



Policy Platform

2024 British Columbia Provincial Election



THE BC SPCA

The mission of The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) is to protect and enhance the quality of life for domestic, farm and wild animals in B.C.

The BC SPCA operates animal shelters, spay/neuter clinics, veterinary hospitals and a wildlife rehabilitation facility, enforces the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA Act)*, provides humane education for children and youth, and conducts evidence-based advocacy to enhance animal welfare laws and policies at all levels of government.

In preparation for the 2024 provincial election, the BC SPCA has outlined six platform priorities to enhance the health and well-being of animals and people in our province.



THE PRIORITIES

House people and pets together: Engage stakeholders to find collaborative solutions to increase the availability and affordability of pet-friendly housing for all British Columbians.

Put food on everyone's plate: Reduce human and animal food insecurity by requiring the provision of pet food in food banks and food security programs supported by the province.

Keep us all safe: Involve and support organizations that rescue and care for animals in emergency planning and extend post-emergency financial assistance to cover all animals under the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act*.

Proactively protect farmed animals: Implement the Farmed Animal Welfare Advisory Committee's recommendations in their entirety with sustainable funding.

Reunite families and enable traceability: Require permanent pet identification to reunite lost pets faster and facilitate regulation of the cat and dog breeding industry.

Look through a One Health/Welfare Lens: Recognize, respect and base policy decisions on the interconnectedness of people, animals and the environment.

If elected, what will your party do to make our province a safer, more caring place for animals and people?



House people and pets together

Lead the development of collaborative solutions

Two-thirds of all B.C. households include pets as important and loved family members. Research is clear that pets benefit their human companion's physical, mental, and emotional health, combat loneliness and help people form important social connections. For vulnerable people, the positive impact of pets is even more critical. However, pets can also exacerbate the systemic housing barriers that vulnerable groups already face.

Pet deposits, which were enabled by provincial legislation in 2002, have not proven sufficient to mitigate landlord concerns and present additional cost barriers for renters. Given the complexity and divisive nature of this issue, historically low vacancy rates, high cost of housing and the inherent power imbalance of residential tenancies, expecting individual tenants and landlords/housing providers to find solutions is not sufficient. **Government leadership is required.**

This leadership has been called for by the local governments of B.C., through the Union of B.C. Municipalities, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, and the voters of this province. In a representative poll conducted by Stratcom, over two-thirds (68%) of British Columbians, including 62% of landlords surveyed, agree that the provincial government should immediately create policies that improve the availability of pet-friendly housing.

Recommendation

Formally engage with housing stakeholders, including groups that serve and advocate for vulnerable people, co-ops, strata, non-profit housing providers, landlords' and tenants' associations and animal welfare organizations to find collaborative solutions to increase the availability and affordability of pet-friendly housing while providing appropriate, timely mechanisms for protection and dispute resolution.



Put food on everyone's plate

Reduce poverty and food insecurity with pet food

As the costs of housing, food, fuel and other essentials continue to rise, more British Columbians must rely on food banks and other government and charitable supports to provide for themselves and their families.

Two-thirds of B.C. families include companion animals, and these pets provide vital love, support and connection for their guardians. The benefits of the human-animal bond, particularly for vulnerable groups like seniors, people with disabilities, low-income earners and those facing housing insecurity are well documented. The prevalence of food insecurity is also highest among these populations, and the critically important bond people share with their pets carries with it the expense of providing food for both people and animals.

Studies have shown that pet owners are likely to put the food needs of their pet(s) before their own. They will also share their own food with their pets when pet food assistance is not available, further contributing to their own food insecurity. The compelling need for pet food and supplies for vulnerable people is borne out by local pet food bank use statistics.

The BC SPCA's province-wide pet food bank program alone has provided the following number of meals for cats and dogs since its inception in 2020: **537,875** meals in 2021, **633,502** meals in 2022, and **717,621** meals in 2023. Other animal welfare and food security groups also contribute to help meet pet food needs, but this approach is unsustainable and coordinated action is needed.

Recommendation

Require that pet food be included in food banks and other food security programs supported by the province to help ensure that the pets who support the most vulnerable people in our communities are fed and that their families are not faced with the choice of forgoing other needed items, potentially including their own food, to care for their pets.



Keep us all safe

Include animals in all phases of emergency management

The new *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* requires that animals be considered in risk assessments, emergency planning and response. This progressive change will help to avoid the serious and sometimes deadly consequences of excluding animals from emergency management, including loss of animal lives, increased likelihood of animal guardians delaying or failing to evacuate, people entering evacuation zones to rescue animals, emergency responders entering hazardous areas to rescue those who have remained, and mental health impacts for animal guardians and rescuers.

Ensuring that the Act's requirements are put into practice through regulations and policies will be key to supporting the health, wellness, resilience and recovery of B.C. families, animals, communities and emergency responders.

Recommendation

Create regulations and policies under the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* that:

- Make food and essential supplies for all animals covered under the Act eligible for post-emergency financial assistance,
- Include organizations responsible for the care of animals as stakeholders in emergency consultation, collaboration and information-sharing,
- Recognize the critical role that animal welfare organizations play in emergency response, and provide appropriate training, protection, coverage and reimbursement of operational costs for these organizations and their staff and volunteers,
- Expand provincial Emergency Support Services to include help finding pet-friendly shelters and temporary accommodations (including requesting that accommodations that do not normally allow pets do so in the case of emergencies), and help accessing animal food, supplies and veterinary care during emergencies, and
- Provide additional assistance for vulnerable groups like seniors, those with low incomes, people with disabilities and those fleeing domestic violence.



Proactively protect farmed animals

Build trust and transparency for farmed animal welfare

Farmed animals represent the largest group of animals in human care in British Columbia, with **more than 22 million** raised in the province annually.

British Columbians are increasingly demanding transparency and accountability for the care of commercially farmed animals; however, the province currently has no proactive, independent compliance system to monitor and report on the welfare of these animals or farmers' adherence to minimum national standards agreed to by the industry itself.

In 2023, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food convened an Advisory Committee made up of farmers, veterinarians, academics, meat processors and representatives from the BC SPCA and the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). Notwithstanding the Committee member's differing experiences and perspectives on the status of farmed animal welfare, they found considerable common ground and reached a consensus on what needs to be done to improve the welfare of farmed animals in this province.

First and foremost, the Committee recognized the need to create a new function within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food with a dedicated team of appropriately resourced and trained constables responsible for inspections and enforcement under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* with respect to farmed animals, particularly those that are not part of an established and audited inspection program.

Recommendation

Implement the Farmed Animal Welfare Advisory Committee's recommendations in their entirety in a timely manner and with appropriate and sustainable resources to improve animal welfare on B.C. farms as well as increase public trust in local agriculture and support farmers.



Reunite families and enable traceability

Require responsible pet ownership, breeding and selling

Losing a beloved pet is heartbreaking for families, and caring for owned animals is costly for municipal animal control facilities and animal rescue organizations. Unlike collars and tags, which can fall off, and tattoos, which can be obscured, altered or faded, microchips provide unique, permanent identification for pets. Microchips are inexpensive, safe, relatively painless to implant, and easily read at veterinary clinics, animal control facilities, pounds and shelters.

Studies have shown that dogs with microchips are two to three times more likely to be returned to their owner, and cats with microchips are up to 20 times more likely to be returned. The Canadian and American Veterinary Medical Associations endorse the implantation of microchips to help return animals to their owners and accurately identify animals for regulatory purposes. The United Kingdom, most of the European Union, Japan, parts of Australia and the City of Montreal require mandatory microchipping of all dogs and cats. Many of these jurisdictions also require microchipping as part of a breeder licensing or registry system.

Mandatory microchipping benefits animals, owners, breeders, and governments by:

- Expediting the return of lost pets,
- Helping breeders maintain accurate records and facilitating the return of abandoned or unwanted animals (as should be required by reputable breeders),
- Identifying the owners of nuisance and dangerous dogs,
- Enabling tracing for infectious disease outbreaks, and
- Facilitating responsible breeding regulations by verifying vaccinations and veterinary care, the frequency and number of litters and animals with inheritable disorders.

Recommendation

Require that all dog and cat owners, breeders, brokers and sellers have their pets identified with ISO-certified microchips that are registered in an international database recognized by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA).



Look through a One Health/Welfare lens

Recognize and respect our shared well-being

Over the last two decades, organizations around the world have realized that tackling today's biggest health challenges, including infectious diseases, climate change, antimicrobial resistance, biodiversity, ecosystem health and food security, requires a comprehensive and integrated approach.

The **One Health** approach recognizes that human, animal, plant and environmental health are connected in a myriad of ways and require a collaborative, multisectoral and transdisciplinary effort to attain optimal health locally, nationally and globally.

The **One Welfare** approach includes One Health and expands upon it to recognize the strong link between animal welfare and human well-being. This approach calls for coordinated action to improve human welfare in order to improve animal welfare (and vice versa), connect the work of animal welfare, human mental health and social support services, and support environmental stewardship as a fundamental step for both human and animal welfare.

As an example, examining the exotic pet trade through a One Health/Welfare lens reveals that more strictly regulating the exotic animals that can be imported, bred and sold in B.C. would:

- Prevent animal suffering and death,
- Protect wild populations in source countries,
- Protect people from zoonotic diseases and injury, and
- Prevent ecosystem harms from exotics that escape or are released in our province.

Recommendation

Evaluate issues, decisions and policies through a One Health/Welfare lens to demonstrate leadership in an emerging field and create a holistic, solutions-oriented approach to the interconnected health, welfare and environmental issues our province increasingly faces.

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