

# PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

# REPORT

# 2018

The essential  
insight into  
the wellbeing  
of UK pets

The PEOPLE'S  
SPENSARY FOR SICK ANIMALS  
of the POOR, Inc.



***PDSA's commitment to improve animal welfare began in November 1917, when our inspirational founder Maria Dickin opened our first clinic.***

Since then, over the last century we've had a lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of our nation's pets, providing over 100 million free treatments to 20 million much-loved family pets. Whilst this vital aspect of our work remains at the very core of our charity, we're also a leading authority on pet wellbeing, and we work tirelessly to educate owners and help them understand how to provide for the 5 Welfare Needs of their pets. Education is, and will continue to be, the key to ensuring that more pets, both now and in the future, experience the wellbeing they so richly deserve.

***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 eighth *PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report*, monitoring changes in pet welfare issues across the UK.





# 100 years of pet wellbeing

**As the UK's leading veterinary charity, PDSA is committed to identifying and addressing barriers to pet wellbeing.**

Animal welfare is at the heart of what we do every single day. During our centenary year, we can reflect on how far pet wellbeing has come in the 100 years since PDSA was founded: pets are now more than ever treasured family members, and owners want to do the right thing by them. PDSA will continue to strive to achieve further advancements in pet wellbeing in our next 100 years, and we look forward to seeing how far we can come once again.

The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report was created, and continues, to be the most rigorous and in-depth assessment of the wellbeing of our nation's pets. This year we have once again structured this Report around owners' knowledge and application of the Animal Welfare Acts 2006 (2011 in Northern Ireland) and the 5 Welfare Needs that are enshrined within them.

While there are improvements to celebrate since our first report in 2011, there is still much work to be done.

The findings of the PAW Report continue to provide a valuable insight into the wellbeing of our nation's pets, and highlights the many areas that still require improvement.

PDSA is at the forefront of pet wellbeing, but we can't win these battles alone. We hope the Report will provide a focus for campaigning, appropriate intervention and educational initiatives to help the animal welfare sector improve pet wellbeing, to give our nation's pets the great lives they deserve.

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# Methodology

## Pet owner survey method

As with previous PAW Reports, to ensure accurate, robust results, we've worked with YouGov to conduct public research using their panel methodology. In using this method, we survey pet owners from the general public who are representative of the entire UK population. The total sample size was 4639 cat, dog and rabbit owners aged 18 years + who live in the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th and 19th January 2018. The survey was conducted online and statistically analysed by YouGov.



## Professional survey methods

This year we've surveyed the veterinary profession on a variety of topics in two ways: through our PDSA professional survey, and through BVA and BVNA's *Voice of the Profession* surveys (see box opposite). Our PDSA professional survey was carried out online to an open sample of 549 veterinary professionals. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th January and 5th February 2018 and analysed by YouGov. Data from the PDSA professional survey is embodied in the text of the report, whereas data from the BVA and BVNA surveys is shown separately in blue boxes with a stethoscope icon as shown opposite.

## Data analysis

Figures from the pet owner survey were weighted to be representative of the population by pet species (cat, dog or rabbit owners) and the owner's age, gender and region. Figures from the other surveys were not weighted. Percentages throughout the report are rounded to the nearest whole number. All differences between figures have been validated by YouGov and are statistically significant unless stated otherwise. When referring to 'owners', this means cat, dog 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 page 8, multiplied it by the percentage and rounded to two significant figures. For example: 57% of cats live alone. This equates to (11,100,000 cat pop figure) x 0.57 = 6,327,000 cats, which when rounded is 6.3 million.



*We surveyed ...*

2080  
dog  
owners

2076  
cat  
owners

483  
rabbit  
owners



//////  
The total sample size was 4639  
cat, dog and rabbit owners aged  
18+ years who live in the UK.  
//////



**BVA**  
British Veterinary Association



**BVNA** British Veterinary  
Nursing Association

## BVA and BVNA's *Voice of the Profession* surveys

As well as conducting our own professional survey, this year we had the pleasure of working with the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) to ask their members what their views are on two key pet wellbeing topics: **pre-purchase** and **pet obesity** – through their *Voice of the Profession* surveys.

The findings from these surveys are shown within blue boxes with the stethoscope symbol in the relevant sections of this report.

BVA's *Voice of the Profession* survey is a bi-annual online survey of vets drawn from BVA members and carried out by the independent research company, Alpha Research (alpharesearch.co.uk). BVA's *Voice of the Profession* captures the profession's views and experiences by asking questions about animal health and welfare, public health, and trends in the veterinary profession. The panel is broadly representative of BVA membership, which is largely in line with RCVS membership. For more information about the survey, and to join the panel if you are a BVA member, please go to: [bva.co.uk/voice](http://bva.co.uk/voice). Responses to questions on pre-purchase and obesity issues were collected from respondents during a survey that ran from 18 October to 27 November 2017. Responses from 888 respondents who are companion animal vets or mixed practice vets who work with companion animals as part of their practice have been included in this report.

BVNA's *Voice of the Profession* survey was carried out online to an open sample of 46 Veterinary Nurses for the obesity survey and 50 for the pre-purchase survey. Fieldwork was carried out between 29th October 2017 and 5th January 2018. Data collected was combined with the BVA's data by Alpha Research.

We are extremely grateful to both of these organisations for the opportunity to collaborate, helping us each maximise the impact and reach of our findings for the benefit of pet wellbeing.



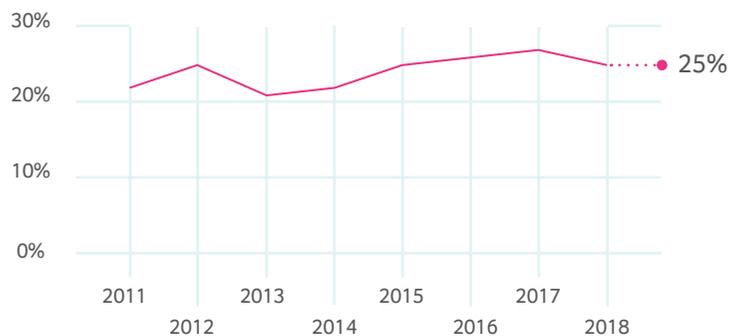
# Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts and the 5 Welfare Needs



## Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts\*

**Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts remains largely unchanged from last year**, with 38% of owners stating that they are familiar with them (compared to 39% in 2017). Over a third (36%) of pet owners are not familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts and 25% say they have never heard of them, a slight increase from 2011.

## Owners who have never heard of the Animal Welfare Acts



## Awareness of the 5 Welfare Needs

**When asked about the 5 Welfare Needs specifically, owners showed a slight decrease in awareness compared to figures from the 2017 Report.** 74% of owners feel informed about all of the 5 Welfare Needs (compared to 78% in 2017) and 24% feel very informed about all of the 5 Welfare Needs (compared to 29% in 2017).

**Companionship seems to be the least well recognised welfare need**, with only 18% of pet owners identifying 'to be housed with, or apart, from other animals' as a requirement (see right). Some pet owners did feel companionship was necessary but chose 'to have human company' as a need (29%), which although higher than animal companionship, still comes out as a low percentage when compared to the other four needs.

Encouragingly, when presented with a list of different descriptions of potential welfare needs, four of the five were correctly identified by a high percentage of owners:

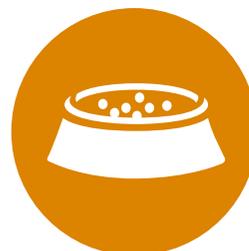
To be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

87%



To live in a suitable environment

85%



85%

To have a suitable diet



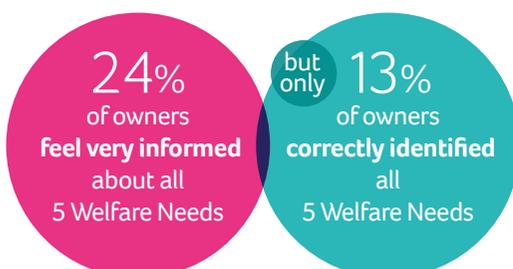
65%

To be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns



18%

To be housed with, or apart from, other animals



\* Animal Welfare Acts refers to Animal Welfare Act 2006 covering England & Wales, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.



## How does awareness affect how well the 5 Welfare Needs are provided for?

Previous research and analysis (PAW Report 2016), while unable to determine cause and effect, has shown us that owners who have not heard of their responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Acts were significantly less likely to have provided preventive healthcare to their pet than those who have heard of them. Additionally, owners who feel informed about each of the 5 Welfare Needs are significantly more likely to provide preventive healthcare to their pets than owners who do not feel informed about the welfare needs.

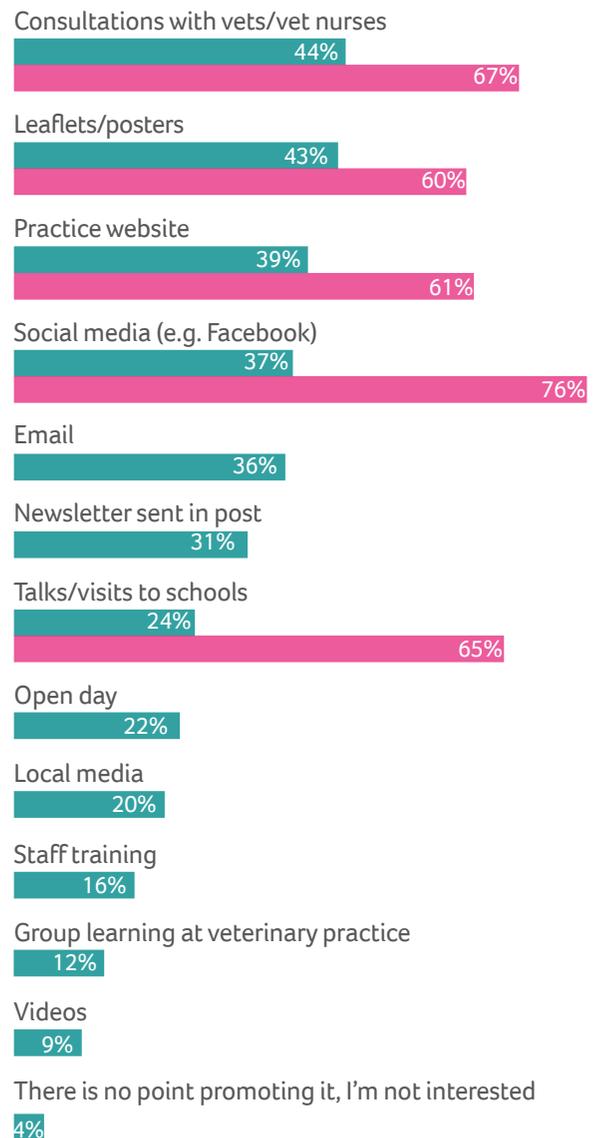
This year's data also shows us that owners who sought advice or researched before choosing their pet are more likely to be familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts (41%) than those who didn't (32%). Similarly, owners who sought advice or researched before choosing their pet are more likely to feel informed about all of the 5 Welfare Needs (76%) than those who didn't (70%).

With this in mind...

- How should we further promote the 5 Welfare Needs?
- What is already being done in practice?
- Are there further opportunities for education?

52% of veterinary professionals say their practice promotes the concept of the 5 Welfare Needs through leaflets/posters, 50% state it's included in routine consultations, and 49% use social media. 14% of veterinary professionals report that their practice does nothing to promote the 5 Welfare Needs.

## How owners\*\* and vets considered the best way a practice should promote awareness of the 5 Welfare Needs



## Further opportunities for education

**PDSA believes awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts and the 5 Welfare Needs contained within them should be taught to all children in schools as part of the national curriculum.**



We asked pet owners and the veterinary profession if they felt that learning about the 5 Welfare Needs of animals should be a compulsory part of the curriculum taught in UK schools.

**70% of pet owners and 95% of the veterinary profession agreed.**

\*\* Data from owners from PAW Report 2017.

# Pet ownership

## UK pet population figures

By working with YouGov we've tracked the estimated number of pet cats, dogs and rabbits in the UK since the first report in 2011.

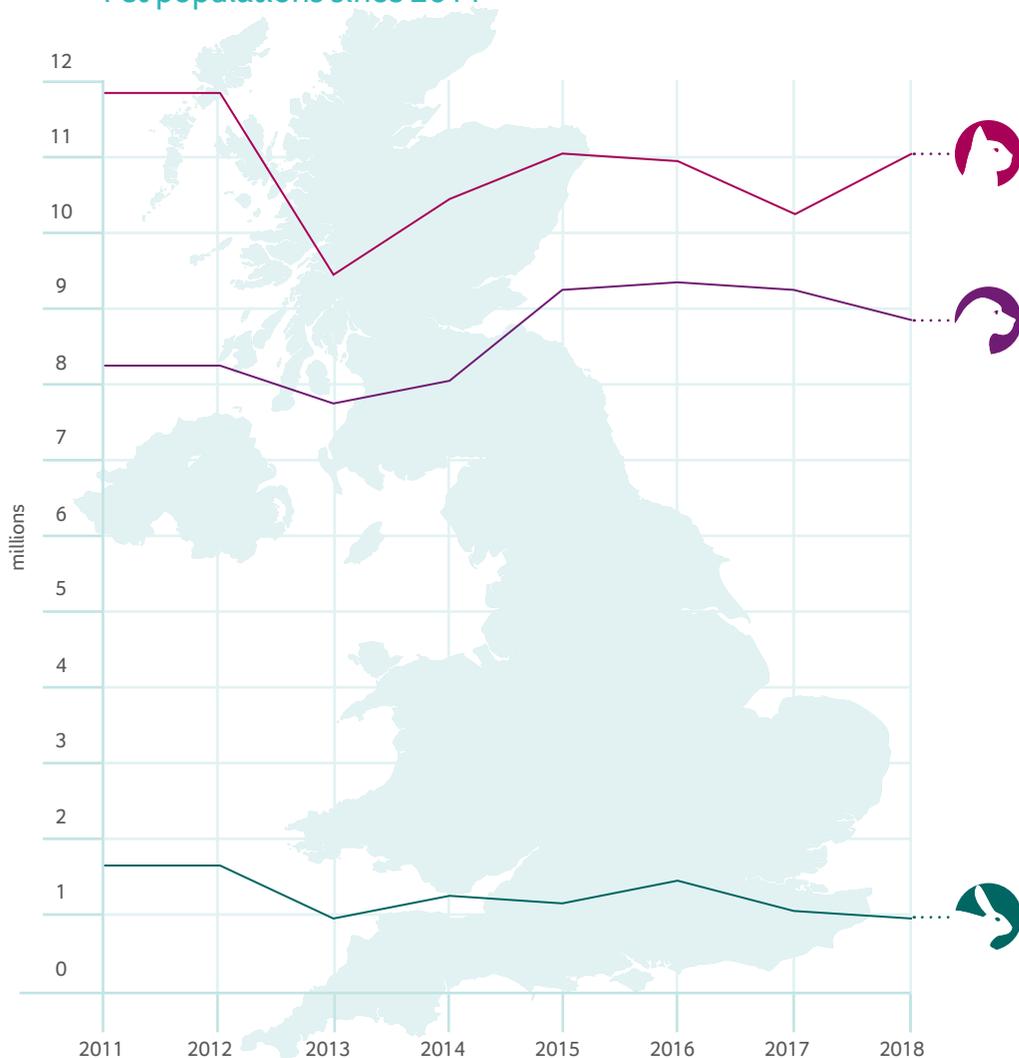
These estimates are calculated using a combination of data collected from the PAW Report, a nationally representative survey of UK adults, and official government statistics.

Here are the results.

**49%**  
of UK adults own a pet



### Pet populations since 2011



11.1 million cats

25% of the UK adult population have a cat

8.9 million dogs

24% of the UK adult population have a dog



1.0 million rabbits

2% of the UK adult population have a rabbit

# £ The cost of pet ownership



Cost of ownership continues to be underestimated by many pet owners, showing that further work still needs to be done to raise awareness of this important aspect of pet ownership.

## We asked pet owners ...

How much do you think your pet costs you every month?

	 Dog	 Cat	 Rabbit
Up to £20	19%	35%	67%
£21 to £40	28%	35%	16%
£41 to £60	23%	18%	7%
£61 to £80	8%	3%	2%
£81 +	23%	9%	7%
<b>PDSA estimated minimum monthly cost*</b>	<b>£70-£105 (dependent on size)</b>	<b>£70</b>	<b>£70 (pair of rabbits)**</b>



**69%\*\*  
of dog owners underestimated the monthly cost**

19% thought up to £20

**88%\*\*  
of cat owners underestimated the monthly cost**

35% estimated up to £20

**77%\*\*  
of rabbit owners underestimated the monthly cost**

67% estimated up to £20

## We asked pet owners ...

How much do you think your pet will cost you in their lifetime?

	 Dog	 Cat	 Rabbit
Up to £500	13%	16%	41%
£501 to £1000	11%	18%	34%
£1001 to £5000	41%	45%	21%
£5001 to 10,000	22%	15%	5%
£10,001 +	12%	5%	0%
<b>PDSA estimated minimum lifetime cost*</b>	<b>£6,500 - £17,000 (dependent on size)</b>	<b>£12,000</b>	<b>£6,500 - £9,000 (pair of rabbits)**</b>



**68%\*\*  
estimated less than £6,500**

13% of dog owners estimated up to £500 over their lifetime

**95%\*\*  
estimated less than £12,000**

16% of cat owners estimated up to £500 over their lifetime

**92%\*\*  
estimated less than £3,500**

41% of rabbit owners estimated up to £500 over their lifetime

**Note: When estimating monthly and lifetime costs, owners were asked to include all costs except for the cost of purchasing their pet, and any ongoing veterinary costs for health issues.**

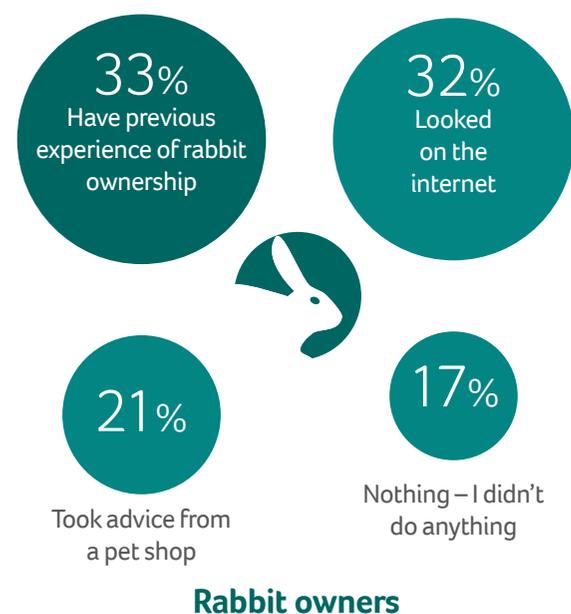
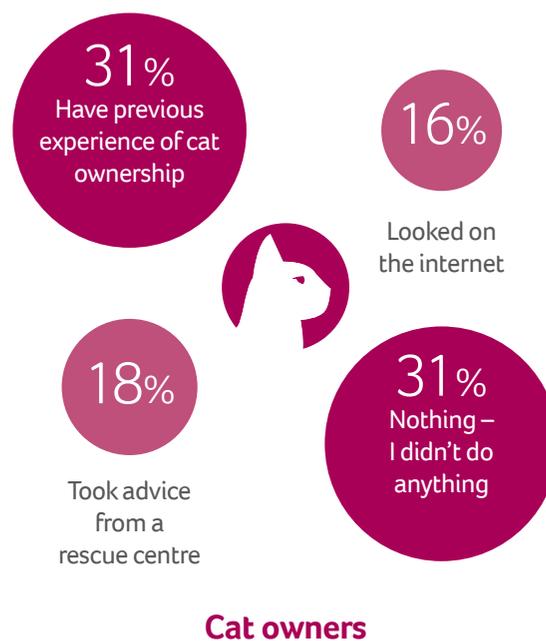
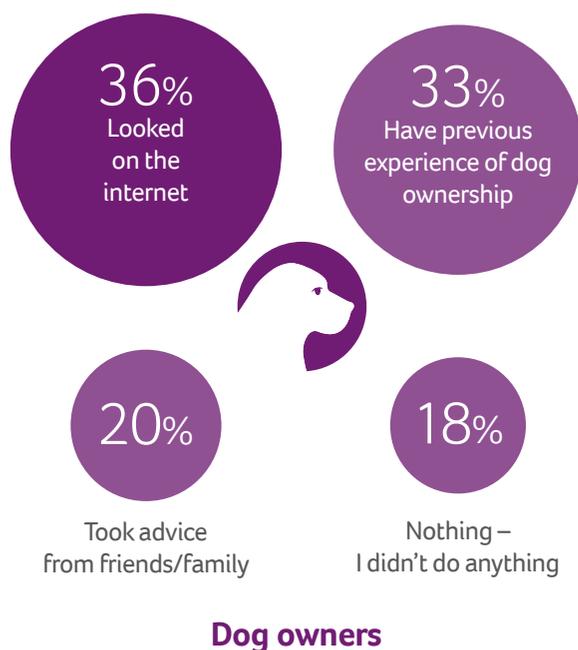
\* See back cover for details of calculations. \*\* This figure, although high, is a much lower percentage than for cat and rabbit owners, indicating that dog owners may be more aware of potential costs of ownership. \*\*\* Rabbit owners were asked to estimate the cost of owning one rabbit which we have estimated as £35 for minimum monthly cost and £3,500 for minimum lifetime cost.

# Pre-purchase

Taking on a new pet is undoubtedly a significant and exciting time in people's lives. Despite this, 5.2 million pet owners (24%) did no research at all before taking on their pet.

## We asked pet owners ...

Which, if any, of the following did you do before you chose your pet?



**Lack of research before getting a pet will have an impact on their future wellbeing, as owners may be unaware of how to provide for their chosen pet's needs.** With so few potential pet owners (5%) turning to vets and vet nurses for advice, this again highlights the need for us as professionals to reach out and offer help with pre-purchase research and decisions.

It's crucial that we look at ways to engage with anyone thinking of getting a pet to help them make an informed decision about which pet may best suit their lifestyle. For so many of life's big decisions, people will spend time planning and researching; where to go on holiday, what car to drive or where to live. It's vital that we elevate the importance of pre-purchase research before getting a pet as one of life's important decisions to be given the priority it needs.

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## 15% of dog owners found their pet via an advert on a classified advertising website

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### Possible links between pre-purchase research and knowledge of the 5 Welfare Needs

Owners who don't feel informed about all of the 5 Welfare Needs are more likely to do nothing before purchasing their pet (28%), compared to owners who feel informed or very informed (23%) about all of the 5 Welfare Needs.

When compared to owners who feel informed about all 5 Welfare Needs, owners who don't feel informed about all of the 5 Welfare Needs are less likely to do the following before taking their pet home:

- See them with their mum (34% compared to 40%)
- See them with their dad (11% compared to 14%)
- Check breeder would complete some form of contract (9% compared to 13%)



24% of pet owners did nothing before choosing their pet

91% of owners agree that online sales of pets should be regulated

5% of pet owners take advice from a veterinary professional before taking on a pet

## BVA and BVNA surveys



Pre-purchase information offered to prospective pet owners by practices:

- 71% offer advice as part of routine consultations
- 29% offer advice through practice social media
- 27% offer printed materials (e.g. practice leaflets and newsletters)
- 16% provide links to websites on how to choose the right pet
- 13% offer free dedicated pre-purchase clinics / appointments
- 10% have part of the practice website dedicated to pre-purchase advice
- 4% use e-newsletters
- 2% offer paid-for dedicated pre-purchase clinics / appointments
- 1% offer videos / DVDs in the practice

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‘To encourage more people to attend pre-purchase consultations we should consider the science of human behaviour change. There is evidence to show that communication based in confrontation doesn't work, so trying to change people's minds away from buying a certain breed through facts that might be perceived as confrontation is unlikely to be successful. Communication based on empathy and values is a much better predictor of behaviour change. Framing the message positively will be key – for example, that the most modern, caring owners seek pre-purchase advice.’

*Suzanne Rogers BSc(Hons) CHBC  
(Human Behaviour Change for Animals CIC)*

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# Pre-purchase

Many pet owners get their pet from reputable sources such as rescue or rehoming centres or approved breeders, however many would still consider getting their pet from unsuitable places.



For example, 16% would consider getting a pet from a puppy farm and 21% said they'd consider buying from a seller who approached them.

Broken down by species, where people get their pets from has stayed fairly consistent with previous PAW Reports.

## As final preparation before bringing their new pet home, what actions, if any, did owners take?

76% of dog owners who got their pet from a breeder or private seller, saw their pet with his/her mum before taking their dog home. Whilst it's encouraging that the majority of owners are taking this important step, this is a figure that should be higher, highlighting the need to educate owners further in this area.

46% of dog owners who got their pet from one of these sources visited their pet on more than one occasion, 39% made sure the breeder was a member of the Kennel Club assured breeder scheme, 32% checked that the breeder would complete some form of contract (e.g. Puppy Contract), 33% saw their pet with his/her dad and for 3% the breeder or seller visited their home to assess it. 17% of dog owners did none of these things regardless of where they got their dog from.

Cat owners are less likely than dog owners to take any actions before taking their pet home. 29% saw their cat with his/her mum and 26% visited their cat on more than one occasion.

Only 6% of cat owners checked that the person or organisation that they got their cat from would complete some form of contract. 12% of owners had a home visit from the breeder, seller or rehoming charity to assess their home. 18% of owners who got their cat from a breeder or private seller made sure that the breeder was a member of an assured breeder scheme (e.g. the GCCF Breeder Scheme). 4% of cat owners saw their pet with their dad. 39% did none of these.

## We asked pet owners ...

### Where did you get your pet from?

#### Dog owners



22%

Rescue or rehoming centre/shelter

28%  
Breeder of one specific breed

20%  
Private seller

#### Cat owners



28%  
From a family member, friend or neighbour

34%  
Rescue or rehoming centre/shelter

11%  
Stray that I found/  
found me

#### Rabbit owners



17%

Rescue or rehoming centre/shelter

36%  
Pet shop/  
garden centre

15%

From a family member, friend or neighbour



23% of rabbit owners visited their pet on more than one occasion, and 19% saw him/her with their mum – much lower than for dog or cat owners. 8% saw him/her with their dad. Just 6% state that the breeder, seller or rehoming charity visited their home to assess it and 5% checked that the breeder or seller would complete some form of signed contract of sale. 46% of rabbit owners did none of these – significantly higher than dog or cat owners. These figures reflect the different nature of purchasing from pet shops or garden centres, which tends to be more spontaneous.

‘Anyone who owns or cares for animals knows that choosing a pet to join your family is a big decision. It’s vitally important to get the relationship off to the right start by ensuring you pick the best species and breed for your particular circumstances.

We were delighted to see that so many veterinary practices offer free pre-purchase advice. We’d encourage anyone who’s thinking of getting a new pet to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge available at their local practice. Vets and vet nurses are always happy to share up-to-date information and tailored advice with prospective pet owners. They can also make you aware of any potential issues with your prospective pet and advise you on how best to manage their introduction to your home.’

*John Fishwick*

*MA VetMB DCHP DipECBHM MRCVS  
President, British Veterinary Association (BVA)*



## BVA and BVNA surveys

**On average, vets and vet nurses estimated that 71% of potential pet owners who were not existing clients of the practice go on to join the practice after receiving a free pre-purchase consultation.**

Of those vets and vet nurses working in practices which do not offer pre-purchase consultations the majority said that the practice either had not considered offering this service (46%) and / or did not feel that there was sufficient demand (44%). **However 90% of those working in practices not currently offering pre-purchase consultations said these were something they would consider offering.**

When asked what additional help and support would assist veterinary practices in dealing with pre-purchase issues veterinary professionals selected:

- Client leaflets (75%)
- National awareness campaigns (71%)
- Social media templates to communicate with owners (56%)
- Practice posters (54%)
- Campaigns to review the current legislation concerning sale of pet animals (52%)
- Promotion of use of Puppy Contract (46%)
- Media engagement (44%)
- CPD (35%)
- Consultation frameworks for pet purchasing with owners (31%)
- Email templates to be sent to owners (30%)



# Dog / contents

15: Key findings

16: Environment

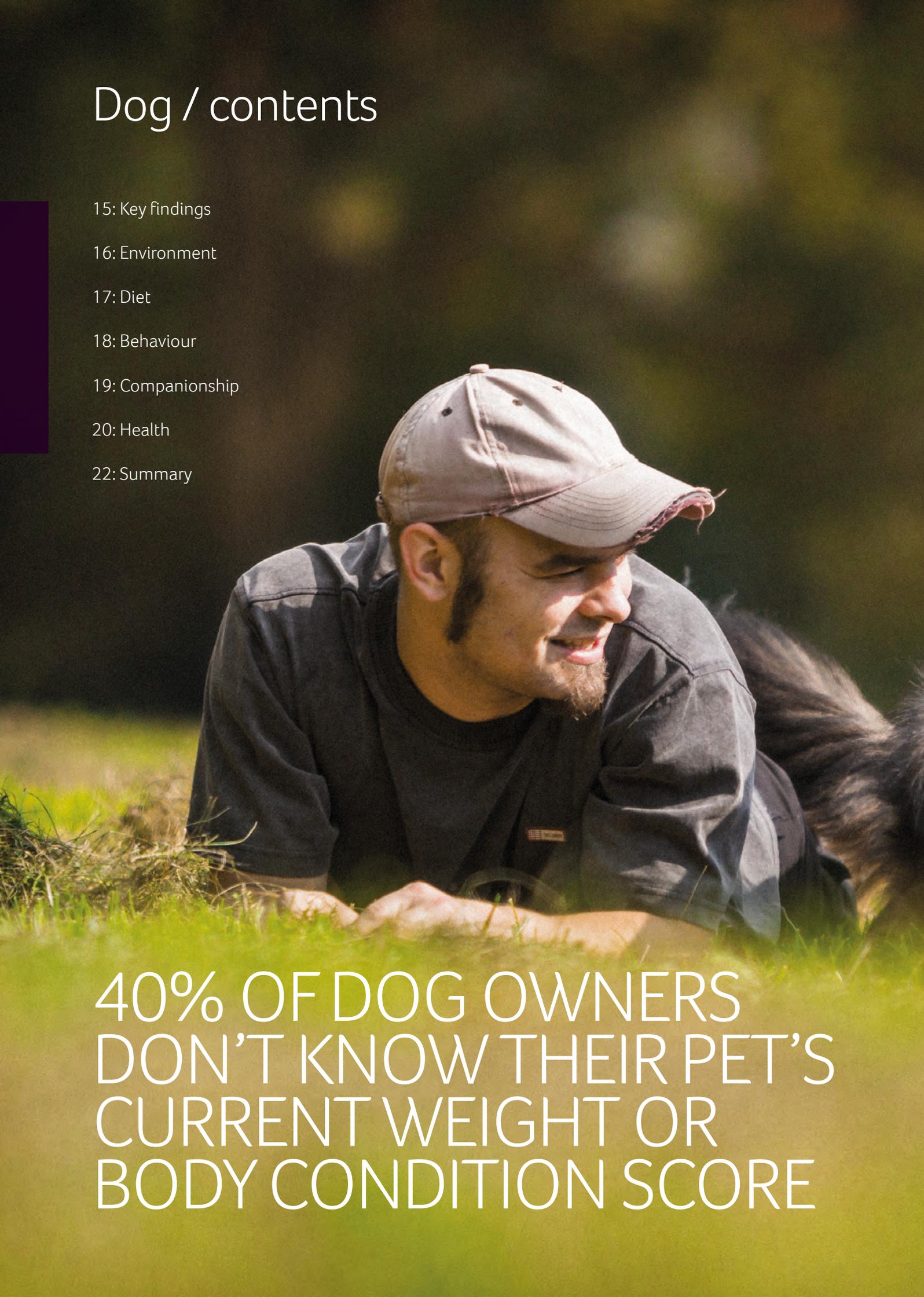
17: Diet

18: Behaviour

19: Companionship

20: Health

22: Summary

A man with a beard and a cap is lying on his stomach on a grassy field, smiling and looking towards a dog. The background is a soft-focus green field.

40% OF DOG OWNERS  
DON'T KNOW THEIR PET'S  
CURRENT WEIGHT OR  
BODY CONDITION SCORE



# Key findings



## 1.4 million dogs

(16%) are walked less than once a day, and 89,000 are never walked at all (1%)

## 40% of dog owners

don't know their pet's current weight and / or body condition score

## 1.1 million dogs

(12%) have received no training in any way

## 2.1 million dogs

(24%) are left alone for five or more hours on a typical weekday

## 91% of dogs

are microchipped

## 90% of dogs

are currently registered with a vet



## Environment

**Daily exercise is vital for a dog's physical health and mental wellbeing.** 32% of owners walk their dog once a day, which is consistent with data from previous years. Nearly half of dogs (49%) are walked more than once a day, but, again consistent with recent PAW Reports, 89,000 dogs (1%) are never walked at all.

Why are some owners choosing not to walk their dogs at all? Top answers given were:

- Garden is big enough for exercise (40%)
- I have health problems (19%)
- My dog has health problems (17%)
- Restricted areas to exercise a dog where I live (16%)

With recent consultations on Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) there has been some concern about whether there could be widespread bans on walking dogs in public spaces. Should this be the case, there would be a great risk that the numbers of dogs not being walked at all could increase, especially as 78% of dog owners say that they rely on public spaces (e.g. parks, beaches) to be able to walk their dog.

And while 47% of owners who walk their dog had no concerns at all about walking them, others expressed concerns which included:

- being scared of their dog being attacked by another dog (17%)
- time restrictions (13%)
- concern over their dog's behaviour on a walk (10%)
- that their dog doesn't come back when called (10%).

Yet, as we can see from our dog behaviour section in this report, 1.1 million dogs (12%) have received no training in any way. Aside from daily exercise, we were interested to know how pets are occupied, and what steps, if any, are being taken by owners to keep them physically and mentally fit.

1.4 million dogs (16%) are walked less than once a day

**We asked dog owners ...**

Which of the following does your dog regularly do?



It's encouraging to see many dogs able to play in some way on a regular basis, however with 2.4 million dogs still regularly having sticks thrown for them, this is an area where more education is required to help owners understand the associated dangers.

89% of veterinary professionals agree that the welfare of dogs will suffer if owners are banned from walking their dogs in public spaces (e.g. parks, beaches) or if dogs are required to be kept on leads in these spaces.



80% of dog owners stated their pet was an ideal weight, but 40% knew neither their pet's weight nor body condition score.



## Diet

**Pet obesity continues to be one of the key welfare issues facing pets in the UK.** It remains as one of the top concerns identified by veterinary professionals, with 50% of those surveyed predicting that pet obesity will have the biggest health and welfare implications in ten years' time.

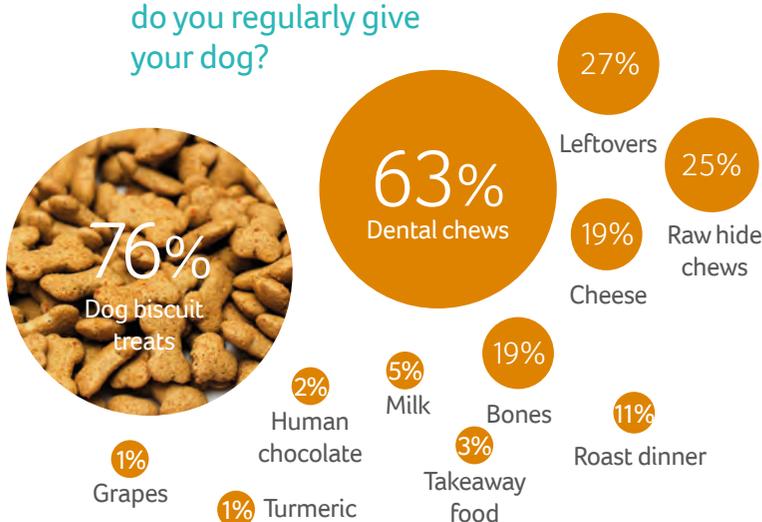
Many pet owners perceive their pet to be an ideal weight but admit to not knowing their pet's current weight and/or body condition score (BCS). As in 2017, we asked owners to match an outline of a dog's shape (ranging from BCS 1-5) with the shape of their dog. 5% of owners selected BCS 5 (obese). Despite this, when asked, less than 1% described their dog as being obese. This indicates more help is needed for owners to understand what a healthy body shape would be for their dog.

Despite 32% of veterinary professionals stating that they typically only discuss weight or body condition score with owners whose pet is overweight or obese, the majority of veterinary professionals (98%) also said that there should be more focus placed on preventing obesity rather than treating it. This suggests that there needs to be more focus on weight and BCS conversations with all dog owners.

Alongside lack of exercise, treats are a likely contributory factor when it comes to pet obesity. 91% of owners give treats to their dog – this is higher than both cat (81%) and rabbit (83%) owners.

### We asked dog owners ...

Which of the following do you regularly give your dog?



## BVA and BVNA surveys



**Vets and vet nurses estimated that 46% of the dogs they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese (mean value).**

Almost half of the vets and vet nurses surveyed (40%) said they felt the proportion of overweight or obese dogs they see in their practice has increased in the last two years, and a similar amount felt that it had stayed the same (41%).

**On average vets and vet nurses estimated that around half (47%) of the overweight and obese dogs they see in their practice have health issues which could be related to their weight.**

The most common weight-related health issues for dogs identified by vets and vet nurses are:

- Musculoskeletal problems (99%)
- Respiratory problems (49%)
- Diabetes (28%)

Most common reasons for excess weight in dogs identified by vets and vet nurses:

- Owner's lack of recognition that their pet is overweight or has obesity (55%)
- Feeding treats, in addition to their base diet (53%)
- Feeding human food, in addition to their base diet (50%)
- Portion size (49%)

When asked what influences them to give their pet a treat the top reasons given by dog owners were that it makes their pet happy (43%), it provides variety for him/her (37%), and that treats are a part of their daily diet (37%).

We've identified that many dogs are not receiving daily walks, and when combined with a lack of awareness of pet's weight and/or body condition score and an inappropriate diet, it's evident there are a combination of factors causing the problem of obesity in the UK dog population.

# Behaviour

## Training

**There has been little change over the past few years in the number of dogs who have received no training at all.** 12% of dog owners state they haven't trained their dog in any way, equating to around 1.1 million untrained dogs. It's likely that this is contributing to some of the unwanted behaviours owners report their dogs are displaying.

Over half of dog owners (51%) have used previous experience of how to train a dog. Encouragingly, there has been an increase in the number of dogs who went to one or more organised training classes (20% in 2018 compared to 17% in 2017), and an increase in the number of dogs who completed a course through a regular dog training class (17% in 2018 compared to 12% in 2017).

**45% of veterinary professionals say that their practice offers socialisation and training clinics or specific advice on these topics for dogs.**

## Unwanted behaviours

**Without adequate training and socialisation, it can be very hard for a dog to understand how to behave in certain situations.** With so many owners not training their dogs at all or relying on their previous experience of training (which could be outdated), it's no surprise to see that 78% of owners state that they would like to change at least one behaviour displayed by their dog. Top behaviours that dog owners wanted to change included pulling on the lead (26%), being afraid of fireworks (25%) and jumping up at people (22%).

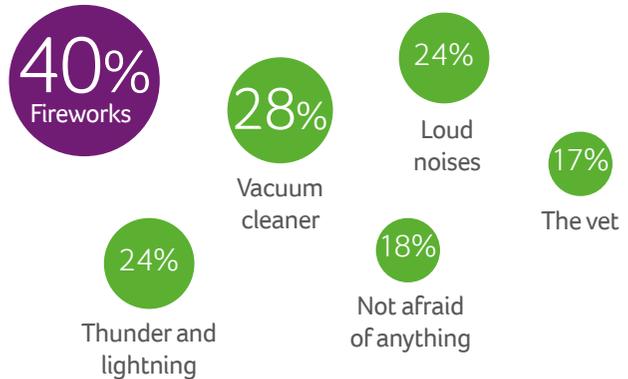
Other behaviours owners are concerned about include aggression to other pets (6%) and aggression towards people (4%). When asked, 62% of pet owners reported that they have been frightened by another dog's behaviour.

**51% of veterinary professionals say that they have seen an increase in dog behavioural issues in the last two years.**

////////////////////////////////////  
**40% of dog owners say that their pet is afraid of fireworks**  
////////////////////////////////////

## We asked dog owners ...

Which of the following, if any, is your dog afraid of?



## Fears

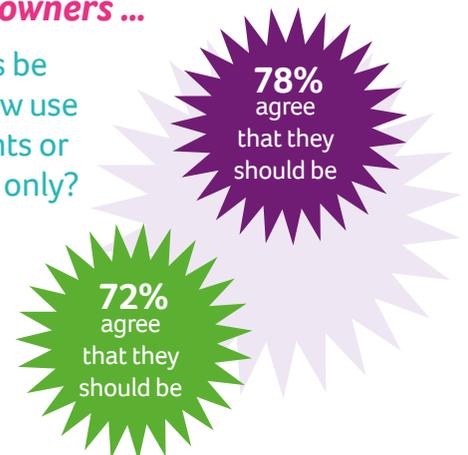
**There has been no significant change in the fears shown by dogs since we asked the question in the 2015 PAW Report.** 82% of owners report that their dog is afraid of at least one of the options given.

51% of veterinary professionals say that they have seen an increase in pets with phobias such as fireworks in the last two years, whilst 40% of dog owners (3.6 million dogs) report their dog is afraid of fireworks.

## We asked dog owners ...

Should fireworks be regulated to allow use for licensed events or on certain dates only?

Should more silent fireworks be available for sale?



////////////////////////////////////  
**83% of veterinary professionals agree that fireworks should be regulated to allow use only for licensed events or on certain dates.**  
////////////////////////////////////



# Companionship

## A nation of lonely dogs?

**The 2017 PAW Report showed that 19% of dogs were being left alone for five hours or more on a typical weekday.** Whilst this was a much higher percentage than any of us would like to see, it had reduced from 23% in the first PAW Report in 2011.

However, data from this year shows that this figure has once again risen and now 24% of dogs are generally being left alone on weekdays for 5 or more hours (longer than the recommended 4 hour maximum) – equating to around 2.1 million dogs with inadequate companionship. Despite this, 81% of owners disagree that their pet is lonely.

Spending so much time alone, potentially bored and under-stimulated, will undoubtedly be having a negative effect on dogs' wellbeing and could be a trigger for some of the undesirable behaviours owners have reported their dogs display. 623,000 dogs (7%) are reportedly showing signs of distress when left alone (e.g. scratching, destructive behaviour, barking or howling for more than five minutes or toileting in the house).

12% of owners said they give treats to their dog because they feel guilt over leaving them alone, which could also be contributing to the ongoing pet obesity problem.

////////////////////////////////////  
**2.1 million dogs are left  
alone for 5 or more hours  
on a typical weekday**  
////////////////////////////////////





## Registered with a vet

**890,000 dogs in the UK (10%) are not registered with a vet.** The main reasons given for not registering with a vet include that it's not necessary – I can just turn up at the vets (29%), it's too expensive (16%) and that it's not necessary as their dog is fine (14%). This demonstrates a potential lack of understanding with regards to the importance of preventive healthcare and that vets aren't just there for when a pet becomes ill or injured.

## Neutering

**29% of owners report that they have not neutered their dog.** Of these:

- 18% report that they don't believe there would be any benefit (higher for owners of male dogs than female dogs)
- 14% state they don't believe in it (higher for owners of male dogs than female dogs)
- 13% haven't got around to it yet (higher for owners of female dogs than male dogs).

More education seems to be needed for owners to understand that neutering their dog can help to prevent serious illness.

## Vaccinations

**25% of owners report that their dog hasn't had a primary course of vaccinations when young – equating to around 2.2 million dogs.** This figure has levelled off after a significant increase last year. In addition to this, 23% of dogs have not received regular boosters.

Reasons given by owners for not vaccinating with a primary course include that it's not necessary (20%), it's too expensive (19%), or that they haven't thought about it (11%). Similar reasons were given for not providing booster vaccinations, with the additional responses that their vet hasn't recommended annual vaccinations (14%) and that they don't agree with it (13%) also given.

25% of dog owners have not had their pet vaccinated with a primary course when young

## Insurance

**43% of dogs – 3.8 million – are not insured. This is consistent with previous PAW Reports.** Top reasons for not taking out insurance include it being too expensive (43%), owners preferring to save money for vet bills instead (24%) and that owners don't think they would get their money's worth (22%).

## Microchipping

**9% of owners report that their dog isn't microchipped.** Microchipping has increased significantly since 2011, when 70% of dogs were microchipped, and has been relatively stable in the last three years. This is likely due to the change in legislation introducing compulsory microchipping, however, it's concerning that this figure is still not nearer to 100%.

## Treated for fleas and worms

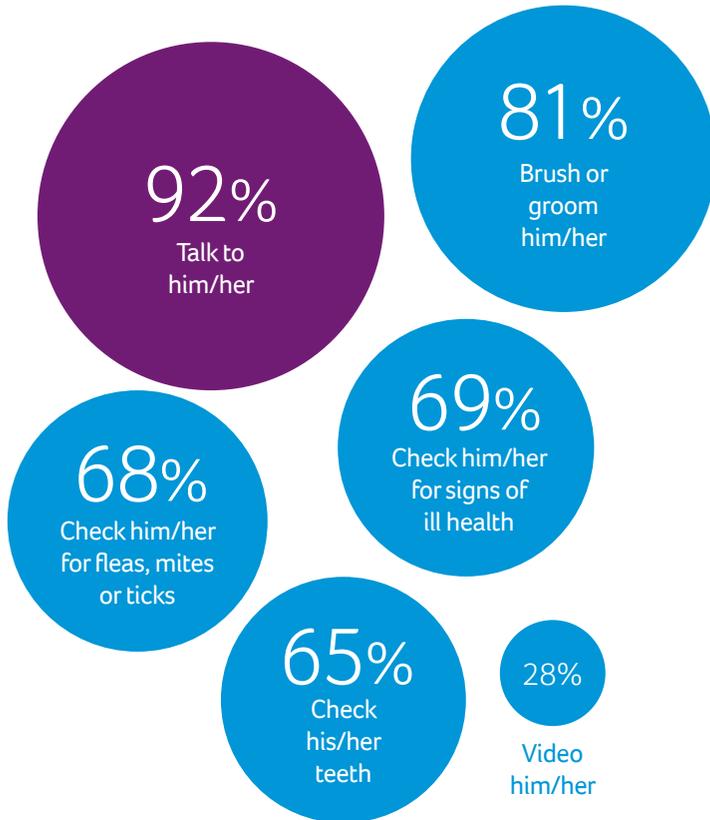
**16% of dogs have not been wormed and 21% have not been treated for fleas.** More needs to be done to educate owners on the importance of year-round preventive parasite treatments.

75% of veterinary professionals agree that they should scan and check the database details for all dogs new to a practice



## We asked dog owners ...

Do you or another person regularly do any of the following with your dog?

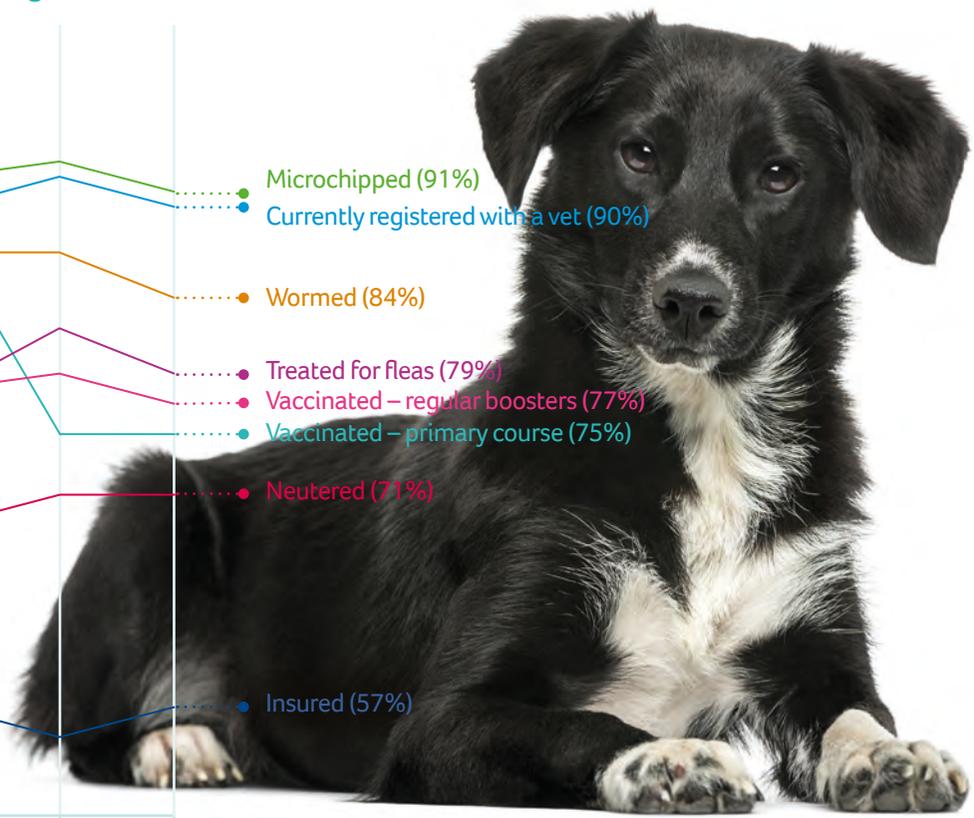
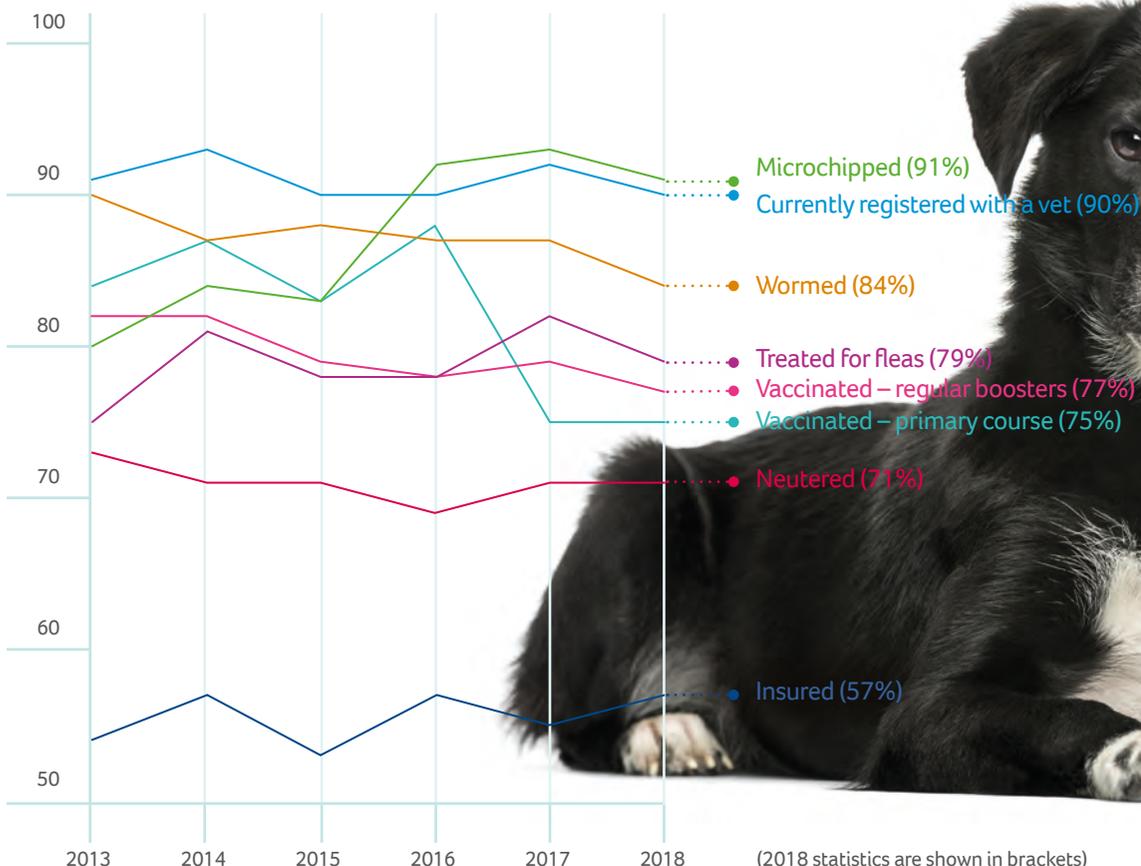


'The BVNA was very pleased that veterinary professionals, including Veterinary Nurses, were again involved in giving their opinions for the PAW Report this year. Veterinary Nurses are key to the pet-clinic relationship. The top pet welfare issues that veterinary professionals felt needed addressing were the awareness of costs associated with owning a pet, along with choosing a healthy breed of pet. These are both perfect examples of where Veterinary Nurses are able to step in and help with education in both pre-purchase and when owners have welcomed a new pet into their home.'

*Wendy Nevins RVN*

*President, British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA)*

## % Preventive health uptake in dogs



# Summary



**We know from experience that owners regard their dogs as part of the family. However, as our report shows, love cannot replace understanding.** This starts with the simple awareness of the cost of keeping a dog, what their needs are, and the best places to get one. PDSA has been at the forefront of developing pre-purchase consultations and is actively promoting the BVA-endorsed *Which Pet?* consultation framework to the veterinary profession. This framework helps veterinary practices to promote pre-purchase research and to structure conversations with potential owners.

Since the first PAW report in 2011, veterinary professionals have consistently identified obesity as a top welfare issue for dogs: a ticking time bomb. Discussing the contributing factors of diet and exercise with owners of all dogs is needed before obesity develops. PDSA's Pet Fit Club, now in its 13th year, succeeds by working with owners to address the barriers to weight loss for their pets and uses techniques such as rewarding training sessions, walks and attention. This approach will not only help reduce obesity, but also address some highlighted areas of concern in dogs' environmental and behavioural needs.

The most frequently reported unwanted behaviours (fireworks fear, lead pulling and jumping up) can be solved with relatively simple behavioural interventions. Vet teams are well placed to recommend appropriate interventions and refer where necessary.

PDSA is working with the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) to build relationships between PDSA Pet Hospitals and ABTC-registered behaviourists, as well as promoting Dogs Trust Dog Schools, to ensure access to reputable dog training sessions. In the longer term, early socialisation could help to prevent most problem behaviours identified in this Report through positive experiences.

As a highly social species, lonely and bored dogs may display more undesirable behaviours, including but not limited to those linked to separation anxiety. Being regularly left alone for longer than recommended will undoubtedly be impacting the wellbeing of nearly a quarter of all pet dogs. Educating owners on their pet's welfare needs could be the key to changing these sobering statistics, as companionship was the least well-recognised welfare need.

As last year, the figures for pets not receiving primary vaccinations and regular boosters may threaten population-level immunity. Microchipping is now a legal requirement, so the plateau in numbers of microchipped dogs over the last few years indicates we need a new approach to target the 9% of owners whose dogs are still not chipped. Of all species surveyed, uptake in preventive health is the best for dogs, but there is still more work to be done to reach the 10% of owners not registering their dogs with a vet – PDSA is supporting the joint BVA and RCVS "Pets Need Vets" campaign which is working towards achieving this.



//////  
Since the first PAW Report in 2011,  
veterinary professionals have  
consistently identified obesity  
as a top welfare issue for dogs:  
a ticking time bomb.  
//////

# Cat / contents

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77% OF CAT OWNERS  
WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE  
ONE OR MORE OF THEIR  
CAT'S BEHAVIOURS



# Key findings



**65% of cat owners**  
don't know their pet's current weight  
and/or body condition score

**53% of cat owners**  
matched images of Body Condition Score 4  
(overweight) or 5 (obese) to their cat's current  
body shape

**89% of cat owners**  
report that their cat is afraid of at least one thing

**77% of cat owners**  
would like to change one or more of their  
cat's behaviours

**4.8 million cats**  
(43%) live in multi-cat households

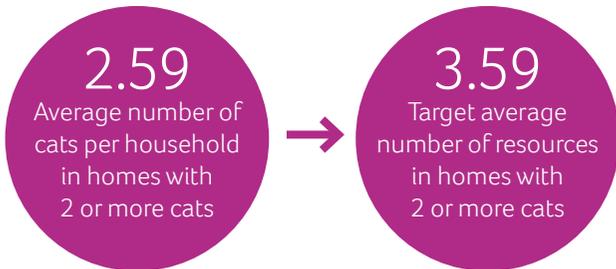
**81% of cats**  
are currently registered with a vet

## Environment

Our research shows that many cats are still having to share their resources with other cats in the household. This can be the cause of significant stress as without sufficient resources, spaced out around the house, cats aren't able to avoid each other should they want to. In households with two or more cats owners should provide at least one resource per cat plus one extra.

Some of our key findings include:

- 66% of owners with 2 or more cats are providing 1 or 0 litter trays
- 55% of owners with 2 or more cats are providing 1 or 0 water bowls
- 73% of owners with 2 or more cats are providing 2 or fewer cat beds
- 16% of owners with 2 or more cats are only providing 1 food bowl



Despite the fact that a worrying proportion of owners are providing their cats with too few resources, **95% of owners state that their cat is happy.**

Actual average number of resources in homes with 2 or more cats





## Diet

As with dogs, the cat obesity problem shows no sign of improving. Just under three-quarters (74%) of cat owners believe their cat is an ideal weight, but nearly two thirds (65%) of owners acknowledge that they don't know their cat's current weight and/or body condition score (BCS). 18% of owners describe their cat as being overweight, and 1% report that their cat is obese.

When asked to match an outline of a cat's shape (ranging from BCS 1-5) with the shape of their cat, 31% of owners selected the image reflecting BCS 3 (ideal) - quite different to the 74% of cat owners who state that their pet is an ideal weight. Over half (53%) of cat owners selected either BCS 4 (overweight) or BCS 5 (obese).

Surprisingly, 76% of cat owners say that they aren't ever worried about their pet being overweight. This could be because they don't believe pet obesity is a growing problem, or perhaps because they're not able to recognise what a healthy weight and body shape is. Further education is needed to help cat owners understand what a healthy weight is for their pet, along with how to tell if their pet is a healthy shape by the look and feel of their body.

One factor likely to be contributing to cat obesity is additional calorie intake through treats. 81% of owners give treats to their cats. The main reasons owners gave for doing so include: it makes their pet feel happy (41%), it provides variety for him/her (39%) and it makes the owner feel happy (22%).

## BVA and BVNA surveys

Vets and vet nurses estimated that 34% of the cats they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese (mean value).

Over a third of vets and vet nurses surveyed (34%) said they felt the proportion of overweight or obese cats they see in their practice has increased in the last two years.

On average vets and vet nurses estimated that 35% of the overweight and obese cats they see in their practice have health issues which could be related to their weight.

The most common weight-related health issues for cats identified by vets and vet nurses are:

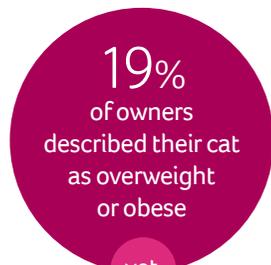
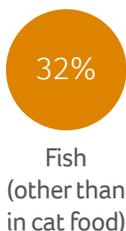
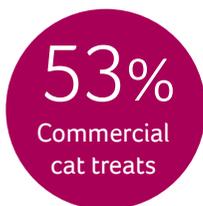
- Grooming / self-care issues (77%)
- Diabetes (66%)
- Musculoskeletal problems (66%)

Most common reasons for excess weight in cats identified by vets and vet nurses:

- Owner's lack of recognition that their pet is overweight or has obesity (68%)
- Portion size (63%)

### We asked cat owners ...

Which of the following do you regularly give your cat?



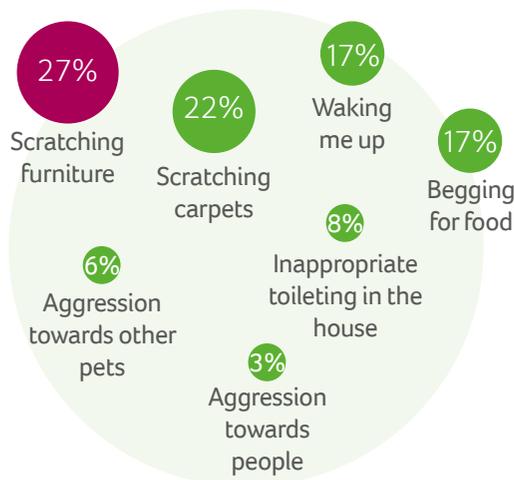
# Behaviour

## Unwanted behaviours

Cats can display unwanted behaviours for many reasons. It could be due to illness, stress, lack of socialisation as a kitten, or simply because in multi-cat households, too few resources are provided. 77% of cat owners report that their cat displays at least one behaviour that they'd like to change and yet 74% of owners don't think that their pet is stressed.

### We asked cat owners ...

Which of the following behaviours does your cat display that you would like to change?



Many cat owners have stated they'd like to change some form of scratching behaviour – and yet when asked, our research shows that owners aren't providing sufficient scratching posts for the number of cats in the household.

Of those owners who want to change at least one behaviour in their cat, 41% would turn to an online search engine e.g. Google for advice, a higher proportion than those who would seek advice from a veterinary practice (37%). 24% of veterinary professionals say that their practice offers behaviour clinics or specific advice on this topic for cats. 23% of cat owners state that they would not seek advice from anywhere to change their pet's behaviour. This is significantly higher than for both dogs and rabbits, indicating that cat owners are more willing to live with behaviours or are less likely to find out why the behaviour is occurring and look to treat the underlying cause.

74% of cat owners don't think that their cat is stressed.

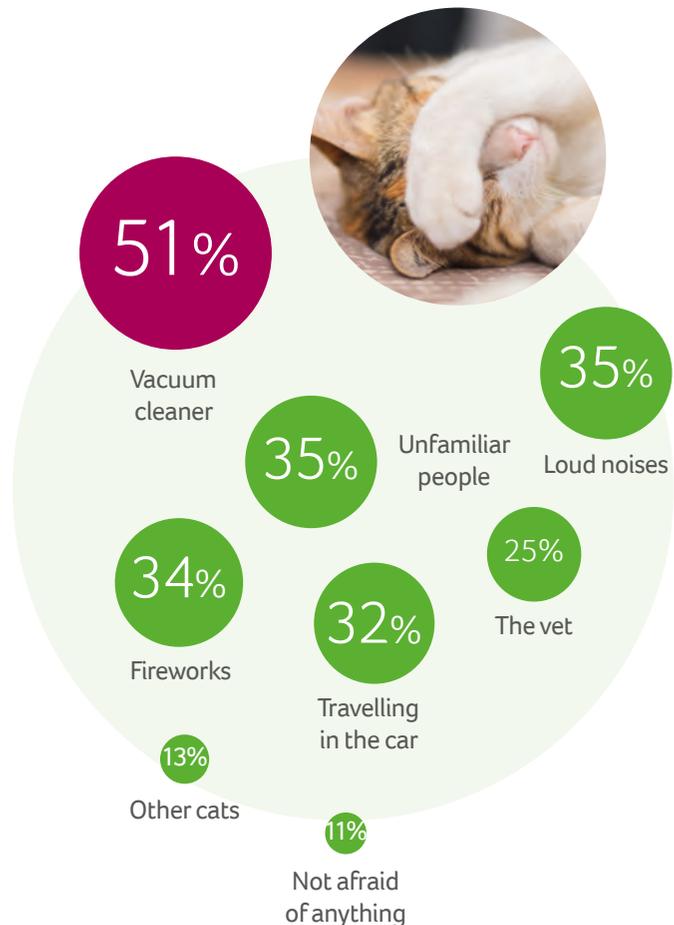
## Fears

A high percentage of owners report that their cat is afraid of at least one thing. With around 9.9 million (89%) UK cats showing fear of something, it's likely that lack of socialisation as a kitten could be a contributory factor. 22% of veterinary professionals report that their practice offers socialisation and training classes or specific advice on these topics for cats. With no significant change in fearful behaviour in cats over the years, socialisation by breeders and new owners needs to be made a higher priority.

The top fears, as reported by cat owners, are illustrated below.

### We asked cat owners ...

Which, if any, of the following is your cat afraid of?





## Companionship

‘Chronic stress in cats is an area of significant welfare concern, especially given how subtle the signs are and therefore easily overlooked. The PAW Report has consistently highlighted the trend for cats living in multi-cat households with one or more other cats, and we know this to be one of the biggest stressors that cats face. In particular, there is a clear mismatch between the number of cats which people are owning versus the recommended number of key resources. Cats Protection’s Behaviour Guide discusses the need for cats to be able to maintain an independent lifestyle if they wish and have enough separate resources in each of their territories. This can be achieved by owners applying the golden rule of one resource per cat plus one extra.’

*Nicky Trevorrow BSc (Hons), PG Dip (CABC), RVN  
Behaviour Manager, Cats Protection*

89% of cat owners say that their cat is afraid of at least one thing.

**Cats do not naturally live well with other cats, other than perhaps littermates.** As more solitary animals, to be placed in an environment with feline company that they haven’t chosen can be very stressful. It’s possible for cats to learn to tolerate, or even enjoy, the company of other cats, providing that they are introduced in the correct way and enough resources (food and water bowls, beds, scratching posts, litter trays) are available that allows them to avoid each other should they want to. Our research shows that many cats are living in homes with too few of these key resources.

57% of cats live alone. This leaves 4.8 million cats (43%) living in multi-cat households. 14% of cats – around 1.6 million – live with another cat they don’t always get along with, and 6% of cats live with more than one cat but some aren’t keen on each other.

2.1 million cats (19%) don’t get along with another cat or cats that they live with.



## Registered with a vet

**2.1 million cats (19%) are not currently registered with a vet.** Many cat owners believe it's not necessary as they can just turn up at the vets (33%) or that it's not necessary as their cat is fine (24%). 13% of cat owners cite that it's too expensive. With nearly a fifth of cats in the UK missing out on vital preventive healthcare and the support of their vet practice in their cat's overall wellbeing, this could be having a significant impact on our cat nation.

## Neutering

**9% of cats are not neutered – equating to around 999,000 unneutered cats in the UK.** A figure that has remained consistent since the first PAW Report. Top reasons for not neutering include that the owner hadn't thought about it (24%), that the cat doesn't go outside (15%) and that they were too young (15%).

It's encouraging that 58% of owners don't believe a cat should have a litter before being neutered (compared to 52% in 2017), whilst 32% don't know if they should (compared to 36% in 2017). This looks to be an improvement since the last PAW Report. However, 10% of owners still believe the myth that a cat should have a litter before being neutered.

The Cat Population Control Group (a group of nine veterinary and animal welfare organisations, including PDSA) recommend neutering cats at 4 months of age to prevent more unplanned litters of kittens.

57% of veterinary professionals say that they routinely recommend neutering cats at 4 months old. The percentage of owners of young cats (less than one year old) reporting that their vet recommended neutering at this age was much lower (24%).

## We asked cat owners ...

At what age did your vet recommend neutering your cat?\*



\*Among owners of cats up to one year old

## Vaccinations

**As with dogs, the levels of primary vaccination remain low after a drop last year, with 35% of owners stating that their cat hasn't had a primary course of vaccinations when young.** Additionally, 41% of cats have not received regular booster vaccinations. Top reasons given for not vaccinating with a primary course include that it's too expensive (21%), it's not necessary (17%) and that the cat doesn't come into contact with other animals (15%). Similar reasons were reported for not giving booster vaccinations, with the addition that the cat finds going to the vets very stressful, cited by 16% of owners. Clearly, more education is needed to impress the importance of regular vaccinations to prevent potentially fatal diseases in cats. Equally, ways of reducing cat stress in veterinary clinics could also be a way of encouraging more cat owners to take their pet in for vaccinations.

## Insurance

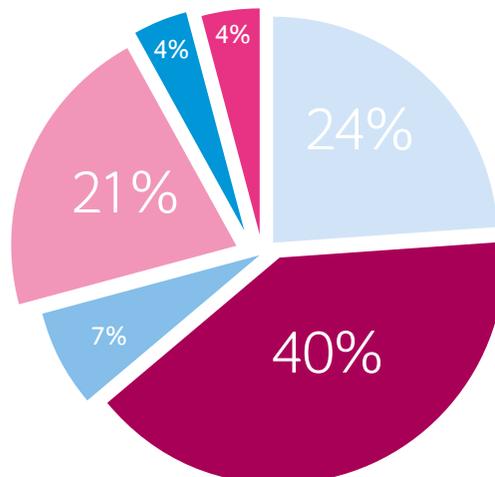
**62% of cats (6.9 million) are not insured.** Top reasons given for not insuring include it being too expensive (39%), to save money for vet bills instead (24%) and that owners don't think they would get their money's worth (24%).

## Microchipping

**32% of cats are not microchipped,** however microchipping overall has increased since 2011 (when 54% were not microchipped), showing that awareness of microchipping in cats is growing despite it not being compulsory.

## Treated for fleas and worms

**23% of cats are not wormed, and 19% are not treated for fleas.** As with dogs, this shows that perhaps more education is required around treating regularly as a preventive method, rather than just treating when a flea or worm problem is present.



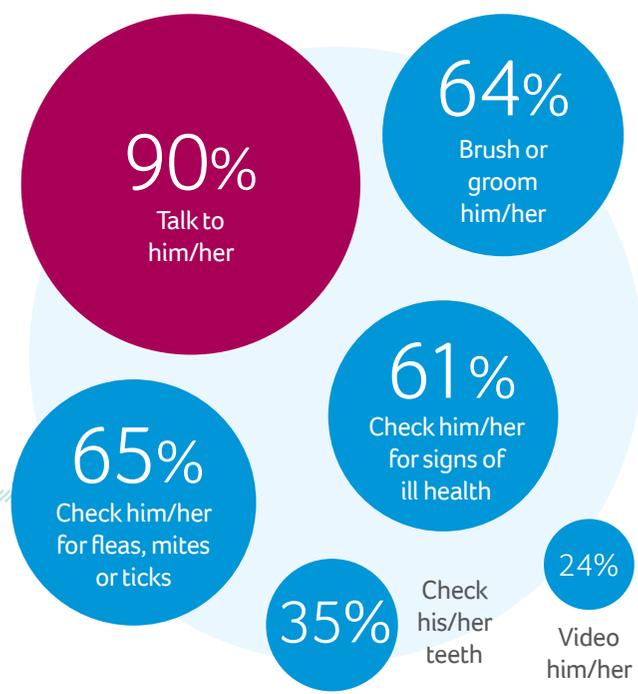


35% of cat owners say that their cat hasn't had a primary vaccination course when young – equating to around 3.9 million cats.

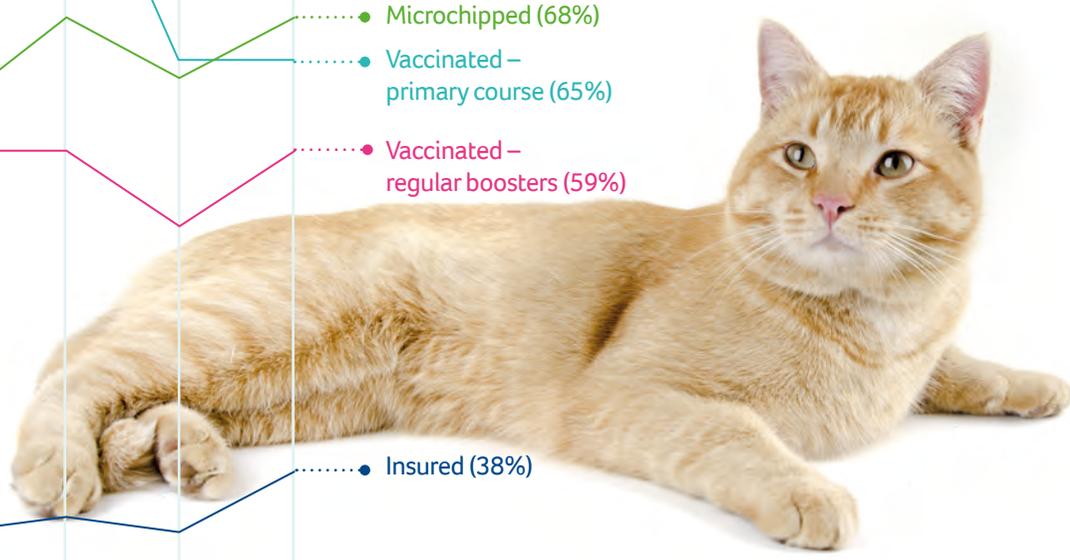
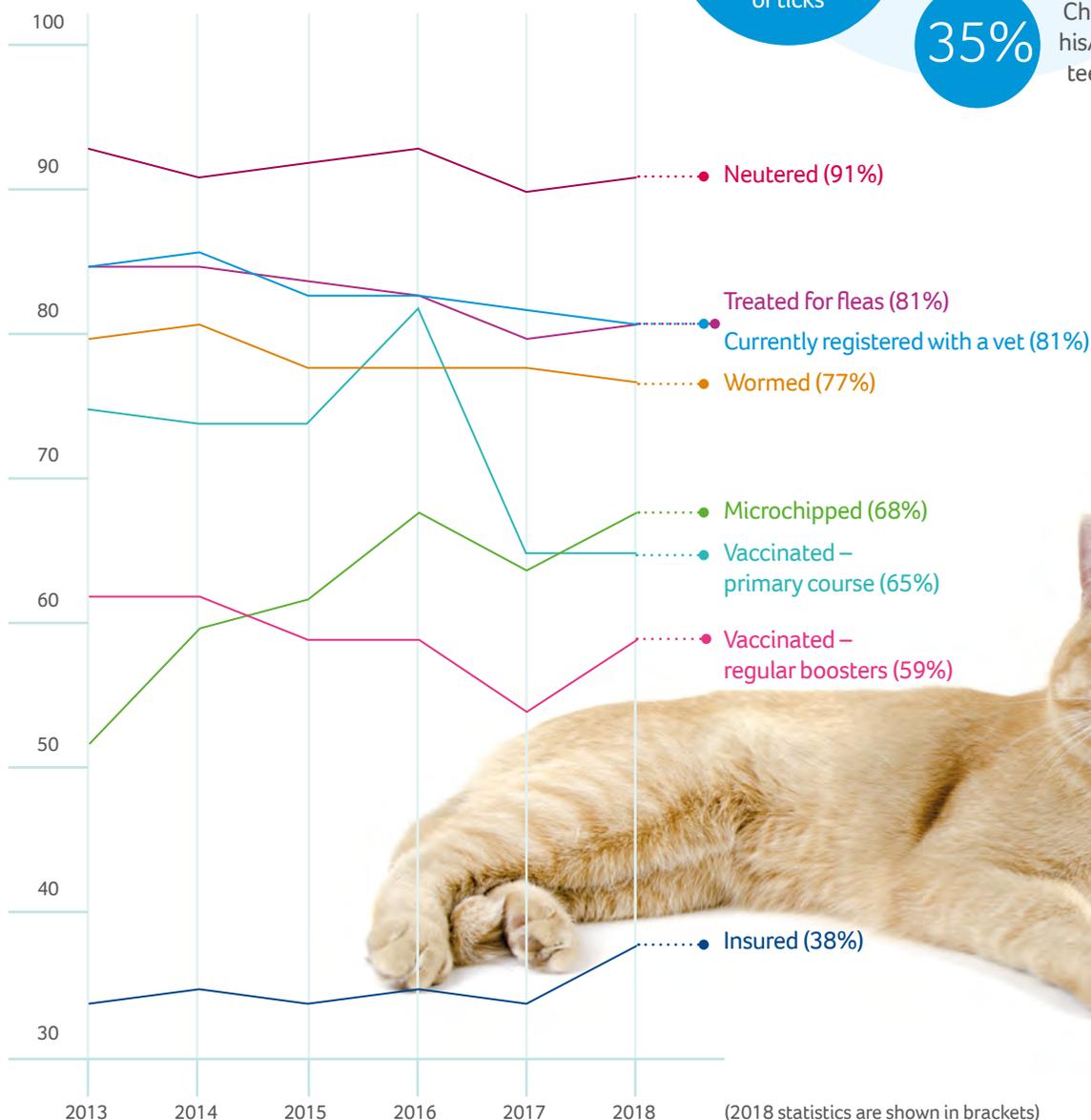
92% of veterinary professionals agree that microchipping should be made compulsory for cats.

### We asked cat owners ...

Do you or another person regularly do any of the following with your cat?



% Preventive health uptake in cats



# Summary

**Cats are the UK's most popular pet, but they continue to be misunderstood. A lack of awareness from owners, or ignoring recognised issues, means that many cats are still being let down.** Reaching potential owners before they acquire a cat will help them to understand their cat's needs, provide adequate socialisation to kittens, and provide the resources they need to avoid problems relating to chronic stress.

Although cats are able to get along with each other, especially if they have grown up together, they're naturally solitary and can experience significant stress living with other unrelated cats. Veterinary professionals identify multi-cat households and chronic stress as two of the top issues facing cats. Nearly a fifth of owners (19%) identify that their cat doesn't get on with another cat in the household. In our veterinary experience, owners can miss subtle signs of disagreements between cats, so the true

figure is likely to be higher. Our findings suggest owners are not providing sufficient resources (one of each resource per cat, plus one extra) to their cats, compounding the issue of territorial disputes.

Stress related to multi-cat households can lead to behavioural and health problems including inappropriate toileting and aggression. The highlighted lack of resources is also reflected in the most common unwanted behaviours shown by cats: inappropriate scratching. Cat owners who do not seek any advice on unwanted behaviour may be resigned to them because they think nothing can be done. Veterinary professionals are well-placed to identify issues owners are tolerating before they cause a breakdown of the human-animal bond. The fact that cat owners are driven to the internet for advice suggests more can be done to increase awareness on the causes of undesirable behaviours and how to address the most common ones.



Veterinary professionals identify multi-cat households and chronic stress as two of the top issues facing cats.

Good socialisation when cats are young can help to prevent fear-related behaviours. Over a fifth of vets offer specific socialisation resources for cats. It's important to provide resources for both breeders and new owners in order to ensure kittens are responsibly sold, acquired and socialised. PDSA is currently supporting development of a Kitten Checklist with the Cat Group to this end.

Obesity is a major issue for cats, but one that owners can find difficult to recognise. Despite many believing their cat is a healthy weight, the number matching their cat to an overweight or obese silhouette was high. Veterinary professionals regularly see obesity's negative impact on health but more work needs to be done to help cat owners recognise a healthy body shape and weight.

Nearly a fifth (19%) of cat owners not registered with a vet is a cause for concern. A sizeable proportion of

owners identified fear of the vet as a reason not to attend for regular booster vaccinations. Promoting a cat friendly ethos to clients (for example by gaining Cat Friendly Clinic accreditation from the International Society of Feline Medicine) may help to increase uptake of preventive healthcare as well as improving cat wellbeing when they visit the practice.

With support from the Marchig Animal Welfare Trust, over the last three years PDSA's PetWise for Cats programme has provided over 104,000 free feline PetWise MOTs, microchipped over 90,000 cats and neutered over 72,000. Encouragingly, nearly 60% of UK vet practices now recommend neutering at four months. PDSA continues to work with the Cat Population Control Group (CPCG) to raise awareness within the veterinary profession of the need to recommend 4 month neutering, rather than at the traditional 6 months, to ensure the health and welfare benefits of neutering are fully realised.

# Rabbit / contents

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RABBITS NEED COMPANY  
YET OVER HALF OF RABBITS  
(54%) IN THE UK ARE  
STILL LIVING ALONE



# Key findings



## 28% of rabbits

live in a hutch or cage that is too small

## 20% of rabbits

(200,000) are fed muesli as part of their main diet

## 77% of rabbit owners

don't know their pet's current weight and / or body condition score

## 54% of rabbit owners

want to change one or more of their rabbit's behaviours

## 540,000 rabbits

(54%) live alone

## 13% of rabbit owners

have provided no preventive healthcare for their rabbit

# Environment

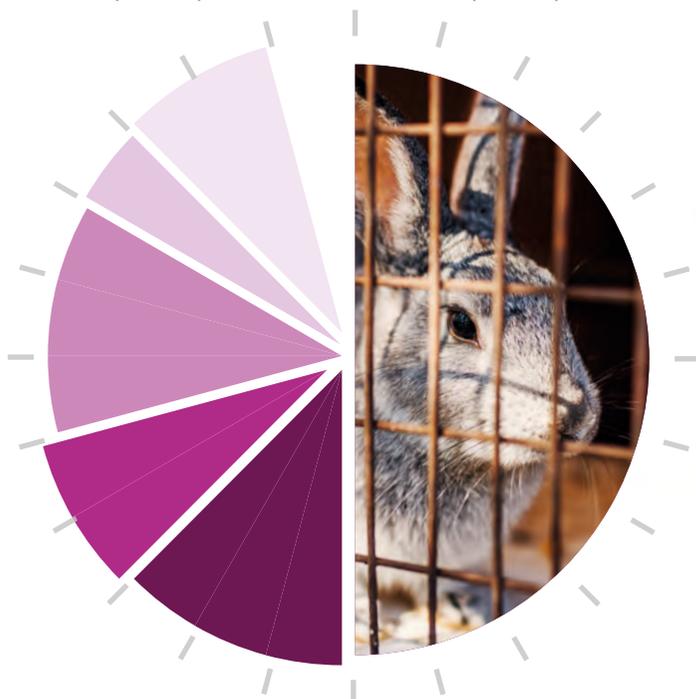
**61% of rabbits live predominantly outside, and 39% live predominantly inside.** When asked to choose an image that most closely resembled where their rabbit lived, 28% of rabbit owners revealed inadequate housing provision - either a small outdoor hutch (16%) or a small indoor cage (13%)\*.

Although this figure has improved since 2017 (when 36% of rabbits were living in inadequate housing), further education is still needed around providing suitable housing for rabbits. In the wild, rabbits have a territory equivalent to around thirty tennis courts, so to be housed in a small hutch or cage will undoubtedly have a negative impact on both their physical health and mental wellbeing.

## We asked rabbit owners ...

In a 24-hour period, how long does your rabbit spend in the following areas?

-  in their hutch (12 hours)
-  in a run in the garden (3 hours)
-  free-roaming in the garden (2 hours)
-  free-roaming in the house (3 hours)
-  in a run in the house (1 hour)
-  spending time interacting with owner (2 hours)



\*'Not stated' accounted for 1 hour

98% of veterinary professionals agree that rabbit hutches smaller than a minimum recommended size should be banned from sale



On average rabbits spend 12 hours in their hutch in a 24-hour period

\* Due to rounding these two figures add up to 28%. The exact figures are: small outdoor hutch 15.54%, small indoor hutch 12.73%



## Diet

### Main types of food

There have been improvements in the diets being fed to rabbits since the first PAW Report in 2011.

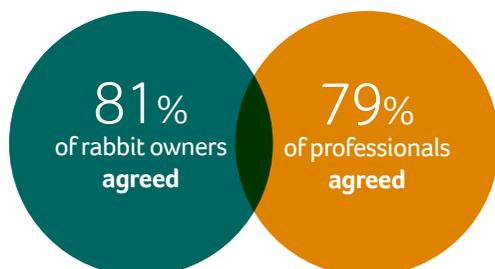
**20% of rabbits (200,000) are fed 'muesli' (a mix of cereals and flakes) as part of their main diet.** Whilst this figure is still higher than we'd like, this is the lowest level reported since the first PAW Report in 2011, when 49% of rabbits were being fed muesli.

**77% of rabbits are being fed hay as part of their main diet,** showing further improvements as this is the highest level since we first reported in 2011, when 62% were being fed hay. In addition to this, fresh greens (75%) and rabbit pellet food (72%) are being fed by the majority of rabbit owners as part of their rabbit's main diet. There is still work to be done however to help owners understand how much hay to feed, as 53% feed the recommended amount of their rabbit's body size or more, but 31% feed less than their rabbit's body size daily, 1% feed no hay and 14% don't know how much hay or grass their rabbit eats.

Although improvements have been made in rabbits' diets, with 20% still being fed muesli, we asked pet owners their thoughts on this food type being available to buy:

### **We asked rabbit owners ...**

**To what extent do you agree/disagree that food stuffs that are bad for rabbits' health, such as rabbit muesli, should be removed from sale?**



**83% of rabbit owners say that their rabbit is the ideal weight, but 77% of owners don't know their rabbit's current weight or body condition score**

### Perceptions of weight and body condition score

**83% of rabbit owners state that their rabbit is the ideal weight, but 77% know neither the weight or body condition score of their rabbit.** This is significantly higher than both cat and dog owners, suggesting that rabbit owners are not as good at monitoring their pets' weight.

Just 10% of owners described their rabbit as overweight, however, 26% chose a picture of an overweight rabbit as the picture that best illustrated their pet's shape, further emphasising that rabbit owners need help with assessing what is a healthy weight and body shape for their pet.

83% of rabbit owners give treats to their pet, with the main reasons being it provides variety for him/her (57%), it makes him/her feel happy (39%) and it makes the owner feel happy (22%).

Another interesting answer given by 12% of rabbit owners was they gave treats due to guilt over leaving their rabbit alone. It's likely that the additional calories of daily treats, alongside spending too much time in their hutch (on average 12 hours per day) and therefore not getting enough exercise, are key contributory factors to obesity.



## BVA and BVNA surveys



Vets and vet nurses estimated that 30% of the rabbits they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese (mean value).

A quarter (26%) of vets and vet nurses surveyed said they felt the proportion of overweight or obese rabbits they see in their practice has increased in the last two years, and almost a half (49%) felt that it had stayed the same.

On average vets and vet nurses estimated that 36% of the overweight and obese rabbits they see in their practice have health issues which could be related to their weight.

The most common weight-related health issues for rabbits identified by vets and vet nurses are:

- Grooming / self-care issues (93%)
- Musculoskeletal problems (42%)
- Respiratory problems (11%)

Most common reasons for excess weight in rabbits identified by vets and vet nurses:

- Inappropriate choice of animal food e.g. wrong food for life stage or exercise level (58%)
- Lack of exercise (54%)
- Owner's lack of recognition that their pet is overweight or has obesity (49%)



'This year's PAW Report has shown improvements in the way pet rabbits are fed, but there is still a long way to go before all rabbits receive the ideal diet. The numbers have come down from an all time high of 49% of rabbits being fed muesli as part of their main diet, to 20% this year, and the proportion of rabbits being fed hay as the main part of their diet has increased from 62% in 2011 to 77% in 2018. Most rabbits are certainly getting closer to an optimum diet, but we would like to see all rabbits on a diet based mainly on hay, with additional fresh green fibrous veg and a small amount of pelleted food, as explained in this year's Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) campaign.'

*Richard A Saunders*

*BSc (Hons) BVSc MRCVS DZooMed CBiol  
FBiol RCVS*

*Specialist in Zoological Medicine (Mammalian)  
RWA Veterinary Adviser*



79% of veterinary professionals agree that rabbit muesli should be removed from sale



# Behaviour

## Unwanted behaviours

Rabbits displaying unwanted behaviours could be doing so for a number of reasons, including ill health, stress, loneliness and boredom.

54% of owners report that their rabbit displays at least one behaviour that they'd like to change. Despite this, the majority (78%) of owners don't think that their pet is stressed. Only 6% report that they think their rabbit is stressed.

### We asked rabbit owners ...

Which of the following behaviours does your rabbit display that you would like to change?



18%

Thumping back feet

17%

Digging up ground and/or carpets

15%

Chewing furniture etc

8% Biting bars of run/hutch repeatedly

8%

Hiding

3% Teeth grinding

3%

Hissing, growling or muttering

3% Fighting with other rabbits

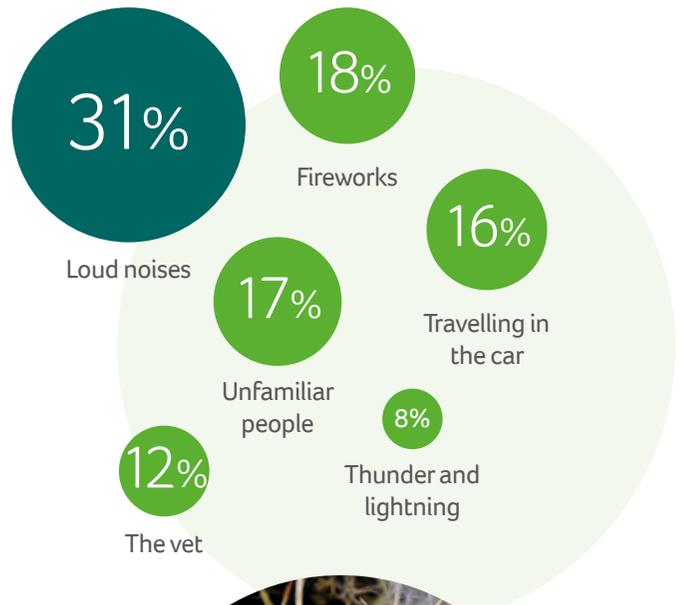
Reassuringly, 43% of rabbit owners would seek help from a veterinary practice to change unwanted behaviours. However, just 11% of veterinary professionals report that their practice offers behaviour clinics or specific advice on this topic for rabbits.

## Fears

66% of owners report that their rabbit is afraid of something.

### We asked rabbit owners ...

Which of the following, if any, is your rabbit afraid of?



34% of owners report that their rabbit isn't afraid of anything, which is higher than in cats and dogs. However, as they are prey animals, it's possible that this is because fear in rabbits may be more difficult to identify than in dogs and cats.



# Companionship



# Health

Rabbits are highly sociable animals, and when bonded with a compatible, neutered partner or partners, they enjoy a much better quality of life than when kept alone.

There is still a vast amount of work to be done in educating owners on the importance of an appropriate companion for rabbits, as **over half the rabbit population (54%) still live on their own – equating to 540,000 lonely rabbits in the UK.** Living a solitary life will be seriously impacting on the physical health and mental wellbeing of our pet rabbits.

39% of rabbits live with one or more other rabbits, which is higher than when first reported in 2011 (when 27% lived with other rabbits) but hasn't changed much over the past four years of PAW Report findings. 62% of owners disagreed that their rabbit was lonely.

54% of rabbits (540,000) still live alone, but 91% of rabbit owners say that their pet is happy



68% of veterinary professionals say that they routinely recommend another rabbit as companionship for rabbits kept alone

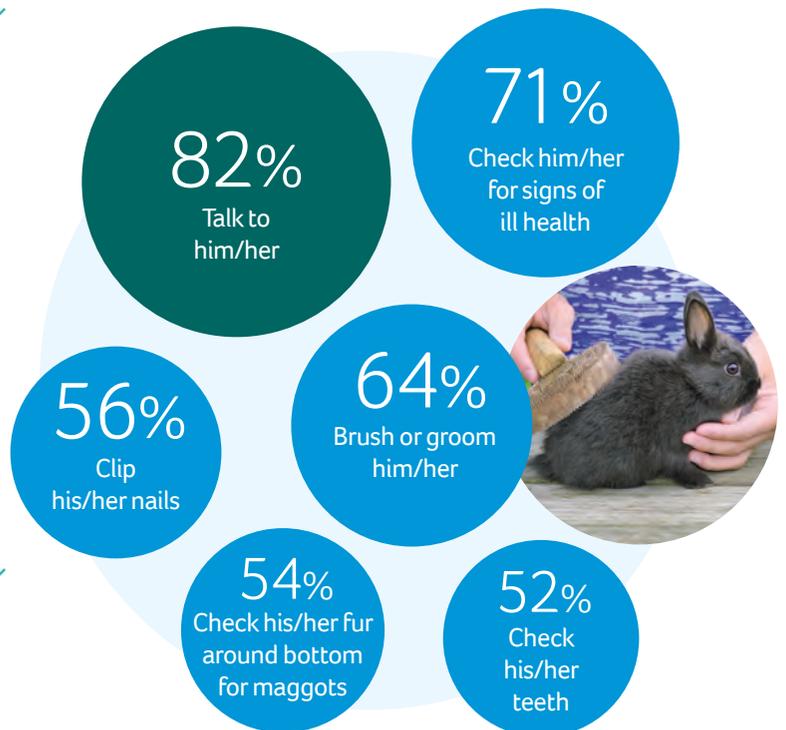
## Registered with a vet

34% of rabbits (340,000) are not currently registered with a vet. Similar reasons were given as for cats and dogs, with over a third of rabbit owners (33%) stating that it's not necessary as they can just turn up at the vets, and 29% saying that it's not necessary as their rabbit is fine. 10% said that they haven't got around to it yet, and 10% report it's too expensive. Preventive healthcare in rabbits is a hugely neglected area, and with so many owners not choosing to even register with a vet, different avenues must be found to help rabbit owners understand the importance of preventive healthcare and the benefits of regular healthcare advice that come from registering with a veterinary practice.

We asked owners whether they spend time interacting with their rabbits and what activities they do to take care of their rabbit at home.

## We asked rabbit owners ...

Which of the following do you regularly do with your rabbit?



Rabbit owners clearly show lots of affection to their rabbits and 91% of rabbit owners say their pet is happy. However, there are still shortfalls in owners providing adequate preventive healthcare.



## Neutering

**46% of rabbits in the UK are not neutered.**

Top reasons given by owners for not neutering their rabbit include that the rabbit lives alone (38%), that owners haven't thought about it (17%), that their rabbit doesn't go outside (15%) and that the owner doesn't think there is any benefit (15%).

## Vaccinated

**Almost half (49%) of rabbits have not been vaccinated with a primary course when young, equating to 490,000 unvaccinated rabbits.**

Further to this, 58% have not had regular booster vaccinations. Top reasons given for not vaccinating with a primary course include that the rabbit doesn't come into contact with other animals (28%), that it's not necessary (20%) and that it's too expensive (13%). Similar reasons were given for not giving booster vaccinations. This is clearly an area where a significant amount of education is needed for rabbit owners to understand the risks to unvaccinated rabbits, and the potentially fatal diseases that can be contracted.

68% of veterinary professionals routinely recommend neutering for rabbits

13% of owners have provided no preventive healthcare for their rabbit – this is higher than cat and dog owners

## Insurance

**The majority of rabbits (87%) in the UK are uninsured.** 30% of rabbit owners whose pet is not insured don't feel they would get their money's worth (this is higher than for dog and cat owners), while 26% state that it's too expensive and 21% prefer to save money for vet bills instead.

## % Preventive health uptake in rabbits



# Summary



**Many people, if asked, could envisage how rabbits live in the wild: large territories, in groups with other rabbits, eating a diet largely made up of grass, and able to run, jump and 'binky' whenever they feel like it.** So why is the reality for our pet rabbits so far from this? They continue to suffer due to misunderstanding of their most basic needs. Indeed, one of the veterinary profession's top concerns is that rabbits are subject to a complete lack of care, or are forgotten about. Greater education of rabbit owners is needed as to the amount of space that is realistically required by rabbits and their requirement for companionship, in order for them to exhibit natural behaviours and enjoy the wellbeing that they deserve.

Despite this and the problems illustrated in this report, 91% of rabbit owners believe their rabbits are happy. Is this because most rabbits are purchased from pet shops, where new owners may not always be receiving informed advice on the reality of their

needs? In an effort to safeguard against this, PDSA has fed into the DEFRA consultation on proposed Animal Establishment Licensing Regulations (due for implementation in autumn 2018), which includes new requirements for provision of point-of-sale information to pet-buyers and training of pet shop staff. This way, all prospective rabbit owners should start receiving the trusted information they need.

Rabbits' diets also remain at the top of the veterinary profession's concerns, perhaps because of recent work to highlight their dietary issues coupled with daily clinical experience of related health problems. In this area, there is cause for optimism: there is a continuing reduction in owners feeding rabbit muesli and an increase in owners feeding hay as part of the main diet. Increased owner awareness has driven the change so far and this year PDSA is again participating in Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) to encourage retailers and the last 20% of owners to 'Move Away From Muesli'.



Rabbits' diets also remain at the top of the veterinary profession's concerns, perhaps because of recent work to highlight their dietary issues coupled with daily clinical experience of related health problems.

Even following these improvements in rabbit diet, obesity is still a problem – perhaps due to rabbits not getting enough exercise as they spend a high proportion of their time in hutches. While the proportion of rabbits in a hutch or cage which is too small has decreased, 28% of rabbits are still housed inappropriately. Spending an average of 12 hours in cramped hutches will have a negative impact on both their health and wellbeing. Public and veterinary support for a ban on hutches smaller than a minimum size represents a possible avenue for legislative improvement of standards.

Owners must also be educated on how to identify a healthy body shape and weight. Aside from obesity, a change in weight can be the first sign of ill health in a prey species which hides signs of disease. Education in other aspects of health is also necessary: worryingly, owners identified tooth grinding as a behaviour they'd like to change, rather than a focus for concern as a sign of pain requiring veterinary attention.

15% of owners of unneutered rabbits didn't see the benefit of neutering – despite the documented risk of uterine cancer in unneutered females. A further 38% of owners said they hadn't neutered their rabbit because their pet lived alone.

Over half of the nation's rabbits are socially isolated but with 62% of owners not thinking that their rabbit is lonely there is more work to be done to encourage people to consider the world from their rabbit's perspective.

Behaviours that owners would like to change in their rabbits include thumping, digging and chewing. Providing enrichment objects such as tunnels, digging substrates and hiding places may help prevent and provide appropriate outlets for some of these behaviours, but increasing the size of living accommodation and providing an exercise area will be a necessary first step for many rabbits in order to accommodate these resources.

# Help us improve pet wellbeing



Every year the PAW Report gives us essential insights into pet wellbeing in the UK. We're incredibly proud that over the last eight years, these findings have helped form the basis of campaigns and collaborative initiatives across the animal welfare sector and veterinary profession.

On a local level, veterinary practices across the UK are able to use the findings to shape clinics and encourage behaviour change in owners to benefit their pet's wellbeing.

We'd love for the findings of this year's Report to again be used by the sector to continue to stimulate change – to enable us all to acknowledge the most pressing issues and tackle them head on. This will ensure continued momentum in the drive to improve the welfare of pets across the UK. Only through hard work and collaboration can we tackle these issues in order to see improvements in key areas such as obesity, loneliness, behavioural issues, pre-purchase decision making and more in future PAW Reports.



**Saving pets is what we do.  
Every. Single. Day.**

Your support today will save pets' lives tomorrow.  
DONATE | SHOP | VOLUNTEER | FUNDRAISE | GIFT IN WILL

Find out how you can help at [pdsa.org.uk](https://pdsa.org.uk)

# Concluding thoughts



Pets do so much to enrich our lives. For many, they complete our families; they provide unconditional love and expect nothing in return. They're a source of comfort, a listening ear, the best welcome home, and a best friend that will always be there, no matter what. To some, they are a person's only, much-needed companion. Don't we owe it to them, at the very least, to give back what they give to us in abundance?

Since our first PAW Report in 2011, we have seen some improvements for dogs, cats and rabbits in the UK. But in our eighth year, are the changes we've seen really enough? What more can we do so that in coming years, we look at the data and feel we're making significant steps forward in advancing pet wellbeing?

We believe that the invaluable role played by veterinary practices is key to tackling the current welfare issues facing pets in the UK. Those finding new ways to talk to local pet owners and offering new consultation models, such as quality of life assessments and pre-purchase consultations, are already moving pet wellbeing forward. By continuing to build bonds with clients that last a lifetime, and using their trust and expertise to speak out with authority about pet wellbeing issues, vets and vet nurses will maintain and enhance their roles as animal welfare leaders. This will help to ensure they are the first point of contact for any pet-related queries, whether from current or prospective owners. We want pet owners to view the veterinary and

A woman with brown hair tied back, wearing glasses and a white lab coat, is looking at a book titled 'Behaviour' on a shelf. The book has a green cover with a picture of a dog.

88,491  
school children  
were educated in 2017  
on responsible pet care  
by PDSA's  
outreach team

3,154  
PetWise MOTs  
for dogs were delivered  
in local communities  
by our outreach team  
in 2017

veterinary nursing professions as the source to turn to whenever they need guidance. We know this vision is shared by the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) and following many years of mutual support, we are delighted to have formally collaborated in presenting pet wellbeing data from each of these organisations in this year's PAW Report.

In 100 years, PDSA's size and scope has changed from Maria Dickin and her dispensary on the streets of London to over 340 vets and 360 vet nurses in 48 Pet Hospitals treating pets in need every day and from a goal of treatment of existing illness towards an increased focus on educating owners to prevent health and welfare problems. One thing that hasn't changed is our dedication to improving the wellbeing of pets. The PAW Report has developed into a respected barometer for the state of UK pet wellbeing, and PDSA will continue to use the results in order to direct our campaigns, interventions and activities towards areas where we feel we can deliver the maximum impact on the welfare of the nation's pets.



////////////////////////////////////  
**We want pet owners to view the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions as the source to turn to whenever they need guidance.**  
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As well as our continuing focus on educating owners with our *WhichPet?* pre-purchase consultation framework, which has been endorsed by the BVA, we have also been campaigning to strengthen legislation and guidelines around buying, selling, travelling with and keeping pets. As a member of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG), PDSA continues to promote responsible advertising of pets. We have also contributed to the UK Centre for Animal Law's report "Brexit – getting the best deal for animals" – making recommendations to improve animal welfare once the UK has left the EU.

This includes improving the Pet Travel Scheme to prevent illegal puppy imports and protect our nation's pets from emerging diseases.

PDSA continues to use our PetWise MOT consultation framework structured around the 5 Welfare Needs. As well as working to increase the delivery of these MOTs across our Pet Hospitals, in 2017 our outreach team has delivered 3,154 PetWise MOTs for dogs in local communities and reached 88,491 school children to educate on responsible pet care.

Addressing the multiple factors behind the persisting shortfalls in pet wellbeing will never be an easy task, but it's a challenge that we are committed to in continuing our mission to provide a lifetime of wellbeing for every pet.

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

For further details of how we have calculated the estimated monthly and lifetime costs for dogs, cats and rabbits please see:

[www.pdsa.org.uk/dogcost](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/dogcost)

[www.pdsa.org.uk/catcost](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/catcost)

[www.pdsa.org.uk/rabbitscost](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/rabbitscost)

When calculating the percentage of dog, cat and rabbit owners who underestimated the minimum monthly cost of owning their pet we used estimated values of £70, £70 and £35 for each species respectively. These figures are based on the smallest breed of dog and one single rabbit.

When calculating the percentage of dog, cat and rabbit owners who underestimated the minimum total lifetime cost of owning their pet we used estimated values of £6,500, £12,000 and £3,500 for each species respectively. These figures are based on the smallest breed of dog and one single rabbit.



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

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What the world thinks

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