



Hill's Pet Nutrition

2025 Canada State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report

To our friends in animal welfare and the veterinary profession across Canada,

Animal shelters and rescues across the country serve as a lifeline for pets and people in need. At Hill's Pet Nutrition, our commitment to ending pet homelessness is unwavering and we are continually inspired by your dedication to animals in need every day. We recognize that solving the shelter crisis requires all of us, and we are particularly focused on understanding and supporting the unique needs of the Canadian animal welfare community.

This year marks the third edition of the Hill's State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report. Over the past two years, our research has highlighted the U.S. need to expand our insights and provide regionally specific data. To further support our Canadian animal welfare partners, the full 2025 report now integrates new consumer data from the Canadian market, enriching our broader North American understanding.

It is with great pride that we present the inaugural 2025 Canada State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report. Drawing from the insights of 500 Canadian respondents, this vital resource is specifically tailored for Canadian animal care professionals, offering a data-driven look at consumer barriers, perceptions and opportunities unique to Canadian pet adoption.

There are growing barriers to adoption and pet ownership. From the persistent concern of pet ownership costs to the nuanced challenges of guilt and doubt, these insights underscore the urgent need for innovative solutions and collaborative efforts. Our goal is to empower you with the knowledge to refine strategies, address misconceptions, and ultimately help more pets find and stay in loving homes.

This report would not be possible without the invaluable contributions of our partners and the broader Canadian animal welfare community. Your expertise, dedication and collaboration are the bedrock of our shared mission. We are proud to work hand in hand with you, supporting your efforts through initiatives like the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love Program, which has helped feed and facilitate the adoption of over 15 million pets across North America since 2002.

We invite you to delve into the findings of this first-ever Canada-specific report. Whether you are a shelter professional, a veterinarian, a policymaker or a passionate pet advocate, we hope these insights incite meaningful change and create a future where every pet has the chance for a healthier, happier life.



Frances Cheslo, RVT
Shelter Engagement Manager
Hill's Pet Nutrition Canada





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SECTION 1

Introduction

Introduction

Across North America, shelters have experienced more intakes than outcomes, resulting in a gap that is contributing to higher populations, according to Shelter Animals Count.

To further understand consumer beliefs and behaviours driving this increase, the animal welfare community needs more data-driven insights. The first Hill's Canada State of Shelter Pet Adoption Report fills this need, presenting findings from a proprietary, single-blind survey of 500 Canadians and 2,000 Americans with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The survey was administered to adults aged 18 and older.

For the purposes of analyzing age demographic differences, respondents are grouped as follows:

- Gen Z and Millennials: under 45 years old
- Gen X and Baby Boomers: 45 years and older

The findings highlight significant barriers to pet adoption, primarily economic concerns related to the cost of pet care. These financial considerations are impacting potential adopter conversion, and in some cases, leading to surrender situations. The report also identifies opportunities to boost foster participation and explores strategies to place more pets in homes, and keep pets and people together.

Despite these challenges, a majority of people remain receptive to adopting shelter animals.



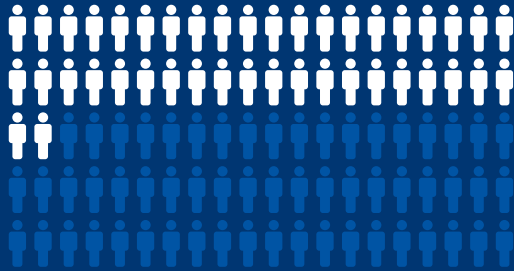


SECTION 2

Highlights

Highlights

The majority of Canadians surveyed indicate they would likely adopt from a shelter or rescue. However, the reality is that most Canadian pets are acquired from a family member or friend, or a breeder.



58%

Canadians said they would likely choose a shelter when adopting a new pet

Top acquisition methods:



Got from a breeder



Got from a family member or friend

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

The price tag of pet ownership creates barriers at two critical points of the Canadian adoption journey.



Getting Started

The percentage of Canadians who say the initial cost to adopt or acquire a pet made it difficult to consider pet ownership:

40%



Ongoing Commitment

The percentage of Canadians who report the biggest concern of pet ownership is the overall cost:

57%

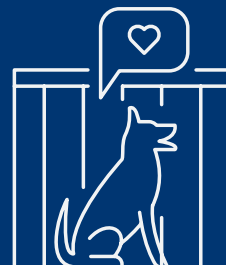
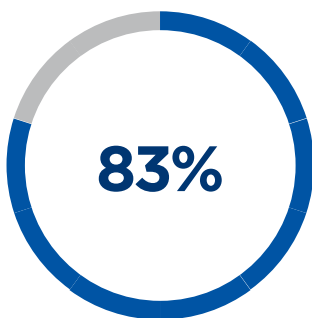


ACCESS TO CARE

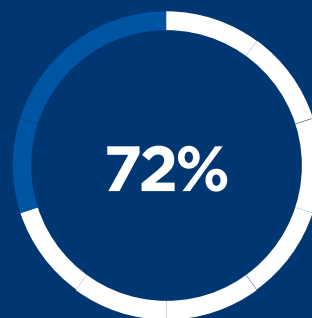


The cost of veterinary care is the #1 barrier to owning a pet.

Canadians most frequently rank veterinary care in their top three pet expenses:



72% of Canadians report the cost of veterinary care directly impacts their decision to adopt a pet.



THE FOSTERING LANDSCAPE

Awareness of fostering is high despite low numbers of registered fosters. Financial clarity and expert support can help unlock untapped potential.



Familiarity with fostering programs	40%
Respondents actively fostering	8%
Respondents familiar with fostering who have not fostered	40%

Expert support is a key motivator for Canadians to consider fostering.



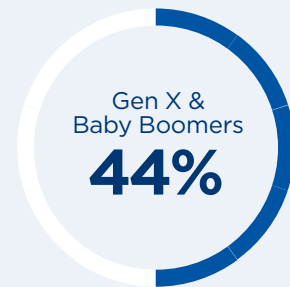
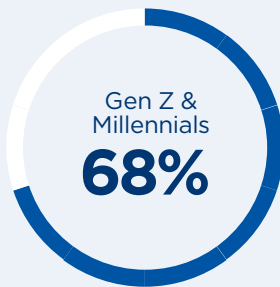
Access to trainer/expert guidance	71%
Financial compensation for fostering	71%
Foster pets who have experience with other animals	69%

Despite fears and misconceptions, fostering, especially foster-to-adopt programs, presents new pathways to pet ownership, allowing potential adopters to try pet ownership commitment-free.



Canadians view fostering positively as a way to try pet ownership	59%
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Willingness to consider fostering if pet care costs are covered:



Attachment and affordability are barriers to becoming a foster parent in Canada.

40%

of Canadians are afraid they will end up adopting their foster pet

23%

of Canadians believe they cannot afford a foster pet



INTENT TO ADOPT

Getting first-time adopters to successfully bring home a new companion is key to establishing a pipeline of repeat adopters.

76%

of previous shelter adopters are likely to adopt

52%

of non-shelter adopters* are likely to adopt

*Non-shelter adopter: Anyone who has never adopted from a shelter or rescue

Younger generations show stronger intent to adopt from shelters, but developing targeted strategies for all age groups is key to converting intentions into actions.

Gen Z &
Millennials

87%

Previous shelter adopters who would consider adopting from a shelter again

67%

Non-shelter adopters who would consider adopting from a shelter

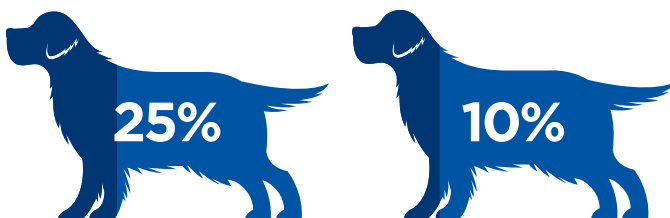
Gen X &
Baby Boomers

64%

42%

Younger generations remain key to large dog adoption.

1 in 4 Gen Z and Millennials are likely to adopt a large dog.



Gen Z &
Millennials

Gen X &
Baby Boomers

However, engaging younger generations in pet adoption requires improving awareness of local shelter locations.

21%

of Gen Z and Millennials are unaware of shelters nearby

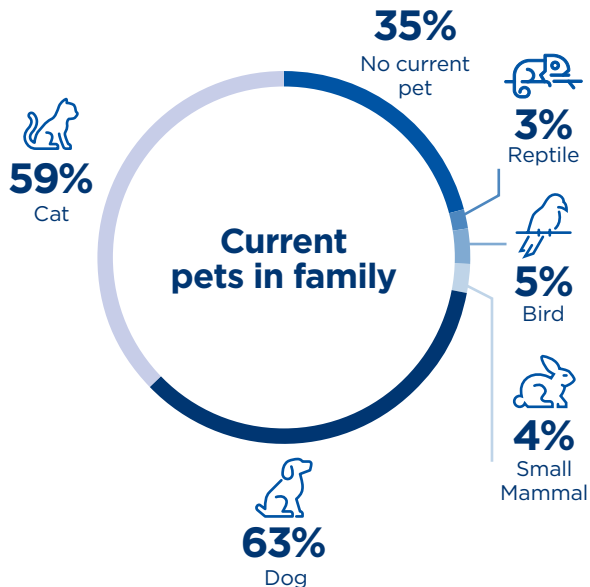


SECTION 3

Barriers to Adoption, Fostering & Ownership

The current state of pet ownership

Pet ownership is widespread in Canada, with 65% of the population owning a pet, and dogs ranking as the most common companion. However, recent trends suggest a shifting landscape. Data from Shelter Animals Count shows increased cat adoptions since 2019 across North America with the number of households owning cats remaining steady. This data suggests several possible trends: current cat owners may be adopting additional feline companions, some households might be shifting their preference from dogs to cats or fewer people overall may be adopting pets, with the decline primarily affecting dog adoptions.



Canada's fondness for felines

Currently owning a cat



How people get their pets

Canadians primarily acquire their cats through informal acquisition methods, such as personal connections and stray rescues.

For dogs, Canadians show a stronger preference for formal channels, with breeder purchases being the dominant method, followed by family/friend transfers and shelter or rescue adoptions.

Most common Canadian pets:
top acquisition methods

		
Got from family/friend	23%	29%
Found as stray	3%	18%
Adopted from shelter/rescue	15%	14%
Got from breeder	28%	3%
Adopted from shelter at pet store	6%	7%

Canadians’ likelihood to adopt

Americans are significantly more likely than Canadians to adopt from a shelter or rescue in the future.

It’s encouraging to note that more than half of Canadians surveyed still express a strong intent to adopt from a shelter or rescue. This data proves that engaging first-time shelter adopters is paramount, as previous shelter

adopters are significantly more likely to do so again as compared to those without prior shelter adoption experience.

Age also plays a notable role in future adoption likelihood. Gen Z and Millennial Canadians demonstrate a greater inclination to adopt than their Gen X and Baby Boomer counterparts.



63%



58%

Shelter adoption likelihood

(by age & previous adoption experience)

	Total Population	Previous Shelter Adopter	Non-Shelter Adopter
Total Population	58%	76%	52%
Gen Z & Millennials	72%	87%	64%
Gen X & Baby Boomers	48%	67%	42%

Canadians have favourable attitudes toward animal shelters and their operations. Respondents expressed particularly strong confidence in shelter health protocols.

Positive perceptions of shelters

(Canadians agree)



Shelters do everything they can to make sure pets are vaccinated before adoption

69%



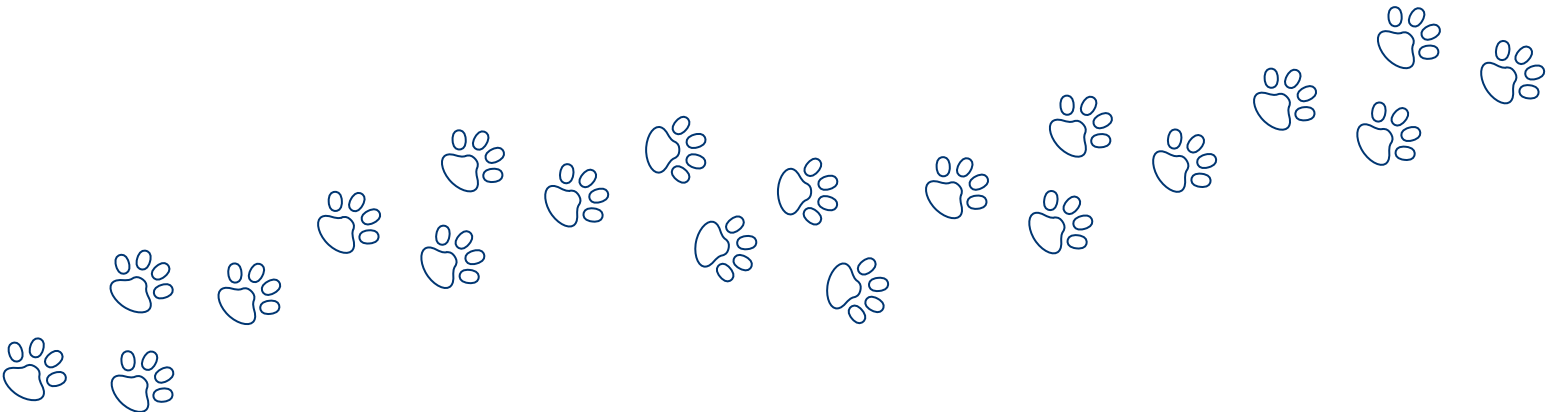
Shelters do everything they can to ensure adoptable pets are healthy

66%



Shelters provide all the necessary information to keep adopted pets healthy

60%



While word of mouth remains the most popular source of information about shelters in Canada, prospective adopters are slightly more receptive to online news and pet stores than the U.S.

Top 5 sources of information about shelters

Word of mouth	41%
Shelter websites	31%
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)	28%
Pet stores	20%
Online news	19%



Preferred pets for future adoption

Only 17% of Canadians express a likelihood to adopt a large dog. This lower propensity is particularly notable given that cats are the preferred pet of choice in Canada, significantly outpacing their popularity in the U.S. Despite this, Gen Z and Millennials represent the most significant opportunity for large dog adoption in Canada.

Likelihood to adopt by pet type

		
Large Dog (55+ lbs.)	17%	25%
Medium Dog (26-54 lbs.)	37%	47%
Small Dog (<26 lbs.)	39%	45%
Cat	48%	40%
Small Mammal	9%	9%



Drivers of the surge in cat adoptions

Cats are popular in Canada, with nearly 60% of people reporting ownership. Unlike dogs, the primary appeal of cats lies in their self-sufficiency, followed by personal preference. Their indoor lifestyle, minimal space requirements, self-grooming habits and perceived lower ownership costs further contribute to their popularity.

Reasons for preferring cats	
Cats are self-sufficient	63%
Personal preference	58%
Cats don't require an outdoor area	39%
Cats require less space	34%
Cats groom themselves	33%
Cats have a lower ownership cost	29%

Likelihood to adopt a large dog by age



Gen Z & Millennials



Gen X & Baby Boomers





Pet healthcare and nutrition are considered the most expensive part of pet ownership for Canadians.

When asked to choose the top three most expensive parts of pet ownership, the cost of veterinary care, pet food and pet insurance top the list.

Barriers to adoption

It is equally important to recognize and actively address the barriers preventing potential adopters from entering shelters in the first place. By reducing operational obstacles and increasing access, shelters can tap into a wider pool of potential adopters and create repeat customers — leading to improved outcomes.

Veterinary care is considered the most expensive part of pet ownership in Canada, followed by nutrition and pet insurance.*



83%

Veterinary care



68%

Pet food/nutrition



45%

Pet insurance



26%

Grooming



11%

Boarding/Dog walking



10%

Toys/enrichment

*Shows top four and bottom two selections from available options to reflect the most significant responses.



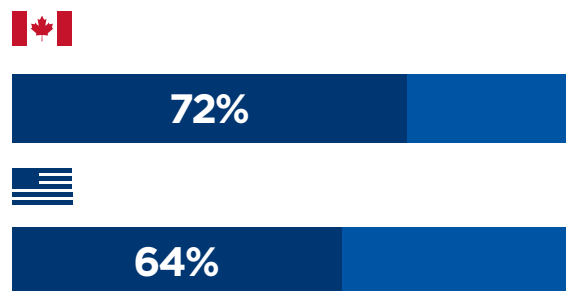
Cost concerns are more prevalent for Canadians

Canadians are significantly more likely than Americans to have cost concerns when considering pet ownership. They are also less likely to say that “nothing makes pet ownership difficult.”

Challenges of pet ownership

		
Overall cost of pet ownership	57%	48%
Cost to adopt/acquire	40%	32%
“Nothing makes pet ownership difficult”	16%	21%

The cost of veterinary care impacts my decision to adopt



Almost 3 in 4 Canadians report that the cost of veterinary care significantly impacts their adoption decisions, a significantly higher proportion than Americans.

Beyond financial concerns:

Reasons behind not choosing shelters for pet acquisition

For Canadians without prior shelter adoption experience, the top reason for not adopting is the concern about perceived behavioural issues, which presents an actionable opportunity for shelters. Enhancing and promoting both pre-adoption and post-adoption behavioural support programs could effectively address this barrier and encourage more potential adopters to choose shelter pets. Canadians are less concerned about wanting a specific breed than Americans.

		
Concerned about the behavioural issues of shelter pets	22%	19%
Concerned about the health of shelter/rescue pets	19%	11%
Wanted specific breed not available at shelter/rescue	17%	22%
Not aware of any shelters/rescues nearby	15%	15%

Two-thirds of Canadians report no housing restrictions when it comes to pets. However, some still face barriers like pet deposits and weight restrictions.



Using an Adopter’s Welcome approach, we no longer ask adopters about their housing situation. Instead, we alert adopters to the fact that pet policies and requirements may exist and trust them to take it from there. We do see adopters looking specifically for animals that meet their strata or rental requirements/limitations, most often size limitations on dogs. We offer a renter’s guide which has a template for pet resumes (a document that tells people more about your pets), sample rental agreements and answers to frequently asked questions about renting with pets on our website to help pet guardians find pet-friendly housing.



Parm Takhar
Chief Direct Care Officer
of British Columbia SPCA





Canadian positivity toward fostering



Canadians feel that fostering is a positive way to try out pet ownership.

59%

of Canadians have a positive attitude toward fostering.

Canadian fostering landscape

Fostering represents a bridge in the shelter ecosystem, providing temporary homes for animals while creating capacity within shelters.

Lacking awareness of fostering leading to low number of active fosters



40%

Canadians familiar with fostering, but have not fostered



8%

Canadians have fostered



Only 40% of Canadians are familiar with fostering, resulting in fewer than 1 in 10 Canadians actually participating in fostering programs.

Attachment and affordability are barriers to becoming a foster parent

The largest factor holding Canadians back from fostering is the fear of getting too attached and adopting the pet. However, there are other factors at play, most notably time constraints and space concerns.



40%

are afraid they will end up adopting their foster pet



29%

already have pets and don't have space for another



26%

do not have time to spend with a foster pet



23%

believe they cannot afford a foster pet

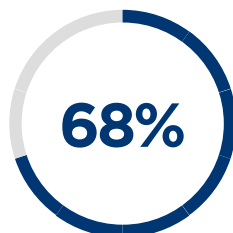
Potential fosters may hesitate to open their homes due to concerns about overall pet ownership costs, fearing they may become emotionally attached and financially responsible for an animal's care. Additionally, the guilt associated with a perceived lack of time for a foster pet could reflect the pressure pet parents feel to provide more love than humanly possible to their companions.

Gen Z and Millennial Canadians are significantly more likely than older individuals to foster if care costs are covered, highlighting the misperception that fostering requires personal financial investment.

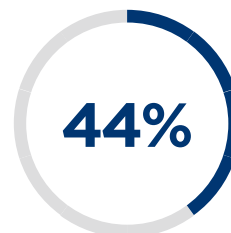
While the overall cost of pet ownership might indirectly deter fostering, shelters can help people become comfortable with the process by highlighting the unique opportunity to enjoy pet companionship without long-term commitment.

Shelters should continue to emphasize that fostering is typically cost-free, offering a risk-free way to welcome animals into one's home. Shelters can also reassure potential foster parents that temporary care is the intended purpose of fostering, helping to alleviate concerns about future adoption expectations or financial commitments.

Likelihood of fostering if care costs are covered:



Gen Z & Millennials

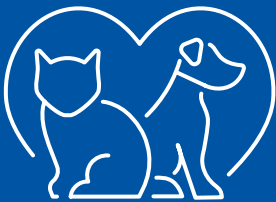


Gen X & Baby Boomers

Access to foster experts and trainers is top motivator

Outside of covered costs, Canadians would be highly motivated to foster by having access to a foster expert or trainer to provide guidance through the fostering process.

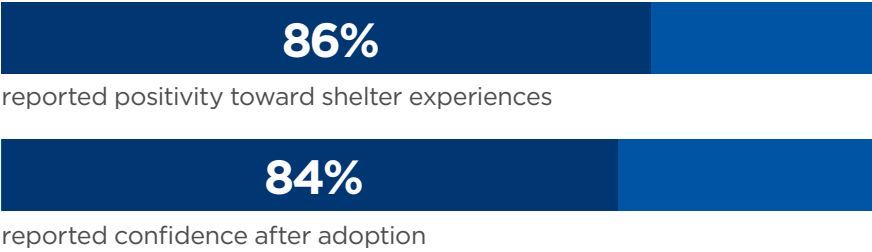
	Motivating	Not motivating
Access to an expert/trainer to provide guidance during fostering	71%	29%
Receive payment for fostering	71%	29%
Foster pet has experience with other pets	69%	31%



Foster motivation could be improved by providing access to experts/trainers and financial compensation.

Post-adoption experiences

Canadian adopters report high confidence and positivity toward their shelter experiences.



Positive outcomes are closely linked to the actions of shelter staff. Most Canadians felt shelters set realistic expectations, understood their needs and matched them with the right pet, contributing to an overall positive adoption experience.





Spending appropriate time and setting realistic expectations with adopters are the strongest drivers of satisfaction.

Spent enough time with me to understand my wants and needs	74%
Set realistic expectations about what I experienced with my adopted pet	72%
Able to match me with the right pet for me	70%
Checked in with me personally via email, phone or text after bringing my pet home	54%
Sent me a general, non-personalized follow-up email, voicemail or text after bringing my pet home	44%



Positive post-adoption feelings



80%



Happiness



87%

47%



Excitement

60%

47%



Fulfilment

57%

The drivers of pet relinquishment

The experience of rehoming or surrendering a pet is not uncommon, affecting approximately 18% of current or former Canadian pet owners and 21% of those in the United States. Across North America, housing limitations stand out as the leading cause for surrender, with financial hardship being the next most common factor. A greater number of Canadians indicated allergies or health concerns, while more Americans pointed to training difficulties.

Reasons behind pet relinquishment



Moved to housing facility that did not allow my type of pet	21%	21%
Financial difficulties	18%	20%
Allergies or health issues with myself or cohabitants	18%	14%
Training issues	11%	16%
Did not get along with other pets in my household	8%	11%



SECTION 4

Hill's Support for Animal Welfare



Hill's Support of Animal Welfare

Since 2002, the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love Program (HFSL) has partnered with animal shelters across North America, focusing on the three pillars through actions like feeding shelter pets, increasing adoptions and keeping pets and people together.

The right nutrition can transform how a pet looks, feels and acts — helping make pets happy, healthy and more adoptable. Since its inception in North America, the program has:



Beyond direct nutritional support, Hill's actively collaborates with non-profits, pet industry partners, veterinary professionals and media organizations to help more pets find loving homes through initiatives designed to help reduce capacity constraints, drive adoptions for harder-to-place animals and boost awareness of critical shelter needs.





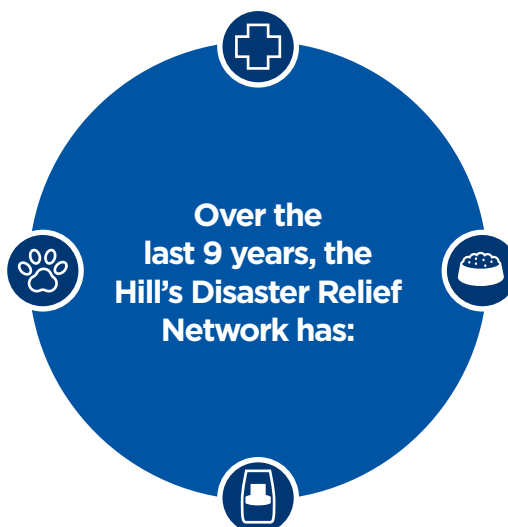
Hill's Disaster Relief Network

There is nothing more rewarding or impactful to shelters than keeping people together with the pets they love during challenging times. When disaster strikes local communities, Hill's is proud to provide critical nutritional support to pets, their families and the organizations on the front lines. This commitment has been exemplified by Hill's response to major Canadian natural

disasters since 2016, providing support when and where it was needed most. Beyond immediate crisis response, Hill's also provides full-circle support during disasters by addressing critical community needs through ongoing pet food pantry donations, giving sustained assistance for pets and their families.

Donated food for wildfire relief efforts in BC, AB, NS, and flooding relief in NB and ON

Supported Canadian shelters, veterinary and non-profit organizations



Responded to more than **200** requests for nutritional support

Donated more than **100K pounds** of cat and dog food to communities in need



Keeping pets and people together also means supporting the veterinary profession. Through the Hill's Pet Nutrition Weight Care Program (University of Guelph) Ontario Veterinary College program, we're working to help support pets facing obesity. Alongside this program is the Nutrition-focused Professorship (University of Calgary), which empowers the next generation of veterinarians by helping make nutrition education part of the curriculum.

Hill's believes that we can do more together than what we can achieve alone. Because of this belief, Hill's is continuing to invest in programming, resources, education and professional development, and support for animal welfare professionals. Through partnerships with Shelter Animals Count and Humane Canada's Summit for Animals annual conference, animal welfare and veterinary professionals have access to vital tools and data insights necessary to improve the industry.

For more information, visit hillspet.ca/en-ca/shelter-program. If you are interested in joining the Hill's Food, Shelter & Love program, email shelters@hillspet.com.



Methodology

Hill's Pet Nutrition partnered with PSB Insights to field a 15-minute online survey from February 24–March 12, 2025, of 2,000 general population American consumers and 500 general population Canadian consumers. The sample is representative of the U.S. and Canadian general population (based on best available data*) on the following characteristics:

- Pet Owners vs. Non-Pet Owners***
- Race/ethnicity***
- Household Income Bands**
- Gender***
- Region***
- Age

*U.S. quotas and weights based on Census ACS data, except for Pet Ownership, which came from Forbes Advisor – Pet Ownership Statistics 2024.

**Canada quotas and weights based on Canadian Census data, except for Pet Ownership, which came from a GfK survey – 61% of Canadians Own a Pet: GfK Survey.

***Post-stratification weights applied

