

Shelter Animals Count Releases COVID-19 Impact 3-Year Comparison Report

The report compares data from the first six months of 2019, 2020 and 2021 to look at pandemic-related trends in animal welfare.

Shelter Animals Count (SAC), The National Database of animal sheltering statistics, enables fact-based insights to improve animal welfare in the United States. SAC just released its latest report analyzing data for the first halves of the last three years (2019, 2020 and 2021). 341 animal welfare organizations across the United States provided complete data for the 18 months covered in the study, and only that data was included in the report.

This report provides clues as to whether 2021 numbers are following a predictable trend as we move towards a “new normal,” or if things are still abnormal due to special market behavior. Based on the analysis, it appears that 2021 is following a normal pre-pandemic trend so far. More people are keeping their pets, based on intake numbers remaining at pandemic level lows overall, and an almost insignificant increase in owner surrender since the pandemic began.

Comparison Insights

- 2020 showed -24.9% fewer intakes overall than 2019. Because fewer animals entered the shelter system, there were also fewer outcomes overall, including -49% fewer sheltered animals euthanized.
- 2021 saw only a 0.56% (less than 1%) increase in intake over 2020. This indicates that pet owners and adopters are not returning or surrendering animals *en masse*, as some anecdotal reports state.
- The proportion of pets experiencing live outcomes has increased every year, with 89.3% of all outcomes in 2021 being live outcomes, versus 85% in 2019.
- So far in 2021 there are 28% fewer strays than 2019, and only 0.3% more strays now than during the highest pandemic period.

Additional Highlights

- In 2021, fewer animals are coming into shelters to become available for adoption. However, of the animals that *do* enter shelters, proportionally more of them are leaving via adoption in 2021 than pre-pandemic (2019) (57.7% versus 53.3%).
- Shelter Euthanasia has continued to decrease even after the pandemic’s peak in 2020, with only 7% of all outcomes being shelter euthanasia in 2021, versus 11.2% in 2019 and 7.9% in 2020.
- Overall, shelter euthanasia has dropped -53.9% since pre-pandemic and dropped -16.9% from during the height of the pandemic. (See previous point; these large decreases are due to decreased shelter intake.)

"I'm pleased with a number of findings in this comparison report," said Jan McHugh-Smith, Board President of Shelter Animals Count. "The animal welfare industry as a whole is not seeing the large number of returns some feared might follow the adoption increases of last year. Fewer animals are entering shelters, and more are experiencing live outcomes. This is all good news."

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"This report backs up what we have been hearing from our colleagues in the field all along," said SAC Executive Director Stephanie Filer. "The first half of 2021 shows the same month-to-month trends as 2019, but with fewer animals, which is great news! But, while there is much to celebrate on how far we've come, shelters are still in desperate need of adopters, fosters, volunteers, and donors as they continue to work to save more lives with fewer resources due to the on-going pandemic/new normal."

The full report can be viewed [here \(shelteranimalscount.org/data-reports\)](https://shelteranimalscount.org/data-reports). It is important to consider the findings of this report in context.

About Shelter Animals Count

Shelter Animals Count (SAC) is a collaborative, independent organization formed by a diverse group of stakeholders to create and share the national database of sheltered animal statistics, providing facts and enabling insights that will improve animal welfare throughout the country. The SAC database follows the Basic Data Matrix specified by the National Federation of Humane Societies.

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