



DAYCARE DILEMMAS AND GROOMING SALON SCARES: THE QUEST FOR HUMANE PET SERVICES

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While veterinary teams are busy providing essential, high-quality companion animal health and emergency care under the oversight of the College of Veterinarians of BC, there is a whole world of unregulated pet care services being offered to dog and cat guardians. In BC, dog daycare, dog walking, and pet boarding and grooming are unlicensed and not obliged to follow any particular standards or codes of practice to protect the welfare of cats and dogs. This means anyone can open a boarding facility or grooming salon, or run a dog daycare or walking service, regardless of their training, experience, and approach to animal care.

The lack of animal welfare standards for these services can result in behavioural and physical harms to companion animals that veterinarians may be familiar with. In a common scenario, a pet service client picks up their animal but does not realize their pet has suffered an injury because the business was unaware of the injury or did not inform the client about it. This results in delayed access to treatment, unnecessary suffering for the animal, and a loss of trust by the guardian in the pet service provider. It is not unusual for veterinarians to see patients with injuries that occurred while in the care of a pet service, such as lacerations from grooming procedures, bites from daycare dog fights, and heat stroke or burns from the use of unattended cage

dryers. Similarly, guardians who have had negative experiences with pet services describe the use of aversive handling methods, crowding of animals, increased fearfulness in their pet, and pets being lost as key concerns.

The availability of humane pet services is essential for many guardians to maintain quality of life for their animals. For example, professional grooming helps maintain coat and skin health. Dog-walking and daycare provide mental and physical enrichment, in some cases helping to prevent bored dogs from barking all day at home and causing

friction with neighbours and landlords. For guardians, these services can be lifesavers and can help keep pets with their families. Thankfully, there are many pet service businesses that do provide high-quality care that prioritizes animal welfare, but finding these businesses should not be reliant on trial and error.

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The BC SPCA is often asked how to identify the best pet care services, and veterinarians and clinic staff are a highly trusted source for local animal services referrals. To help guardians make informed decisions, evidence-based standards for companion animal services were created with veterinary and industry input. The standards provide the foundation for education and advocacy about the benefits and risks of pet services, and resources for pet service business operators.

The journey toward creating pet service standards began in 2019 with a survey of BC dog daycares and kennels and one-to-one consultations with pet service professionals to learn about practices and challenges directly from the industry. The standards were also informed by peer-reviewed literature and a review of 21 existing standards, including veterinary standards such as the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association's kennel and cattery codes, and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' guidance for standards of care in animal shelters. The standards were circulated for feedback to over 30 experts, including academics, veterinarians, pet professionals, and AnimalKind accredited dog trainers. The final step was a public comment period, during which over 2,500 respondents, both pet service providers and pet guardians (91 per cent from BC), offered insights and described their experiences.

The evidence-based standards are voluntary and cover topics such as humane care and handling for cats and dogs, caregiver training, and size and composition for dog-walking and daycare groups, among many others. They also outline practices that guardians should say no to, including non-professional dental scaling services (aka anesthesia-free dentals), and aversive handling practices used to manage animal behaviour.

To provide a practical resource for animal guardians and the veterinary community, the BC SPCA also created a series of questions for guardians to ask for each of the pet care service categories to help select businesses that prioritize animal welfare. For example:

- Are humane, reward-based methods with treats and play used for animal handling?
- How and when is water provided?
- Are guardians required to provide vaccination and health information?
- How many dogs are in a daycare group and how many caregivers are supervising them?
- How many dogs does one walker have in their group?

To see the AnimalKind pet care standards and the complete list of questions, visit www.animalkind.ca. **WCV**