

Highlights of

The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Second Edition (2022)



2. Population Management

2.1 General

Shelters must practice active population management, which is the process of intentionally and efficiently planning services for each animal in the shelter's care. All shelters have limits to their ability to provide care, and these limitations define the number and type of animals for which an organization can provide humane care, also known as the organization's **capacity for care**. Working to maintain the population within the shelter's capacity for care has been linked to decreased length of stay (LOS), decreased disease and euthanasia rates, and increased live outcomes.

2.2 Determining capacity for care

The most visible factor in determining the shelter's capacity for care is housing capacity, including in-shelter enclosures as well as foster homes and off-site housing. Housing units that are too small or otherwise inappropriate cannot be included.

The organization's capacity is also determined by shelter personnel, resources, and available outcomes. Trained personnel must be scheduled to meet daily animal care needs and efficiently and effectively accomplish each critical task. Animals with medical and behavioral challenges may need more care time per day and may also require services from personnel with advanced skills or credentials. Foster programs also must have sufficient personnel to provide support to foster caregivers and animals.

2.3 Operating within capacity for care

2.3.1 Admission planning: When appropriate, admission policies should prioritize retention over shelter intake. Owners may be able to keep their pet if given access to services, supplies, or information. Admission must be balanced with the ability to provide appropriate outcomes, minimize LOS, and ensure the shelter remains within its capacity for care. Intake by appointment can be used to control the flow of animals into the shelter. Organizations impacted by unpredicted intakes (e.g. disasters, large-scale investigations) must have a plan to flex their operations to increase their capacity for care.

2.3.2 Outcome planning: Every attempt must be made to locate a lost animal's owner, including careful screening for identification and microchips, in the field and at the time of intake. Shelters should remove barriers to local outcomes by providing accessible and convenient open hours; adoption and reclaim services in languages spoken by the community; affordable adoption and reclaim fees; and adoption and outreach events that reach the entire community.

2.3.3 Length of stay: The number of animals a shelter has in its care on any given day is a product of the number of animals it admits and the length of time they stay in the shelter's care (i.e. LOS).

$$\text{Average Daily Population} = \text{Average Daily Admissions} \times \text{Average LOS}$$

Caring for fewer animals at a time allows shelters to improve welfare and creates the capacity to provide care for animals who require longer stays.

2.3.4 Pathway planning: LOS can be minimized through effective pathway planning. Pathway planning is a proactive process that anticipates the services and care an animal will require to achieve an appropriate outcome, with consideration to available housing, personnel, resources, and the likelihood of achieving the outcome while maintaining good welfare. Planning ahead prevents needless delays that add days to a shelter stay.

2.3.5 Population rounds: The entire shelter population, including animals housed in foster or off-site, must be regularly assessed by knowledgeable personnel with decision-making ability and authority. The population rounds team answers the following for each animal: How are you doing? What is your pathway? Are there updates or concerns that change this pathway? What are your next steps?

Additionally, all animals physically in the shelter must be monitored daily to identify housing, care, or service needs to determine whether the shelter is within their capacity for care. A shelter animal inventory, including all animals in foster care, should be taken and reconciled daily.

2.4 Monitoring population data

At a minimum, shelters must track monthly intake and outcome type for each species by age group. LOS data should also be regularly analyzed to identify bottlenecks, mismatched resources, and capacity for care concerns. Population level data should be reviewed and analyzed regularly, and ideally shared with other community organizations directly or through national databases such as Shelter Animals Count.

Outcome-based metrics do not account for quality of life or animals still in the shelter's care. Live release rates or save rates must be evaluated in the context of animal welfare and cannot be used alone as a measure of success. Aversion to euthanasia is not an excuse for crowding and poor welfare.

*See the full guidelines for references and supporting documents:
<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/issue/view/2>*