

Veterinary update

BCSPCA
SPEAKING FOR ANIMALS

Dear Colleagues,

A common challenge for animal shelters is caring for pregnant, nursing, and newborn animals. At the BC SPCA, cruelty investigation work can lead to seizures of large populations of sexually intact, freely-reproducing animals. These large influxes of pregnant or nursing animals often stretch the branch and especially foster capacity of our branches.

When pregnant animals (dogs, cats, rabbits, mice, etc.) come into BC SPCA care our first goal is to get them calm and settled into a dedicated foster home. Ideally, no animal would give birth in the shelter, due to the increased risk for contracting infectious disease and the limited staff time available for the high needs of birthing or neonatal animals.

It is preferable for pregnant animals to have time to settle and adjust to their new environment before the birthing process begins, because stress affects the ability of the mother to provide maternal care and may have long-lasting epigenetic effects on the neonates' development. If everything goes according to plan, the animal will give birth in the foster home and the puppies or kittens (or kits or pups) will be raised with the mother in a home environment similar to the homes they will be adopted into. They will get used to all the things that house pets need to be comfortable with, and have access to their mother for nutritional and social development throughout their infancy. Parasite treatments and vaccines are provided by the shelter, and adoption occurs around 8-10 weeks for puppies and kittens if the legal case has been resolved.

Of course, animals do not always follow our carefully laid out plans. Despite our best efforts, animals give birth in shelter before we can get them into foster homes. Sometimes animals reject their newborns because of stress or medical reasons. Sometimes there is disease within the population that affects developing neonates. Sometimes animals in foster care have difficult births and require medical intervention.

Often, our branches do rely heavily on the expertise of community veterinarians when we run into unexpected problems with birth and neonate care, and we are so grateful for your support in this area.

From training foster owners on tube feeding to emergency caesarian sections, you are often the last hope for these needy newborns and new moms. We are also especially grateful to the many veterinarians and veterinary staff who have offered to foster neonatal animals, giving up their sleep for a few weeks to ensure that these fragile little ones get the best possible care. Today in BC there are hundreds of animals in loving homes who would not have survived without critical medical intervention in the first few days or weeks of their lives.



Thank you for your continued support during this challenging time,

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Do you have questions or feedback for the BC SPCA?

Please email us at outreach@sPCA.bc.ca

The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) is a not-for-profit organization reliant on donations from the public.

Building relationships with local wildlife rehabilitators

What do you do if a member of public brings injured or orphaned wildlife (i.e., non-domestic, non-exotic animals) into your veterinary clinic? You may find yourself in a quandary because, without a permit authorized under the BC Wildlife Act or Migratory Birds Convention Act (federally-regulated species), you can only legally hold wildlife for 24 hours and you may be reluctant to euthanize otherwise healthy or treatable animals. Fortunately, there is another option – your local wildlife rehabilitator!

Permitted facilities have the specialized knowledge, experience and equipment needed to care for wild animals and give them the best chance at being returned to their wild homes. Establishing a relationship with a permit-holding wildlife rehabilitator ensures more animals will receive the help they need.

Wildlife rehabilitators are very happy to have support and interest from local veterinarians. Most are charitable, non-profit organizations with limited funds for veterinary consults and euthanasia services for wildlife in critical distress. Luckily, generous veterinarians all over BC donate services to wildlife rehabilitators, and in return, they know who to turn to when the public walks through their clinic doors with injured or orphaned wild animals. The BC SPCA's Wild ARC is one example having relationships with several veterinary clinics across Vancouver Island who graciously provide temporary drop-off locations for transfer and/or emergency euthanasia for wild animals in critical distress.



In the unfortunate case you find wildlife in critical distress in your care, a veterinarian may euthanize these animals without needing consent from the BC SPCA. However, euthanasia of species “of concern” or “at risk” requires approval from a Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Regional Biologist or the provincial Wildlife Veterinarian.

To find a wildlife rehabilitator in your area, contact the BC SPCA animal helpline at 1-855-622-7722, or visit the Wildlife Rehabilitators Network of BC (WRNBC) at: wrnbc.org

New AVSAB position statement on humane dog training



BC SPCA's AnimalKind dog training standards were recently acknowledged by your colleagues at The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB). The AVSAB's new position statement on humane dog training cites the BC SPCA's dog training literature review and authoritatively recognizes the detrimental effect of aversive training methods, stating that only reward-based training methods should be used for training dogs effectively and compassionately.

They recommend that “Whenever possible, veterinarians should interview and observe a trainer’s methods before recommending them to clients.” With the veterinary shortage finding the time to identify a qualified trainer to recommend is likely not possible. Instead, you can refer clients to the BC SPCA’s list of qualified, science-based, humane trainers by suggesting they visit www.animalkind.ca

We will also provide informative rack cards to give to clients or have available at your clinic. They are free, and we mail them at no cost to you. Contact rackcards@animalkind.ca to request yours.

Effect of a provincial feline onychectomy ban on cat intake and euthanasia

In May 2018, the College of Veterinarians of British Columbia implemented a ban on elective feline onychectomy with support from a majority of registrant veterinarians. On the three-year anniversary of the ban, we decided to examine our shelter data to understand whether the bylaw ban had an impact on our feline shelter metrics. We did this because the most common argument against declaw bans is that cat relinquishment, abandonment, and euthanasia could increase and we wanted to understand whether this concern was warranted.

We worked with Dr. Alexandre Ellis, DABVP (primary author) and Dr. Sasha Protopopova (UBC) to analyze the impact of a provincial declaw ban on shelter intake, outcomes, and length of stay across our 36 locations (which represent the majority of animal shelters in B.C.). Our study included 74,587 animal records (cat intakes for 3 years before and 3 years after our ban). We found that there was no increase in cat/kitten intake, euthanasia or length of stay after the ban.

We also looked specifically at owner-requested euthanasia and relinquishment for the reason of “destructive scratching” and found no statistically significant increase in either of these. Additionally, we found that destructive scratching is an extremely rare reason for shelter surrender (50 cats in 6 years, or 0.18% of surrenders). Last, we reference another study of BC SPCA data that is in prep; this study of feline surrender reasons found that 83% were due to “human-related” reasons such as owner health, financial and housing challenges. As the veterinary profession continues to move away from declawing, we encourage discussion of how we can collectively support owners facing hardships due to systemic issues in society. We are proud to be in one of the first provinces where veterinarians voted to stop declawing cats, and we hope this analysis helps relieve fears about relinquishment and euthanasia.

Read the study in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery (open-access until March 2022):

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098612X211043820>

Tenth year of spay/neuter grant program includes spay pack loans

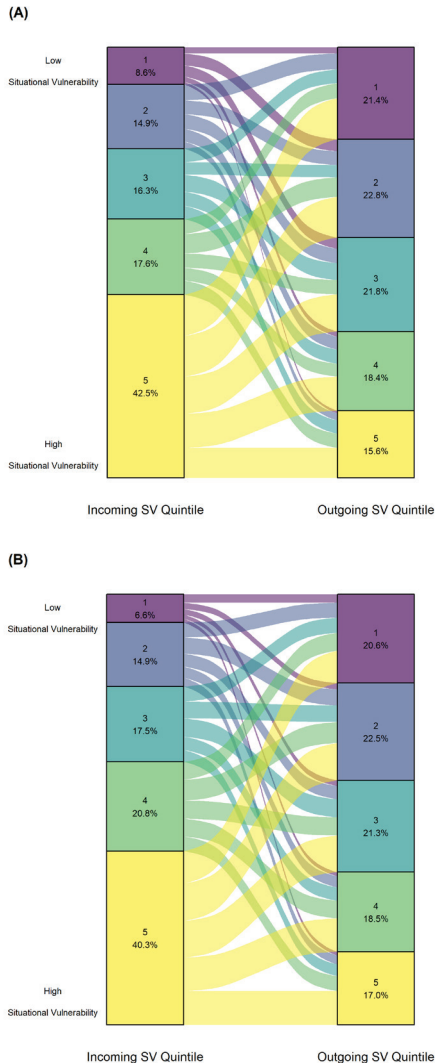
Applications are now open for the BC SPCA Community Animal Spay/Neuter grant program. Now in its tenth year, the program provides grants to help B.C. communities reduce animal suffering by preventing pet overpopulation.

The program is designed to help non-profit community organizations, veterinarians and regional and municipal governments implement targeted spay/neuter projects at a low cost to the community.

Veterinary grantees and veterinary partners participating in a grant-approved project are able to participate in a spay pack loan program to increase capacity to complete the spay and neuter surgeries required. Additionally, the spay packs can be utilized to further increase your spay and neuter capacity during the time of the loan.

Learn more or apply today at www.sPCA.bc.ca/spayneutergant. Applications are due by December 15, 2021.

Analyses of data help identify access to care issues



Proportion of animals from each Situational Vulnerability quintile upon surrender (left axis) and upon adoption (right axis) for (A) puppies and (B) kittens.

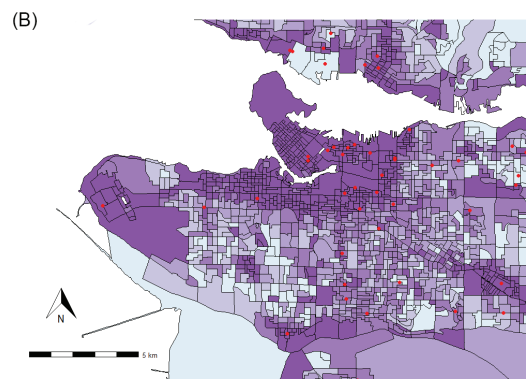
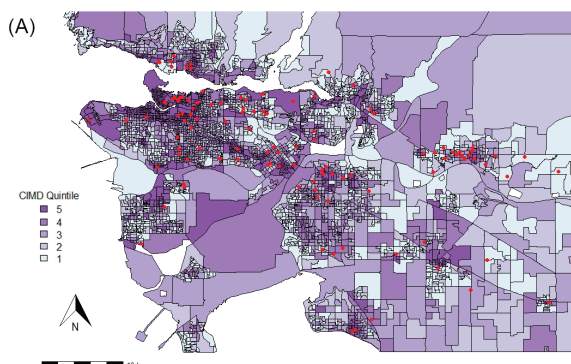
Recent research from the University of British Columbia's Animal Welfare Program explores animal shelter services through a One Welfare framework—where the well-being of humans, animals, and the environment are interconnected. MSc student Lexis Ly (supervised by Dr. Protopopova, BC SPCA/NSERC Industrial Research Chair, and Dr. Emilia Gordon) connected BC SPCA animal shelter data with human demographic data to better understand the relationship between human vulnerability and animal shelter services.

To do so, Ly used the Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation (CIMD), which is an index derived from Canadian census data that indicates community-level vulnerability. In the first study, the researchers compared the CIMD to multiple intake variables to better understand whether human vulnerabilities put communities at greater risk of surrendering for any particular reason compared to another. Many of the results indicated issues with access to care:

- Higher Ethnocultural Composition (e.g. higher proportion of racialized populations, immigrants, residents with no knowledge of English or French) predicted increased risk of surrendering for owner-related reasons, including issues with veterinary costs, compared to other reasons for surrender.
- Higher Residential Instability (e.g. higher proportion of renters, apartments, people living alone) predicted increased risk of surrendering an animal that was deemed Unhealthy-Untreatable upon intake.
- Higher Situational Vulnerability (e.g. higher proportion of low-income residents, fewer years of education, single-parent families) predicted increased risk of surrendering an animal that was not spayed or neutered upon intake.

In a follow-up study, Ly and colleagues found differences in the vulnerabilities of communities that surrendered animals compared to those that subsequently adopted the same animals. One striking finding was that young animals moved from communities of higher to lower Situational Vulnerability, suggesting that animals may “flow” from less to more affluent communities.

Overall, these results suggest that intake and adoption of animals are greatly impacted by community vulnerabilities—indeed a One Welfare issue. Animal shelters can use community-level demographics to better understand the use of shelter services in their respective communities. Understanding community use of shelter services can help animal shelters better serve community members and their pets equitably and keep owners and their animals together.



The locations of animals surrendered that were deemed Unhealthy-Untreatable by the Asilomar Accord standards in (A) Metro Vancouver and (B) the City of Vancouver.