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Dog and Cat Population Control

The population of dogs and cats in the United States currently exceeds the capacity of our society to care and provide homes for them as companion animals.

As a result, millions do not have homes and are euthanized annually by animal control agencies, humane organizations, and veterinarians in private practice. Dogs and cats that are not adopted can become victims of trauma, starvation, or disease. The AVMA concludes that dog and cat population control is a primary welfare concern of our society.



A. Public Policy

The AVMA does not support regulations or legislation mandating spay/neuter of privately owned, non-shelter dogs and cats. Although spaying and neutering helps control dog and cat populations, mandatory approaches may contribute to pet owners avoiding licensing, rabies vaccination and veterinary care for their pets, and may have other unintended consequences.

The AVMA believes that state and local governments must evaluate their needs and resources to develop appropriate and effective dog and cat population control programs. This would include:

1. Providing sufficient funding to animal control agencies to facilitate:
 - a. Strict enforcement of existing animal control laws, and
 - b. Licensing of all dogs and cats.
2. Prohibiting the sale or adoption of intact dogs and cats by humane organizations and animal control agencies.
3. Promoting surgical and nonsurgical sterilization of intact dogs and cats. Just as for other veterinary medical and surgical procedures, veterinarians should use their best judgment in recommending at what age sterilization should be performed for individual animals.
4. Requiring licensing, rabies vaccination and permanent identification through microchipping.

B. Research

1. The AVMA encourages research into the development and use of nonsurgical methods of sterilization.
2. The AVMA encourages research to better define and quantify the dog and cat overpopulation problem.

C. Education

1. The AVMA supports public education campaigns that help pet owners be more responsible and concerned.
2. Comprehensive public education campaigns to prevent relinquishment require the commitment and cooperation of state and local governmental agencies, humane organizations, and veterinary associations.
3. Education to prevent relinquishment should include tenets of responsible pet ownership, including appropriate selection, the importance of spaying and neutering, keeping pets indoors or in restricted environments, preventing or solving behavioral problems, and consulting with veterinarians for information on these issues.
4. The AVMA encourages all independent sources of pets (e.g., breeders, pet shops, shelters, animal control facilities, private individuals) to educate new owners about the importance of surgical or nonsurgical sterilization and regular veterinary care.
5. Schools of veterinary medicine and veterinary technology should emphasize the prevention and/or solution of behavioral problems and other factors leading to dog and cat relinquishment.

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