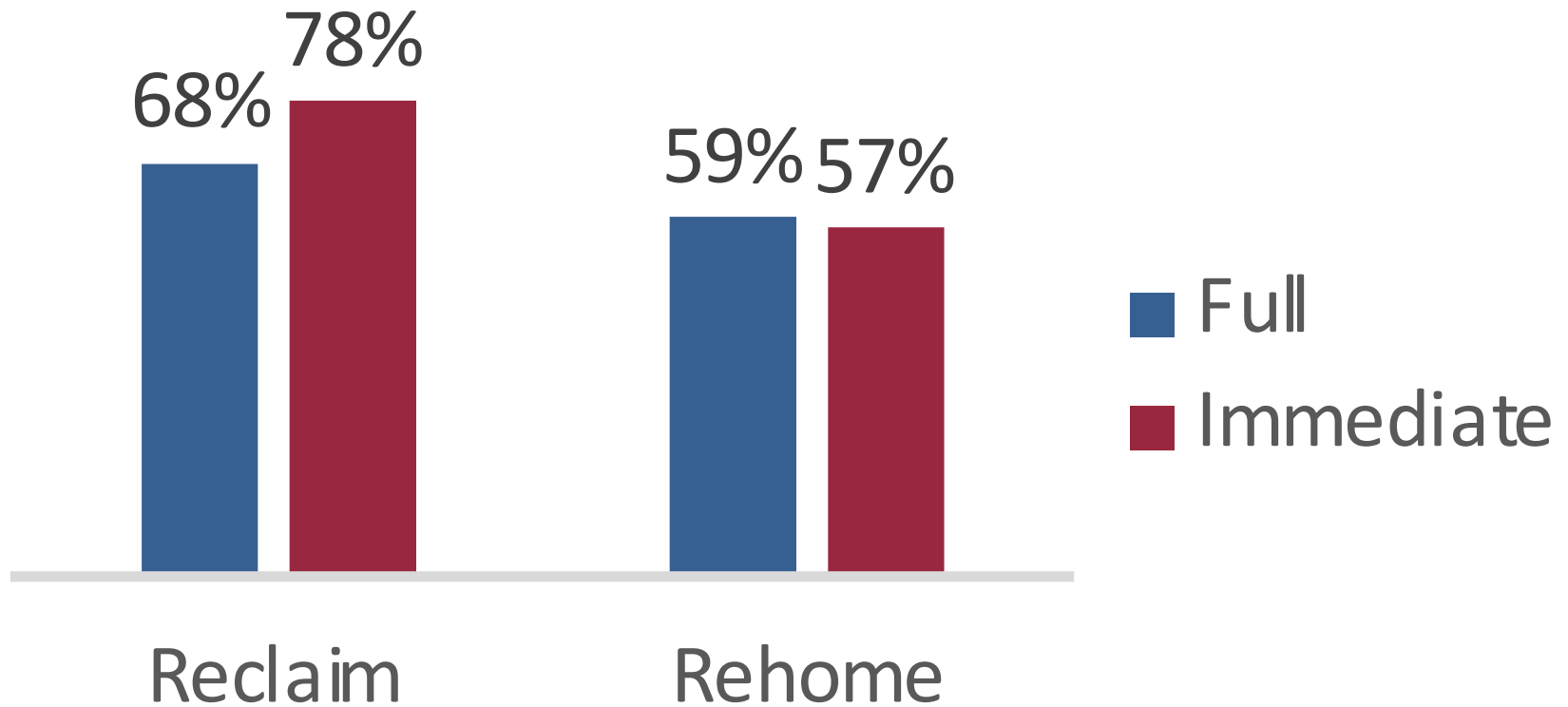
- **Small differences between type of operation**
 - Immediate transfer 48% (9- 93%)
 - Hold – 53% (28-70%)
 - Full service 62% (21- 90%)
- **No big difference between demographics**
 - City -52%
 - Rural City – 55%
 - Shire 45%





Live release - dogs

Full Service vs Immediate (Dogs)

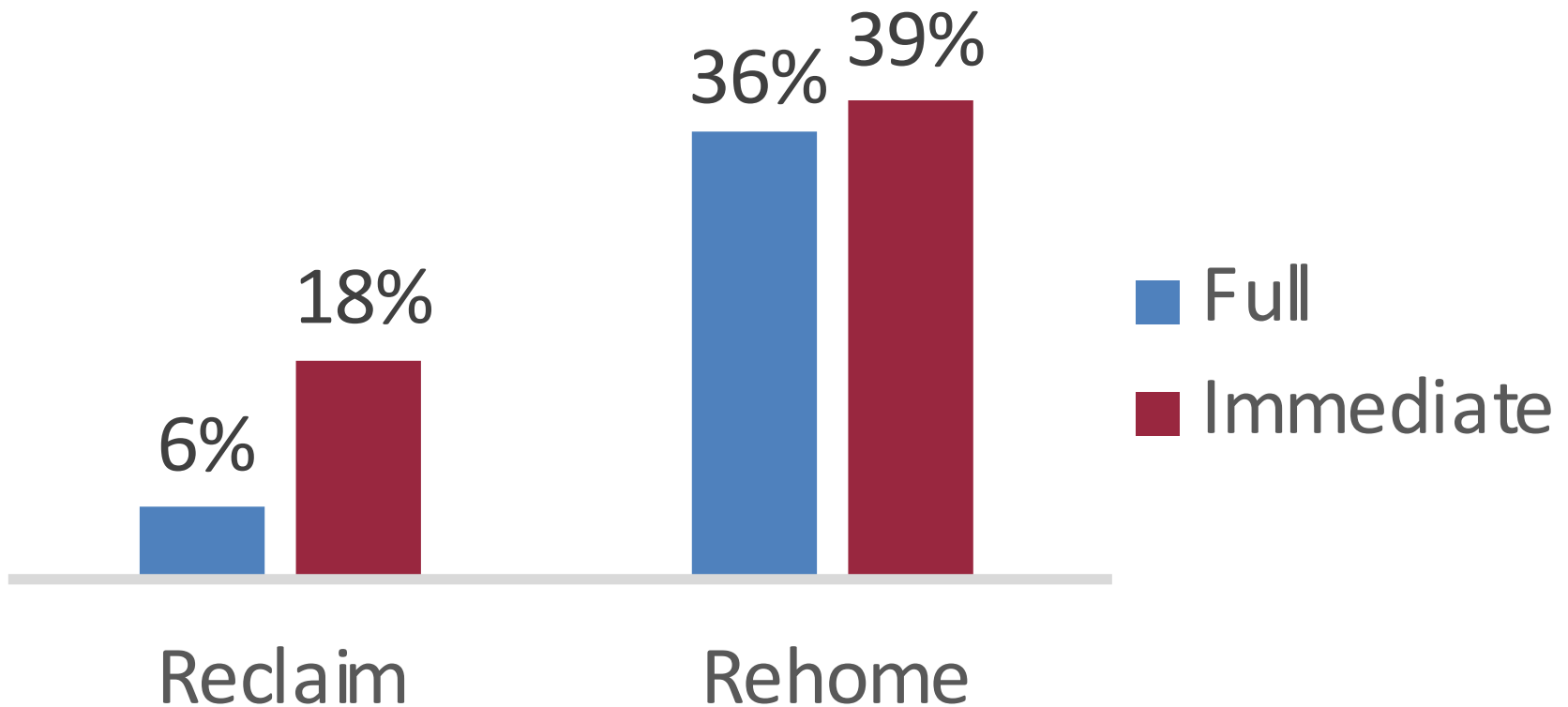


Rehome = % rehomed of
unclaimed animals



Live release- cats

Full Service vs Immediate (Cats)

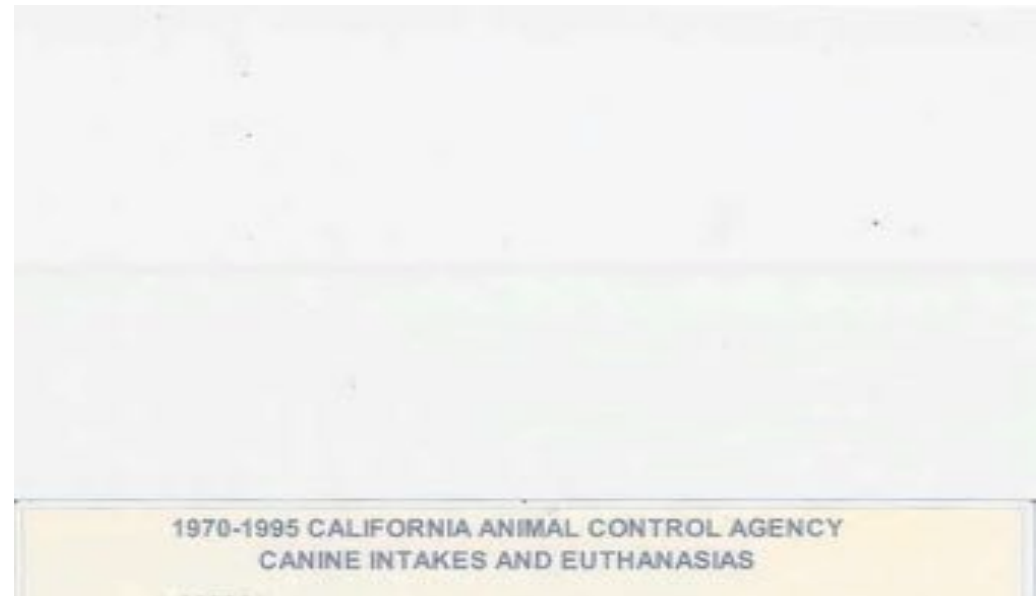
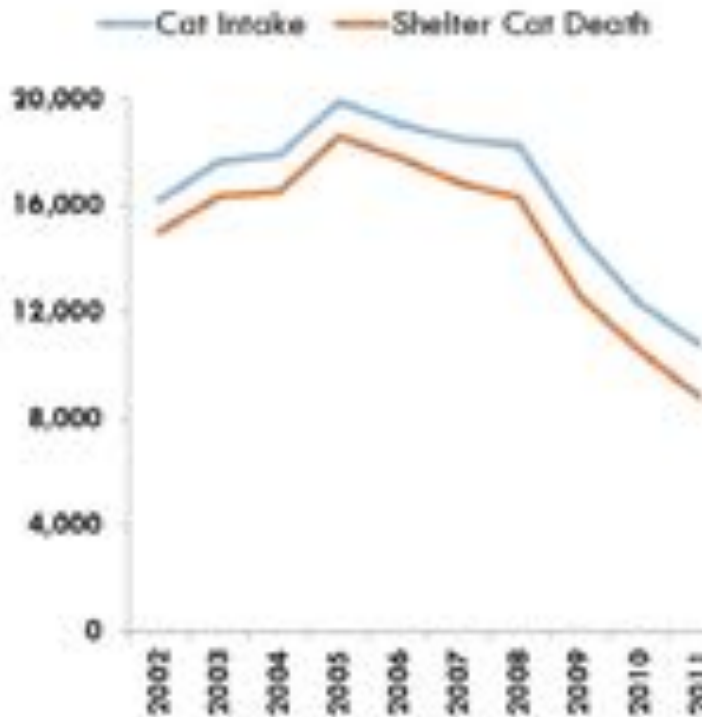


Rehome = % rehomed of
unclaimed animals

Strategies to decrease intake most important!



Cats



“The drop in shelter euthanasia rates over the past 30 years has been produced almost exclusively by a decline in shelter intake rates”. Peter Marsh *Replacing Myth with Math: Using Evidence-Based Programs to Eradicate Shelter Overpopulation*,

Strategies to decrease intake:

Desexing programs

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- Targeted low-cost or free desexing reduces dog & cat intakes².
- San Jose 50% drop in cat shelter admissions using spay/neuter voucher program & net savings to county = \$1.5 million ^{1,2}.
- Blacktown NSW – dog desexing 50% subsidy - \$100 spent saved \$200 in pound (per comm Dr N. Blackman)

¹Kass PH, et al 2013), ²Johnson K, Cicirelli L, PeerJ 2014, ³Scarlett, J, Johnston, JAAWS 2012, ⁴Jefferson E, Levy J, White, S JAAWS 2010.

Strategies to decrease intake:

Desexing programs

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- 37% ran subsidised desexing directly or with other organisation eg RSPCA programs but mostly *ad hoc*
- 60% had awareness of AVA desexing vouchers
- Of those aware, 50% either distributed them or advertised them
- Comments that lot of paper work & no cap on number (\$)



Strategies to decrease intake:

Return directly to owner

- 94% returned animals with current registration tag & microchip directly to owner (with some discretion eg. serial offenders)
- If pound at capacity, 8% returned identified dog without current rego & followed up registration



Strategies to decrease intake:

Assistance with problems

- 97% took owner surrenders
- Some offered pound facilities to temporarily house animals to prevent surrender while a solution was found.
- Examples include:
 - Housing a dog free of charge while a yard, fence or confinement facilities repaired



Strategies to decrease intake

- 23% (8/35) attempted to slow the number of cats & dogs when nearing capacity eg
 - contacting volunteers, rescue groups
 - advising surrendering owners
 - returning unregistered dogs directly to owner & following up on rego



Strategies to decrease intake

Promotion of Responsible Pet ownership

- 23% held information seminars for public on responsible pet ownership
- Park patrols
- Pet expos



Strategies used to increase live release

- Top 25% of pounds for live release (≥ 93%), most (76%) had reclaim rates in top quartile (≥ 80% of dog intake reclaimed)
- Most (64%) pounds with lowest live release were in lowest quartile for reclaim (≤ 54% dogs)
- High reclaim rate is associated with low euthanasia & high live release



Strategies used to increase reclaim by owner- microchipping

- 2014 study from RSPCA Qld
 - Only 28% of stray dogs & 9% stray cats had microchip
 - 37% had incorrect data
 - reclaim significantly higher if microchip with accurate contract details
- 38% held microchipping events



Strategies used to increase reclaim by owner

- Registration compliance monitoring:
 - 100% conducted door knocking – often *ad hoc*
 - 33% utilised microchip registrar data
 - 25% utilised SMS, email or phone reminders when overdue
- 24 h hot-line for owners to report lost pet & rangers emailed details from field



Strategies to increase live release: adoption

- Worked extensively with rescue groups & community to adopt animals - worked with up to 50 groups

Full service

- 71% adoption programs, 29% relied on foster carers and rescue organisations to find homes.
 - designated adoption interaction areas
- 75% had foster programs (very effective for behaviour modification & rehoming)
- 75% advertised in local newspaper, Facebook, some used TV, Pet Rescue, Petshop (1)



Strategies to increase live release:

Prevent illness

- Vaccination for common infectious diseases in dogs & cats
- **25%** (4/13) provided vaccination
 - Full service (3)
 - Hold (1)

Time of vaccination

- 1 on admission – parvo (hold)
- 3 after 1-8 days



Strategies to increase live release:

Community engagement

- 14% (5/35) of respondents accepted, donations of food, bedding and toys, money for veterinary treatment .



- Other community engagement: work for dole, correctional services, volunteer programs including with schools, TAFE students
- Community information seminars, school educational visits,

Views on Zero Euthanasia

“With adequate resources, when could zero euthanasia of all healthy & treatable animals be achieved (approx. <10% of intake)?”

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- More respondents believed that their council could rehome all treatable and adoptable dogs (71%) than cats (39%) in next 10 years.
- 30% of respondents believed that the large number of cats made it impossible to achieve zero euthanasia of cats



Views on time to Get to Zero

Provided adequate resources, zero euthanasia could be achieved in:

Dogs

Cats

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<10 years	57%, 23/33	31%, 13/33
10- <20 years	3%, 1/33	14%, 5/33
20- <30 years	0%, 0/33	3%, 1/33
30- <40 years	0%, 0/33	6%, 2/33
Never	17%, 6/33	29%, 10/33
Unsure	9%, 3/33	6%, 2/33

71% (5/7) full service facilities believe they already rehome all suitable dogs (all \leq 8% euthanasia)

How do beliefs correspond with performance?

- Strong association between those who believed they could get to zero & euthanasia rates ($p < 0.001$)
- Those who believed they could never get to zero, had significantly higher euthanasia

"If you believe you can, you can"

- Live release rates of $> 90\%$ (euthanasia $< 10\%$) are achievable by doing things differently.



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Comments.....

- "We started managing dogs in the 1970's but have only started managing cats since the 90's. There is a 20 year lag existing in people's understanding of cat management"
- "Cats breed too much and not enough stringent laws"
- "Incoming cat numbers are a problem because irresponsible owners"



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Comments....

- "Pinning this on councils is difficult as each municipality has different circumstances & strategies need to cross council boundaries. We would need to standardise requirements across the state and have nation-wide regulations"
- "If cats are desexed then we can do it in 5 years"



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Strategies for cats?

- "In your opinion, where efforts should be focused to see greatest reduction in euthanasia of cats":
- 74% (26/35) - desexing
- 17% (6/33) - education
- Legislation, responsible pet ownership, increasing ownership of community cats

Views on Trap-Neuter and Return

"Targeted TNR programs can reduce pound cat intake by 66%"

"TNR can result in stabilization or modest reduction of colony size & healthier cats".

Response to TNR	Percent, proportion of respondents	
Positive	53%, 10/19	- Comments: - Wildlife impacts even if they were neutered
Negative	37%, 7/19	- Large cat numbers would prevent any effectiveness
Unsure	11%, 2/19	- Needs research

Levy JK, Isaza NM, Scott KC, Veterinary Journal, 2014

Levy JK, Gale DW, Gale LA, JAVMA, 2003

Pounds with high live release have multiple strategies to:

Decrease intake

- Desexing programs, direct return to owner

Increase reclaim

- SMS, email reminders for registration, microchipping events

Increased rehome

- Community approach
- Work with rescue groups
- Good adoption area
- Volunteers
- Foster programs
- Newspaper, Facebook & TV advertising



Limitations

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- Participation rate 55% of contacted could lead to bias (64 of 79 councils contacted)
- Biased to municipalities with better outcomes for animals
- DAM Plans not up to date with data

Recommendations

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Decrease entry

- Change legislation to allow direct return to owner even if not registered – notice of requirement to register with escalating fine for delays
- Comprehensive, community-orientated door-knocking – registration, microchip (update details) & tag with phone numbers (innovative – provide tag & engrave on site)
- Implement targeted desexing programs to decrease cat & dog admissions – **LOOK at data – where are highest intakes/1000 residents**

Recommendations

Increase reclaim

- Make it easy for pet owners to have correct identification & registration – reminders by SMS, email,
- Microchipping days etc
- Immediate photo of found dog put on Facebook/website & provide to shelter

Increase rehome

- Work with rescue agencies
- Promote a community approach -fostering, rehabilitation, & volunteer programs
- Pet shops?? (most not thought of it or not in favour)

Conclusions

- Victorian pounds could get to zero euthanasia in next 5 years for dogs – nearly 40% have \geq 90% live release
- Cats will need alternative strategies to decrease intake & increase live release, if to get to zero euthanasia of treatable releasable animals



The Need for Transparency

- Mandated reporting of cat & dog outcomes by Victorian legislation enables transparency about animal management
- Enables municipalities to monitor progress & identify effective strategies for municipality.
- Guides use of council resources to improve outcomes for cats, dogs and the community.
- Needs to include welfare agencies





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Contact details

Thanks to participating councils!

PLEASE update DAM Plans!!!

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3. Scarlett, J.; Johnston, N. Impact of a subsidized spay neuter clinic on impoundments and euthanasia in a community shelter and on service and complaint calls to animal control. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* **2012**, 15, 53.
4. Jefferson, E.; Levy, J.; White, S. Impact of publicly sponsored neutering programs on animal population dynamics at animal shelters: The new hampshire and austin experiences. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* **2010**, 13, 191-212.