

UNDERSTANDING THE NATIONAL CRISIS: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR MANAGING PET OVERPOPULATION AND ENHANCING PLACEMENT INTO FOREVER HOMES

Earlier this year, *USA Today* reported “more than 6.5 million animals entered U.S. shelters and rescues in 2023, marking the fourth consecutive year of overpopulation and adoption rates insufficient to meet the challenge;” further articulating that shelters across the nation are in crisis.¹ Experts are offering explanations for the nationwide pet overpopulation crisis in animal care centers. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) stated, “Until we cure the root problems of animal overpopulation, there will be a never-ending source of animals that need our help”.² According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), more than 23 million American households — nearly 1 in 5 nationwide — adopted a pet during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet numerous veterinary services, including spay and neuter services were closed or difficult to access. And over the past few years, costs of veterinary care, changes in housing circumstances, and inflation have forced many pet owners to relinquish the animals they adopted to local shelters or leave them abandoned.

In California, a shortage of veterinarians (vets) and registered veterinary technicians (RVTs) is also negatively impacting shelters statewide. A survey conducted by the San Francisco SPCA concluded, “Veterinarian shortages are profoundly impacting California’s most vulnerable animals.”³ There are currently 22 approved RVT programs in California with only three located in Los Angeles County (California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, Mount San Antonio College, and Los Angeles Pierce College). And there are only two fully accredited California schools offering degrees in Veterinary Medicine - the University of California, Davis and Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona.

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1 Ramirez, Marc. How many dogs are euthanized in the US every year? USA Today, February 20, 2024

2 Humane Society of the United States. Determining and Exceeding Capacity: Use data to improve the care of animals with your rescue group. Humane Society of the United States, 2024.

3 San Francisco SPCA. Statewide Veterinary Shortage, Suffering, Euthanasia Increase as Animal Shelters Struggle to Cope with Statewide Veterinary Shortage. San Francisco SPCA, January 31, 2023.

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A shortage of vets and RVTs combined with the increased intake at shelters has created serious challenges and significantly impacted the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control (DACC).

Few legislative efforts have been made to address these issues. SB1233 (Wilk), supported by the County and recently signed by Governor Newsom, requests that the University of California and the Western University of Health Sciences develop high-quality, high-volume spay and neuter certification programs in their veterinary medicine programs. SB1233 also requires certification programs to offer low/no-cost spay and neuter procedures to the public. Expanding training programs for vets and RVTs and encouraging more colleges to offer these courses can make a significant difference in meeting the demand for animal care and reducing shelter populations.

In [December 2022](#) and [December 2023](#), the Board of Supervisors approved two motions aimed at reducing euthanasia rates in seven LA County Animal Care Centers. These directives included a review of policies and procedures related to the notification process, record keeping, accessibility to animals in our care, the behavioral assessment process, decision-making related to euthanasia, and more. DACC has dedicated many hours of analysis to these topics and positive changes have been made.

One such improvement is the expansion of Pets Are Family (PAF) which is aimed at helping families with assistance to keep pets in homes. In 2023, DACC distributed 1,912 care vouchers worth \$687,000, hosted 16 “Vet at the Park Clinics,” and distributed nearly \$300,000 worth of free pet food. The PAF program received the National Association of Counties Achievement Award in 2022 and was a top ten winner for the Los Angeles County Productivity and Quality Awards in 2023.

In addition to this, improvements have been made in collaborating with Adoption Partners, expansion of free and low-cost spay-neuter services, leveraging more grants and donations through the Los Angeles County Animal Care Foundation, adding animal groomers to improve health and adoption outcomes, and more.

LA County animal care volunteers and adoption and foster care partners who work side by side with DACC staff are to be commended. Their care and dedication are more critical now than ever before. Our Animal Care Foundation has a long history of making meaningful and sometimes critical contributions to our LA County Care Centers, providing supplies and funding for pet services. And many of our contract cities are recognizing the current challenges and bringing creative ideas to the table to help solve the overpopulation crisis.

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For example, the City of Walnut recently launched a Pet of the Month program to spotlight animals at the Baldwin Park Animal Care Center. City representatives visit the Center to film adoptable pets and present them at City Council meetings. The City of Santa Clarita holds quarterly meetings with DACC to discuss animal trends at the Castaic Animal Care Center and to coordinate upcoming adoption and community events. They also introduced an Animal Care Grant Program in January 2024, allocating \$50,000 annually to provide financial assistance to non-profit organizations that support the city's animal population. These efforts help enhance the capacity of community organizations and supplement the services provided through the Castaic Animal Care Center.

Additionally, three of the 45 contract cities served by LA County (Santa Clarita, Walnut, Compton) have adopted Los Angeles County Code Title 10 as a living document; contribute to the spay and neuter trust fund; support vaccination clinics; and require spay and neuter for dogs in their communities. By allowing the DACC to enforce policies, especially mandatory spay and neuter laws, it helps reduce the overpopulation of stray animals and lessens the burden on shelters. These laws play a critical role in managing the population of dogs and cats, ultimately improving animal welfare and public health in the community.

Of the 45 contract cities DACC serves: 27 have adopted mandatory spay and neuter policies for dogs and cats; 28 have adopted mandatory microchipping for dogs and cats; 25 provide vaccination clinics, and 9 contribute to DACC's spay and neuter trust fund.

It is now time to consider more broadly the causes of pet overpopulation, finding solutions that will help DACC better serve the animals in our care, and help successfully place more pets into forever, loving homes.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Animal Care and Control (DACC) to report back to the Board in writing in 90 days with the following:

1. Effective strategies (including programs, services and messaging) employed by animal care centers across the nation, to alleviate overcrowding that may be implemented in Los Angeles County and;
2. Analysis of contract cities participation in programs and enforcement efforts offered through DACC which may help alleviate overcrowding. Programs may include a spay and neutering ordinance, contributions to the spay and neuter trust fund, microchipping, and others.

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I, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Animal Care and Control (DACC), in collaboration with the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), as well as the Chief Executive Office's Classification and Compensation division and the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to report back to the Board in writing in 90 days with:

1. A plan to develop a hiring and training strategy to include a review of classifications and compensation for veterinarians (vets), registered veterinary technicians (RVT), animal control officers, and animal care attendants, focusing on job descriptions, pay scales, and advancement opportunities; and
2. A proposal for a targeted recruitment campaign by DEO and the America's Job Center of California (AJCCs) seeking eligible candidates, and partnerships with educational institutions who offer relevant programs, as well as outreach efforts to local community colleges within Los Angeles County exploring opportunities to expand RVT courses and programs. These efforts should include the consideration of County training programs, such as Los Angeles for County Employment (PLACE) and Countywide Youth Bridges along with financial stipends and other incentives for employment in these fields.

I, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control, in collaboration with the Internal Services Department and other relevant departments to report back in writing in 60 days with a review of any contracting challenges that prevent contract veterinarians from agreeing to provide services to the Department. This review should consider complexity of proposed contracts, excessive paperwork, and insurance requirements.

I, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office's Legislative and Intergovernmental Branch to support future legislation that offers solutions to pet overpopulation including but not limited to spay and neutering programs, education outreach efforts, funding for doctor of veterinarian medicine and registered veterinary technician programs, and recruitment and retention of veterinarians and RVT professionals.

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