The Importance of Standardized Shelter Data in Animal Welfare: Regional Initiatives

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Importance of standardization

• Understanding
  – E.g., the reasons behind owner relinquishment

• Identification
  – E.g., Identifying areas where interventions could be put into place

• Implementation
  – E.g., implementing interventions that have shown to work

• Resources
  – E.g., determining where to allocate resources
Our story...

Nestlé Purina PetCare Canada Chair in Communications

- Pet relinquishment
- Pet overpopulation
- Positive pet behaviour
A systematic review and meta-analysis of the proportion of dogs surrendered for dog-related and owner-related reasons

Systematic review

Objective:

• Establish an overall estimate of the proportion of dogs surrendered by reason for relinquishment

• Look at the amount and sources of variation in the estimates across relinquishment studies
Systematic review

115 primary research articles on companion-animal relinquishment identified

• Through review process: 18 included in the study

Relinquishment studies results:

• Over half done in U.S.
• Over half in a shelter setting
• Most used questionnaires for data collection
• Most did NOT report the # of reasons given per dog
Systematic review

• Large variation in study methods = large variation in findings across studies
  – Differences in questionnaire format (e.g., open-ended vs. forced-choice questions)
  – Varied ways of reporting reasons or not reported
Systematic review

Study conclusion:

Impossible to compare or combine results because studies are conducted very differently
Systematic review

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Impossible to compare or combine results because studies are conducted very differently

Efforts towards standardized approaches to collecting these data by shelters and researchers needed
Ontario Shelter Data Working Group

OMAFRA, CFHS, OSPCA, AASAO, Ottawa HS, Guelph HS, Oakville & Milton HS, Toronto Animal Services, Mississauga Animal Services, Brampton Animal Services, Animal Care Program - School of Interdisciplinary Studies & Employment Services (Whitby Campus), Animal Shelter Town of Georgina, Pethealth Inc., Ontario Veterinary College
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First meeting

• Identified areas needing standardized data collection

• Identified obstacles to standardizing
  – Established obstacle severity

Two biggest obstacles:
Staff training and standardized definitions
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Second meeting:

• How to begin standardization process?
  – Looked at common definitions
  – Identified commonly used resources

• Determined minimum database
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Third meeting

• Collated resources for definitions
  – Basic Animal Data Matrix
• ‘Live intake’ definitions
• How to engage stakeholders
  – Best practices for record keeping
  – Incentives
  – Engage stakeholders nationwide
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Fourth meeting

• Continued to revise and agree on definitions for ‘live intake’, ‘live outcomes’, and ‘other outcomes’
• Continued discussion on engaging stakeholders
Conclusions

• Difference in data collection formats impacts our understanding

• Need for standardization of data collection

• Standardized shelter data and data collection will help us move FORWARD

• Standardized shelter data will assist with measuring the impact of interventions