



Community Consultation 2023

Summary of Findings

Ottawa residents say they are facing a pet affordability crisis

Between July and Sept. 2023, the Ottawa Humane Society (OHS) consulted publicly to inform the development of its upcoming strategic plan (2024-2029). The consultation included work with stakeholders and focus groups and an *Ask Me Anything* on Reddit. It culminated with a general public survey available in many languages. 3,010 people participated in the survey; the overall consultation reflects the input of more than 3,100 individuals, including the general public, OHS staff, partners and supporters, including Ottawa’s veterinary community.

Overwhelmingly, respondents rated the ability to provide care to their pets as their number one concern. **Affordability was identified nearly 3 times more frequently than the next most significant issue.**

Issue, as identified by the public	% response
Affordability and access to care	52.7%
Irresponsible pet ownership, cruelty, mistreatment and abandonment	18.8%
Importance of spay and neuter	15.4%
Public education and awareness	10.9%
Outdoor, stray and feral cats	10.2%
More dog parks and safe spaces	7.0%
Irresponsible breeding	6.3%
Dog behaviour, under-socialization and access to dog training	4.8%
Wildlife concerns	2.8%

“I’m on ODSP and I can care for all of the basic needs of a cat, but not vet care. Because of that I don’t have a companion and I am isolated.”

“I had to rehome my dog because I couldn’t afford the boarding costs while recuperating from an injury. To this day I still miss my dog and feel guilty that I had no choice”

“I am concerned about middle-class families who are struggling to afford pet care”

“I fear daily that if my pets get sick I will have to surrender them because I don’t have money to cover the vet bills”



Top issues by species



- **Outdoor cats**, including safety, quality of life and impact on wildlife
- **Overpopulation**; promotion of and access to spay and neuter
- Poor living conditions of **feral cats**; support for TNR (some opposed)
- Concerns about where to bring **stray cats**
- Support for **bylaw restrictions** on outdoor cats



- Irresponsible breeding and **puppy mills**; spay and neuter
- More safe **spaces to play** (parks), **safety from dangerous dogs** and a more dog-friendly city
- **Behavioural issues**, socialization and aggression concerns among dogs
- **Lack of enforcement of leash laws**; off-leash dogs in neighbourhoods
- Access to and cost of **training** and concerns about an unregulated training industry

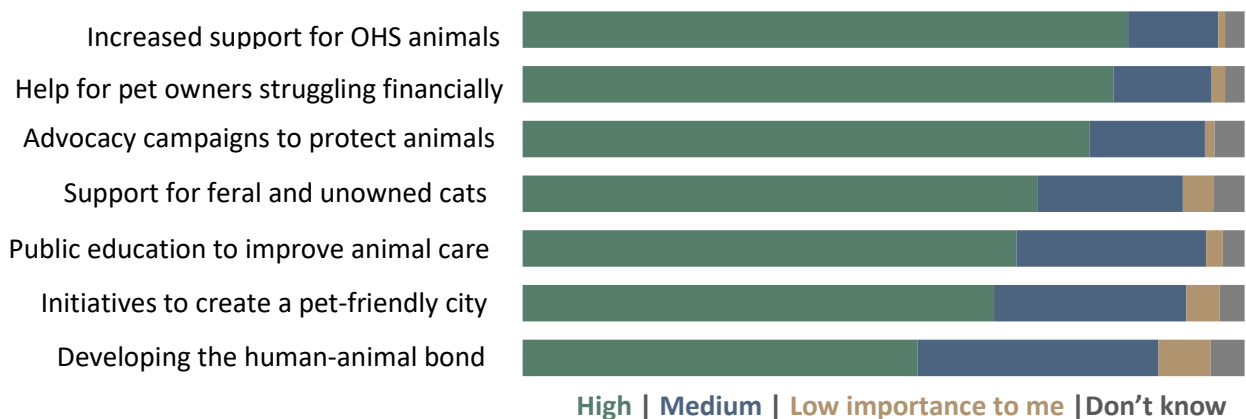


- Overpopulation and **abandonment of pet rabbits**; described as a crisis
- Public knowledge of **care needs for rabbits** and other small animals

Support for the OHS's future direction

The OHS asked the community about its proposed future direction, to help at both ends of the leash, and community feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Respondents want care for OHS animals to be the top priority. Help for pet owners struggling financially was a close second.

Importance of strategic priorities according to survey respondents



When it comes to advocacy, cruelty and irresponsible breeding are the priority

Respondents were presented with 11 advocacy issues and asked to pick up to 5 that the OHS should prioritize, including the ability to add their own.

Two issues were identified twice as often as others: enforcing animal cruelty legislation and restricting irresponsible breeding.

One issue divides our community: repealing breed-specific legislation (BSL). Repealing BSL is supported by many, but strongly opposed by others.

Wildlife and farm animals

Approximately 100 respondents shared concerns for wildlife, such as development encroaching on habitat. 50% of respondents selected protection for wildlife as a priority advocacy issue.

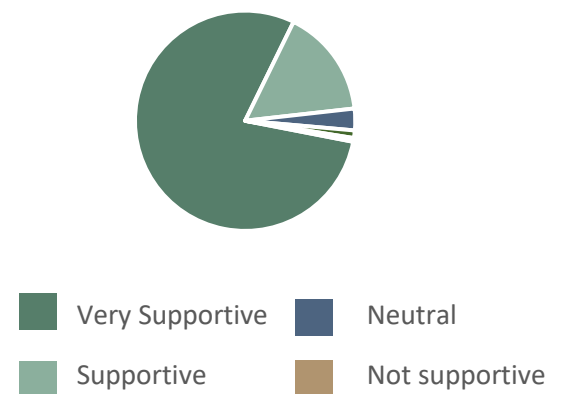
Farm animals were identified less often than other species throughout the surveys, however, 45% of respondents selected protections for farm animals as an important advocacy issue.

Helping struggling pet owners

Public and stakeholders were asked if they would support the OHS providing subsidized veterinary care for income-qualified pet owners. **The response was very supportive:**

- 78% of survey respondents are very supportive and 16% are supportive (94% total in support)
- Additional feedback provided focused on concern about who would qualify for help, as it was noted that middle-income earners are also struggling; what services would be offered; and ensuring the service was in an accessible location (public transit access).
- The veterinary community was overall very supportive although cautioned about ensuring the model serves the appropriate need and doesn't result in people acquiring more pets than they are not equipped to provide for.

Support for OHS veterinary care for owners

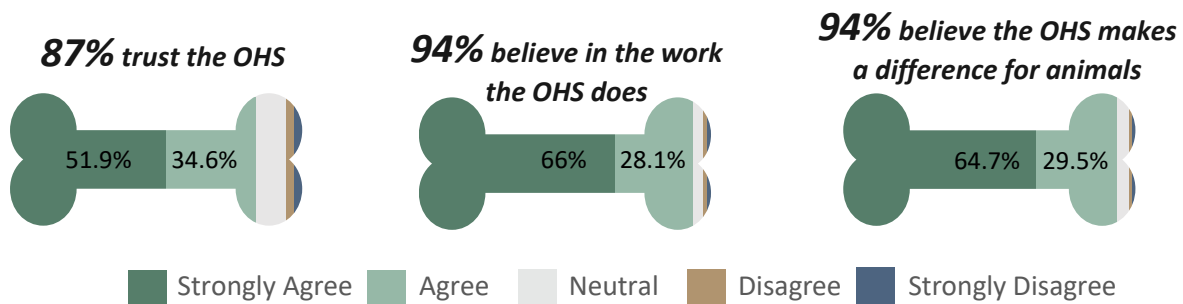




Strengths and improvements

The OHS asked its community *what it did well*, and how they felt about the OHS. This is what they said.

What does the OHS do well? (n=1507)	# of mentions
Care for OHS animals	463
Adoptions and rehoming	336
Communication, education and awareness	249
Advocacy for animal welfare	150
Support for pet owners in the community	106



When asked where the OHS could improve, 1,325 respondents shared their thoughts; top results included:

- Secure more positive outcomes
- Play a bigger role in providing spay-neuter services for the public
- Advocate more for anti-cruelty legislation
- Do more for stray and feral cats
- Provide more behaviour support for dogs and their new families
- Collaborate and build more bridges with the community, including local rescues
- Engage in more public education for adults



What's next: The OHS's path to helping at both ends of the leash

 **October 2023:** Consultation results reviewed in preparation for strategic planning.



 **November 2023:** Strategic planning sessions completed to create draft strategic plan.




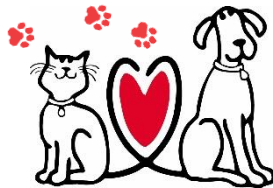
 **March 2024:** Strategic plan approved by OHS Board of Directors.



 **April 2024:** Strategic plan implementation begins.



 **2024 – 2029:** Better outcomes secured for more pets at the OHS and pets in the community.



The OHS relies on the support of a caring community to help animals in need today and to build a better future for all. Thank you for taking the time to read this report and for your interest in helping to build a more humane and compassionate community.

Feedback from this consultation, along with a variety of other relevant inputs, will be used to:

- Identify priorities and key investment areas;
- Prioritize community input in strategic planning; and
- Ensure all OHS programs are delivered efficiently and effectively.