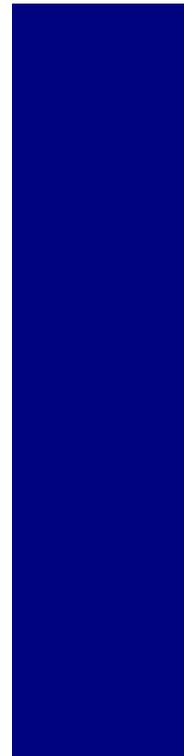


BCSPCA

**PET-FRIENDLY
HOUSING TOOLKIT**
*for non-profit housing
providers*



February 2026

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The BC SPCA is committed to a future when diversity, equity, and reconciliation are meaningfully embedded in all aspects of our work and within the communities we serve.

In our efforts to foster an environment of kindness, compassion and respect, we have a responsibility to stand up for those who face injustice and cruelty, including people. As an organization, we are fully committed to systemic change within the animal welfare sector, in alignment with our foundational principles of diversity, inclusion, equity, accessibility, reconciliation, intersectionality and justice.

We gratefully acknowledge that the BC SPCA operates on the unceded territories and treaty lands of many diverse First Nations and Indigenous peoples. We also recognize that our reconciliation journey is ongoing and that we have much work to do.

1. Introduction

Housing is key to our health and well-being. Having a safe and affordable place to live gives us a sense of stability, belonging and security. For many, 'home' includes those we share our lives with – the people and pets we call family.

With some of the lowest vacancy rates and highest housing costs in the country, finding safe and affordable housing in B.C. is a challenge. Widespread pet restrictions make it even more difficult for those who have pets, as more than half (52%) of British Columbians do.

In a representative poll conducted for the BC SPCA in 2025, over a quarter (27%) of British Columbians said they have had difficulty finding a place to live that accepts pets, and another 24% have wanted to add a pet to their family but couldn't due to pet restrictions in the places they have lived. Women, households with children, people under 35 and lower-income households reported the greatest difficulty.



As a result, people who love their animals as family members are being forced to give them up because the alternative may be homelessness or staying in an unsafe living situation.

The BC SPCA sees this heartbreaking decision firsthand, as these animals enter our shelters by the hundreds each year. In fact, a lack of pet-friendly housing continues to be the primary reason for the surrender of healthy, loved, adult pets across the province.

Pet-friendly housing is more than just an animal issue. Extensive research shows that pets contribute to better physical and mental health, support childhood development and promote healthy aging. Pets also help alleviate stress, improve mood and fight depression, address social isolation and reduce loneliness, improve physical fitness and encourage activity, and facilitate healing and resiliency.

In the same 2025 poll, British Columbians strongly agreed that pets are family members (89%) and that pets have enhanced their mental health (86%) and helped them feel less lonely (84%). Women, people under 35 and lower-income households were the most likely to agree, meaning that those reporting the greatest reliance on their pets for support are also the ones most at risk of having to give them up to find, or keep, housing.

The BC SPCA recognizes the importance of the human-animal bond, and we want to help keep people and their pets together. At the same time, we know that providing pet-friendly housing is not without challenges.

We have developed this toolkit, with input from members of the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA) and Co-op Housing Federation of BC (CHF BC), and a two-year pilot project with BC Housing, to help non-profit housing providers house people and their pets together.



Aboriginal Housing Management Association
Over 25 Years of Indigenous Housing Expertise



2. Terminology

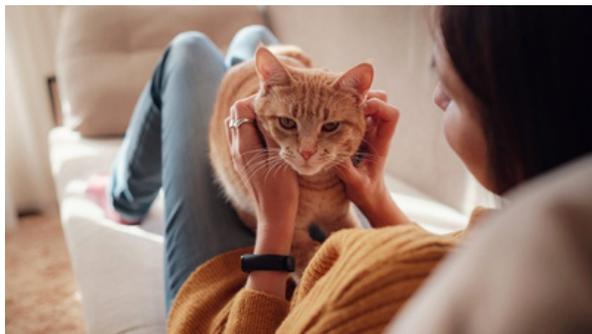
Guardian - the person/people responsible for an animal's care, welfare and management.

Human-animal bond - the special, mutually beneficial relationship people share with their pets.

Non-profit housing provider - organizations that own or manage housing units with the primary goal of providing affordable housing, rather than generating profit, including societies and cooperatives that offer housing across the spectrum, from emergency shelters and supportive housing to rent-geared-to-income and cooperative housing.

Pet - domesticated companion animals that live with their human families.

Tenant - all those who reside in non-profit housing (we recognize that other organizations may use other terms such as “client” or “member”).



3. Housing Provider Survey

The BC SPCA’s Science & Policy Team distributed a survey to members of BCNPHA, AHMA, and CHF BC and collected responses from May to December 2023. The survey intended to gather information on experienced and perceived challenges of pets in non-profit housing and generate ideas for addressing those challenges.

Members were not required to be pet-friendly to complete the survey, allowing us to gain different perspectives on the issue.

The survey results informed the preparation of this toolkit and the resources we hope will help keep more British Columbians and their pets together in non-profit housing.

We recognize that the information provided through this survey belongs to the people and groups that shared it, so we have given the anonymized raw data back to BCNPHA, AHMA and CHF BC.

It’s interesting to note that the issues housing providers **perceive** will be a challenge are not necessarily the top issues that those who allow pets **experience**.



Key Findings - Challenges

While most non-profit housing providers recognize the critical love and support pets provide for their guardians, allowing pets can create challenges. These challenges may be related to the animals themselves (creating noise or causing damage), the actions of their guardians (tenants not cleaning up after their pets, not containing their pets as required or not caring for them properly), other tenants (who may have allergies or be afraid of animals) and/or staff (who may be too busy, or may not have the knowledge and skills to address pet issues).

Housing providers who **currently allow** pets reported that their top five challenges are:



Housing providers who **do not currently allow** pets reported that their top five **perceived** challenges are:

-  Tenant capacity for pet care
-  Conflicts with other people
-  Cost
-  Limited staff time and resources
-  Noise complaints

Housing providers who **don't currently allow** pets reported that their top five reasons for not allowing pets are:

-  Damage caused by pets
-  Tenants not cleaning up after their pets
-  Conflicts with other people
-  Noise complaints
-  Tenant capacity for pet care

Key Findings - Solutions

Housing providers who currently allow pets have significant insight and experience to share with others, and they have implemented a variety of strategies to manage pet-friendly housing challenges. The most frequently shared solutions are:

-  Adopting a pet policy
-  Issuing written warnings for breaches of the pet policy
-  Dealing directly with tenants if there are issues
-  Having tenants review and sign a pet agreement
-  Implementing pet restrictions
-  Providing tenant education on expectations and pet care
-  Connecting tenants with external pet care resources

Key Findings - Advice

We also asked housing providers who currently allow pets to share the advice they would give to others who would like to allow pets in non-profit housing. Survey respondents provided a variety of recommendations:

Policies and Agreements

Housing providers should:

- Have a pet policy
- Keep a registry of all pets in the building

Tenants should:

- Sign a pet agreement
- Provide pet references and proof of spay/neuter and vaccinations
- Have a backup plan, including contact information for alternate caregivers if they are temporarily unable to care for their pets or will be away for an extended time

Education, Training and Resources

Housing providers should:

- Educate prospective tenants on the pet policy
- Provide pet care education and guidance to tenants
- Provide tenants with information on where they can go for assistance if they cannot afford pet food and supplies
- Seek community support for solutions to pet issues

Proactive Enforcement

Housing providers should:

- Interview prospective tenants and have staff meet pets before tenants move in
- Enforce their pet policy
- Respond promptly to pet issues as they arise
- Conduct regular inspections of units

Costs and Budgeting

Housing providers should:

- Budget for staff time to address pet issues
- Budget for cleaning and repairs
- Budget for dog training at no charge to tenants (if possible)
- Charge a pet deposit

Infrastructure and Management

Housing providers should:

- Assess their building's suitability for pets
- Consider reserving some units for pets to limit the impact on prospective tenants with allergies
- Take a gradual approach to allowing pets by phasing in pets for a few units or tenants with excellent records
- Reconsider size restrictions for dogs (large dogs do not necessarily cause more problems than small dogs)
- Have a dedicated outdoor pet area

Key Findings - Resources

We also asked housing providers to identify resources, training, support or services that would help resolve challenges for those who currently allow pets or help remove barriers for those who do not currently allow pets. The most requested resources are:

-  Tenant education
-  Sample pet policies
-  Staff training
-  A resource guide
-  Donations of food and supplies
-  Referrals to humane training
-  A list of best practices



This toolkit attempts to provide the most-requested resources for issues housing providers experience as, or perceive to be, the most significant challenges for housing people and pets together. Funding to address challenges like additional staff time, pest control, damage and pet emergencies was also requested. However, as a donor-funded charitable organization, the BC SPCA cannot provide this funding.

4. BC Housing Pilot Project

Beginning in 2022, the BC SPCA’s Outreach Team conducted a two-year pilot with BC Housing to learn about the experiences of staff and residents in 11 supportive housing buildings, mostly within Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES), and understand the overall animal well-being and the challenges that exacerbate risk and jeopardize the safety of animals and people.

Through surveys, on-the-ground interviews, conversations and information sessions with residents and staff, the pilot identified and tested key priorities for action over a 12-month period.

While some of the pilot report’s recommendations may focus on issues not relevant in other housing situations, this project provided valuable engagement, insight and practical advice for non-profit housing providers, staff and tenants.

Recommendations and resources from the pilot have been included in this toolkit, and the full report is [available here](#).



5. Administrative Resources

We have developed a variety of administrative resources, as well as a list of BC SPCA and other community outreach supports.

Pet Policy / Agreement

We recommend that housing providers implement and consistently apply a pet policy/agreement. You know your tenants, staff, units, buildings and capacity best, and we recommend carefully considering and crafting your pet policy based on what will work for you.

Questions you may want to consider:

- *How are our buildings designed? Do we need to consider pets in elevators or on stairs?*
- *Is there an outdoor space for dogs on our property? Do we need to add outside garbage cans or a pet waste bag dispenser?*
- *Who are our tenants and what challenges or barriers may they face in caring for their pets? What community supports are available to help address those challenges?*
- *How much capacity and knowledge does our staff have to address pet challenges? Do they need training?*
- *Do we want to allow pets in all units and/or on all floors? Or designate some units or floors as pet-friendly or pet-free?*
- *If necessary, can we provide financial assistance for vet care, spay/neuter surgeries, parasite (flea/tick) prevention and behaviour training?*
- *What resources and supports already exist in our community? Who can we connect with to help our tenants and their pets?*
- *Does our insurance contain any requirements or restrictions about pets?*

To ensure tenants understand and are familiar with your policy, we recommend you review your pet agreement with tenants and have them sign it before moving in or before getting a pet if they are already residents.

The [sample pet agreement](#) is intended to ensure the safety and well-being of pets and people in non-profit housing and identify expectations for care and safety. Tenants may not always comply with the requirements of the agreement (just like other conditions in a tenancy agreement), so it is essential for housing providers to consistently apply the agreement, document any non-compliance in writing and have a plan for enforcement. The expectations for care in the agreement can help housing providers explain why a pet request was not approved and work with tenants to resolve issues, including the cleanliness of their unit, concerns with an existing pet, and their capacity to care for a pet.

The [sample pet agreement](#) uses the definition of “dangerous dog” from the [Community Charter](#). Municipalities and local governments may have their own definitions of aggressive, vicious or dangerous dogs. If so, we recommend aligning your definitions with those of the local government bylaws where the housing is located.

The pets included in the [sample pet agreement](#) (cats, dogs, rabbits and domesticated rodents like guinea pigs and hamsters) are recommended based on access to veterinary care, availability of food and supplies and general knowledge of/ability to provide good welfare.

The BC SPCA does not recommend or support allowing exotic pets (like snakes, reptiles, or chinchillas) as the specialized care required to meet their needs exceeds the time, resources and knowledge of most pet guardians, and it can be challenging to find a veterinarian to care for exotic pets.

We strongly recommend that all pets be spayed or neutered to prevent breeding and for health benefits; however, we recognize that cost and access to vet care may be limited. If housing providers are not able to help tenants pay for spaying/neutering, not permitting opposite sex pairs of the same species in the same unit will help prevent intentional or unintentional breeding.

The amount of space that cats and dogs require varies depending on their age, energy levels, size, presence of other animals in the home and the unique needs of each individual animal.

The BC SPCA does not support breed or size restrictions for pets, as they are not reliable indicators of behaviour or temperament, but we recognize that each housing situation is unique and would prefer to see a successful pet program with some limitations, rather than no pets allowed at all. Decisions about pet species, size, breed and numbers should be at the discretion of the housing provider, factoring in the type of pet, rental unit size and condition, and tenant's capacity to care for a pet.

As management, staff and tenants become more comfortable with housing people and pets together, housing providers can explore refining and expanding the pet agreement.

The [sample pet agreement](#) recommends that dogs be given at least three outdoor bathroom breaks per day. However, more frequent breaks may be needed depending on the age and size of the dog, and any medical conditions. Puppies and senior dogs will likely need more frequent breaks.

We recommend that the pet agreement include a clause allowing the housing provider to enter a unit without notice if a pet has been left alone for more than 24 hours and reasonable attempts to contact the tenant are unsuccessful. After assessing the situation, staff can call the tenant's emergency contact person to care for the pet until the tenant returns, arrange for boarding or contact the BC SPCA about a third-party surrender of the pet.



Pet Request Form



We recommend that tenants submit a written request to have pets and provide basic information about each pet they are asking to have in their rental unit.

This information can help you determine a pet's suitability under your policy.

Pet Reference Check



It is helpful to check references before approving a pet application, just like you might for a new tenant.

Previous landlords or housing providers, animal trainers and veterinarians can be good references for a tenant and their pet(s).

Pet Profile



Basic information about each animal and a photo of them should be attached to the pet agreement.

The pet profile should also include contact information for the animal's veterinarian and someone who could temporarily care for the animal in an emergency.

Pet Inventory



We recommend keeping a regularly updated inventory of all pets in each rental unit and building.

Knowing how many, and what kind of pets live in each unit is critical in the event of an emergency, or if staff or service workers need to access a unit when the tenant is not home.

Pet Incident Report



Pet incidents should be treated like any other incident or breach of your policies. It's important to keep a written record of each incident and address any issues immediately and consistently.

If the incident involves aggression or a bite, you may need to report it to your community's bylaw enforcement team, police or RCMP. If the incident involves animal cruelty, distress or neglect, you can report it to the BC SPCA Animal Helpline at 1-855-622-7722.

Community Resource List



It is helpful to have a list of community resources in case your tenants need assistance with their pets. These can include low-cost veterinary clinics (or veterinarians who may be willing to partner with you to provide lower-cost care), pet food banks, and local reward-based trainers.

We have provided a list of BC SPCA outreach and community support resources, as well as a few from other organizations.

6. Animal Care Resources

The [animal care resources](#) can be shared with your staff and tenants to increase their understanding of how to care for pets and address issues that may come up in specific circumstances, like hot or cold weather, or a dog who should be muzzled. We have also provided information on which organizations and agencies you can call for help, and a staff training presentation.

Basic Care Guides



Information on proper basic care for [cats](#), [dogs](#), [rabbits](#) and domesticated rodents ([gerbils](#), [guinea pigs](#), [hamsters](#), [mice](#) and [rats](#)). Topics include food and water, home environment, health, veterinary care, grooming, exercise and play.

Issue-Specific Guides

Helpful information about caring for pets in [hot weather](#), [cold weather](#), [using a muzzle](#) for dogs and responding to [pet opioid poisoning](#).

Who and When to Call

Some pet and animal issues cannot be handled internally by your staff and should be reported to external organizations and agencies.

Call your community's **local animal control or bylaw enforcement team** about:

- Animal licenses and tags
- Lost or stray animals
- Barking dogs, dog bites or attacks

Call your **local BC SPCA Community Animal Centre** about:

- Reuniting lost pets with their families
- Adopting or surrendering an animal
- Pet food bank supplies

Call the **BC SPCA Animal Helpline** at **1-855-622-7722** to:

- Request temporary compassionate pet boarding or the Safekeepers Program
- Report pets, wild or farmed animals in distress

The BC SPCA Animal Helpline is open from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, seven days a week, except for statutory holidays.

To report an animal emergency outside these hours, call your local police or the RCMP.



Animal Training

There is a lot of animal training advice on the internet, but not all advice is equal. The BC SPCA strongly recommends using only reward-based training techniques that focus on rewarding and positively reinforcing desired (“good”) behaviours rather than punishing unwanted (“bad”) behaviours with pain, fear or physical or verbal intimidation.

For dogs, research shows that reward-based training is more effective than punishment-based approaches, with the added benefit that dogs trained with rewards are more likely to be playful and to interact positively with strangers. Research also shows that dogs trained with punishment may bond less with their family, exhibit less playful behaviour, be less inclined to interact positively with strangers and show an increase in fearful behaviours, including aggression. Reward-based, humane training is inherently safer for both animals and people.

The BC SPCA website (spca.bc.ca), the AnimalKind website (animalkind.ca) and the Fear Free website (fearfree.com) are good resources to share with your staff and tenants. They contain a wealth of advice for common animal training and behaviour issues, such as walking on-leash, reactivity, resource guarding, separation anxiety, meeting new people, barking, and scratching.

If your tenants need more help with dog training, we recommend contacting an AnimalKind-accredited trainer. Dog training is an unregulated industry in British Columbia, so anyone can call themselves a trainer regardless of their knowledge, training, or experience. Accredited AnimalKind trainers use evidence- and reward-based training techniques, and many can provide online as well as in-person training.



If staff are recommending or tenants are using trainers who aren't accredited by AnimalKind, we recommend asking questions about their approach and training philosophy and looking for credentials in positive-reinforcement training. These questions can help identify trainers who use reward-based methods that will be more effective and better for the animal:

Say YES to trainers who:

- Train with rewards like treats, food and play
- Use humane, science-based methods
- Make training fun for you and your dog
- Let you watch and participate in training
- Explain dog behaviour and body language
- Have small class sizes (4 to 6 dogs per trainer)
- Work with veterinarians to help you care for your dog
- Act professionally and treat you and your dog with respect

Say NO to trainers who:

- Train with punishment like shouting, pushing, hitting or jerking on a leash
- Use shock, prong or choke collars
- Refuse to let you participate in or watch training
- Refuse to use treats or food rewards
- Talk about "dominance" or "alphas"
- Give veterinary advice or diagnoses
- Guarantee training results
- Make you feel uncomfortable or make your dog scared or unhappy

7. Tips, Tricks and Best Practices

Through our survey of non-profit housing providers, work with supportive housing providers on the Downtown Eastside in the BC Housing Pilot Program and research into other pet-friendly housing guides and resources, we have identified a few additional tips, tricks and best practices that may help you house people and pets together, for both of their benefit.

- Provide training for staff so they can support tenants with pets
- Share the toolkit resources with staff and tenants
- Consider allocating funds to help residents with spaying or neutering their pets, veterinary care or one-on-one training, if your budget allows
- Hold regular drop-in sessions for tenants to identify their needs and connect them to resources for their pets
- Keep some basic pet supplies on hand, especially basket muzzles, leashes and cat carriers
- Become a BC SPCA pet food bank partner to reduce barriers to accessing food and supplies
- Connect tenants with local community events and organizations that can help with veterinary care costs



8. Staff Training

We recognize that non-profit housing managers and staff are very busy, and that some may not be familiar or comfortable with pets. To help, we have developed a staff training presentation to introduce the importance of housing people and pets together and provide an overview of the contents of the toolkit.

To request a pre-recorded presentation for your staff or a copy of the PowerPoint slides, please email us at advocacy@sPCA.bc.ca.

9. Feedback

We appreciate your feedback so we can keep improving this toolkit.

If there are other resources or tools that would help you become, or remain, pet-friendly, if you would like to suggest changes to the resources in this toolkit, or if you have any questions, please email us at advocacy@sPCA.bc.ca.



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