Dog & Cat Demographics and Animal Welfare: Seattle, King County and Washington State

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Brief Background

- WellBeing International was founded in 2018 but I have been tracking dog and cat demographics and shelter intakes and outcomes since 1980.

- Today – hope to provide insights and context to inform your strategic thinking and planning.

- In particular, I will be emphasizing the uncertainties in national dog and cat population statistics and the importance of tracking trends.
Outline of Talk

• US Pet Demographics
  • Trends – 1980 to Present
  • State by State Differences
  • Urban-Rural Differences

• US Shelter Intakes and Outcomes, 1973 to Present
  • Suggested Reasons for Changes

• Washington & Seattle – Companion Animal Specifics
  • Washington State
  • King County & Seattle

• Animal Protection Income

• Concluding Comments
US Pet Ownership Rates

The chart shows the percentages of US households with pets over time. Note that two of the national surveys find no/little change in ownership rates. One reports significant increases.
Tracking RELATIVE Pet Populations
(dogs and cats per 1,000 people)

People routinely take the latest survey estimate and then assume that reflects the correct dog/cat population.

The graph shows the relative pet dog and cat numbers in the USA from 1940 to 2020.

**Dogs** - without 2006 and 2016 values, relative dog population hardly changes in 70 years.

**Cats** - population estimates are problematic.

The equation $y = 0.397x - 573.01$ is provided for the line of best fit.
According to the 2016 AVMA survey of US dog and cat populations, the map at right shows dogs per 1,000 people for each state.
The plot of pet ownership rates against log human density produces a strong trend line. Predicts 40% of Seattle HHs have pets.
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• Nationally, 3.4 dogs and cats were euthanized in shelters per 1,000 people in 2019. In King County, it was 0.5 in 2015.

1974/6 Challenge – how to reduce shelter euthanasia – even animal advocates said that sterilization would not be sufficient.
Shelter Trends & Causes

The data at right comes from a CA shelter that had records going back to 1970. The big decline in the 1970s is observed in other shelter records in the USA.


Dog intakes start to decline again in late 1980s – vet hosps switch from opt-in to opt-out

Cat intakes decline in mid-1990s as TNVR becomes more widespread?

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Shelter Intake and Euthanasia (standardized to per 1,000)

• Big changes in animal sheltering numbers in Washington state in last thirty years. State euthanasia numbers for 2017-2019 (data from Pre-read) were 0.81, 0.68 & 0.77 per 1,000

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Population</td>
<td>4,314,437</td>
<td>5,371,544</td>
<td>6,544,170</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelter Intake/1,000</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelter Euthanasia/1,000</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<td>King County Intake/1,000</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County Euth/1,000</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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King County Shelter Numbers: 2017-2020

- Numbers from Shelter Animals Count. The 5 main shelters in King County reported in each of the four years below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King County</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number Reporting Orgs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Intake</td>
<td>19,990</td>
<td>20,931</td>
<td>20,131</td>
<td>11,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted intake (not transfers)</td>
<td><strong>11,261</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,588</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,130</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,503</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Live Outcomes</td>
<td>18,799</td>
<td>19,937</td>
<td>19,081</td>
<td>11,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Live Outcomes</td>
<td>16,346</td>
<td>17,933</td>
<td>17,314</td>
<td>9,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other outcomes</td>
<td>1,043</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Humane Intake</td>
<td>6,700</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Cats/Dogs</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Some Observations

• Three-fold income growth in Washington State Animal Protection movement in last twenty years. Will this continue? Do Seattle Humane and other animal groups have to do anything to continue this growth? Did they do anything to prompt this growth?

• In 50 years, only ONE major animal group in the US has, to my knowledge, taken the trouble to survey its catchment area. If you do not know how many dogs and cats there are in your community, where they are, what welfare challenges they experience nor how many experience such challenges – how can you claim to be addressing the critical welfare needs of King County/Washington animals?

• The lack of attention to animal data and demographics, to data anomalies and to the insights that such data brings (think of tracking Covid if we did not know how many people there are and where they are) is just stunning.

• Nearly all US animal sheltering attention is focused inwards.
In 1973, around 20-25% of the US dog and cat population was passing through an animal shelter every year.

Today, only 5% are. In King County, only 1.5% of local pets (maybe less) are passing through the animal shelter/rescue system. Seattle Humane is handling less than 0.5% of local animals.

The bulk of the animal welfare challenges are out in the community, and not among Seattle Humane’s animal intake.