SHELTER
ANIMALS
COUNT

2023
ANNUAL ANALYSIS

COMPARING 2023 TO 2022, 2021, AND 2019

MOST TRUSTED
ANIMAL SHELTERING DATA
SINCE 2016

Dear Animal Welfare Community,

Since our founding in 2012, Shelter Animals Count (SAC) has been on a collaborative journey of data collection and sharing. Through it all, our work has been driven by the belief that understanding the number of animals entering and leaving animal shelters is essential because with this knowledge, we are able to identify real solutions to the challenges faced by animal shelters today.

2020 marked a pivotal "reset" in animal welfare, showcasing the power of unity and fostering creativity and innovation. It also unveiled vulnerabilities in the system. In the years following, we have seen steady increases in animal intakes, flatlines or decreases in outcomes, and a persistent gap in animals awaiting an outcome. The result? An ongoing capacity crisis.

Entering our fourth year of this "new normal," we are faced with confronting the challenge of the year-over-year buildup of animals that have entered and lingered in organizations, waiting for an outcome — the total now reaching an estimated 900,000 animals since 2021. As recent trends indicate another challenging year ahead in 2024, SAC remains steadfast in our commitment to supporting you.
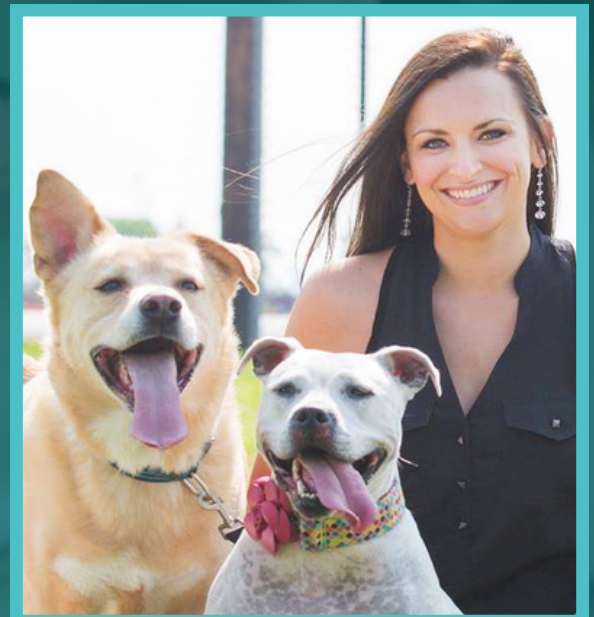
Recognizing the importance of understanding the historical changes of animal counts within the welfare system, our report includes 2019 comparisons to provide context for the industry's evolution toward this "new normal." Moreover, we are proud to introduce our new estimation model, translating percentages into estimated animal counts. This development makes the data more accessible and user-friendly, allowing us to bring even more animal advocates into the fold.

While 2023 presented its share of challenges for our industry, our collective passion and resilience will fuel progress in 2024. As we embark on this new year, we must continue to look ahead, while learning from where we have been. Embracing post-pandemic changes, sharing experience, and collaborating on solutions will all play a pivotal role in shaping what comes in the years ahead.

Our commitment to transparency, cooperation, and neutrality remains unwavering and we look forward to telling your stories through data, collectively and individually, as we forge ahead into 2024!

Stephanie Filer

Executive Director, Shelter Animals Count

HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY - DECEMBER, 2021 - 2023

NEW in 2024: Introducing Shelter Animals Count's new estimation model

This report is the first report to contain data from Shelter Animals Count's new estimation model, which translates percentages into estimated figures. Please note that the reported numbers are rounded for simplicity, allowing for a more comprehensive representation of the data.

For more information about the model, see page 14.

1 The number of animals entering shelters through community intakes in 2023 remained roughly the same as 2022 at 6.5 million, with intakes nearly evenly split between dogs and cats.

PAGE 5

2 Even though total community intakes remained flat in 2023, 4% fewer animals (-67,000) were transferred between organizations compared to 2022.

PAGE 5, 7

3 While 2.2 million dogs were adopted in 2023, dog adoptions are still 5% lower than in 2019 (-108,000 dogs adopted).

Cats are experiencing a more hopeful trend: 2.6 million cats were adopted in 2023, 14% more (+319,000 cats) than 2019.

PAGE 11, 12

4 While non-live outcomes are on the rise for both cats and dogs, the number of dogs euthanized (359,000 dogs) surpassed the number of cats euthanized (330,000 cats). Shelter euthanasia represents 9% of total intakes.

PAGE 11, 12

5 **A total of 900,000 animals have entered and lingered in our nation's shelters and rescues since January 2021. This surplus is on top of the population already residing within organizations, resulting in an ongoing capacity crisis.**

INTAKES

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT 2023 FULL YEAR REPORT

In 2023,

6,550,000

dogs and cats entered shelters and rescues nationwide.

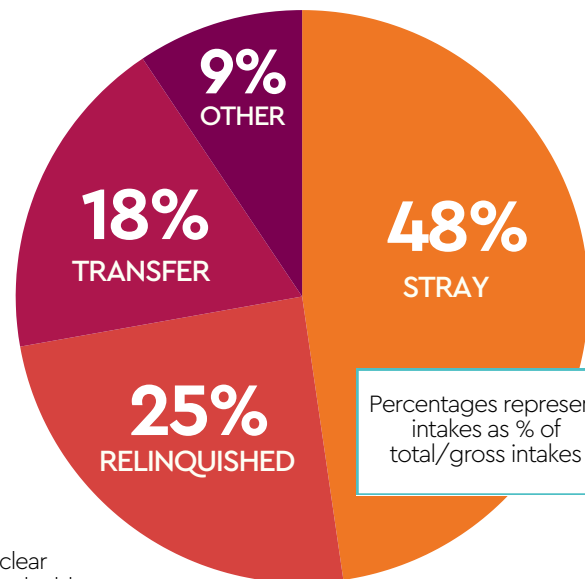⬆ **0.2%** COMPARED TO 2022

⬆ **4.0%** COMPARED TO 2021

⬇ **3.2%** COMPARED TO 2019

COMMUNITY INTAKES* FOR 2023

Community intakes in 2023 remained fairly consistent with 2022, but are still 3% lower than 2019 — accounting for a reduction in roughly 214,000 animals entering organizations compared to pre-pandemic times. Community intakes remained evenly split between dogs and cats in 2023.
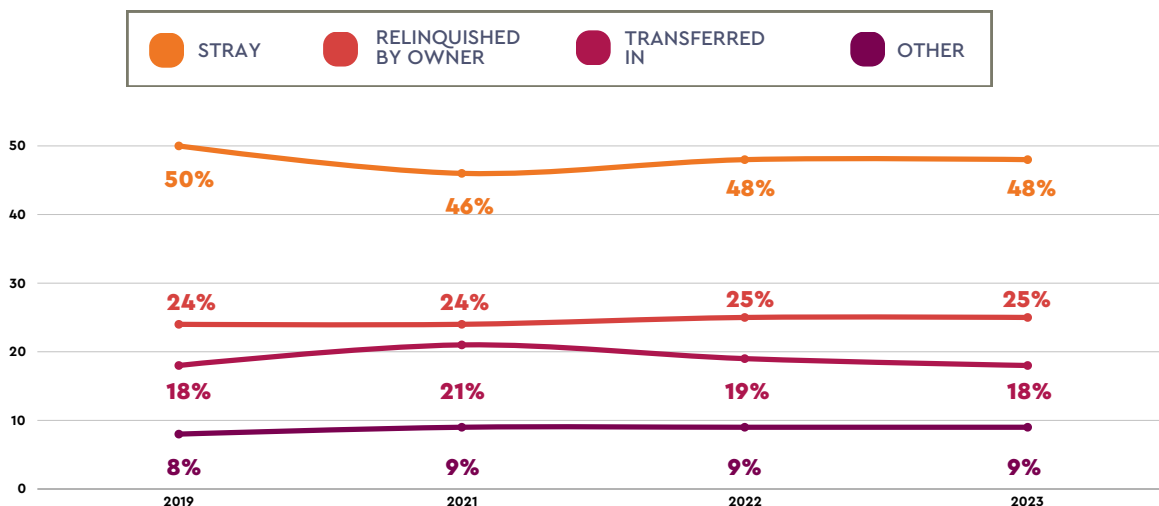
In addition to animals entering organizations through their community, 1.5 million animals were transferred between organizations in 2023, marking an 4% decrease since 2022.

*Community intakes tally all intakes except transfers to ensure a clear count of animals received directly from the community, avoiding double counting during total intake calculations.

9% OTHER
18% TRANSFER
48% STRAY
25% RELINQUISHED

Percentages represent intakes as % of total/gross intakes

● STRAY ● RELINQUISHED BY OWNER ● TRANSFERRED IN ● OTHER

COMBINED SPECIES % OF TOTAL INTAKE

	2019	2021	2022	2023
STRAY	50%	46%	48%	48%
RELINQUISHED BY OWNER	24%	24%	25%	25%
TRANSFERRED IN	18%	21%	19%	18%
OTHER	8%	9%	9%	9%

3.2 MILLION DOGS

ENTERED SHELTERS AND RESCUES IN 2023

↑ **3.2%** COMPARED TO 2022
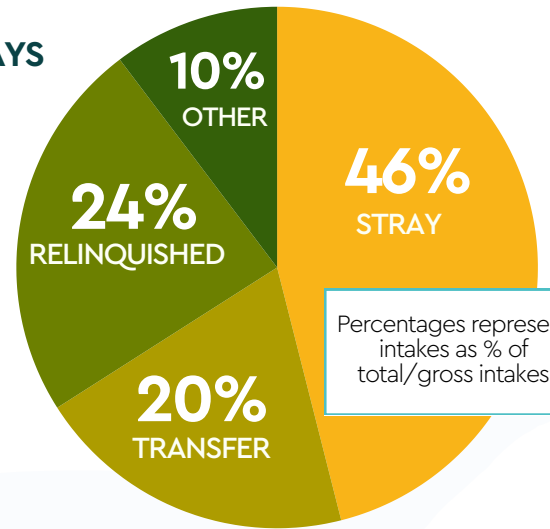
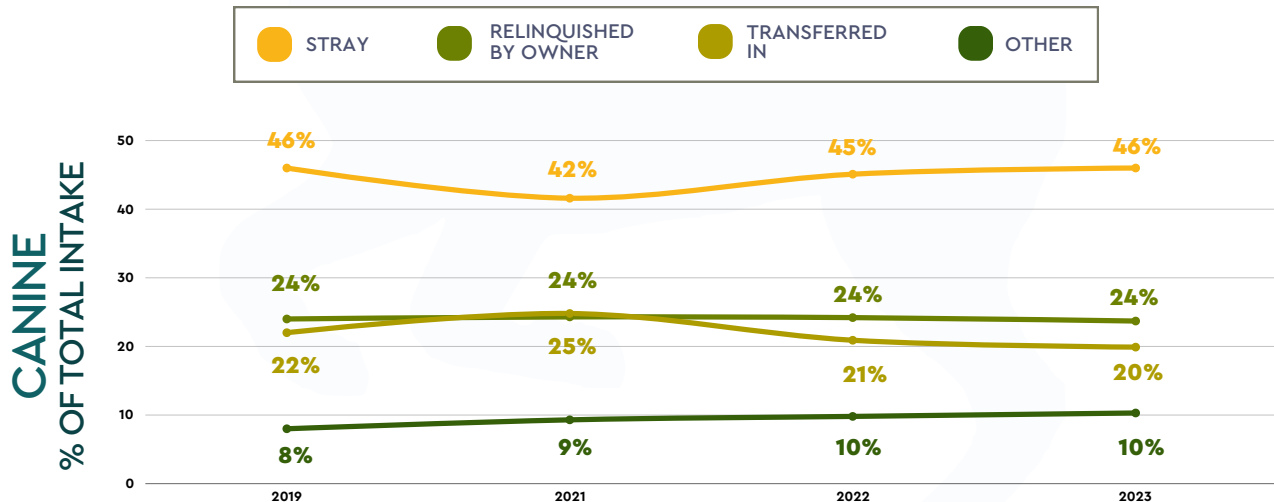PREVIOUS YEARS: ↑ **10.2%** COMPARED TO 2021 · ↓ **5.6%** COMPARED TO 2019

DOGS IN 2023: INCREASES FUELED BY STRAYS

Dog community intakes increased by 10% from 2021 and 3% from 2022, yet they remain 6% below 2019 levels. Stray intakes drove this increase, with an additional 234,000 strays entering organizations compared to 2021, constituting 46% of intakes, matching 2019 rates.

Other sources, like dogs born in care or dogs confiscated/seized, contributed to a 14% overall increase (52,000 dogs) compared to 2019/2021. Owner surrenders for dogs have remained steady since 2021, while still reflecting a 10% decrease compared to 2019.

Pie chart

- **46%** STRAY
- **20%** TRANSFER
- **24%** RELINQUISHED
- **10%** OTHER

Percentages represent intakes as % of total/gross intakes

CANINE % OF TOTAL INTAKE

Legend: STRAY · RELINQUISHED BY OWNER · TRANSFERRED IN · OTHER

	2019	2021	2022	2023
Stray	46%	42%	45%	46%
Relinquished by owner	24%	24%	24%	24%
Transferred in	22%	25%	21%	20%
Other	8%	9%	10%	10%

COMMUNITY INTAKES

3.3 MILLION CATS

ENTERED SHELTERS AND RESCUES IN 2023

↓ **2.4%** COMPARED TO 2022
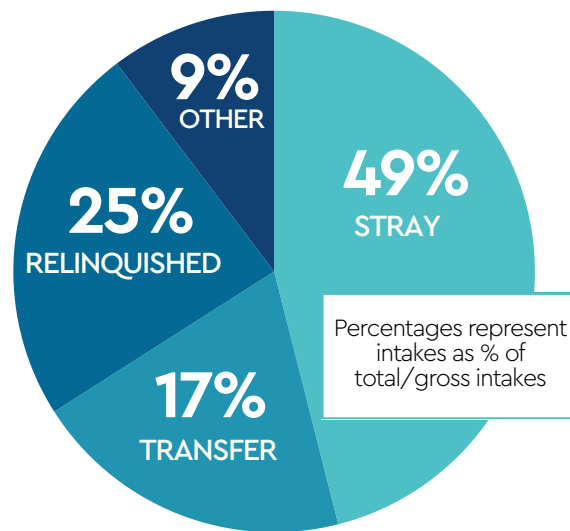
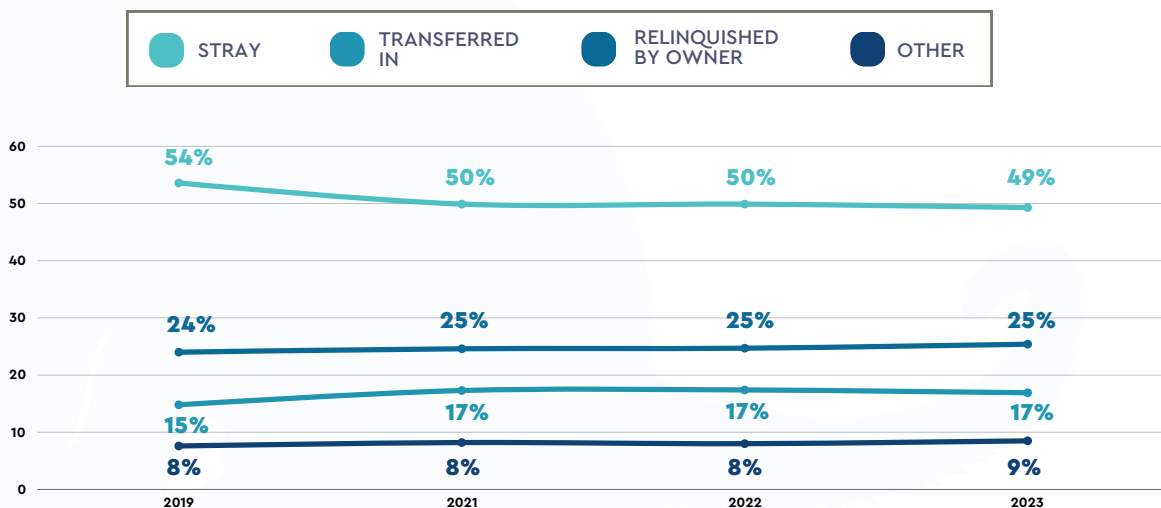PREVIOUS YEARS: ↓ **1.2%** COMPARED TO 2021   ↓ **0.7%** COMPARED TO 2019

CATS IN 2023: STRAY INTAKE DOWN

In 2023, community intakes for cats are nearly on par with 2019 levels, showing less than 1% decrease. Stray intakes are down by 6% compared to 2019. Other sources, like cats born in care or cats confiscated/seized, contributed to a 14% overall increase (43,000 cats) since 2019.

Owner surrenders for cats have remained steady since 2021 (accounting for 25% of total intakes), but they are 8% higher (73,000 cats) than 2019 rates.

9% OTHER
25% RELINQUISHED
49% STRAY
17% TRANSFER

Percentages represent intakes as % of total/gross intakes

Legend: STRAY | TRANSFERRED IN | RELINQUISHED BY OWNER | OTHER

FELINE % OF TOTAL INTAKE

	2019	2021	2022	2023
Stray	54%	50%	50%	49%
Relinquished	24%	25%	25%	25%
Transferred	15%	17%	17%	17%
Other	8%	8%	8%	9%

OUTCOMES

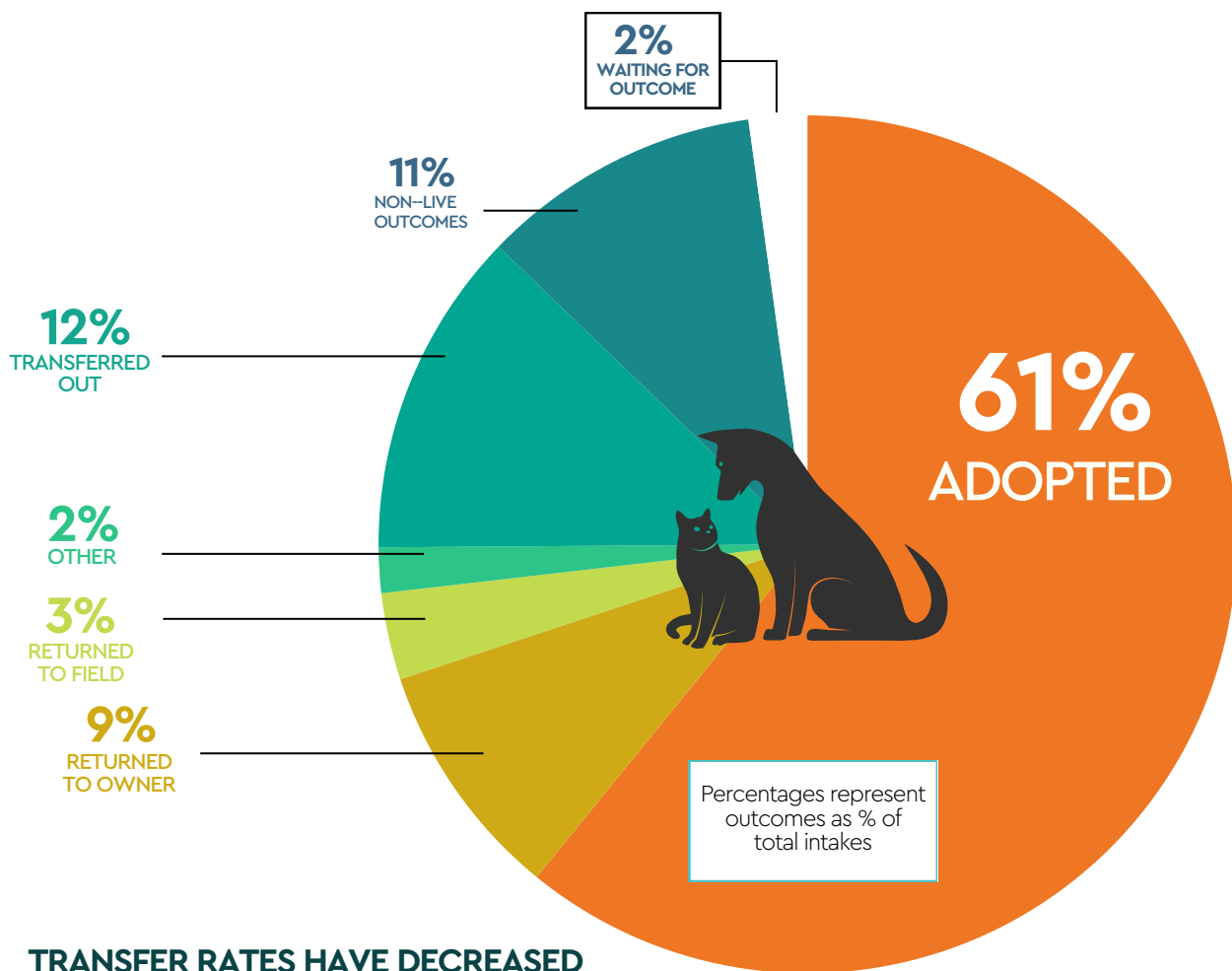SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT 2023 FULL YEAR REPORT

In 2023,

6,010,000

dogs and cats had a live outcome* from animal sheltering organizations.

> 🐾 This is an increase of 166,000 live outcomes over 2022 and 75,000 more than in 2019.

2%
WAITING FOR OUTCOME

11%
NON-LIVE OUTCOMES

12%
TRANSFERRED OUT

2%
OTHER

3%
RETURNED TO FIELD

9%
RETURNED TO OWNER

61%
ADOPTED

Percentages represent outcomes as % of total intakes

TRANSFER RATES HAVE DECREASED

Dogs and cats entering organizations from their community are less likely to be transferred to another organization in 2023 compared to 2019. The transfer rate has decreased from 16% in 2019 to 12% in 2023.
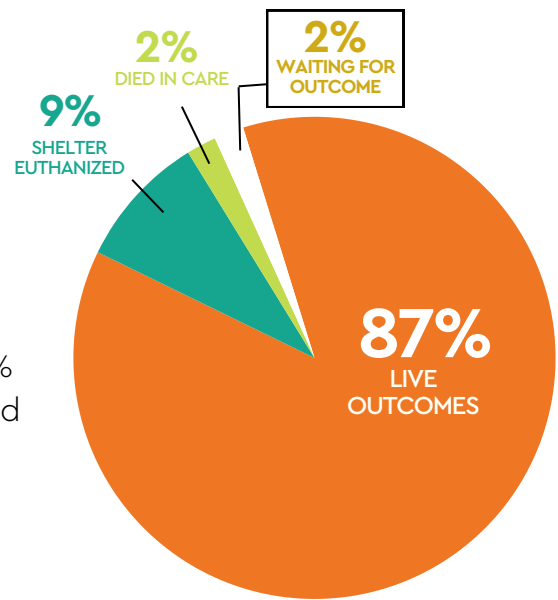
*Live outcome totals tally all live outcomes except transfers to ensure a clear count of animals receiving a final outcome in their community, avoiding double counting.

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT
THE NATIONAL DATABASE

In 2023, 850,000 dogs and cats had non-live outcomes from animal sheltering organizations.

Non-live outcomes increased by 15% (112,000 animals) compared to 2022, but are still 16% lower than 2019 (156,000 animals).
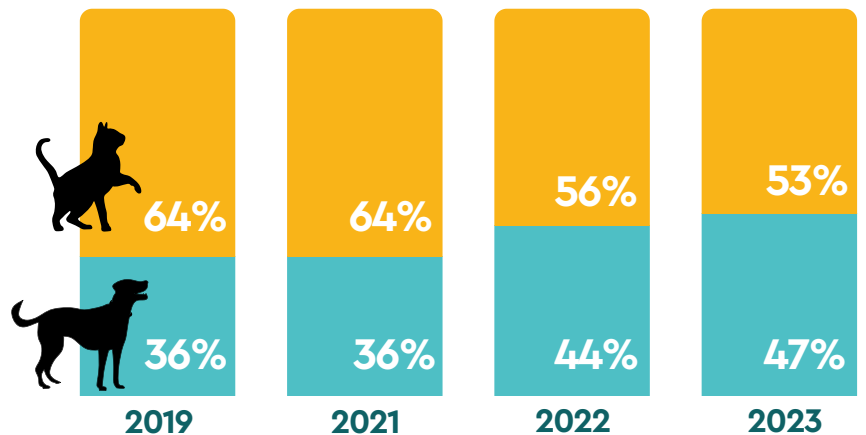
In recent years, there has been a notable rise in non-live outcomes for dogs (+24% or 78,000 more dogs from 2022; +64% or 157,000 more dogs from 2021). Additionally, non-live outcomes for dogs have risen by 12% (42,000 dogs) compared to 2019.

Cats are also witnessing an uptick in non-live outcomes, albeit at a slower rate. There was an 8% increase (34,000 more cats) compared to 2022 and a 3% increase (+15,000 cats) compared to 2021. However, the data shows a positive shift as 31% fewer cats (-198,000 cats) experienced non-live outcomes in 2023 compared to 2019. Died in care rates for cats have remained relatively flat since 2021.

2% DIED IN CARE

2% WAITING FOR OUTCOME

9% SHELTER EUTHANIZED

87% LIVE OUTCOMES

Non-live outcomes species breakdown

In 2019, 64% of non-live outcomes involved cats. By 2023, this number dropped to 53%, as dogs began seeing substantial increases in non-live outcomes.

	2019	2021	2022	2023
Cats	64%	64%	56%	53%
Dogs	36%	36%	44%	47%

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT
THE NATIONAL DATABASE

2.9 MILLION DOGS

had a live outcome* in 2023.

2023 DOG TRENDS

In 2023, 3% more dogs entered shelters than left, resulting in an additional 107,000 dogs in shelters at the end the year. While dog live outcomes exceeded those in 2021 and 2022, they are still 8% lower than in 2019, which means 242,000 fewer dogs exited shelters via a live outcome than in 2019.

ADOPTIONS

109,000 more dogs were adopted in 2023 than in 2022, however the total number of dogs adopted in 2023 is still nearly 108,000 fewer (-5%) than in 2019.

RETURN TO OWNER

Return to owner rates (of total dog intakes) have decreased from 18% in 2019 to 16% in 2023 despite stray intakes rising back to 2019 rates.

2023 DOG OUTCOMES SNAPSHOT

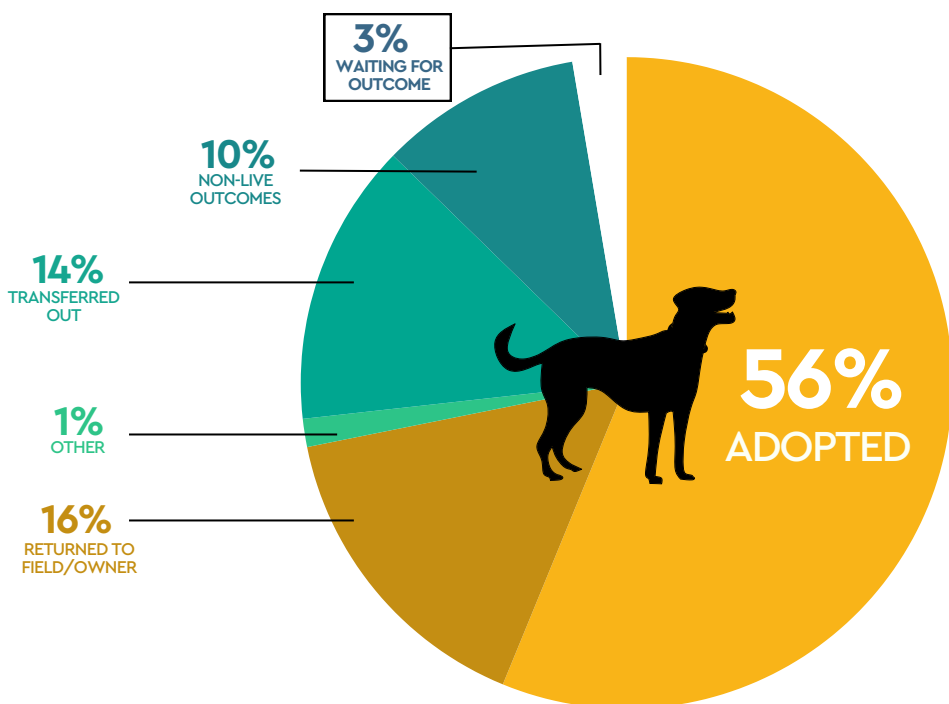- 2.2 million adopted
- 625,000 returned to owner
- 359,000 euthanized in shelters
- 561,000 transferred between organizations
- 37,000 died in care

3% WAITING FOR OUTCOME

10% NON-LIVE OUTCOMES

14% TRANSFERRED OUT

1% OTHER

16% RETURNED TO FIELD/OWNER

56% ADOPTED

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT
THE NATIONAL DATABASE

*Live outcome totals tally all live outcomes except transfers to ensure a clear count of animals receiving a final outcome in their community, avoiding double counting.

3.0 MILLION CATS

had a live outcome* in 2023.

2023 CAT TRENDS

In 2023, the total number of cats entering shelters exceeded the number of cats leaving by 2%. This means there were an additional 70,000 cats still waiting for an outcome at the end of 2023.
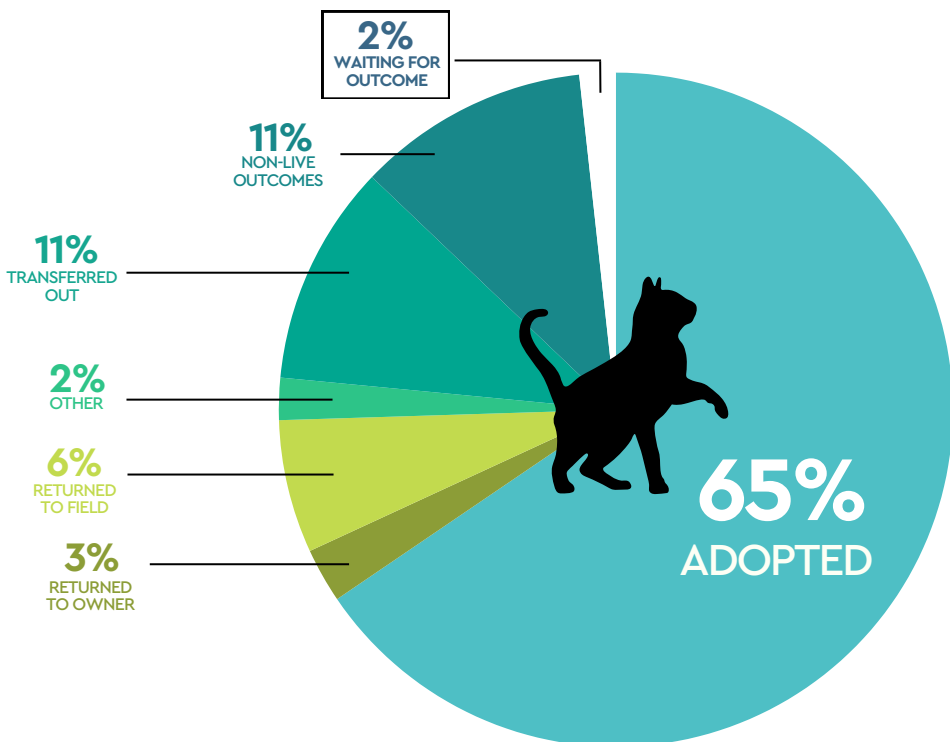
ADOPTIONS

34,000 more cats were adopted compared to 2022, while 319,000 more cats were adopted compared to 2019. The percentage of intakes that resulted in an adoption has increased from 59% in 2019 to 65% in 2023.

RETURN TO FIELD

Return to field rates (of total cat intakes) have decreased from 7% in 2019 to 6% in 2023. 12,000 fewer cats were returned to field in 2023 compared to 2019, even with intakes very close to 2019 levels.

2023 CAT OUTCOMES SNAPSHOT

- 2.6 million adopted
- 363,000 returned to owner/field
- 330,000 euthanized in shelters
- 427,000 transferred between organizations
- 111,000 died in care

2% WAITING FOR OUTCOME

11% NON-LIVE OUTCOMES

11% TRANSFERRED OUT

2% OTHER

6% RETURNED TO FIELD

3% RETURNED TO OWNER

65% ADOPTED

*Live outcome totals tally all live outcomes except transfers to ensure a clear count of animals receiving a final outcome in their community, avoiding double counting.
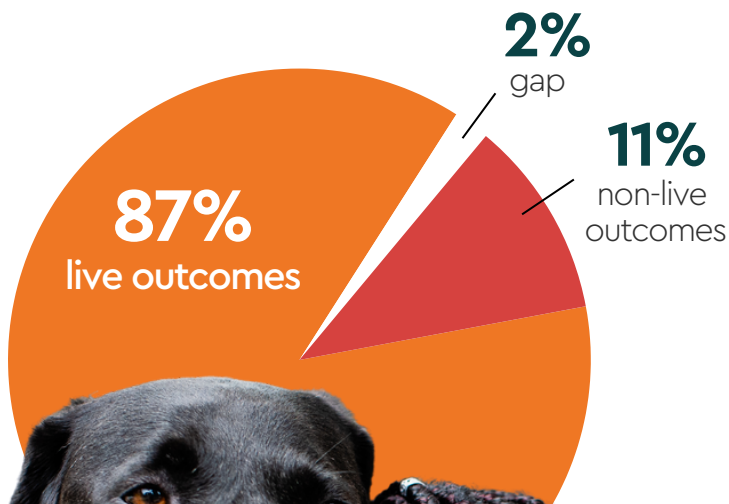
At the end of 2023,

177,000

additional dogs and cats were in the animal sheltering system nationwide compared to the end of 2022.

+70,000
additional cats

+107,000
additional dogs

2%
gap

11%
non-live outcomes

87%
live outcomes

900,000

more animals have entered and lingered in our nation's shelters since January 2021, resulting in an ongoing capacity crisis.
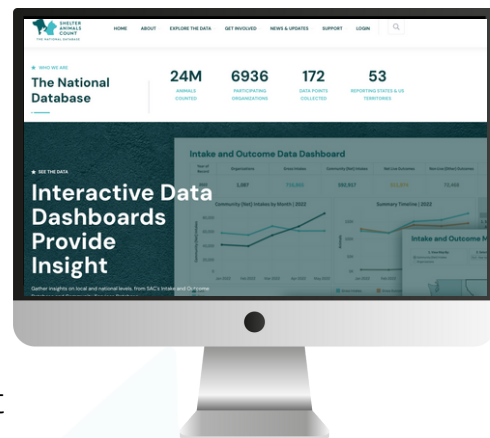
Shelter Animals Count's Estimation Model

Data estimation models are a common tool used by organizations in all business sectors and are a best practice for population/census-type data. Using intake and outcome data from over 6,000 organizations nationwide, SAC developed a peer-reviewed estimation model that includes representative data from all animal sheltering organization types and sizes in all U.S. states and territories. Data was analyzed separately to account for organizational differences, and then combined for the national numbers shared in this report.

Tips for using this report

Estimates are rounded. Calculating raw totals from rates in this report is not recommended as all rates are calculated using Total Intakes (Community Intakes + Transfers in). For raw numbers on all intake/outcome types over the years, visit our dashboard.

NEW: Find estimation model details, dashboards, and FAQ at:

www.shelteranimalscount.org/stats

Definitions

Community Intakes
Total intakes excluding transfers in to show actual community activity, and avoid double counting intakes when aggregating.

Community Live Outcomes
Total outcomes excluding transfers out.

Intake types as % community intake
The percentage of total intakes that were a certain intake type.

Live Outcomes
Adoption, return to owner (RTO), return to field, transfer, and other live outcomes.

Non-live outcomes
Died in care (neonatal loss, illness, etc.), lost in care, and shelter euthanasia.

Outcome types as % community intake
The percentage of intakes from within the community that resulted in certain outcomes.
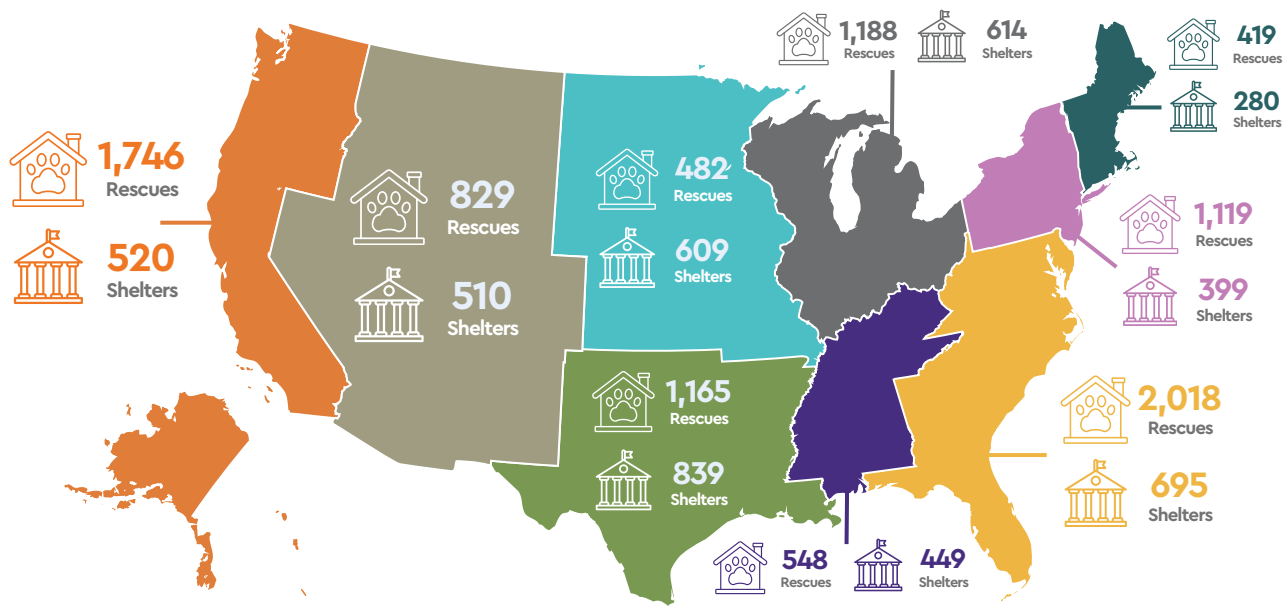
Population Change
Gross Intakes minus Gross Outcomes provides the number of animals that have entered and not had an outcome. In the specified time period, this is the number that the population in care has increased/decreased by.

Total Outcomes
Includes all live outcomes and non-live outcomes.

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT
THE NATIONAL DATABASE

14

There were
14,429
animal sheltering organizations operating in the U.S. in 2023.

1,746 Rescues
520 Shelters

829 Rescues
510 Shelters

482 Rescues
609 Shelters

1,188 Rescues
614 Shelters

419 Rescues
280 Shelters

1,119 Rescues
399 Shelters

2,018 Rescues
695 Shelters

1,165 Rescues
839 Shelters

548 Rescues
449 Shelters

4,915 shelters | **9,514** rescues

The majority (85%) of community intakes occur in shelters, with 15% coming from rescues.

Shelters are brick-and-mortar organizations, whereas rescues tend to be foster-based organizations.

15% COMMUNITY INTAKES FROM RESCUES

85% COMMUNITY INTAKES FROM SHELTERS

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT
THE NATIONAL DATABASE

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT

THE NATIONAL DATABASE

www.shelteranimalscount.org

ABOUT SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT
THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE FOR ANIMAL SHELTERING STATISTICS

Over the past few decades, several attempts were made to create a platform for shelter data reporting in the animal welfare industry. Shelter Animals Count was founded in 2012 by a diverse group of animal welfare agencies with the desire to come together as an industry and finally create a standardized database.

Their partnership and collaboration led to the development of The National Database, which aims to measure progress in animal welfare, foster collaboration, and address the issue of pet homelessness. Shelter Animals Count is a neutral, independent non-profit organization entrusted with analyzing and sharing animal sheltering data to provide crucial information and insights to save lives.

Data collection began in 2016 and has grown to include intake and outcome data from all organization types (without any minimum intake requirements), all species (beyond just cats and dogs), and community services (for owned pets) in all 50 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The database is continuing to grow with planned expansions into Canada and the collection of additional data points (172 currently collected) — including field services and more detailed intake and outcome data categories (animal-level data).

Shelter Animals Count operates as a 501(c)(3) organization, relying on grants, sponsorships and donations to fund our efforts.

SHELTER ANIMALS COUNT

THE NATIONAL DATABASE

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