



Pet adoptions fall as surrenders hold steady: CANA's Impact Report warns rescue services remain under pressure

New data shows fewer pets entering shelters and foster care, growing community support for pets in aged care and ongoing challenges for pet owners.

Leading national animal welfare charity and advocacy group Companion Animal Network Australia (Australia CAN or CANA) has released its July 2024 – June 2025 Impact Report, revealing that while fewer animals entered shelters and foster care this year, adoptions declined and surrenders held steady, leaving animal rescue services under continued pressure.

The consolidated data from CANA's [five member agencies](#) shows surrenders for dogs and cats have remained relatively steady compared to 2023–24, with only a modest **6% drop**. With fewer animals entering the system, adoption numbers declined by **17%** — a trend potentially influenced by cost-of-living pressures.

“When pets stay in homes where they are loved, that’s the best outcome for everyone. At the same time, we recognise that cost-of-living pressures are making some families think twice before taking on the responsibility of a new pet,” said CANA CEO Trish Ennis.

“This year’s data points to fewer animals being abandoned – a trend we hope reflects positive change potentially driven by pet-friendly rental reforms, more aged care facilities allowing pets, and improved education around responsible pet ownership.”

Australians back pets in aged care

CANA's Pet Friendly Aged Care (PFAC) program continues to highlight strong community support for pets as people age. The 2025 PFAC Survey drew double the responses of 2023, with **68% of Australians saying people in aged care should be able to own a pet.**

“The strong response to this year’s Pet Friendly Aged Care Survey shows just how passionate Australians are about ensuring older people can stay connected with their pets,” said Ms Ennis.

Yet significant barriers remain, including a lack of education by staff about the benefits and management of pets in facilities.

CANA has played a national role in advancing companion animal welfare and policy change, including formal government submissions calling for pet-assistance services to be included under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP).

In June, CANA also [welcomed](#) the passing of the Retirement Villages Amendment Act in Victoria, which prohibits retirement villages from having rules that “unreasonably limit the keeping of a pet on a resident’s premises.”

CANA has worked closely with the aged care sector and government bodies, including the Australasian College of Infection Prevention and Control (ACIPC), to promote the inclusion of companion animals in aged care services.

“In collaboration with ACIPC, we developed resource kits for residential aged care homes, which are already having a positive impact by helping facilities accommodate people and their pets,” said Ms Ennis.

This progress shows what’s possible, but it’s only the beginning for CANA.

“Aged care is an area where we know there is much more work to do,” Ms Ennis said. “The human–animal bond is vital for health and wellbeing, with studies showing dog owners may have up to a [40%](#) lower risk of developing dementia. That’s just one example of the extraordinary benefits pets bring. CANA will continue working with aged care providers, government and the community to expand options for older Australians to keep their pets by their side.”

Challenges facing pets and their people

CANA’s Impact Report also highlights critical trends in rescue. More than half of the cats arriving at CANA member rescue services are under six months old, showing the continuing strain of kitten season on rescue organisations and the need for affordable early desexing programs.

“Dogs and cats come into animal rescue services in almost equal numbers, but cats dominate adoptions, making up 60%. At the same time, **61% of dogs come in as strays**, and **dogs are seven times more likely than cats to be reunited with their families** — proof of how important identification and microchipping are!” said Ms Ennis.

While overall surrenders decreased slightly, the reasons reveal ongoing pressures for pet owners, particularly around renting challenges, cost of living pressures and change in circumstances for pet owners and pet behaviour problems.

“These figures show that while progress is being made, people still face barriers when life circumstances change or when housing challenges arise,” Ms Ennis said.

Looking Ahead: CANA’s priorities for 2025–26

In the year ahead, CANA will continue to lead the national conversation on companion animal welfare issues, with a few priorities, including:

- Promoting desexing education to prevent unwanted litters
- Advocating for a national ban on greyhound racing
- Education and training of pet owners and their companion animals
- Collaborating with aged care stakeholders to expand options for older Australians to live with and keep their pets.

“Thanks to the tireless efforts of our members and the support of the community and our corporate sponsors, real progress is being made,” Ms Ennis said. “But there is more to do to ensure every Australian can experience the benefits of companionship and joy of animals, regardless of their circumstances.”

Download the 2024-2025 Impact Report [here](#).

ENDS