

**SILVER PAWS:
THE ROLE OF PETS IN REDUCING HUMAN HEALTH CARE
COSTS**



Humane Society of Canada
1-800-641-KIND

www.humanesociety.com

Cover Photos:

80-year-old Michael O'Sullivan Sr. with 16-year-old "Ashe"
79-year-old Joan Olsen with 4-year-old "Giskin"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
OVERVIEW: PETS AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING.....	7
THE SILVER PAWS PROGRAM: CARING IN ACTION FOR THE ELDERLY AND THEIR PETS.....	9
AT RISK: THE ELDERLY AND THEIR PETS.....	10
WHERE DO PETS COME FROM, WHERE DO THEY GO, AND HOW ARE THEY TREATED.....	12
DISASTER RELIEF: THE ELDERLY AND THEIR PETS	14
THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF THE PET INDUSTRY.....	16
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	16

Dear Mr. Romanow,

I am writing to you on behalf of our 115,000 supporters and the millions of Canadians who share our views about the protection of people and animals.

The Humane Society works to protect dogs, cats, horses, birds, livestock, lab animals, wildlife and the environment. We carry out hands-on programs to help animals and nature, mount rescue operations, expose cruelty through hard hitting undercover investigations, work to pass laws to protect animals, fund scientific research, support animal shelters and wildlife rehabilitation centres and spread the word about how to help animals and nature through humane education.

The purpose of our report, Silver Paws, is to emphasize the role of pets in reducing human health care costs and to ask you to consider recommending that health care funds be made available to elderly people to assist them with the care of their pets. Our Silver Paws Program is designed to be a catalyst to stimulate a greater public awareness and involvement in providing care for the pets of elderly people. The program works through a combination of grants, volunteer assistance and support networks to provide routine and emergency veterinary care.

We believe there is ample evidence to support our recommendation that pets have a positive role in reducing human health care costs and improving the quality of life for people and look forward to discussing our report with you at your convenience.

Awaiting your reply, I remain, yours sincerely,

Michael O'Sullivan
Chairman & CEO
The Humane Society of Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Humane Society of Canada has prepared this report on behalf of the elderly and their pets, and on behalf of the 115,000 supporters and the millions of Canadians from all walks of life who share our views concerning the protection of people and animals at risk.

The Humane Society works to protect dogs, cats, horses, birds, livestock, lab animals and the environment. They carry out hands on programs to help animals and nature, mount rescue operations, expose cruelty through hard hitting undercover investigations, work to pass laws to protect animals, fund scientific research, support animal shelters and wildlife rehabilitation centres and spread the word about how to help animals and nature through humane education.

The purpose of our submission is to emphasize the role of pets in reducing human health care costs and to ask you to consider recommending that health care funds be made available to elderly people to assist them with the care of their pets. Our Silver Paws Program is designed to be a catalyst to stimulate a greater public awareness and involvement in providing care for the pets of elderly people.

The program works through a combination of grants, volunteer assistance and support networks to provide routine and emergency veterinary care because elderly people and their pets are two members of society that are often at risk.

We believe there is ample evidence to support our recommendation that pets have a positive role in reducing human health care costs and improving the quality of life for people.

Our first example is Australia. With a population of 19,357,594 (2001 census data) the Australian government reports that 12.6% of the population is 65 years of age or older, representing 2,439,057 seniors.

By comparison, the Canadian government reports that with a population of 31,081,887 people that 12.8% of our population is 65 years of age or older, representing 3,979,249 seniors (2001 Census data).

A 1999 Australian study reported by Petnet Australia estimated that Australian dogs and cats saved \$AUD 2.227 billion (\$CAD 1.848 billion) of current health expenditure in 1994-95.



The study found that compared to non-pet owners:

- people who own pets typically visit the doctor less often and use less medication
- pet owners, on average, have lower cholesterol and lower blood pressure
- pet owners recover more quickly from illness and surgery
- pet owners deal better with stressful situations
- pet owners are less likely to report feeling lonely.

While we have been unable to find such specific reliable information for Canada or other countries, this is an intriguing area that bears more investigation and research and we are actively pursuing both avenues.

A new study released in September of this year by Dr. Karen Allen, a psychologist and the lead researchers at the State University of New York in Buffalo, found that spending a few minutes cuddling with your pet can do more to relieve stress than trying to talk about problems with your spouse. The researchers also found that having a pet present when you carry out unpleasant tasks is more effective than human support.

They studied 240 married couples, half of whom had a cat or a dog as a pet. Each participant underwent two stress tests (i.e. mental arithmetic and submerging one's hand in ice water for two minutes). The tests were conducted in the presence of, separately; spouse and pet, and their blood pressure and heart rate were monitored. Those who did arithmetic in the presence of their spouse made the most errors. However, when pets were present, the participants did better at math, and they were also less stressed by the ice water test and they recovered more quickly. (There was no difference between dog and cat owners).

The findings indicate that pets can help reduce and deal with stress.

A second study, carried out by Laura Glynn, an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of California in San Diego found that arguing with your spouse causes an increase in blood pressure and is not only emotionally stressful, it can also cause damage in a way that physical stress on the heart does not. The study said that exposure to emotional stress may be of greater potential harm to cardiovascular health than stresses that lack emotion; even both types of stress may have been provoked by the same initial responses.

Both studies were published in the Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine.

Chronic stress is considered an important factor in elevation of blood pressure, which is a major cause of cardiovascular disease. As many as 20% of Canadians suffer from high blood pressure, and this can lead to heart attacks, arteriosclerosis, and strokes. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Canada.

A recent poll conducted for the Globe and Mail and CTV found that 43% of Canadians said that work was the main cause of stress in their life; 39% said finances, another 10 % said children, and 7% said it was their health.

In the interim, however, we would like you to consider the information we do have available.



OVERVIEW: PETS AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

During the terrorist attacks last year, a woman named Irene who is now retired, told us: “I watched in horror, over and over, the images of the planes flying into those buildings, and I thought ‘those poor people’. Without even thinking, I called out for ‘Beau.’ I wanted to reach out and hold him, but then I remembered, he wasn’t there anymore.”

Silence greeted Irene, as she remembered with sadness, that her best friend ‘Beau’, who she had raised from a puppy, had died of cancer at the age of 14.

If you have ever looked into the eyes of a shivering, frightened animal and through a simple act of kindness been rewarded by a gentle nuzzle, the sounds of a whimper or a contented purr, and felt the gentle warmth of their heartbeat, then you know exactly what we’re talking about.

However, often we need science to quantify for us what our feelings and common sense are already telling us. Namely that pets are natural therapists for children and adults alike. They can help kids overcome aggression and shyness, and they teach responsibility and empathy.

Scientific studies have demonstrated that pets lower blood pressure just by being present.

For example, in the early 1980s, the staff of The Humane Society of Canada helped pioneer the concept of pet facilitated therapy by visiting nursing homes with dogs and cats. Although we had to overcome a great deal of scepticism and opposition from many members of the medical community, the improvement in the disposition and the well being of some of the patients was nothing short of astonishing.

In a study at the Centre for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University in Indiana, Dr. Alan Beck, found that nearly 50% of adults and 70% of the children they studied confide in their animals. They know that pets won’t betray them, and animals give back unconditional love. Pets don’t judge. They have no gender, no race and no age in the eyes of many people.

In a study released in February 2000, researchers led by Dr. Karen Allen, at the State University of New York at Buffalo found that stockbrokers with hypertension who adopted a dog or a cat had lower blood pressure readings in stressful situations than did their pet-less counterparts.

The researchers examined 48 male and female stockbrokers who were using medication to control high blood pressure. All earned more than \$ USD 200,000 a year, lived alone, and had highly stressful jobs.

The researchers admitted that they were not sure what happens physiologically to lower a patient’s blood pressure, but suspected that having a pet on your side, someone you can always count on that is non-judgmental, psychologically creates a beneficial atmosphere.

For nearly 25 years, research has shown that living with pets appears to provide certain health benefits. Heart attack patients with pet companions survive longer than those without, according to several studies. Male pet owners have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels than non-owners, according to Australian researchers.



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Even more interesting are the psychosocial effects according to Dr. Lynette Hart of the University of California at Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. Her studies have shown that Alzheimer's patients have fewer anxious outbursts if there is an animal in the home. Their caregivers also feel less burdened if there is a pet, particularly if it the animal is a cat, which generally requires less care than a dog.

For the elderly, pets can be a great source of comfort and joy. Walking a dog or just caring for a pet, for those who are able, can provide exercise and companionship. In fact, one insurance company, Midland Life Insurance Company of Columbus, Ohio ask clients over the age of 75 if they have a pet as a part of their medical screening. A spokesperson for the company said that pet ownership often helps tip the scales in favour of older clients looking for life or long-term care insurance.

In addition, many people who are vulnerable to depression or anxiety suffer less if they have a pet than those living without pets. Dr. Judith Siegel, a UCLA professor of public health, published a study in May 2000 in the journal AIDS Care showing that pet owners with AIDS are far less likely to suffer from depression than those without pets. The benefit is especially pronounced when people are strongly attached to their pets.

Even in immune-compromised AIDS patients, the health benefits outweigh the risks if the owners adopted safe pet handling practices (such as washing their hands after handling their pet, and taking normal precautions to control fleas and ticks).

Does this mean that everyone who suffers from heart disease or depression should adopt a pet to ease his or her pain?

No, say the researchers. The positive health aspects of living with a pet seem to work best in people who like animals. You can't simply prescribe a dog to everyone. People come along with a history of loving animals – perhaps certain kinds of animals – that brings with them those warm feelings. The benefits are there because you have the expectation of these warm, good feelings, according to the researchers.

For example, Aline Kidd, a psychology professor at Mills College was instrumental in introducing animals in nursing homes in the United States, a practice that is gaining more acceptance today. In one particular nursing home, she brought in cats and dogs only to find that the residents were not really all that interested. Then one day, she brought in a pig and all of the residents loved him. It turned out, that many of the residents had grown up on farms with pigs.

Does this mean that if a person has fond memories of pets, that the person can improve their health by adopting a pet now?

Not necessarily. People with allergies to dogs and cats are not encouraged to keep them as house pets. In January 2000, a committee at the Institute of Medicine in Washington, D.C. reported that dogs and cats, along with other causes, can aggravate asthma, and recommended the removal of pets from the homes of people with asthma.

Notwithstanding this kind of advice, it has been our professional and personal experience (my father and brother have asthma) that people still keep dogs and cats in their homes, and simply keep taking allergy medication, because their affection for their pets outweighs their discomfort.



THE SILVER PAWS PROGRAM: CARING IN ACTION FOR THE ELDERLY AND THEIR PETS

Through the generosity of the Donner Canadian Foundation and our supporters, The Humane Society of Canada has established the Silver Paws Program which has two principal objectives: to stop the killing of adoptable dogs and cats and to provide a lifeline for elderly people and their pets. We want to put our resources into efforts that save lives and improve the quality of lives today by providing a community wide safety net and lifeline for the elderly and their pets.

Everyone grows older. As a member of the baby boom generation, I am acutely aware that by 2010, the oldest of the baby boom generation will turn 65 years of age. At present, there are four people working for every one person who is retired. By the year 2026, there will be only two people working for every one person who is retired.

Unlike the United States and New Zealand, which through their courts and legislation have ruled against mandatory retirement at age 65, this is not the case in Canada. In 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in a 5–2 decision that mandatory retirement is a justifiable limit of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Although it is possible that the Supreme Court will be asked in future to revisit this controversial issue, for the moment their decision stands.

However, with the increased costs of living, particularly in urban centres like Metropolitan Toronto, many people will want or need to work past the age of 65 years. At present, only civil servants in Ontario and British Columbia are allowed this privilege, as well as those who are self employed.

This means that society as a whole will be faced with a new set of problems involving an aging population that needs more social services, including care for their pets. And we can be certain of two things.

The first is that pets are an integral part of a person's family, particularly in the case of an elderly person. It is no exaggeration to say that their dog or cat may well be a senior's only friend, and that their own well being is inextricably bound to the well being of their pet.

Secondly, you can also be certain, that putting our faith in government agencies to deliver effective social services for elderly people, let alone their pets, is simply not a workable solution. Instead, we need to come up with short and long-term strategies in order to carry out effective forward planning to meet these very real needs by relying on a combination of private and public initiatives.

For example, there are more than 800,000 people in Metropolitan Toronto over the age of 65 and the number is growing daily. Further there are an estimated 1 million dogs and cats living in this same area, and these numbers are growing at an exponential rate.

Each year in Metropolitan Toronto alone, at least 20,000 animals are killed because there are simply not enough loving homes. Thousands more are taken out into the countryside and abandoned or are left to roam wild in the back alleyways and ravines where they eventually



succumb to illness or injury, and before this happens, help breed the next generation of homeless animals at risk.

In just six years, two dogs and their offspring can theoretically be the source of 67,000 puppies. Cats, able to have three litters per year, are even more prolific. In theory, over a seven-year period, two cats and their offspring can produce 420,000 kittens.

Based upon our firsthand experiences, we believe that many of these animals belong to elderly people who can no longer afford to care for their pets; who have lost their pets and are unable to find them; who are forced, through no fault of their own, to surrender their pets because of landlord-tenant disputes; because they have become ill or bedridden or are forced to enter nursing homes and hospitals.

(As a point of interest, the policy of The Humane Society of Canada has always been based on performance and not age. We value the work and life experiences and contacts of older people. For example, Al Hickey, our Western Regional Director is 67 years of age. Based in Vancouver, he is a tremendous asset to our programs across Canada and around the world).

AT RISK: THE ELDERLY AND THEIR PETS

Elderly people are one of the segments of our society most at risk. Many do not have families or are isolated from them, may be too proud or nervous to ask for help, want to keep their affairs private, or lack a safety net for themselves and their pets. In many cases, they regard their dog or cat as the only real friend they have left.

For example, the most recent census data for 2001 estimates that there are 4,881,400 million people living in Metropolitan Toronto, an increase of 4% since 1996. Statistics Canada estimates that 12.6% or 885,249 people are 65 years of age and over, and this number is growing daily. We are uncomfortable with simply using 65 years of age as an arbitrary cut off point to denote seniors, because we are aware that many other elderly people and their pets are also at risk. However, for the purposes of our illustration, we will use 65 years of age as a benchmark.

Based upon our experiences, on average a pet owner spends over \$1,000 per year to buy food and treats for their pet. Veterinary care, including routine examinations, vaccinations, medication, deworming, spaying and neutering surgery, emergency care and treatment of chronic illnesses (particularly in older pets) all works out to more than \$500 per year. These figures can increase dramatically if a pet contracts an illness like cancer, or requires extensive bone surgery or blood tests. This normally happens, as the pet gets older.

While some insurance policies are available for pets, generally speaking they do not cover older animals, or if they do, they may be beyond the reach of an elderly person on a fixed income.

Most people would overextend their finances for the well being of themselves, their spouse or their child. But what about their family pet? Is there a price tag that is too high? Not so according to a recent national survey by the American Animal Hospital Association. Approximately 74% of pet owners surveyed indicated that they would go into debt in order to provide for their pet's well being.



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Pets are living longer, healthier lives than ever before because they now receive a higher level of care than in the past. Just as in human medicine, there is a shift to wellness care in veterinary medicine that addresses all aspects of health – from proper nutrition and exercise to regular veterinary care and grooming.

Pets are not only becoming more susceptible to cancer because of increased age, they also share our environment and take in most of the same elements, such as second-hand smoke that contribute to cancer in humans. Faced with possible radiation or chemotherapy, many pet owners seek advice and guidance from veterinarians on the success of therapy and related side effects.

By the age of 10 years, most dogs and cats that have not received dental care will have lost some of their teeth to disease. As in humans, abscessed teeth or periodontal disease can affect other parts of the body. In dogs and cats, it can cause heart and kidney disease. Preventative care, such as teeth cleaning, filling cavities, performing root canals, surgically removing mouth tumours and teaching owners to regularly brush their pet's teeth can improve the quality and length of a pet's life.

An animal can weigh as little as one pound above normal and be overweight. In other words, if a pet's weight is 15% above normal, the animal is classified as obese, with all of the related health problems that humans experience. For example, a 10 pound cat is overweight at 11.5 pounds and a 20-pound dog is obese at 23 pounds. Veterinarians can prescribe high fibre, low fat meals and encourage regular daily exercise to stave off related health problems

Like people, many pets have allergies to dust, pollen, fleas, feathers, foods and even other pets. Unlike allergies in people, which may cause sneezing and runny noses, animal allergies typically cause itchy skin. If the animal worries at the affected area with his/her teeth and claws, the area may become inflamed and infected. Treatment may require allergy shots and other medication.

A survey of 1,189 pet owners in the United States and Canada carried out in 2000 by the American Animal Hospital Association reaffirms that that pets are indeed an integral part of the family. The results indicated that the human-animal bond is stronger than ever:

- 83% adopt pets mainly for companionship
- 44% have adopted a pet simply to keep another pet company
- 66% specially prepare their pet's food
- Of those who have a will, 27% have included provisions in their will for their pets
- 29% of pet owners rely on their pet the most for companionship and affection
- 48% of people who live alone rely on their pets the most for companionship and affection
- 37% talk to their pet on the telephone or through an answering machine
- 93% buy presents for their pet (more than 50% of pet owners buy at least four presents each year)
- 44% have purchased souvenirs for their pet while on vacation
- 77% of dog owners travel with their pet, and 41% have stayed in a hotel or motel with their dogs
- 80% of dog owners take their canine companions along with them on errands
- 79% provide daily exercise for their pets
- 52% provide more exercise for their pets than for themselves



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- The most common cat behavioural problems were listed as clawing furniture (20%), climbing on furniture and table counters (16%), and relieving them outside of the litter box (10%)
- 51% of dog owners and 35% of cat owners deal with behavioural problems by scolding their pets
- 5% of dog owners and 8% of cat owners admitted disciplining their pets by spanking or swatting them
- 20% of dog owners and 25% of cat owners advised that they did nothing to correct their pet's behavioural problems
- 81% advised they had never given up an animal because of a behavioural problem; and 14% said they had given up dogs and 5% said they had given up cats
- The primary reason for giving up dogs was because they had bitten people (30%) and the primary reason for giving up cats was because the animal was relieving himself/herself outside of the litter box (33%)
- 28% of owners surrendered their animals to shelters
- 20% of those who gave up their pet had the animal euthanized
- 12% admitted selling or giving away their animal to a stranger
- 60% reported reducing pet overpopulation as their major concern
- 75% said their pets were spayed or neutered
- Of those whose pets were not sterilized, 33% said they simply hadn't bothered to have the surgery performed yet
- 21% of dog owners said their pet was not sterilized because they wanted to breed their dog and another 13% said their dog was too young
- 20% of cat owners said their pet was not sterilized because their cat was too young and another 18% said they could not afford to have the operation done
- 97% said that their animal's overall health was good
- Dog owners averaged 2.3 visits to their veterinarian each year
- Cat owners averaged 1.6 visits to their veterinarian each year
- Pet owners aged 18 to 35 and people without children took their pet to the veterinarian more often than others
- 78% of dog owners and 71% of cat owners turn to their veterinarian most often for advice about their pet

At this point, we would like to offer a word of caution.

While this study provides a good starting point, more research and analysis is necessary.

We have found more specifically, that there is a tremendous amount of guilt and reluctance on the part of people to be completely truthful about why they have given up their pet or put him/her to sleep.

And for these reasons, we believe that in some instances, the numbers and percentages of animals given up or euthanized is much higher than those reported in this study.



DISASTER RELIEF: THE ELDERLY AND THEIR PETS

No one person or agency can help every animal suffering in a disaster. We believe the best answer is to assist local communities with planning, and when disaster strikes, provide whatever emergency assistance we can. By working with other agencies to educate members of the public, politicians and the media about the need and importance of advance planning, we can be prepared to handle emergency situations when and where they arise. However, every individual in every community needs to stand ready to do their part.

Since most people regard their dog or cat as a part of their family, it is hardly surprising that experience has shown us time after time that people will not leave a disaster area unless there are plans in place to care for their animals. Helping animals is not only humane; it makes it easier for humane rescue workers to do their job. In times of disaster, rescue and relief groups are overwhelmed. That's why we need to plan ahead.

As a part of this forward looking approach, we have developed the enclosed disaster relief checklist and emergency animal alert decal which we are offering free of charge to seniors, nursing homes, and other agencies working to help the elderly and their pets.

We are also forging an alliance with the Insurance Bureau of Canada to determine the best ways to help elderly people and their pets.

A recent study bears out exactly what our field experience in disaster and war zones has shown us firsthand. The study asked: "Would you risk you life for your dog or your cat?" For a surprisingly large number of people, the answer is a resounding 'yes' according to the findings released in April 2001 by researchers at Purdue University in California. A study of responses to a 1997 emergency evacuation warning for residents in California found pet ownership was a major factor when it came to ignoring the warning.



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ANIMAL
EMERGENCY ALERT

There are animals inside.
 In the event of an emergency
 please help them.
 If you are unable to assist
 please call your local
 humane society, animal shelter,
 veterinarian, kennel or stable.



HSC
ALERTE D'URGENCE POUR ANIMAUX

Il y a des animaux à l'intérieur.
 En cas d'urgence,
 aidez-les s'il-vous-plaît.
 Si vous n'êtes pas en mesure de
 fournir de l'aide, veuillez communiquer
 avec votre société protectrice des
 animaux locale, un lieu d'hébergement
 pour animaux, votre vétérinaire,
 un chenil ou une écurie.



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Protecting Animals and the Earth

DISASTER RELIEF CHECKLIST/SPECIAL DISASTER RELIEF KIT

Your Special Disaster Relief Kit should be stored in something easy to carry like a knapsack or a canvas bag and contain at least:

- one week's supply of animal food, water and bowls
- Humane Society of Canada Animal First Aid Kit or other first aid kit
- extra leash, harness or halter
- roll of nylon cord or strong twine
- extra identification tags (the kind you can write on)
- strong multipurpose tool (combination screw driver, pliers, knife, can opener, etc.)
- waterproof flashlight and batteries
- portable carrier for cats and small dogs
- roll of duct tape
- waterproof marking pen and paper
- health records and special medicines
- waterproof blanket
- small tarp or waterproof cover
- small portable radio and batteries
- recent photos of your pet or animals
- adaptor cord that plugs into car/truck cigarette lighter (emergency power for a wide range of small tools, air pump, generator, battery charger, etc.)
- protective gloves
- waterproof matches or windproof lighter
- chew bone, catnip toy, or other treat

VERY IMPORTANT: Find a place where your animal will be welcome before disaster strikes. Many human relief shelters will not allow animals. Plan ahead by making arrangements with friends, family, a kennel, a stable, a vet, or a motel/hotel outside your area that will take care of your animal. Make sure you have a way of reaching them in an emergency 24 hours a day. Because the safest place for your animal is with you or with someone you trust. Make sure your animal is wearing his/her identification at all times.

In the event of an emergency, my animal will be taken to:

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ Province: _____
 Telephone: _____ Fax: _____
 Cell phone: _____ E mail: _____

SPECIAL NOTE: If you do take your animals with you, please leave a note on the door and/or immediately notify rescue workers so that they can do their jobs more effectively and avoid placing their lives at unnecessary risk.

1-800-641-KIND

Victoria/Vancouver/Calgary/Ottawa/Toronto/Montréal/Halifax



There was a risk of flooding – which became a reality when a levee broke. Just under 20% of the 397 household surveyed ignored the evacuation warning. Two thirds of the residents who didn't evacuate had no children in the house. But the effect of pet ownership was striking, with nearly 72% of those who refused to evacuate listing themselves as pet owners. Because they believed, quick rightly, that there was no way to care for their pet, and that emergency shelters would not allow them to bring their pet with them.

The more pets a household owned, the higher the risk of evacuation failure, was the conclusion of the study, which appeared in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF THE PET INDUSTRY

The American Animal Hospital Association study reports that pet owners currently spend \$USD 12 billion (\$CAD 19.2 billion) annually on veterinary medical services for their pets. Including pet supplies and food, pet owners spend an additional \$USD 23 billion (\$CAD 37.8 billion) a year on their pets.

A 1998 Australian study reported by Petnet Australia states that the pet care industry is one of the largest in that country, contributing around \$AUD 3.3 billion (\$CAD 2.7 billion) to the economy annually and employing over 37,000 people. Of the total expenditure, 65% is spent on dogs and 26% spent on cats.

So far, we have been unable to find reliable figures for Canada, however this an important area for further investigation and analysis and we are pursuing both avenues.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Humane Society of Canada believes that there are measurable social and economic benefits to elderly people by providing more comprehensive services and care for their pets.

And although we are still pursuing avenues of investigation and research, in the interim, we believe there is sufficient information at this juncture for us to make the following recommendations:

- We are uncomfortable with simply using 65 years of age as an arbitrary cut off point to denote seniors, because we are aware that many other elderly people and their pets are also at risk. For the moment at least we will use 65 years of age as a benchmark, however, we would ask you to give every consideration to our request that this benefit be extended to seniors less than 65 years of age;
- Based upon the estimated costs of \$ 1,500 per year for keeping one pet, The Humane Society of Canada is asking all levels of governments to agree to consider extending financial benefits on the order of \$ 62.50 per month to elderly people to assist them with the care of their pets for a total annual benefit of \$750 which represents half the estimated costs for keeping one pet per year;



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- Based upon the most recent census data (2001) there are an estimated 3,917,875 people 65 years of age and older, the total cost per year would be in the order of \$2.9 billion dollars (i.e. \$2,938,406,250 dollars);
- The Humane Society of Canada believes that careful study and investigations will demonstrate results similar to that of the Australian study, namely that these costs will be offset by lower health care costs, and a healthier, more content and more productive society;
- In order to ensure that this measure does not create any additional bureaucracy, and that it is fair and equitable, the Humane Society of Canada recommends that the figure of \$62.50 per month or \$750 per year, be added to the personal exemptions category that is now included in personal income tax returns filed by seniors;
- This method and this figure would ensure that there is assistance for only one pet for each senior and that there is no means test
- The Humane Society of Canada also believes that this measure would encourage more seniors to adopt pets from animal shelters and humane societies, resulting in and thereby helping save lives, stimulating the multi-million dollar pet industry and the economy further; and even more importantly resulting in a healthier, more content and more productive society;
- A new study released in September of this year found that spending a few minutes cuddling with your pet can do more to relieve stress than trying to talk about problems with your spouse and that having a pet present when you carry out unpleasant tasks is more effective than human support;
- Another recent study found that exposure to emotional stress may be of greater potential harm to cardiovascular health than stresses that lack emotion, even both types of stress may have been provoked by the same initial responses;
- Chronic stress is considered an important factor in elevation of blood pressure, which is a major cause of cardiovascular disease and as many as 20% of Canadians suffer from high blood pressure, and this can lead to heart attacks, arteriosclerosis, and strokes;
- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Canada;
- A recent poll conducted for the Globe and Mail and CTV found that 43% of Canadians said that work was the main cause of stress in their life; 39% said finances, another 10 % said children, and 7% said it was their health.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael O'Sullivan
Chairman & CEO
The Humane Society of Canada

