

The State of U.S. Animal Sheltering

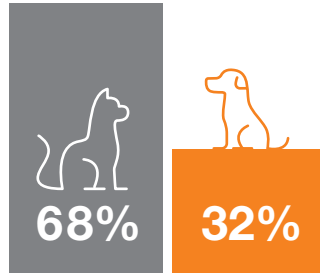
2021

THE STATE OF U.S. ANIMAL SHELTERING 2021

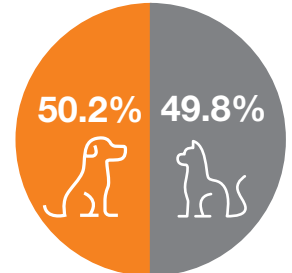
National and species trends

Shelters in the U.S. finished 2021 with a lifesaving gap of 355,000 cats and dogs, which was slightly higher than the lifesaving gap in 2020 (347,000). This increase was a result of adoptions and other live outcomes not increasing at the same rate as intake.

- ▶ **The nation's lifesaving gap of 355,000** is made up of 68% cats and 32% dogs, roughly 240,000 cats and 115,000 dogs.



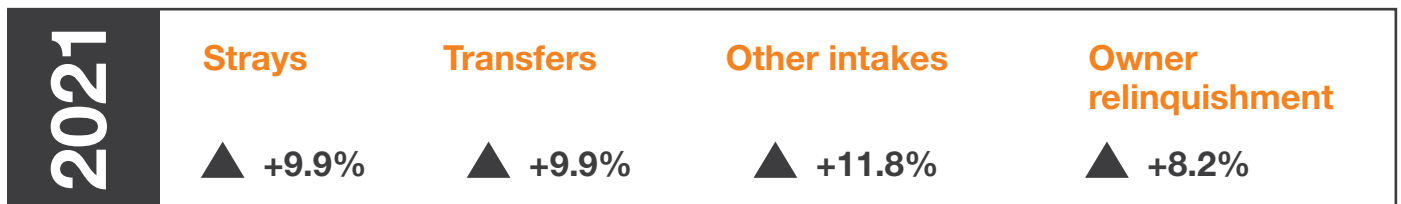
- ▶ **The nation's 2021 intake was 4.6 million**, split almost equally between dogs and cats. (From 2016 to 2018, dogs made up about 53% of intake.)



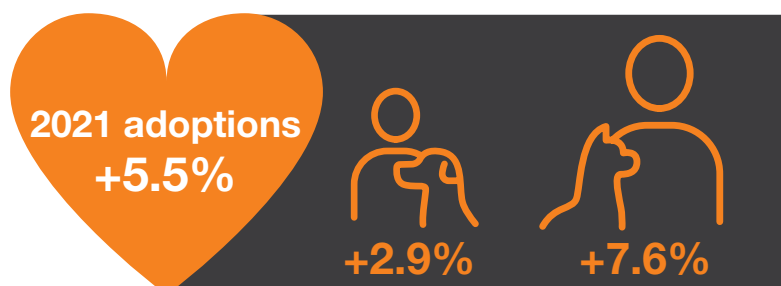
- ▶ **In 2021, intake increased by 9.8%**, outpacing that of both live outcomes and other outcomes. This resulted in increased shelter populations.



The increase in intake was driven more by strays, transfers and other intakes rather than owner relinquishment. **The increase in cat intake was 3% points higher than that of dogs.**



- ▶ **Adoptions increased by 5.5% in 2021**, a significantly lower increase than that of intake. This increase was driven more by cats than dogs.



Types of intake and outcomes

The ways in which pets enter and leave shelters in the U.S. differ by species and highlight opportunities for improvement.



- ▶ Stray dogs and cats make up the majority of intake (52.1%).
- ▶ Cat intake is more concentrated in strays (54.3% cats vs. 49.8% dogs), with less cat intake coming from transfers and owner-intended euthanasia.
- ▶ Adoptions are a larger driver of live outcomes for cats (56.7% cats vs. 45.1% dogs).
- ▶ Cats are more likely to be euthanized or die in a shelter's care.

Intake	Overall	Dogs	Cats
Stray at large	52.1%	49.8%	54.3%
Relinquished by owner	24.7%	24.0%	25.3%
Transferred in	13.3%	15.0%	12.0%
Other intakes	8.1%	8.9%	7.3%
Owner-intended euthanasia	1.7%	2.4%	1.1%

Live outcomes	Overall	Dogs	Cats
Adoption	50.7%	45.1%	56.7%
Returned to owner	12.1%	21.4%	3.0%
Transferred out	17.6%	19.7%	15.3%
Returned to field	3.1%	0.1%	6.3%
Other live outcome	1.5%	1.2%	1.8%

Other outcomes	Overall	Dogs	Cats
Died in care	1.7%	0.7%	2.7%
Lost in care	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Shelter euthanasia	9.5%	7.1%	11.1%
Owner-intended euthanasia	1.6%	2.3%	1.0%

Methodology: Among the 2,007 shelters that reported fully categorized 2021 data, all numbers are a share of gross intake. **Note:** The dog returned-to-field number is likely due to reporting errors. Dogs were not actually returned to the field.



Community differences: urban/rural and social vulnerability

Communities influence the rates at which dogs and cats enter and leave shelters in the U.S. The level at which a community is rural and socially vulnerable correlates to higher intake volumes and lifesaving gaps.

- ▶ **Intake per capita is lowest among the most urban counties** (10.7 per 1,000 population) and highest among the most rural counties (25.0 per 1,000 population).
- ▶ **Lifesaving gap per capita is lowest among the most urban counties** (0.6 per 1,000 population) and highest among all ranges of rural counties (between 1.7 and 2.6).
- ▶ **Cat intake is highest relative to dogs in urban counties, but lifesaving gap is lowest.**
In the most urban counties: Cat intake is 50.8% and lifesaving gap is 61.8%.
In the most rural counties: Cat intake is 42.9% and lifesaving gap is 84.5%.
- ▶ **Urban counties rely more heavily on adoptions** for live outcomes (62.3% urban vs. 52.3% rural). **Rural counties rely more heavily on transferring** out pets (33.1% rural vs. 18.5% urban).
- ▶ **Social vulnerability is a significant factor in rates of intake and lifesaving gap**, impacting both rural and urban counties. Rural counties that are the most socially vulnerable have the highest per capita rates of intake and lifesaving gap by a wide margin.

Intake per 1,000	High SVI	Moderate SVI	Low SVI
Rural	27.4	19.6	16.1
Urban	17.4	12.4	9.1
Total	18.6	13.1	9.9

Lifesaving gap per 1,000	High SVI	Moderate SVI	Low SVI
Rural	3.3	1.9	0.8
Urban	1.7	0.6	0.4
Total	1.9	0.7	0.5

SVI = Social Vulnerability Index



Sources: U.S. Census for rural scoring analyzed by decile; CDC for Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) analyzed by categories of high (70 or higher), moderate (30-69) and low (below 30).

Sustainability of 90% save rate

Despite the reversal of national intake and lifesaving gap trends in 2021, shelters that previously met the 90% save rate benchmark overwhelmingly maintained that status.



Of the shelters that were at the 90% save rate benchmark in 2020, 93.1% remained so in 2021. This is higher than the rates in 2018 and 2019.



Among Best Friends Network Partners, 94.7% maintained the 90% save rate benchmark, compared to 90.3% of shelters that are not Best Friends Network Partners.



Municipal shelters and shelters with an intake between 2,500 and 4,999 dogs and cats had the lowest chance of sustaining a 90% save rate. Even so, they sustained a 90% save rate 88.4% and 82.0% of the time, respectively.

