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PAW
PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING REPORT 2017

The essential insight into the wellbeing of UK pets

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PDSA's history dates back to 1917.

Over the last century, we've helped over 20 million companion animals and their owners by providing free veterinary care for those who need it the most. Today, this is still at the heart of our work, treating people's beloved pets through our veterinary network. However, we're also a leading authority on pet wellbeing, and are committed to helping owners understand how to provide for the five welfare needs of their pets, and we work tirelessly to promote good pet wellbeing, both to this generation of pet owners, and to the next.

YouGov is one of the UK's leading research companies, providing accurate insights into what people are thinking and doing all over the world, all of the time.

The most quoted research agency in the UK, YouGov has an established track record of consistently accurate and high-quality survey-data, representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types. YouGov is delighted to be involved in the seventh *PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report*, monitoring changes in pet welfare issues across the UK.

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Foreword

We asked RCVS President Dr. Chris Tufnell to introduce the seventh PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report.

At the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons we are here to make veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses the best they can be – and we do that through setting, upholding and advancing veterinary standards.

We aim to ensure that the veterinary team can provide the best levels of care to animals and their owners, but the role of veterinary professionals is only part of the picture in terms of maintaining the health and welfare of the UK's pets. Animal owners themselves play a crucial role – one that is emphasised by the Animal Welfare Act.

By taking an annual sounding on the welfare of the UK's cats, dogs and rabbits, the PAW Report helps to provide a vital framework via which we can better understand where that partnership between animal owners and the veterinary profession can be improved.

Recent PDSA initiatives, such as the PetWise MOT, which provides a structure for veterinary consultations around the five animal welfare needs, have developed out of previous PAW Reports. I commend PDSA for really utilising the data and insights that they discover. So many research reports end up gathering dust on a shelf, but, now in its seventh year, PAW is one that continues to shape the future of the veterinary-owner relationship, to the great benefit of the UK's pet population.

Veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses advocate for animals' best interests not only in terms of the pets they see before them each day, but also at a local, national and even global level. Our recent Vet Futures project, carried out jointly with the British Veterinary Association, showed that veterinary surgeons were prepared to really challenge in this area, where they felt that animals were at risk, and the PAW Report provides useful data in terms of where that focus might lie.

The Vet Futures research also showed that the animal-owning public had great trust in veterinary surgeons – with 94% of members of the public surveyed saying that they trusted the profession. Yet the PAW Report indicates that **15% of animal owners have not yet registered their pets with a vet. The profession clearly needs to work hard to encourage more owners to understand the benefits of building a relationship with a veterinary practice**, not just for when things go wrong and healthcare is needed, but as a partner throughout a pet's life – in fact, even from the moment someone considers bringing an animal into their lives.

November 2017 marks the beginning of PDSA's centenary year, and it is only through continuing to listen, and be innovative in responding, that organisations remain sustainable for such a great length of time. The PAW Report is no doubt one of the initiatives that will enable the organisation to continue to thrive and remain relevant to the UK's pets, owners and veterinary professionals for many years to come.

Dr Chris Tufnell,
BVMS MRCVS
RCVS President

Methodology

Pet owner survey method

As with previous years, we have worked with YouGov to conduct public opinion research using their panel methodology. The total sample size was 4,153 dog, cat and rabbit owners aged 18+ who live in the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 23 February and 6 March 2017. The survey was carried out online and statistically analysed by YouGov.

Data analysis

The figures were weighted to be representative of the population by pet species (cat, dog or rabbit owners) and the owner's gender, age and region. Percentages throughout the PAW Report are rounded to nearest whole number. All differences between figures have been validated by YouGov and are statistically significant unless stated. When we refer to 'owners' we mean dog, cat and rabbit owners, not the owners of all types of pets.

When calculating approximate numbers of the population we've taken the population figure from this page, multiplied it by the percentage and rounded to two significant figures.

E.g. 19% of dogs are being left alone for 5 hours or more on a weekday. This equates to 9,300,000 x 0.19 = 1,767,000 dogs, which when rounded up is 1.8 million.

25%

of the UK population have a cat with an estimated population of 10.3 million cats.

25%

of the UK population have a dog with an estimated population of 9.3 million dogs.

Data from previous years

In this year's Report we've also included data from previous PAW Reports to highlight important findings and to compare trends over several years. Trends reported have been validated by YouGov and are statistically significant. We have not repeated the survey of veterinary professionals in 2017 but included data from the veterinary professionals' survey we undertook in 2016, and trends from across the veterinary professionals' surveys since the first PAW Report that was published in 2011.

Where 2016 professional survey data has been used, we have marked it with an asterix.

We surveyed:

2076 cat owners
1814 dog owners
263 rabbit owners

Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts

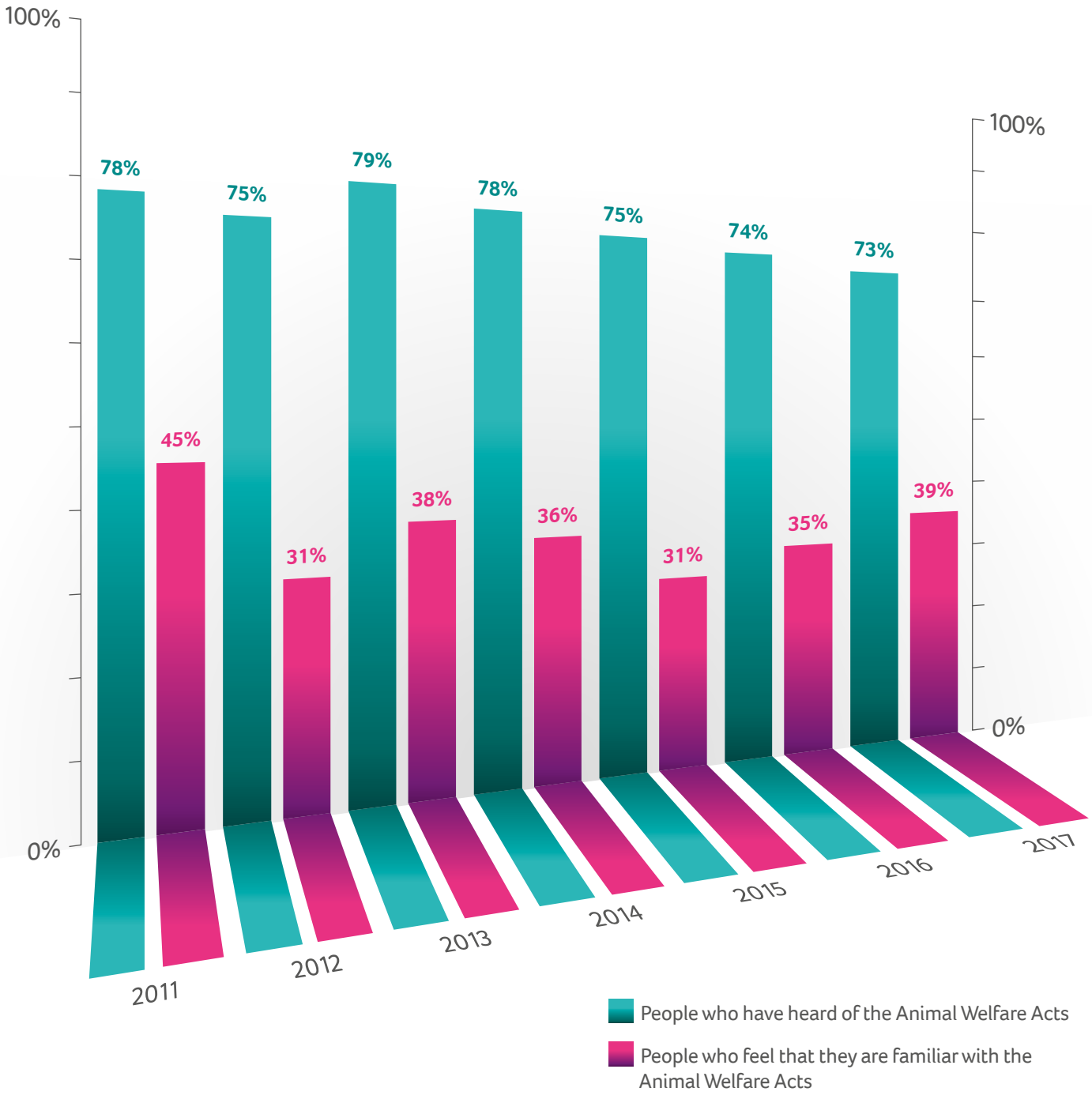
39% of owners stated that they are familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts, an encouraging improvement on 35% of owners in 2016, and 31% in 2015. However, with 34% of owners still feeling that they're not familiar with the Acts, and 27% never having heard of them, much work remains to be done to increase owner awareness of their legal responsibilities to their pets.

The Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition*, initiated as a Vet Futures action, brings together leading veterinary and veterinary nursing bodies with animal welfare charities delivering veterinary services, to raise awareness of the five welfare needs amongst UK pet owners.

Since launching in November 2016, to mark the 10th anniversary of the Animal Welfare Act, the group has produced a 5 welfare needs logo which the British Veterinary Association (BVA) has had made into popular stickers for vets and vet nurses to use when giving talks to groups of children.

During National Pet Month in April 2017, coalition members tweeted something each day that vets and vet nurses wished pet owners knew about their pets, which has reached thousands of supporters via the hashtag #WeWishYouKnew helping to raise awareness about providing for the five welfare needs of pets.

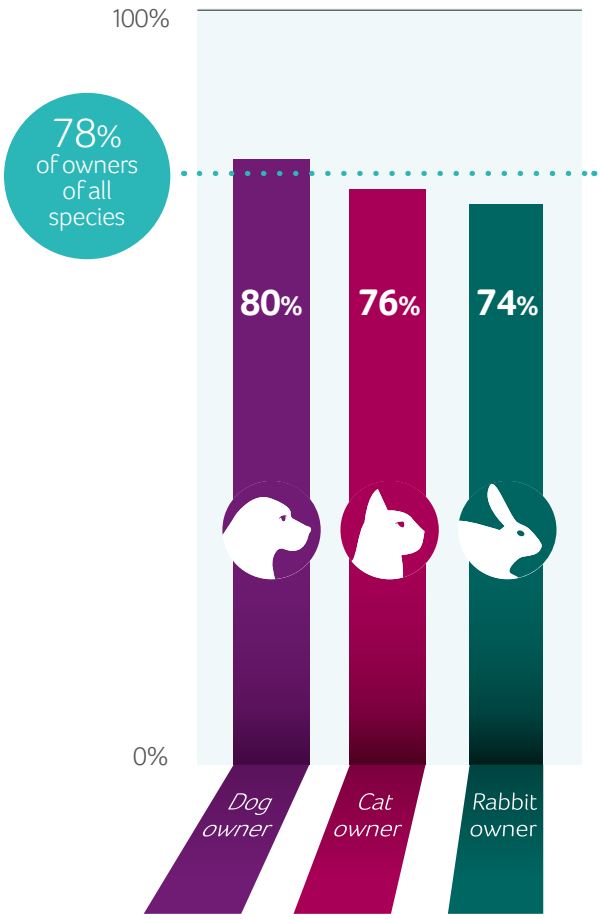
* British Veterinary Association (BVA), British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS), RSPCA, PDSA and Blue Cross.



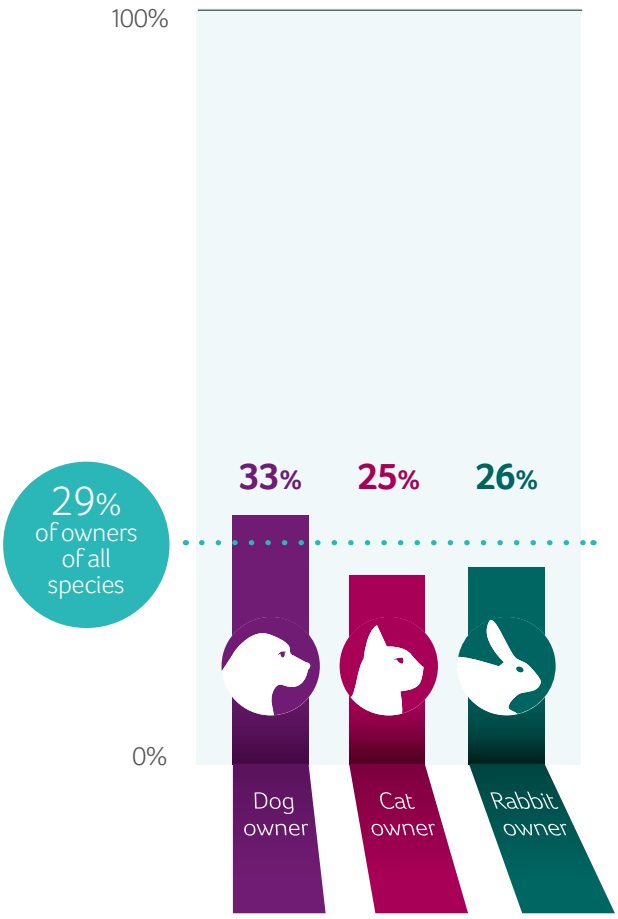
Awareness of the five welfare needs

Our 2016 Report showed that owners who feel informed about each of the five welfare needs were significantly more likely to provide preventive healthcare to their pets. This year, our analysis shows further interesting trends. For example, owners who don't feel informed about each of the five welfare needs are more likely to think that the lifetime cost of their pet will be less than £500. With expense being given as a reason for not providing some types of preventive care to cats, dogs, and rabbits, our data shows that knowledge of the cost of ownership is important for ensuring that the five welfare needs of pets are met.

Owners who feel **informed** about all of the 5 welfare needs

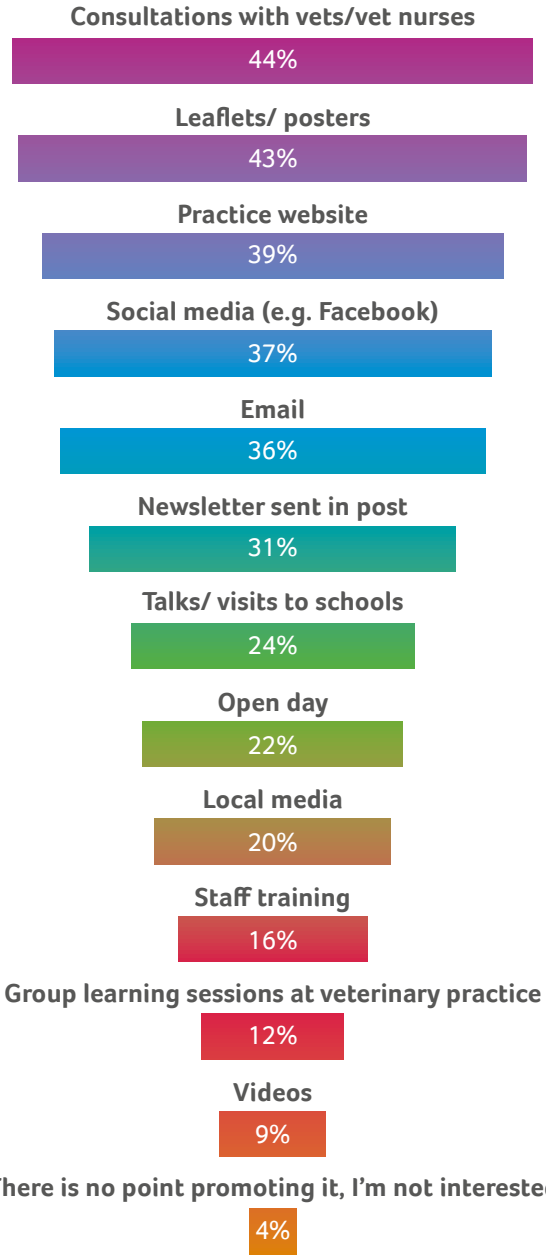


Owners who feel **very informed** about all of the 5 welfare needs



We asked owners...

What do you think is/are the best way(s) for a veterinary practice to promote awareness of the five welfare needs to you?



Interestingly, the top answer for this varied depending on the species owned. Dog owners preferred to have the five welfare needs promoted during consultations with a vet or vet nurse (47%), cat owners' first choice was for leaflets and posters (44%), whereas the rabbit owners preferred for this information to be communicated via social media (42%). It is possible that this relates to cat and rabbit owners feeling that trips to the vet are more stressful for their pets than dog owners. The preference for social media from rabbit owners may reflect the pet owner age demographics, as rabbit owners are more likely to be aged 18-34 (43%) than dog (23%) and cat (28%) owners.

'Animal welfare is vets' top priority, so it is great to see more owners than ever before saying that they know the five welfare needs of their pets. Yet with the ease of access to 'Doctor Google' we need to make sure that the advice we're getting online and via social media is credible – which is why BVA and other vet-led organisations have launched the Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition, to help owners better understand their pets' five welfare needs. It is encouraging that veterinary practices across the UK are still pet owners' go-to place for trusted information and advice, and your local vet-team will always be best placed to advise on your animal's specific welfare needs.'

Gudrun Ravetz
BVSc MRCVS
President, British Veterinary Association (BVA)

Dog contents

Key findings 11
Owner demographics 12
Pre-purchase research 12
Obesity 13
Behaviour 15
Training 16
Preventive health 16
Veterinary action areas 18
- Cost of ownership 18
- Obesity 20
- Unwanted behaviour 20
- Veterinary registrations 22
- Exaggerated conformation 22
- Top concerns of the veterinary profession relating to the welfare of dogs 22

Dog Owners

54% Female

46% Male

Key findings:

1.2 million dogs (13%) have received no training at all

1.2 million dog owners (13%) did no research at all before taking on their pet

93,000 dogs are never walked at all

Almost 1.8 million dogs (19%) are left alone for five hours or more on a typical weekday

92% of dogs are registered with a vet

25% of dogs have not had a primary vaccination course when young

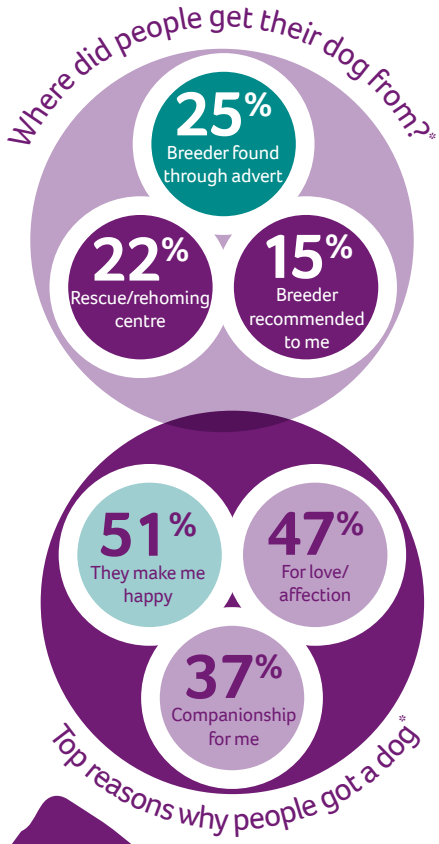
Dog owners

Pre-purchase research

Only 7% of owners say they'd turn to a veterinary professional for advice before taking on their dog, demonstrating that there is work to be done to convince potential owners that the veterinary profession should be their first port-of-call for knowledgeable, trusted pre-purchase advice.

13% of dog owners did no research at all before taking on their pet

Lack of research before getting a pet is having health and wellbeing implications for our nation's dogs. Reaching potential owners before they even take on a dog is crucial in ensuring their health and wellbeing.



Owner demographics

Owners of dogs are slightly more likely to be female (54%) than male (46%). 36% of dog owners are over the age of 55 compared to just 6% of dog owners being aged 18-24.

Owners aged 45 or older are more likely to walk their dog once a day or more than those between 25 and 45.

Owners aged 65 or over are less likely to leave their dog home alone for five hours or more on a week day than those under 65.

Owners who leave their dogs alone for 5 or more hours on a weekday are more likely to:

- be under 55 years old
- have a university degree or higher qualification
- earn £25,000 or higher
- be working full or part time or be a full time student than those who are retired, unemployed or not working.
- want to change more than one of their dog's behaviours.

Region

Fewer dog owners (6%) live in London than cat (12%) and rabbit owners (11%), and the same in the South East (dog owners 10%, cat owners 14%, rabbit owners 15%). Owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to have a dog (4%) than a cat (2%) or rabbit (1%).

England (16%) is significantly higher than Wales (6%) in percentage of owners who are scared that their dog will be attacked by another dog whilst out on a walk*.

What is the cost of dog ownership?

Size	Initial set up[1]	Minimum monthly cost[2]	Minimum annual cost[3]	Basic lifetime cost[4] (dependent on life expectancy)
Small Dog	£370	£70	£840	£6,500 - £12,000
Medium Dog	£390	£80	£960	£8,500 - £13,000
Large Dog	£425	£105	£1260	£7,400 - £17,000

For workings please see back page.

The minimum lifetime cost of dog ownership is estimated to be approximately £6,500 depending on the size of the dog

Building on our work from previous years to look at the cost of dog ownership, the table above shows the set up costs[1] for a new dog and the minimum monthly[2], annual[3] and lifetime[4] (see back page) costs necessary to ensure that the five welfare needs are covered.

This baseline approach will help owners understand the financial commitment of pet ownership. The actual cost of dog ownership is likely to be significantly higher once extra costs such as veterinary treatment, boarding fees, grooming and replacing accessories are taken into account. Additional costs to this baseline can be extremely variable from pet to pet and owner to owner. Whilst it's difficult to give a total cost of lifetime pet ownership, an estimate including some of these costs could bring the potential lifetime cost of dog ownership up to £33,000 depending on the size and breed of the dog.

When asked to estimate the lifetime cost of their dog, 69% of dog owners estimated lower than the minimum lifetime cost and 98% estimated lower than the potential lifetime cost showing that the vast majority of dog owners are still unaware of what their pet is likely to cost them.

Obesity

Since the first PAW Report in 2011, the veterinary profession has consistently stated that they are seeing an increase in pet obesity. The top reason cited for this was lack of exercise.

This year's data shows that 52% of dog owners walk their dog more than once a day (a marginal change from 2016 which was 49%) and 33% walk just once a day. Our research also shows 4.2 million dogs (45%) are only getting up to 30 minutes of exercise when they are walked and 93,000 are never walked at all (1%). This lack of exercise is likely to have both weight gain implications and to impact on a dogs' mental health.

Obesity has consistently been identified as one of the top three welfare concerns veterinary professionals have for dogs since our first PAW Report in 2011.

In 2016 the PAW Report found that 26% of dogs received scraps or leftovers as part of their main meal and many owners fed daily treats (27%). Current scientific literature suggests that around 40% of dogs are thought to be overweight or to have obesity, this is creating both health and welfare issues for dogs that owners can often be unaware of.

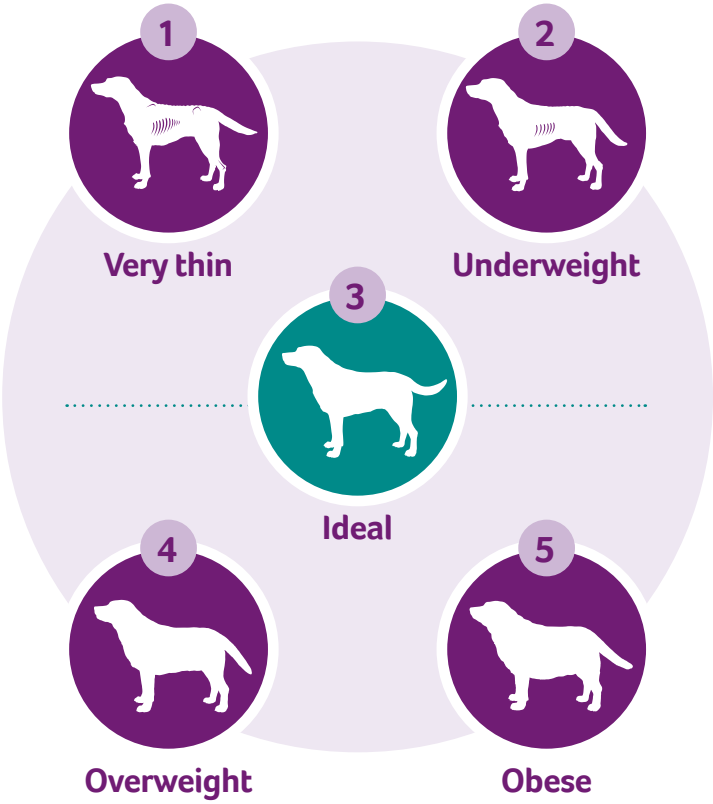
'Obesity is the most concerning disease of our time, and can cause a range of illnesses as well as affecting quality of life. The findings of the PAW Report mirror those of recent research studies in showing that owners often do not realise their pet has obesity, meaning that they are not getting the care they need.

To rectify this, veterinary professionals should be more proactive in their approach to obesity, giving owners clear guidance about the disease and how to prevent it. Such support is most effective when started early in life, such as at first vaccination. Tools like the Puppy Growth charts (**waltham.com/resources/puppy-growth-charts**) are a great way of ensuring puppies grow at the right speed and ensure they reach early adulthood at a perfect weight, setting them up for a long and healthy life.'

Professor Alex German
BVSc PhD CertSAM DipECVIM-CA MRCVS

As part of our research, owners were asked to match an outline of a dog's shape, ranging from Body Condition Score (BCS) 1-5, with the shape of their dog. **18% of owners matched images of body condition score 4 or 5 to their dog's current body shape,** however only 15% of owners said that their dog is overweight or had obesity. This indicates owners need more help recognising their pets have obesity.

Dog body condition score (BCS)



When owners were asked how they decide whether or not their dog is the correct weight, encouragingly the most popular choice (55%) was to get advice from their vet or vet nurse. However, just 19% of dog owners said a veterinary professional's advice is the main source of information they use when deciding how much to feed their dog.

- 19% use 'common sense'
- 18% past experience
- 12% use packet guidelines
- 14% use their dog's body weight or shape as a guide.

Only 15% of owners said that their dog is overweight or had obesity

19% of dogs in the UK are left for 5 hours or more on a typical week day

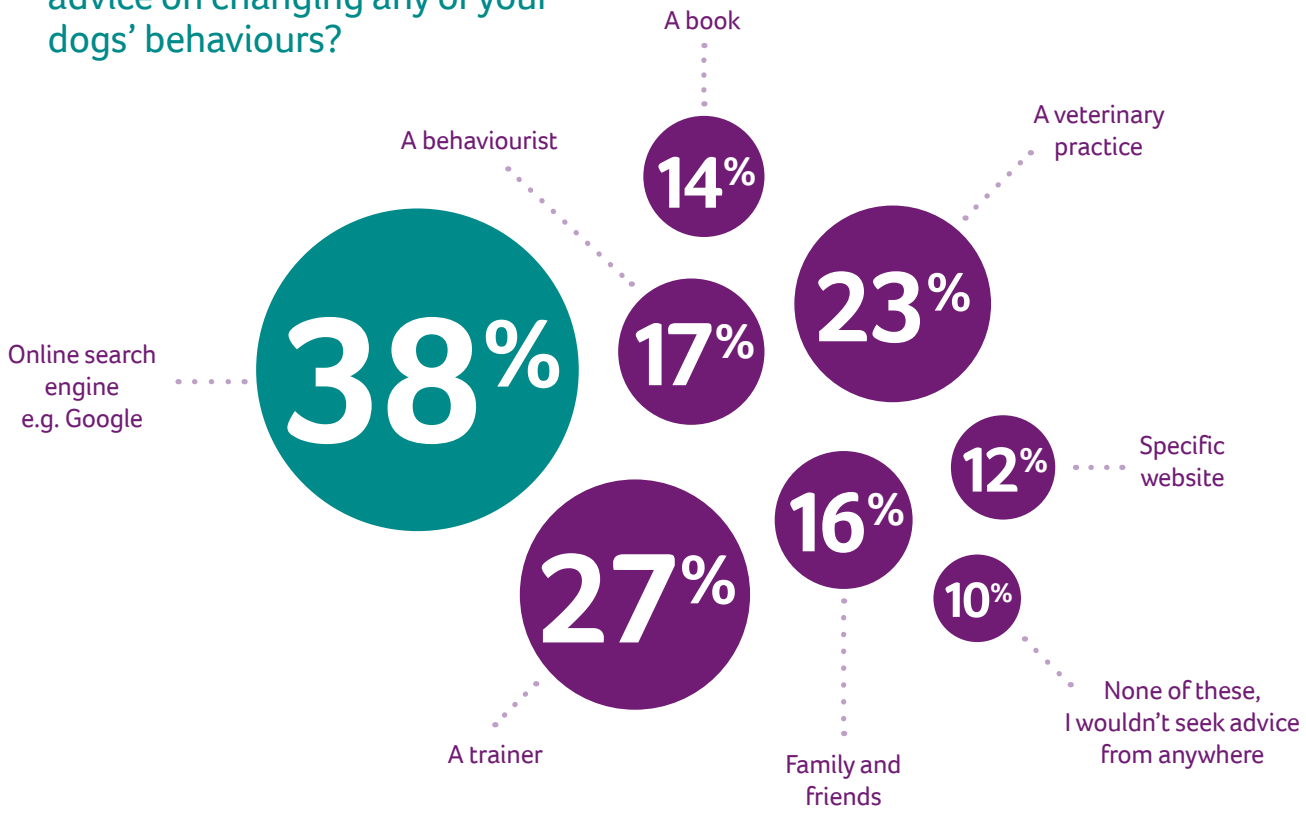
Behaviour

Dogs leading an inactive and unstimulating life will be at risk of boredom, which in some can lead to the development of unwanted behaviours, e.g. jumping up at people, not coming back when called. 66% of owners reported that they would like to change at least one behaviour shown by their dog, showing no difference from last year's findings.

Loneliness is also likely to be contributing to unwanted behaviours. However, findings show that there has been a small reduction in the root of this problem, from 23% of dogs being left alone for longer than recommended in 2011, reducing to 19% in 2017.

We asked owners...

Where would you go for initial advice on changing any of your dogs' behaviours?



'The statistics suggesting that many dog owners do not finish or even attend training classes is worrying especially since there appears to be a link between class attendance and a lower likelihood of behaviour problems developing in later life. Perhaps it's time to re-evaluate class design using similar approaches now used in children's schools and inviting the views of dog owners.

Regulation of the training and behaviour industry would go a long way in helping an owner source a trusted and reputable qualified trainer or behaviourist when looking for a suitable class or experiencing problems with their dog's behaviour - APBC continues to support the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) in its work towards achieving this.'

Rosie Barclay

MPhil CCAB Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist, past Chair Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC)

Training

In the last two years of the PAW Report there has been no significant change in the number of dogs that have received no training at all (13% this year and 12% in 2016). However, there has been a decrease in the number completing a course through regular dog training classes (16% in 2016, 12% in 2017) and a decrease in the number who went to one or more organised training classes (21% in 2016, 17% in 2017). This would suggest that training is becoming neglected as part of owning a puppy, and could explain in part some of the unwanted behaviours being reported.

Preventive health

8% of dog owners have not registered their dog with a vet, equating to around 744,000 unregistered dogs. This leads to concern that these dogs are not accessing vital preventive treatments and their owners are not being kept up-to-date with the services their local veterinary practice can provide, to help keep their dog happy and healthy.

Microchipping

The number of microchipped dogs continues to increase with 93% of dog owners saying their pet has been chipped. This high level can be largely attributed to the legislative change introducing compulsory microchipping in April 2016. Levels of dog microchipping have risen year on year from just 70% in 2011. Despite this, we found that 11% of dog owners still don't know that their dog must be microchipped by law.

93% of dog owners believe that their details are up to date on the microchip database that they use. Of these, 6% of dog owners say they have relied on their veterinary practice to ensure that these details are up-to-date, whereas the remainder haven't changed their details or have updated them themselves. 7% of dog owners have either not updated their details when they needed to or are not sure whether or not the details are up-to-date.

Insurance

Over 4.2 million dogs are not insured (45%), a marginal change from last year (43%). The top reason owners provide for not insuring their dog is that they think insurance is too expensive (46%).

Neutering

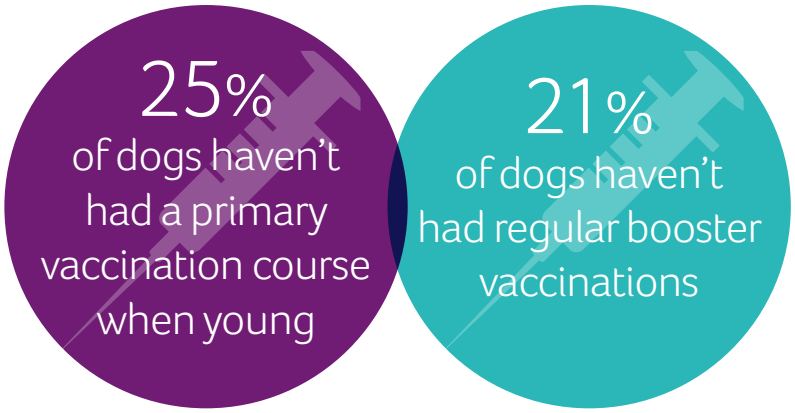
29% of dog owners said that their pet is not neutered, and of these 19% say this is because they don't believe in it. A significant proportion hadn't thought about it (16%), would like to breed from their pet (13%) or simply hadn't got around to it (12%). These figures emphasise the importance of regular health checks at the local veterinary practice so preventive healthcare that has lapsed can be highlighted and actioned, and any concerns or possible misconceptions about preventive healthcare can be discussed with clients.

Vaccination

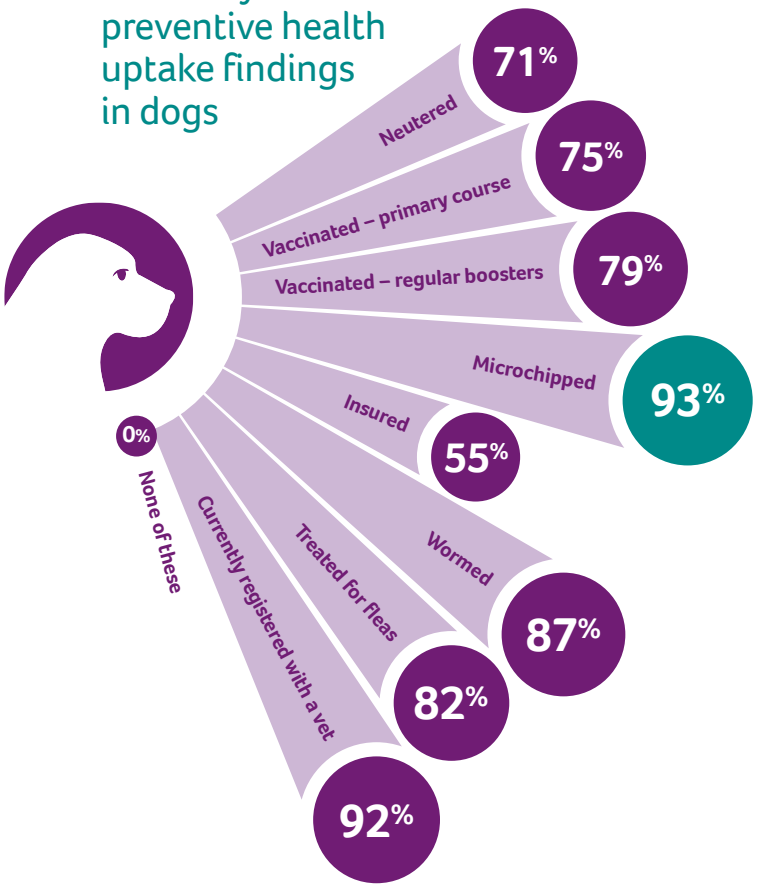
25% of owners say their dog has not had a primary course of vaccinations when young (2.3 million dogs), a significant increase from 2016 when this figure was 12%, resulting in potentially 1.2 million more dogs being unprotected. Additionally, 21% of dogs haven't had regular boosters.

Expense is the top reason given for not vaccinating (20%). These figures help support the case that owners need to understand the full cost of pet ownership before they get a pet.

Additionally, of owners who hadn't vaccinated, 14% said they didn't think it was necessary and 16% said that their dog didn't come into contact with other animals. These findings clearly show there is a need to help owners understand the necessity of vaccinations.



Summary of preventive health uptake findings in dogs



"These are valuable data contained within the latest PAW Report and should be of concern to UK practitioners. The WSAVA strongly promotes vaccination as one element of an integrated preventative healthcare programme for companion animals (the annual health check). Maintaining the level of herd immunity to key vaccine-preventable infectious diseases should be the aim of every first opinion veterinarian in all of the 86 WSAVA member countries. It is of particular importance to establish robust immunity with core vaccines in the early life of puppies and kittens and the latest recommendations are contained within the 2015 WSAVA vaccination guidelines. The Vaccination Guidelines Group (VGG) also provides an on-line educational document for pet owners and breeders to help explain the importance of vaccination in lay language."

Professor Michael Day

BVMS PhD BSc DiplECVP FASM FRCPath DSc FRCVS
Chairman of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) Vaccination Guidelines Group

Veterinary action areas

£ Cost of ownership

Choosing a new pet is an exciting time, but this can often cause decisions to be dictated by emotions. It's important that we help owners to look at the facts too, so they can choose a pet that best fits with their home circumstances and lifestyle.

Only 7% of dog owners spoke to a veterinary professional before taking on their dog

Veterinary professionals are perfectly placed to help prospective pet owners make this important decision. Our 'Which Pet?' consultation framework is freely available on our website (**pdsa.org.uk/whichpet**) to help veterinary professionals guide potential owners through the decision making process.

GET SET FOR THE RIGHT PET✓

We need to make potential dog owners aware that vets and vet nurses can be their first port-of-call for friendly, knowledgeable, local advice. This would help them to make an informed decision on not only which breed could be right for their lifestyle, but also how to provide for their prospective dog's five welfare needs, the cost and time implications of dog ownership and, importantly, how to find a puppy responsibly and avoid puppy farms.

Getting the right pets in the right homes is a vital first step to ensuring that they have a lifetime of wellbeing.

Which Pet? consultation resources are free to download at: **pdsa.org.uk/whichpet**. These include: a client booklet, step-by-step guide for veterinary professionals, e-learning module and promotional poster/leaflet which can be personalised for your practice.

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HELP A VET HELP A PET

Obesity

Obesity is consistently one of the top welfare concerns the veterinary profession has for dogs. In 2016, 35% of veterinary professionals stated that if not tackled, obesity would be the issue that has the biggest health and welfare implication for pets in ten years' time and it has consistently been one of the top three issues that need to be addressed in dogs as identified by veterinary professionals since the first PAW Report in 2011.

Many practices are now offering specialist weight loss clinics, usually with nurses guiding owners through the process. Our 'Pet Fit Club' weight loss campaign has brought this issue to the attention of the national media, and we've had some great success stories over the years with our finalists. **Often just ensuring an owner is aware that their dog is overweight is the first step in helping trigger a weight loss journey**. It can also help to ensure that the owner is aware of the health and welfare implications for their overweight or obese pets.

As with many things, prevention is better than cure. PDSA, working with leading veterinary obesity specialist, Dr. Alex German, has helped WALTHAM™ develop Puppy Growth Charts. These are used in practice to help identify puppies that may be growing too quickly and therefore at risk of getting obesity, and are now freely available to all UK vet practices (**waltham.com/resources/puppy-growth-charts**)

Our findings show that people most often feed their pets treats as they think it makes them happy, so we've developed video advice on tackling obesity, which also demonstrates how effective alternative methods of positive reward and praise can be. **This can be found on our YouTube channel.**

Another aspect covered in our obesity videos is how owners can body condition score their dog. This helps owners to be more aware of the shape of their dog and we'd encourage vets and vet nurses to help owners with this during weight clinics or conversations, as a first step towards being aware of any problem with their pet's weight.

Unwanted behaviour

Vets and vet nurses can help their clients' puppies get the best start in early life by holding puppy socialisation events. As a profession, we can also raise awareness amongst owners that it's best not to routinely leave dogs alone for longer than 4 hours at a time. If clients are struggling with this aspect it's useful to be able to recommend local dog walkers that can be engaged to relieve the boredom of dogs being left alone during the day. Providing mental and physical stimulation is essential for their health and wellbeing and helping to prevent obesity.

Dog owners need appropriate professional help when dealing with unwanted behaviours. 23% of owners said they would seek help with behaviour problems from a veterinary professional, 17% from a behaviourist and 27% from a trainer. 38% of dog owners would use an online search engine such as Google and 10% would not seek advice from anywhere at all.

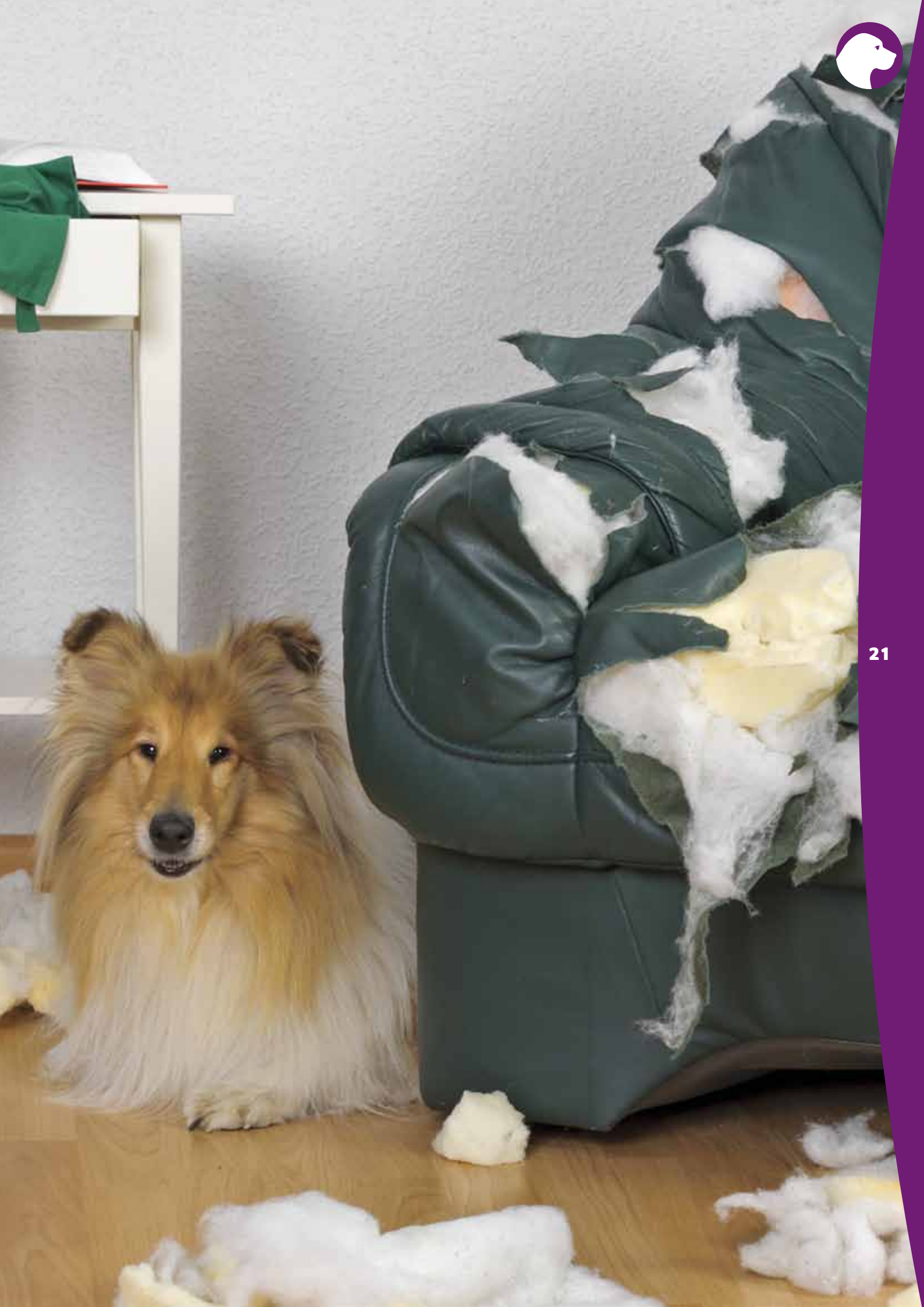
Raising awareness of the Animal Behaviour and Training Council, the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers UK is essential in assisting owners to access the right help when they need it most. Many practices will have ABTC-registered behaviourists and trainers working locally, who use kind and effective methods, and who they can refer to and recommend to clients.

ABTC
ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR & TRAINING COUNCIL
APBC
A.P.D.T UK
ASSOCIATION of PET DOG TRAINERS

abtcouncil.org.uk

apbc.org.uk

apdt.co.uk



Veterinary registrations

It is vital that we try to reach the 8% of dogs that are not registered with a vet. If a dog is not registered with a vet then it's unlikely the owners will have accessed appropriate healthcare and it's a missed opportunity for us to advise the owner on their dog's health and wellbeing.

We'd like to help veterinary practices become recognised as hubs for animal wellbeing in their local communities, and an owner's first port-of-call for advice on anything to do with their pet. In this way we can ensure owners are receiving the most up-to-date, evidence-based advice on which to base their decisions when taking care of their pet.

Engaging pet owners before they even get their pet, to help them in the decision-making process, would be a great step forwards in reaching more of the pet owning public.

8% of dogs are not registered with a vet

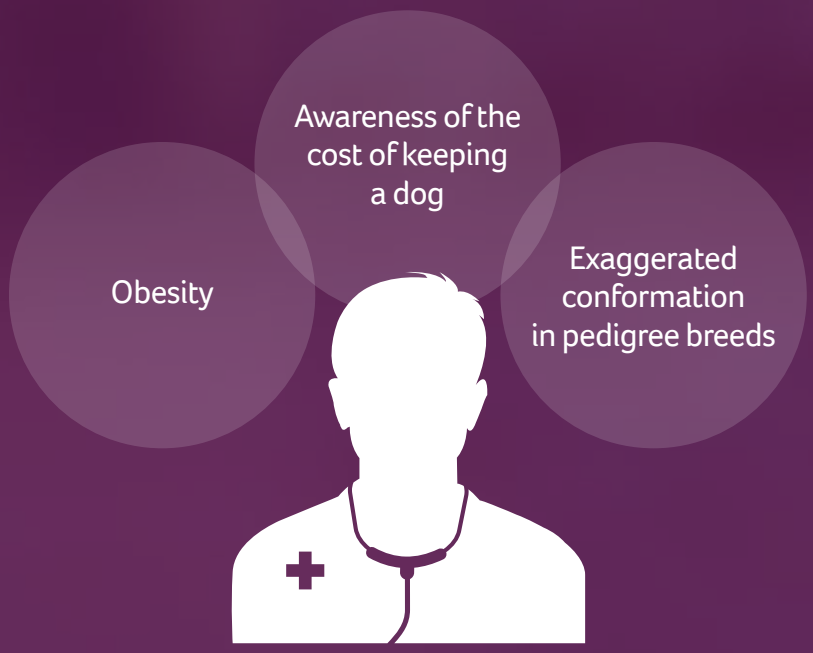
Exaggerated conformation

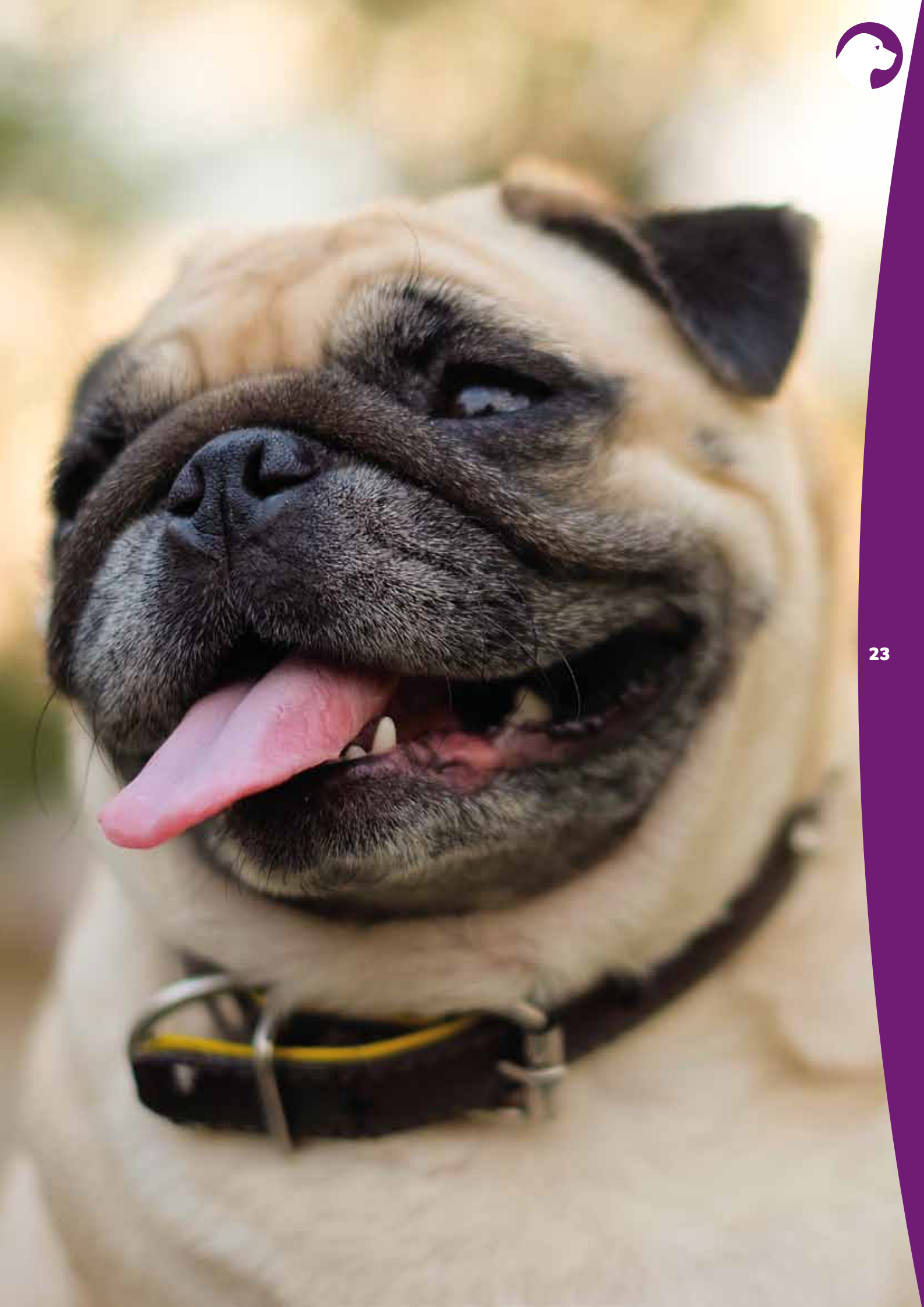
Exaggerated conformation in pedigree breeds remains a very topical issue, particularly with brachycephalic breeds. This is such a vital area where engagement with the public is key, to reduce the high demand for these breeds of dog.

Conformation in pedigree breeds is also listed as one of the top three welfare issues that veterinary professionals identified as needing to be addressed in dogs*. When asked what issues, if not tackled, would have the biggest implications in ten years' time 28% of veterinary professionals selected this issue. As veterinary professionals, it is important that we increase public awareness of the health and welfare problems that dogs can suffer from when looks are selected for rather than health of the breed.

PDSA is a member of the multi-organisation Brachycephalic Working Group, continues to work as an advisor to the Dog Breeding Reform Group (DBRG) and supports the work of the Campaign for the Responsible Use of Flat Faced Animals (CRUFFA) to help raise public awareness on this issue.
As a profession it is important to ensure images we use (e.g. practice marketing and using images on social media) only show healthy breeds and avoid contributing to the problem of normalising brachycephalic and extreme breed conformations.

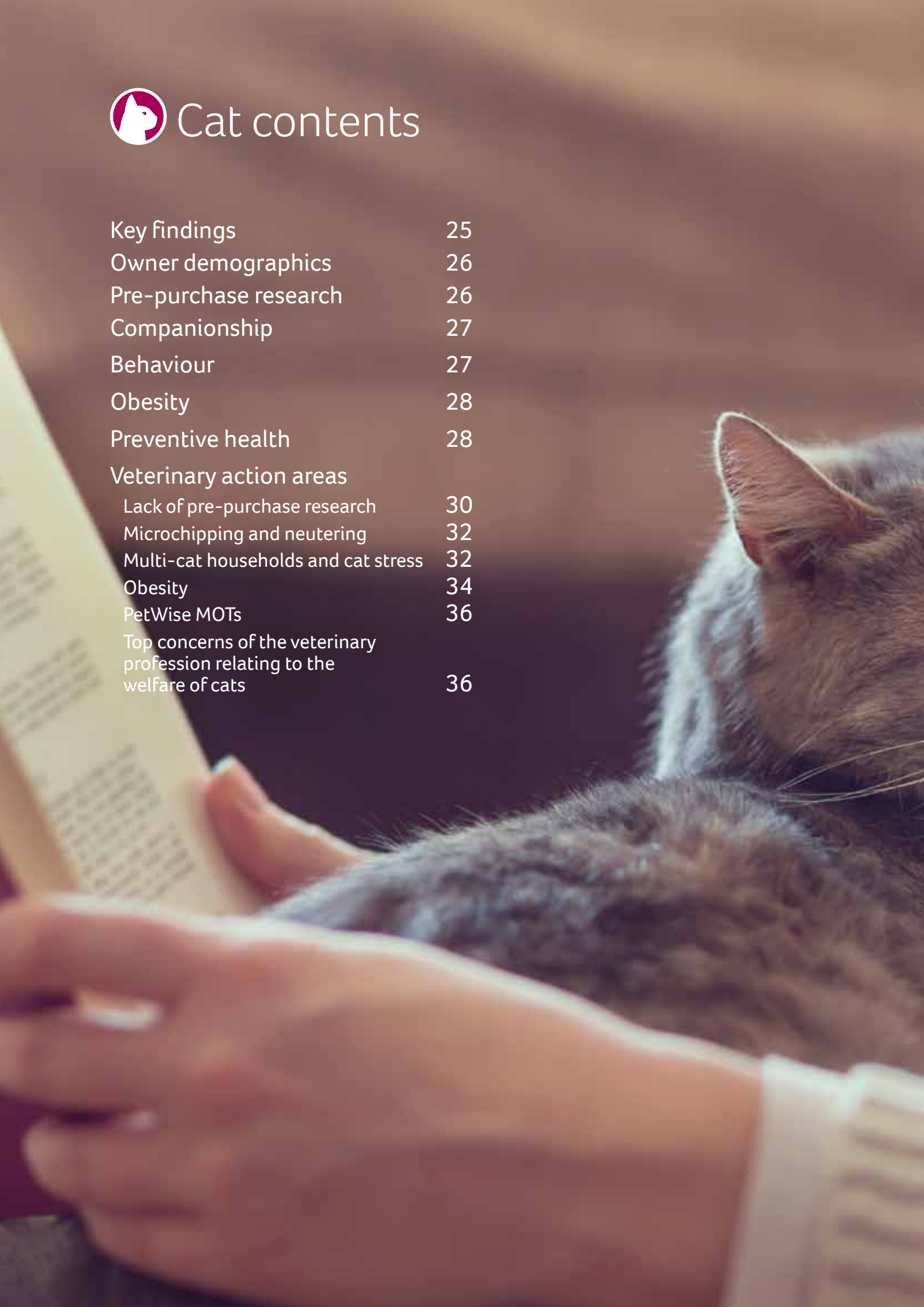
Top concerns of the veterinary profession relating to the welfare of dogs*





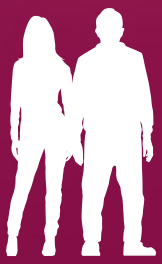
Cat contents

Key findings 25
Owner demographics 26
Pre-purchase research 26
Companionship 27
Behaviour 27
Obesity 28
Preventive health 28
Veterinary action areas
- Lack of pre-purchase research 30
- Microchipping and neutering 32
- Multi-cat households and cat stress 32
- Obesity 34
- PetWise MOTs 36
- Top concerns of the veterinary profession relating to the welfare of cats 36



Cat owners

58% Female



42% Male

Key findings:

98% of cat owners underestimated the potential lifetime costs of cat ownership

On a scale of 1 to 5, 50% of cat owners matched images of Body Condition Score 4 or 5 to their cat's current body shape

62% of owners report they'd like to change one or more of their cat's behaviours

Over 4.3 million cats (42%) live in a multi-cat household

36% of cats are not microchipped

35% (3.6 million) cats have not had a primary vaccination course when young

Cat owners

Pre-purchase research

As part of our research, we've calculated the minimum lifetime cost of caring for a cat to be £12,000 but could extend to a potential lifetime cost of £24,000. 96% of cat owners underestimated this minimum lifetime cost, and 98% of owners underestimated the potential lifetime cost, with 15% thinking that their cat will cost less than £500 over his or her entire lifetime.

24% of cat owners said they did no research at all prior to taking on their pet, which is likely to be a major factor in the lack of awareness of lifetime costs of owning a cat. With 33% of veterinary professionals* stating that the full cost of caring for a pet is something which is often least understood by owners, there is work to be done in raising awareness on this issue.

15% of cat owners estimated their cat would cost less than £500 over their entire lifetime

Owner demographics

Owners of cats are more likely to be female (58%) than male (42%). Male cat owners (62%) are more likely to have just one cat than female owners (56%).

- Households with five or more inhabitants are more likely to have 3+ cats than those with fewer people living there.
- 24% of cat owners are aged 25-34 compared to just 5% of cat owners being aged 18-24.

Region

More cat owners live in London (12%) than dog owners (6%). Cat owners living in the North of England are more likely to have just one cat than those living in the South of England.***

- Scotland (42%) is significantly higher than Wales (24%), Northern Ireland (14%) and England (24%) in percentage of cat owners whose cat lives indoors only.
- Cat owners aged 18-25 are more likely to provide no opportunities for exercise than all other age groups**.

**Further PAW Report 2016 data analysis

***Not statistically different to other English regions (Midlands, London, East of England)

What is the cost of cat ownership?

Species	Initial Set up[1]	Minimum monthly cost[2]	Minimum annual cost[3]	Basic lifetime cost[4] (dependent on life expectancy)
Cat	£250	£70	£840	£12,000

For workings please see back page.

We estimate the minimum lifetime cost of cat ownership to be approximately £12,000

The table above shows the set up costs[1] for a new cat and the minimum monthly[2], annual[3] and lifetime[4] (see back page) costs necessary to ensure that the five welfare needs are covered. This baseline approach will help owners understand the financial commitment of pet ownership.

The actual cost of cat ownership is likely to be significantly higher once extra costs such as veterinary treatment, boarding fees, grooming and replacing accessories are taken into account. Additional costs to this baseline can be extremely variable from pet to pet and owner to owner. Whilst it's difficult to give a total cost of lifetime pet ownership, an estimate including some of these costs could bring the potential lifetime cost of cat ownership to around £24,000.

Companionship

58% of cats live as the only cat in a household, however 4.3 million cats (42%) live in a multi-cat home. 2.1 million cats (20%) don't get along with another cat or cats that they live with. This could be a real source of stress for many, as cats normally prefer to live alone.

There has been little change in the number of cats living in multi-cat households since 2015, when 43% of cats did so.

There is evidence to suggest that cat owners are not providing enough resources for their cats; in particular 34% of cat owners do not have any cat beds with the same percentage not providing any scratching posts.

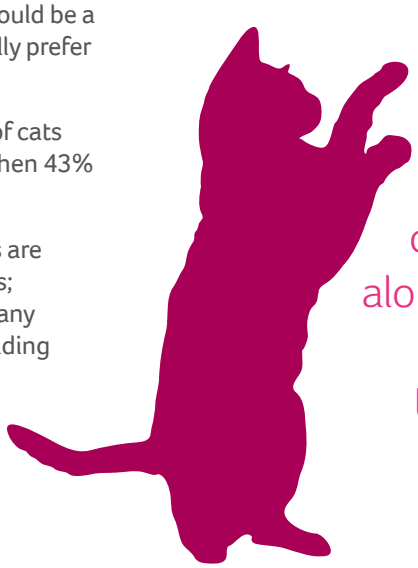
Behaviour

Cats can react to stressful situations in a variety of different ways. Toileting in the house outside the litter tray can be due to multifactorial reasons, many of which are an expression of the cat feeling stressed in some way. 29% of cat owners provide no litter trays within the home. 9% of cat owners reported they would like to change their cats' inappropriate toileting in the house.

930,000 cat owners (9%) want to change their cats' inappropriate toileting in the house

40% of cat owners who would like to change at least one behaviour in their pet said they'd turn to a veterinary practice for advice and 45% would use an online search engine.

62% of owners report they'd like to change one or more of their cat's behaviours



2.1 million cats don't get along with another cat or cats they live with

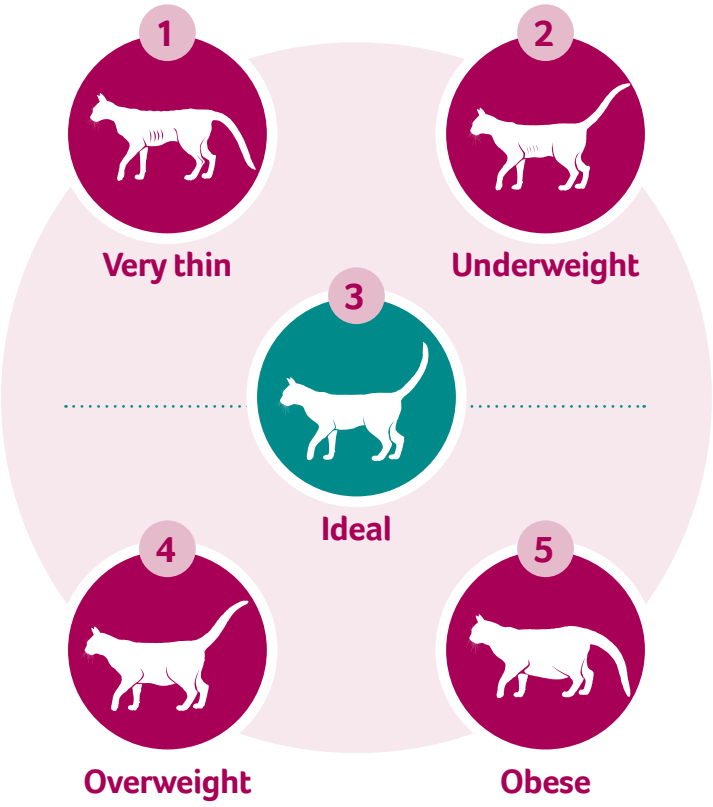
Obesity

Current scientific literature suggests that around 40% of cats are thought to be overweight or to have obesity. **On a scale of 1 to 5, 50% of cat owners matched images of body condition score 4 or 5 to their cat's current body shape** but only 17% of owners said that their cat is overweight or has obesity. Owners need to be helped to get a clearer idea about body condition scoring in cats.

When deciding how much to feed, only 8% of cat owners use packet guidelines while 25% use common sense, and 20% use past experience. 13% of cat owners stated that they use advice from their vets when deciding how much to feed. When it comes to treats, we've found that 51% of cats are given commercial cat treats, 13% have cheese and 21% have dental treats at least once a month. The top answers cat owners gave for wanting to give their pets treats were that it makes the cat feel happy (45%) and to provide variety for them (42%).*

With so many owners believing the key to keeping their cats happy is to give them extra food, this could be one of the reasons that there has been no sign of improvement in pet obesity.

Cat body condition score (BCS)



Preventive health

Microchipping

36% of cats are not microchipped. The top reasons owners give for this is that they feel their cat is unlikely to stray (31%), don't feel it's necessary (22%), they haven't thought about it (12%) or their cat is not out unsupervised (13%).

12% of cat owners said they hadn't updated their details for their cats microchip since they'd changed address, or did not know if their cat's microchip was up-to-date.

Although microchipping was made compulsory for dogs in April 2016, this is not the case for cats, although it is referenced in the Codes of Practice under the Animal Welfare Acts.

Neutering

The Cat Population Control Group, which consists of nine veterinary and animal welfare organisations including PDSA, recommends neutering of kittens at 4 months old. 90% of cat owners have had their cats neutered. However, 13% of owners of a female cat say that their cat has had at least one litter. 70% of those owners said that their cat's pregnancy was unplanned. Of those that hadn't had their cat neutered (10%), the top reason for this was that the owner hadn't thought about it (24%).

Although 52% of cat owners believe it is not necessary for a cat to have a litter before being neutered, 12% believe that they should (and 36% don't know).

Owners of female cats who have had at least one litter are more likely to live in urban (13%) or town and fringe (14%) environments than those living in rural environments (5%).

With 61% of veterinary professionals* recommending neutering at 4 months, there is still some work to be done in raising awareness of the need to do this in the profession as well as amongst cat owners.

Vaccination

3.6 million cats (35%) have not had a primary vaccination course when young. This is a significant increase from 2016 when this figure was just 18%, resulting in potentially 1.6 million more cats being unprotected. Additionally, 46% of cats haven't had regular boosters.

The top reasons given by owners for not vaccinating were that their cat didn't come into contact with other animals (24%), that they believe vaccinations are unnecessary (22%), and that they were too expensive (20%).

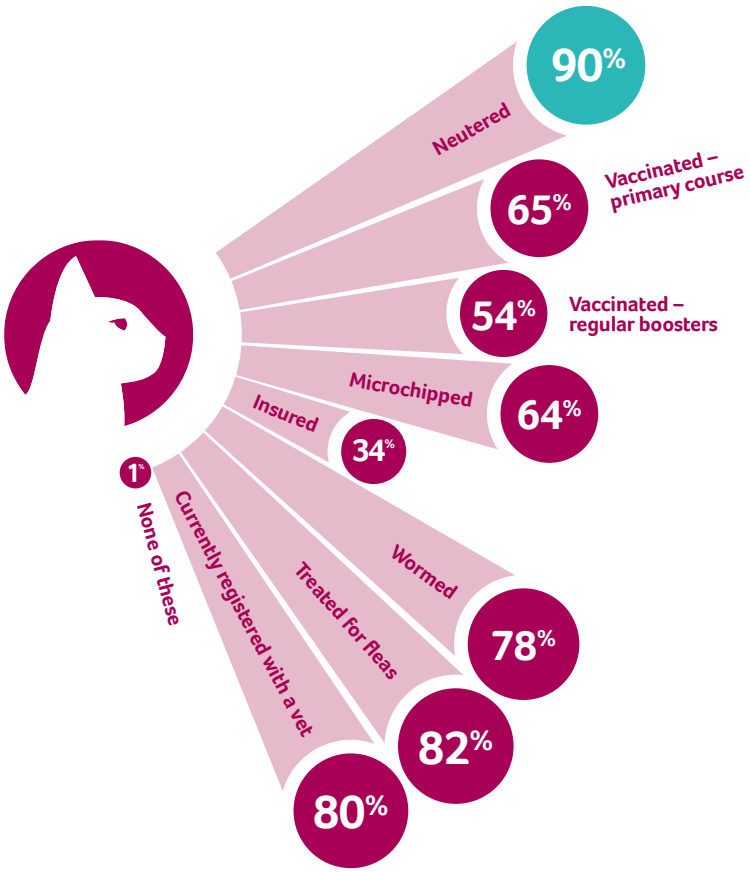
Of those that thought vaccinations were not necessary, 13% said that this was because they didn't know what the benefit was, 10% thought there are more risks than benefits to vaccination, and 13% didn't know why they thought they were unnecessary.

These findings indicate that there is a need to raise awareness of the benefits of vaccination amongst cat owners.

35% of cats haven't had a primary vaccination course when young

46% of cats haven't had regular booster vaccinations

Summary of preventive health uptake findings in cats



Veterinary action areas

Lack of pre-purchase research

Without appropriate research, potential owners may be unlikely to know how to properly provide for their cat's five welfare needs, causing their wellbeing to be compromised. The owner may not be aware that most cats prefer to live on their own, or that they need to be provided with adequate resources such as litter trays, scratching posts and food and water bowls when they live in multi-cat households (one per cat plus one extra of each resource type). Owners also may not know that cats should be neutered at 4 months old and about other preventive health care necessities without properly researching their new pet before getting them. Reaching potential owners before they even take on a cat is crucial in ensuring that animal's lifelong health and wellbeing.

Only 4% of cat owners spoke to a veterinary professional before taking on a new pet

With the vast majority of cat owners underestimating the minimum lifetime cost of pet ownership, we have worked to raise awareness amongst pet owners, and those thinking of getting a pet, of the costs entailed, as well as promoting the advisory role that vets and vet nurses can play in providing advice on all things pet-related.

In particular, we'd like people who are thinking about getting a new pet to use their local vet practice as their first port-of-call when considering which pet or particular breed they might want to get. Last year, we launched 'Which Pet?', a pre-purchase consultation framework to guide vets and vet nurses through a conversation with potential pet owners.

These consultations are designed to frame a conversation with a potential owner around the key areas they need to consider before getting a pet, including their five welfare needs and the time, cost and lifestyle implications that come with ownership of different species or breeds. **Our aim is to get the right pets in the right homes where their needs are well provided for from the outset**. We hope, in time, to see an improvement on our finding of just 4% of cat owners seeking advice from a vet or vet nurse before getting a cat.

The resources to run a Which Pet? consultation are free to download at: **pdsa.org.uk/whichpet** and include a client booklet, step-by-step guide for veterinary professionals, e-learning module and promotional poster/leaflet which can be edited to personalise for your practice.

'*Which Pet*? consultations are designed to help vet professionals to guide potential owners through all the areas they need to consider before taking on a pet, including the five welfare needs and the time, cost and lifestyle implications that come with pet ownership.'

Microchipping and neutering

The top reason given by owners for not microchipping their cats is that they think they are unlikely to stray (31% of owners who haven't had their cat microchipped). Work needs to be done in this area to encourage greater uptake, specifically highlighting that any cat can stray or be unfortunate enough to be hit by a car and be taken for emergency veterinary care, at which point identification via a microchip is often the best and quickest way to be able to notify the owner.

Although it's very encouraging to see that 90% of owners have had their cat neutered, a very high statistic, there are still many cats having litters first. Work needs to be done to continue to promote 4 month neutering in kittens, as recommended by the Cat Population Control Group. Although awareness amongst the profession of 4 month neutering is growing, it's important to ensure that this translates to owners so they can make an informed decision to neuter at the right time. PDSA promotes 4 month neutering across our veterinary network.

'This report does show that owners want advice for their pets' life and well-being beyond just their health and as a Veterinary Team we need to be thinking of multiple ways of getting that message out. We also need to consider all species that we commonly see so that each pet is thought of as an individual.

We want to encourage owners to come to the practice for all enquiries and receive quality, evidence-based knowledge that will mean a happier future for both the owner and their beloved pet.'

Samantha Morgan
Cert Ed DipAVN (Medical & Surgical) RVN
President, British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA)

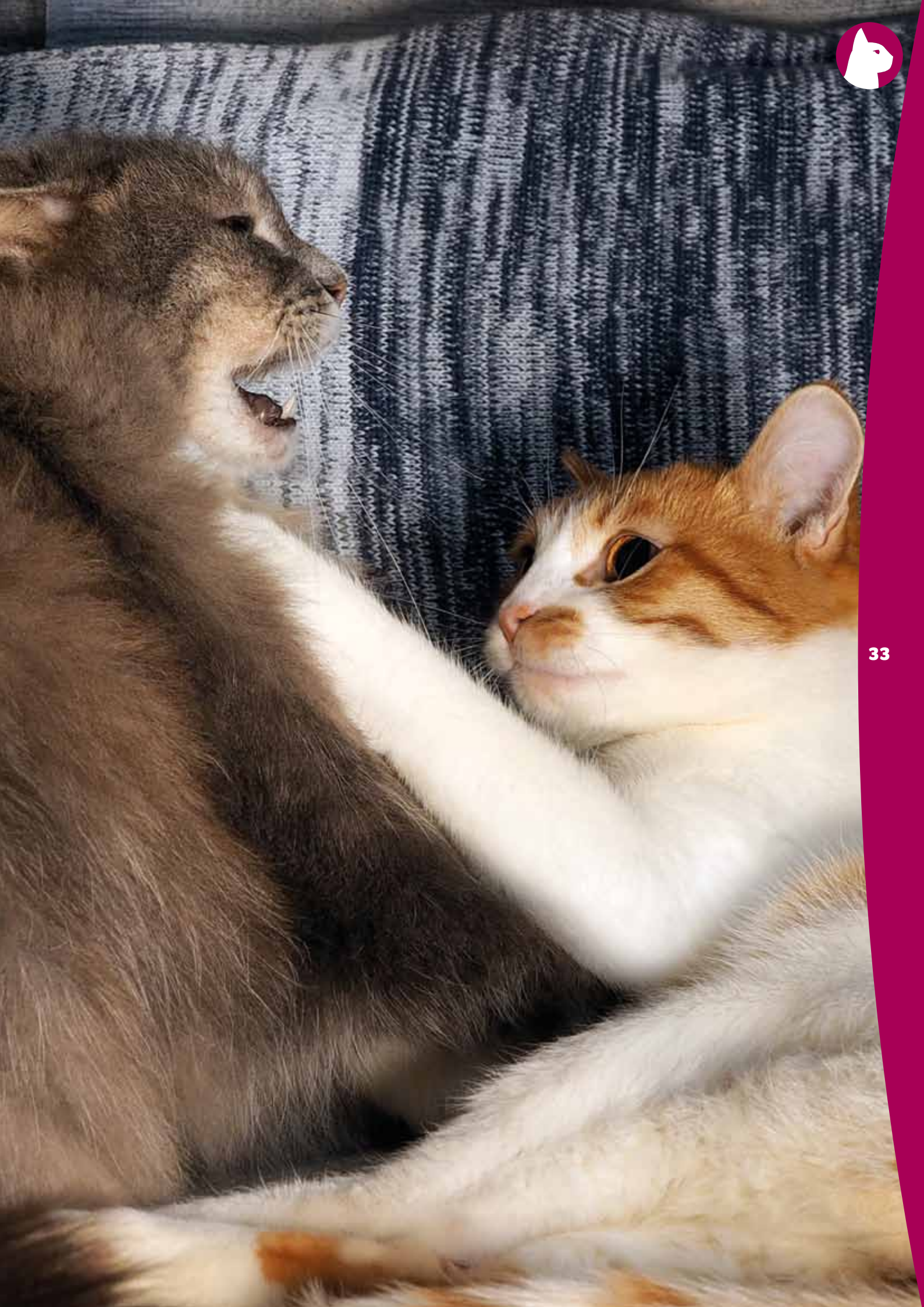
Multi-cat households and cat stress

Many owners may not be aware that cats are naturally solitary animals and tend to prefer living away from other cats. Unfortunately, as reflected in this Report, many owners also do not know the number of resources that need to be provided to help ensure harmony in a multi-cat household. This means ensuring beds, food and water bowls, scratching posts and litter trays for each cat, plus one extra, to be spaced around the house. If these needs are not provided for this can cause significant stress, and linked medical problems in cats. With this year's findings showing that over a third of owners have no bed for their cat and the same number not providing any scratching posts, there is work to be done to raise awareness of a cat's environmental needs.

As stress is related to various health problems such as urinary tract disease, it is vital that any potential causes of stress in a cat's life are identified and tackled.

We have produced a leaflet for cat owners to explain how to help cats that suffer from stress related bladder problems. This is available to download at **pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet/kittens-and-cats**

We have also produced a video to help clients minimise stress when travelling to the vet practice, available on our YouTube channel. Please feel free to use these to help cats in your practice.



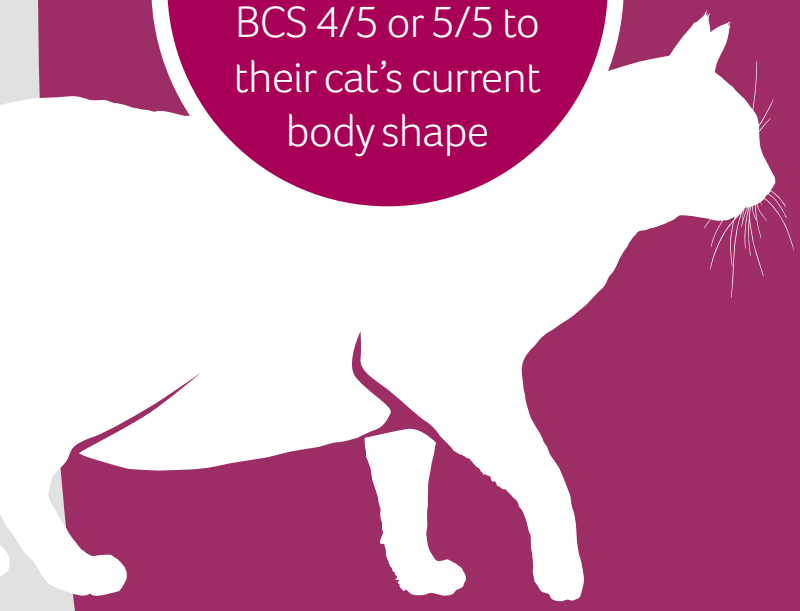
Obesity

With such a large percentage of cats being overweight or having obesity, now is the time to raise awareness of the correct weight and body shape for cats.

Many owners with overweight cats don't realise that their pet is not a healthy weight, so raising awareness and supporting owners to create a weight loss plan for their cat is key. Many practices will provide nurse weight loss clinics for overweight or obese pets.

We know owners like to provide treats for their pets and that the top reason for owners giving cats treats is to make their cat feel happy. With this in mind, it's worth helping owners to find a healthy way to treat their cat (for example as part of a more balanced diet, adjusting main food allowance if using treats and include help to increase exercise) to improve compliance.

50%
of owners matched images of BCS 4/5 or 5/5 to their cat's current body shape



'Owner underestimation of body condition has been identified as a risk factor for feline obesity in multiple scientific studies, so it's of great importance to help owners understand what constitutes a healthy body condition. It is also important to help owners understand that cats do not need treats to make them feel happy – a far better way of providing positive enrichment is through play, which also provides valuable exercise. International Cat Care recognises that it is not only what we feed our cats that can contribute to obesity, but also the way in which we feed them, which is often both behaviourally and physiologically unnatural for cats.

Our 'Five-a-Day Felix' report on this details simple changes we can make to our feeding practices to improve the health and welfare of our cats.'

Dr. Lizzie Rowe
BA (Hons) MA (Cantab) PhD
Distance Education Co-ordinator, International Cat Care

Many owners with overweight cats don't realise that their pet is not a healthy weight

PetWise MOTs

An important way that PDSA is tackling all these issues and raising awareness amongst owners about their cat's five welfare needs is through our PetWise MOT consultations.

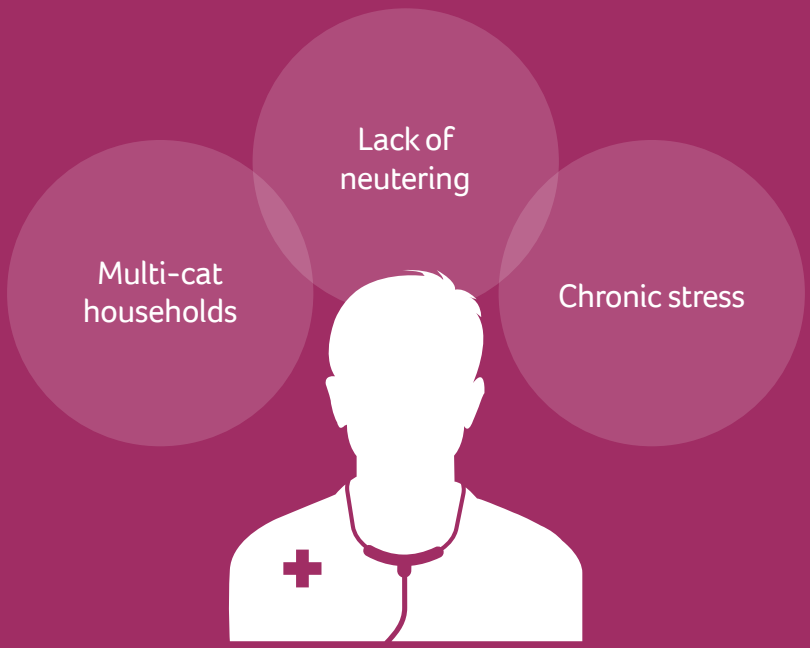
This gives vets and vet nurses the platform to discuss any issues and help the owner to improve the health and wellbeing of their pet. The issues prioritised will depend on the individual cat, but a clear focus in many cat PetWise MOTs is to identify any potential areas of stress so these can be minimised, as well as encouraging uptake of preventive health measures.

Thanks to generous funding from The Marchig Animal Welfare Trust we've been able to provide in excess of 83,000 PetWise MOTS for cats since September 2014.

Details about CPD training covering how to deliver a PetWise consultation can be found at **pdsa.org.uk/petwise**

PDSA PetWise MOTs are dedicated appointments with a vet or vet nurse where the five welfare needs of the pet are discussed, assessed on a traffic light scale and an action plan produced with the owner to help improve the wellbeing of the pet.

Top concerns of the veterinary profession relating to the welfare of cats*



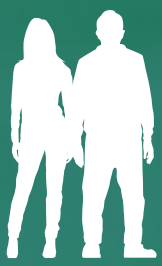
HELP A VET HELP A
Robert

Rabbit contents

Key findings 39
Owner demographics 40
Pre-purchase research 40
Inappropriate diet 41
Companionship 42
Behaviour 42
Environment 42
Preventive health 43
Veterinary action areas
- Lack of awareness 46
- Pre-purchase research 46
- Diet 48
- Neutering 48
- Improve owner understanding of rabbit needs 48
- Top concerns of the veterinary profession relating to the welfare of rabbits 48

Rabbit owners

50% Female



50% Male

Key findings:

35% of rabbits live in inadequate housing

25% of rabbit owners feed rabbit muesli mix as part of their main diet

33% of rabbits are not being fed the correct amount of hay

44% of rabbit owners would like to change at least one of their rabbits' behaviours

56% of rabbits are still living alone

44% of rabbits have not been neutered

50% of rabbits have not had a primary vaccination course

32% of rabbits are not registered with a vet

Rabbit owners

Owner demographics

Owners of rabbits are equally likely to be male (50%) as female (50%). 32% of rabbit owners are aged 25-34 compared to just 13% of owners being over the age of 55.

- Owners of small / dwarf rabbits (16%) are less likely to feed rabbit "muesli" (a mix of seeds and flakes) than owners of medium-sized rabbits (30%).
- Significantly more female rabbit owners are feeding the right amount of hay (53%) than male owners (38%).
- Rabbit owners who are familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts are more likely to feed the right amount of hay (60%) than owners who are unfamiliar with it (39%).
- Owners who have registered their rabbits with a vet are more likely to be feeding the right amount of hay (54%) than those than those who aren't registered (29%).
- Owners of male rabbits are significantly more likely to house them alone (67%) than the owners of female rabbits (35%).

Pre-purchase research

Lack of research before getting pet rabbits continues to be a concern, with 8% of rabbit owners saying they did no research at all before taking on a pet. This may negatively impact on the way the new owner provides for their rabbits' welfare needs.

92% of rabbit owners underestimated the minimum lifetime cost of rabbit ownership, which we estimate at approximately £3,500 for one rabbit, or £6,500-£9,000 for a pair of rabbits and 97% of rabbit owners underestimated the potential lifetime costs for a pair of rabbits, which could be as high as £30,000.

It's clear that engaging with owners before they get their pets will be essential in improving the health and wellbeing of rabbits.

We estimate the minimum lifetime cost of rabbit ownership to be approximately £6,500 - £9,000 per pair of rabbits depending on life expectancy.

What is the cost of rabbit ownership?

Species	Initial set up[1]	Minimum monthly cost[2]	Minimum annual cost[3]	Minimum lifetime costs[4]
Pair of rabbits	£570	£70	£840	£6,500 - £9,000

For workings please see back page.

The table above shows the set up costs[1] for a new pair of rabbits and the minimum monthly[2], annual[3] and lifetime[4] costs (see back page). With 47% of rabbit owners using previous experience for knowledge before getting their pet, it is possible that owners will continue to feed inappropriate diets (that were historically more popular) and keep rabbits in hutches that are too small, unless they learn from up-to-date research. 32% of rabbit owners say they researched online before getting their pet, which reinforces how important it is to help owners find information from reputable sources.

Inappropriate diet

Inappropriate diet has been consistently identified by the veterinary profession* as the number one issue that needs to be addressed in rabbits in each PAW Report since 2011.

25% of rabbits continue to be fed muesli mix as part of their main food, which is a significant reduction since our first Report in 2011 (49%) but still equates to 280,000 rabbits being fed a harmful diet. The percentage feeding hay (75%) and pellets (75%) as main food sources is the highest since 2011, which is encouraging (62% and 53% respectively in 2011).

Worryingly, there continues to be a significant percentage of rabbit owners who don't feed enough hay, with 31% being fed less than their own body size daily (the recommended amount) compared to 33% in 2016 and 26% in 2015.

'The PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report has, for several years, been a very useful guide to the health and welfare of the nation's rabbits. This has helped to inform us, as a charity, of the most pressing areas of concern for rabbit welfare, and this year, for Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW), it reinforces the need for an emphasis on hay as the central part of a rabbit's diet. Whilst there is good news from the newest PAW Report, with a significant decline in the number of rabbits being fed muesli mix - from 49% in 2011, down to 24% this year - there is still a long way to go. For example, around a third of owners still don't feed enough hay to their rabbits. 31% of rabbits are still fed less than their own body size in hay (the amount recommended by experts). RAW aims to focus on improving owners' awareness of hay as the main component of a rabbits diet.'

Richard Saunders

BVSc BSc CertZooMed DZooMed (Mammalian) MRCVS
Veterinary Advisor, Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund (RWAF)

Companionship

Unfortunately, 56% of rabbits still live alone. Although an improvement on 2011 (67%), this important issue needs vast improvement for such a social species. Lack of appropriate companionship was identified as one of the top three issues that need to be addressed in rabbits by veterinary professionals (27%)*.

45% of veterinary professionals* cited a complete lack of care (i.e. rabbits being forgotten about) as one of their top three concerns for the species.

Behaviour

44% of rabbit owners report that their rabbits display one or more unwanted behaviours that they'd like to change. The top behaviours selected were thumping their back feet (14%) and biting the bars of their run or hutch repeatedly (12%).

"SPVS supports the on-going message of heightening owner awareness of basic welfare needs. Practising veterinary surgeons are a trusted source of information and are ideally placed to continuously educate clients in these basic needs through veterinary consultations, nurse clinics as well as 'over the counter' receptionist advice. For example, practising veterinary surgeons can help raise awareness surrounding welfare-compromising deformities and husbandry practices by encouraging pre-purchase conversations with prospective pet owners."

Brian Faulkner
BVM&S MBA MRCVS
President, Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS)

Environment

This year we asked whether pet rabbits lived predominantly inside or outside the owner's house. **We found that 59% live predominantly outside and 41% live predominantly inside the house.** When owners were asked to choose an image that most closely resembled their rabbits' living arrangement, we found that 35% of rabbits are being housed inappropriately (20% outside, 15% inside).

Exacerbated by so many living alone, these factors are causing boredom and loneliness in rabbits, leading to behavioural manifestations of their stress.

Preventive health

Neutering

44% of rabbit owners report that their rabbits are not neutered. Of those that haven't neutered their rabbits, 13% stated that it was because it was too expensive and 31% hadn't thought about it.

Vaccination

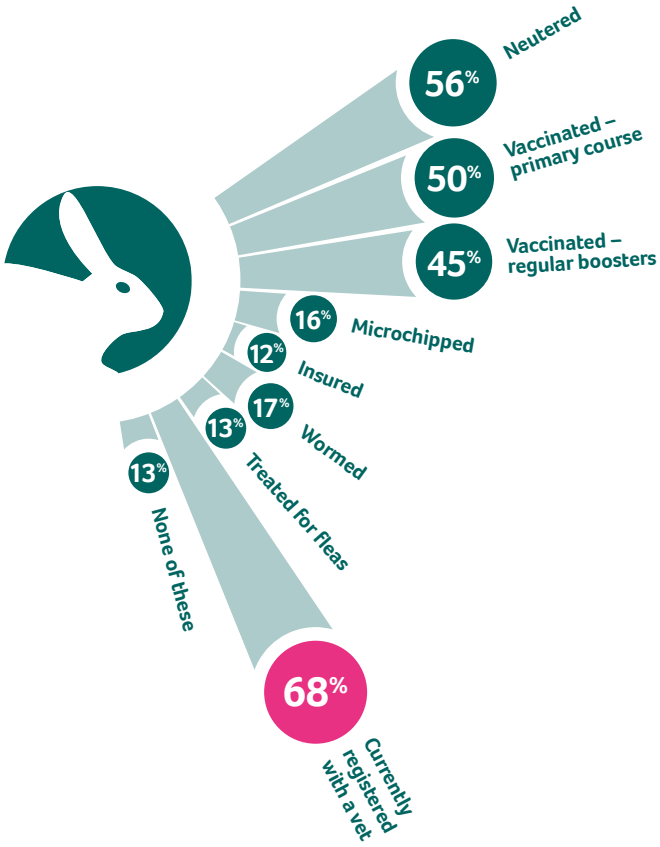
50% of owners said their rabbits had not been given a primary course of vaccinations when young, an increase compared to last year's findings (37%), however 55% said their rabbits hadn't had regular booster vaccinations which is a decrease from 60% in 2016.

32% of those who have never vaccinated their rabbits stated that this was because they thought vaccines were not necessary, and 10% stated that this was because it was too expensive, emphasising the need to raise awareness of the importance of vaccinations and the costs of rabbit ownership.

Veterinary registration

68% of rabbits are registered with a vet. Our research shows that owners who have registered their rabbits with a vet are more likely to feed pellets (83%) than those who are not registered with a vet (59%). Similarly, owners who have registered with a vet are less likely to feed muesli mix (17%) than those who have not registered with a vet (41%).

Summary of preventive health uptake findings in rabbits



50% of rabbits haven't had a primary vaccination course when young

55% of rabbits haven't had regular booster vaccinations

"It is genuinely worrying to see the fall in numbers of pet animals receiving primary and booster vaccinations. The current vaccination levels in cats and rabbits are far below the levels expected to provide a "herd immunity effect" with the consequence that significant reductions in these diseases are further away, and those pets not vaccinated are at even greater risk.

In particular it is deeply worrying to see the fall in vaccinated rabbits. The recent advances in myxomatosis vaccines mean that it is now much easier and cheaper to ensure more complete protection of pet rabbits from what is a common and lethal disease. The advent of RHD-2 virus in the last couple of years also seems to have failed to stimulate more owners seeking vaccination for their rabbits, especially given the publicity that this has generated.

It is clear that as a profession we are failing to persuade owners that vaccination is essential and good value for the vast majority of pets, and this is an area where all bodies must come together and put out a coordinated and vigorous message."

John Chitty
BVetMed CertZooMed MRCVS
President, British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)

Where did people get their rabbits from?*
40% Pet Shop
16% Rescue/ rehoming centre
15% Family or friends
Top reasons why people got a rabbit*
34% They make me happy
25% Children wanted a pet
31% Had one before

Veterinary action areas

Lack of awareness

These findings indicate the need to raise the profile of rabbits as complex, social animals who need more than just a hutch at the bottom of the garden. We need prospective and current rabbit owners alike to be aware of their need for companionship, space to hop, run, jump and dig, an appropriate diet and access to preventive healthcare. With over half of all rabbits still living alone, 25% being fed muesli-type food and 31% not being fed enough hay, evidence suggests that owners are not doing the necessary research prior to taking on a rabbit or understanding what their pet needs. It seems that there is still some way to go to help owners to understand how to provide a happy and healthy life for their rabbits.

Without adequate prior research, a new owner may not have considered:

- Rabbits are highly social animals and should live in compatible pairs or groups
- They need a large, secure hutch with constant access to a large run with toys and places to hide
- They can be neutered from 3 months (males) to 4 months (females) of age
- They need a small amount of pelleted, rather than muesli-type food and the rabbits' body size in hay to eat each day.

Reaching potential owners before they even take on pet rabbits is crucial in ensuring their long term health and wellbeing.

Only 6% of rabbit owners spoke to a veterinary professional before taking on a new pet

Pre-purchase research

To address lack of owner research before taking on a pet, our 'Which Pet?' consultations are specially designed to engage and advise pet owners on the welfare needs and lifestyle commitments to pet ownership. Vets and vet nurses are perfectly placed to advise prospective rabbit owners on their five welfare needs including how important having a companion and the right size and type of enclosure are. Also covered are their preventive health and dietary requirements as well as time and financial commitments. **Getting the right pets in the right homes is a vital first step to ensuring that they have a lifetime of good wellbeing.**

The resources to run a Which Pet? consultation are free to download at: **pdsa.org.uk/whichpet**. These include: a client booklet, step-by-step guide for veterinary professionals, an e-learning module and a promotional poster and leaflet which can be edited to personalise for your practice.

'Anybody considering rabbits as pets should have access, before purchase, to reliable and up-to-date information about husbandry, nutrition, healthcare and the significant lifetime cost of ownership. The pet industry and the veterinary profession have started working together to develop new pre-purchase educational resources, which we hope will support modernisation of pet sales legislation and universal uptake of best practice. The aim should be that all prospective purchasers have a realistic understanding of the care and welfare requirements of rabbits before taking them home.'

Dr Mark Stidworthy
MA, VetMB, PhD, MRCVS, FRCPath
President, British Veterinary Zoological Society

Diet

Encouraging owners to feed the correct amount and type of hay and to feed pellets instead of muesli mix is key to dental and digestive health in rabbits. Our research shows that owners who register their rabbits with a vet are more likely to do both of these things than owners who have not registered. This emphasises the importance of contact with rabbit owners in vet practices across the UK, to help them understand the needs of their pets. Many veterinary practices sell pellet food and good quality feeding hay for rabbits, which, as a minimum, may stimulate a conversation with the client about what they are feeding their rabbits and to make clear what the profession recommends.

Last year's 'Buddies for Bunnies' Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) campaign helped to raise public awareness that rabbits are social pets that need companionship of their own kind. This year's RAW will focus on diet, encouraging people to ensure they are feeding the correct amount of fibre and pelleted rather muesli-type food. It will also emphasise the importance of providing good quality feeding hay, over and above the rabbits' bedding hay. PDSA is a partner in RAW, helping to raise awareness of rabbits' welfare needs and how to meet them.

Neutering

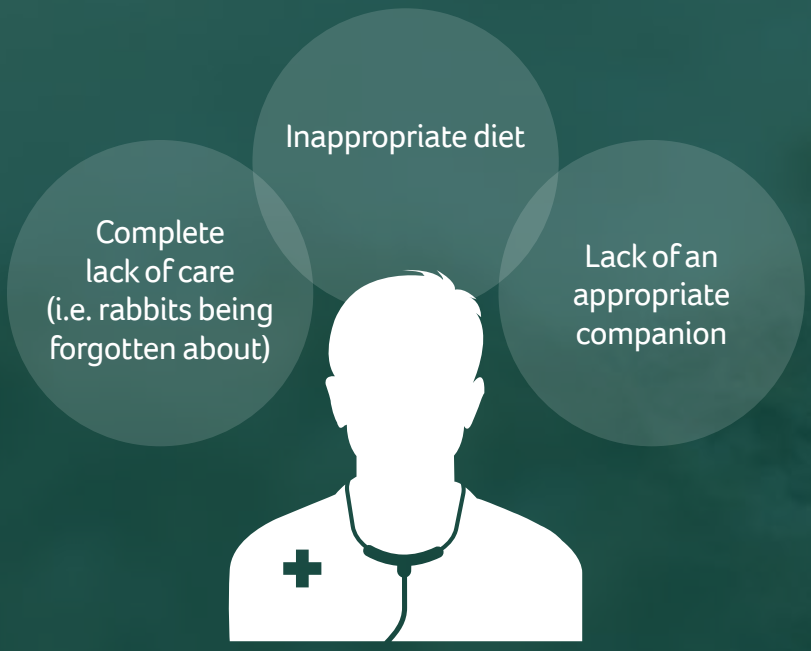
Neutering is an essential factor for ensuring this social species can have the companionship of other rabbits, in harmony and without unwanted pregnancies. Additionally, 80% of female rabbits over the age of five are at risk of developing uterine carcinoma (cancer of the uterus), so it is essential we tackle this by increasing owner awareness of the benefits of neutering in rabbits. It's important for vets and vet nurses to be proactively raising awareness of neutering rabbits amongst rabbit owners. Equally, raising awareness of vaccination should be just as highly recommended to rabbit owners as it would be to dog and cat owners.

Improve owner understanding of rabbit needs

Our PetWise MOT consultation framework is a great way to discuss the five welfare needs of rabbits with an owner and assesses how those needs are being met in an easy to use traffic light system. We have produced a telephone version of the PetWise MOTs for rabbit owners to help ensure they can access veterinary advice regarding the welfare of their rabbits, while helping to avoid what can often be a stressful journey for rabbits.

A follow-up appointment at the practice can then be encouraged if a problem becomes apparent during the telephone conversation. All clinical staff in our Pet Hospitals receive training in running PetWise MOTs. We have now extended this to private practices and run low-cost CPD days across the UK; for more details visit: **pdsa.org.uk/petwise**

Top concerns of the veterinary profession relating to the welfare of rabbits*



Concluding thoughts

Over the last seven years, the PAW Report has continued to track the health and wellbeing of UK pets. Despite some positive changes, it's clear there is still much work to be done to ensure the five welfare needs of pets are being met, and encourage responsible pet ownership. A better understanding of the demographics of pet owners, and how these factors link to care provision for pets, allows us to target who owns our nation's pets. Knowledge about where these pets are living allows us to target initiatives more effectively, encourage behaviour change and track positive welfare improvements across the UK.

Collaboration with the veterinary profession and other veterinary charities is proving to be a strong channel for pet wellbeing messages. The Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition*, formed in 2016, is providing clear and co-ordinated messaging to raise awareness of the five welfare needs to the public, and is emphasising the invaluable role of veterinary practices in reinforcing these messages. As a founder member of the coalition, PDSA believes this unified veterinary voice will help boost owners' familiarity with the five welfare needs and Animal Welfare Acts. Despite a slight increase on last year's finding, only 39% of owners are familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts. Although 78% of owners feel informed about all of the five welfare needs, there are still many areas of concern. This fundamental issue needs to be addressed before we see significant improvements in each aspect of pets' lives.

Reaching owners before they get a pet is the most significant step that can be taken to ensure they are aware of their five welfare needs and how they will meet them. 3.8 million pet owners are not doing any research before taking on a pet, a number we are committed to help reduce. Our 'Which Pet?' consultation framework and e-learning module supports vets and vet nurses to have a pre-purchase conversation with clients and tackle potential welfare issues before they arise. Veterinary professionals are perfectly placed to help pet owners responsibly navigate the journey of pet ownership. By finding out how to responsibly get a pet and how to meet their welfare needs for the duration of that pet's life, owners will be able to enjoy happier and healthier pets. Our 'Which Pet?' materials are free to download at: **pdsa.org.uk/whichpet**

We believe the synergy of individual veterinary professionals, veterinary bodies and animal welfare organisations, working together as an interdisciplinary animal welfare community, will continue to create solutions to the current welfare problems being experienced by the UK's companion animals, and ultimately ensure a lifetime of wellbeing for each of them.

Richard Hooker, BVMS (Hons), MRCVS
PDSA Director of Veterinary Services

* British Veterinary Association (BVA), British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS), RSPCA, PDSA and Blue Cross.

Additional notes on the calculation of the lifetime costs of pet ownership

All costings are approximate and based on current prices of items at time of print. Please note the costs of possible veterinary treatment are not included.

1. Set up costs in preparation for a new pet include: for cats – bed, food bowl, water bowl, microchip, initial course of vaccinations, neutering, scratching post / play tower, two litter trays and litter scoops, toys, grooming brush and cat carrier. For dogs – bed, toothbrush, toothpaste, coat, lead, collar, tag, microchip, food bowl, water bowl, initial course of vaccinations and monthly wormers to six months of age, toys, neutering and car restraint. For a pair of rabbits – waterproof home, exercise run, initial course of vaccinations, toys, neutering, food bowl, water bottle, grooming equipment and carrier. The set up costs do not include the initial purchase price of the pet.

2. Monthly costs include preventive treatments (annual booster, regular flea/worm treatment) as well as insurance, food and a small toy allowance. For dogs, this monthly cost also includes poo bags and toothpaste. For cats, litter is included in the monthly allowance. For a pair of rabbits, this also factors in an allowance for two applications of flystrike prevention each during the summer months.

3. Annual costs calculated by multiplying monthly costs by twelve.

4. Minimum lifetime costs calculated by multiplying the minimum annual cost by the average lifespan of the pet and adding the initial set up cost. We estimated average lifespans as: Cat: 14 years (from O'Neill et al (2015) Longevity and mortality of cats attending primary care veterinary practices in England. Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, Vol. 17(2) 125–133), Small Dog: 7.1-14.2 years, Medium Dog: 8.4-13.5 years, Large Dog 5.5-13.1 years (from O'Neill et al. 2013. Longevity and mortality of owned dogs in England. The Veterinary Journal. 198 (2013) 638–643), Rabbit 7-10 years (RWAF).

Thank you to everyone who is already working alongside us to improve pet wellbeing. We can't do it alone.

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SAVING PETS CHANGING LIVES