

## Characteristics of clients and animals served by high-volume, stationary, nonprofit spay-neuter clinics

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### OBJECTIVE

To characterize the clients served by and the cats and dogs admitted to nonprofit spay-neuter clinics.

### DESIGN

Cross-sectional survey.

### SAMPLE

2,154 dogs and 1,902 cats that were owned by 3,768 survey respondents and admitted to 22 nonprofit spay-neuter clinics across the United States between April 29, 2013, and January 24, 2014.

### PROCEDURES

Participating clinics distributed surveys to clients during each of 4 quarterly study weeks. The survey collected descriptive information about clients' pets and households as well as their decision-making regarding sterilization of their pets. For each of the study weeks, clinics reported the total number of surgeries, including those involving shelter animals, feral cats, and other owned animals.

### RESULTS

Respondents indicated that 49% of dogs and 77% of cats had not been examined previously by a veterinarian, except during vaccine clinics. Among animals  $\geq 4$  months of age, 1,144 of 1,416 (81%) cats and 572 of 1,794 (32%) dogs had not received a rabies vaccination. Previous litters were reported for 204 of 716 (28%) queens and 153 of 904 (17%) bitches. Most clients' (53%) household income was  $< \$30,000$  annually. Common reasons for clinic choice included cost; friend, neighbor, or family recommendation; and good reputation.

### CONCLUSIONS AND CLINICAL RELEVANCE

Nonprofit spay-neuter clinics predominantly served low-income clients and animals lacking regular veterinary care, in addition to animals from shelters and community cats. These clinics increase access to services needed for animal population control and public health. (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2018;253:737–745)

Approximately 7.6 million cats and dogs enter animal shelters each year, and of these, approximately 2.7 million are euthanized.<sup>1</sup> Surgical sterilization has long been a major approach to this problem and is credited as a key influence in reducing the annual number of cats and dogs euthanized from approximately 13.5 million in 1973.<sup>2</sup> Spay-neuter clinics operate throughout the United States to reduce overpopulation and euthanasia of companion animals.<sup>3</sup> In targeted areas, programs for owned pets<sup>4–8</sup> and free-roaming cats<sup>9,10</sup> have been associated with decreased cat intake into shelters.

Nonprofit spay-neuter clinics are established to increase pet owners' access to services for surgical sterilization of cats and dogs, especially for pets that would not be sterilized otherwise by private practitioners or by shelter practitioners before adoption.

Despite successful neutering of over a million<sup>4</sup> pets annually, the impact of nonprofit spay-neuter clinics has been questioned by some who believe that the availability of these subsidized services displaces business from practices where these surgeries might be performed otherwise or competes unfairly with the for-profit sector for clients.

The cost of ovariohysterectomy or castration is an important barrier to service access for many pet owners. People with lower incomes are nearly as likely to own cats or dogs as are people with higher incomes<sup>11,12</sup>; however, a 2011 survey<sup>13</sup> found that 32% of 1,000 respondents with recently acquired, sexually intact pets stated that neutering was too expensive. In addition, a survey<sup>12</sup> of cat owners found that cats from households with annual earnings  $< \$35,000$  were significantly less likely to be surgically sterilized than cats from higher-income households and that cost was a commonly cited reason. A different study<sup>14</sup> found that pet owners from households with unplanned litters cited cost of sterilization surgery

### ABBREVIATIONS

TNR Trap-neuter-return

