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## **Animal Shelters are in a State of Emergency** *On Adopt a Shelter Pet Day, San Diego County's leading animal welfare organizations join together to urge the community to act*

**SAN DIEGO** — For the first time, San Diego's leading animal welfare organizations have come together to raise awareness about the critical state of animal shelters in San Diego County. During a press conference on Adopt a Shelter Pet Day today, eleven organizations implored the community to join them in saving lives by adopting, fostering and spaying and neutering their pets, before the situation becomes even more urgent during the busier summer months.

[City of Chula Vista Animal Services](#), [East County Animal Rescue](#), [Feral Cat Coalition](#), [Friends of Cats](#), [Frosted Faces Foundation](#), [PAWS of Coronado](#), [Rancho Coastal Humane Society](#), [San Diego County Department of Animal Services](#), [San Diego House Rabbit Society](#), [San Diego Humane Society](#) and [Spay Neuter Action Project](#) are all committed to staying at zero euthanasia of healthy or treatable shelter pets. However, sustaining this achievement is becoming increasingly difficult.



**Here's how the community can help:**

- **Adopt:** Adopting saves lives, and there are thousands of pets available at shelters and local rescues right now. From puppies and kittens to senior companions and small pets like rabbits and guinea pigs — shelters are overflowing with deserving animals in need of adoption.
- **Foster:** This is a critical – and temporary – way you can help save lives. By opening your home to foster a pet, you give them relief from the stress of the shelter and create space for other animals in need.
- **Spay and neuter:** Increasing the number of spayed/neutered animals is the only way to stop the crisis of pet overpopulation at its root. Reduced access to spay/neuter services during the pandemic exacerbated the challenges facing our shelters.

Nationally, 359,000 dogs and 330,000 cats were euthanized last year, according to [Shelter Animals Count](#). In 2023 alone, more than 3 million cats and dogs nationwide entered animal shelters and rescues. In San Diego County, local shelters and rescues are caring for far more animals than their facilities were designed to house. As an example: In 2022, San Diego Humane Society reached a record high of nearly 494 dogs in care each day. In 2023, that daily average rose to 540. Now, in 2024, they have skyrocketed to a daily average of 632. Stray dog intakes are up 12%, and 65% of these pets are never reclaimed by their owners. They are also seeing an increase in owners turning to us to surrender their pets, with the most common reasons being unplanned litters, having too many animals already, or the owners are moving and can't bring their pets.

Despite these challenges, San Diego County has maintained its commitment to “[Stay at Zero](#)” euthanasia of healthy or treatable shelter pets since 2015. This success is due to the collaborative efforts of local shelters and rescues, and the generosity of those who share their passion for animals



“Summer is the busiest time for animal shelters, so we need the community to help us help them, before it gets worse,” said Dr. Gary Weitzman, president and CEO, San Diego Humane Society. “There are hundreds of deserving animals, from puppies and kittens, to special breed dogs and cats, and small pets, who are waiting for a second chance at our shelters and rescues.”

“The number of pets coming to us in need of help is more than we ever imagined,” said Ashley Milo, Deputy Director of Animal Services, City of Chula Vista Animal Services. “We are sounding the alarm. We need our community's help now more than ever - whether it is adopting or fostering, volunteering or donating.”

“Even if you can't make a permanent commitment to adopt, there are so many ways to help,” Jennifer Stein, Senior Manager of Fund Development, PAWS of Coronado. “Our fosters serve as bridges, preventing dogs from entering the shelter by seamlessly transitioning them from one loving home to another, ensuring their journey ends in a forever family!”

“All rescues and rabbit shelters are full as well, and we have been turning away relinquishment requests because all of our spaces in the shelters and foster homes are full,” said Jennifer Lee, Executive Director, House Rabbit Society. “Many of the rabbits we take in are medical needs rabbits, they need to be spayed/neutered and vaccinated and we need funding to do that, which is hard to come by for small animals.”

“In just six years, two unaltered dogs and their offspring can be responsible for more than 60,000 canines,” said Dorell Sackett, Executive Director of Operations, Spay Neuter Action Project. “For cats, that figure doubles to 120,000! The best way to end this crisis of unwanted pets, and overpopulated shelters is through spaying and neutering.”

“Every year, San Diego's kitten season stretches the resources of our local shelters and rescues,” said Amber Millen, President, Feral Cat Coalition and Vice President, East County Animal Rescue. “Spaying and neutering is the only effective way to reduce the population of community cats, and stem the flood of kittens into local shelters and rescues.”

“Every animal in shelter care is looking for their forever home, waiting for their person,” said Cora Zwartjes, Shelter Director and Head Vet Tech, Friends of Cats. “By adopting from a shelter people can not only help their new family member, but open up resources for the next animal in need.”

“Frosted Faces Foundation rescues senior dogs of all breeds and sizes, but the capacity at our Ramona shelter is limited to about 50 dogs,” said Andrew Smišek, Co-Founder, Frosted Faces Foundation. “Fostering is a critical step in saving more lives because, as soon as a dog leaves our shelter for a foster home, a kennel opens up and we are able to rescue another senior dog who may be at risk of euthanasia at an open admission shelter. In this way, fostering one dog literally saves the life of another dog.”

“The County of San Diego Department of Animal Services urgently calls upon our community for assistance,” said Suzy Clayton, Intake2Placement Program Coordinator, County of San Diego Department of Animal Services. “With an unprecedented number of animals in our care and over a third who have been awaiting homes for 30 days or longer — some for over a year — we ask you to support us through fostering, adopting, and advocating for responsible pet ownership by spaying and neutering your pets. Your actions will help create vital kennel space for the anticipated surge of incoming pets this summer. Together, through community support and collaboration, we can uphold our commitment to Stay at Zero.”

“Rancho Coastal Humane Society has been rehoming abandoned companion animals for more than 63 years,” said Judi Sanzo, President and CEO of Rancho Coastal Humane Society. “Ten years ago, we adopted Every Animal Deserves a Tomorrow® as our tagline. That message is especially important now as we work together with our Coalition partners to overcome crowding. How we respond to today's state of emergency will impact generations of animals and the families who open their foster homes and their forever hearts to an adoptable animal. We must be successful if there is to be a brighter tomorrow for the animals in our care.”



For more information on how the community can help, visit [sdhumane.org/helpus](https://sdhumane.org/helpus).

**Photos/b-roll and soundbites from today's press conference at San Diego Humane Society for media use can be downloaded here:**

**<https://spaces.hightail.com/space/BYBvmIGld>**

**Photo/video credit: San Diego Humane Society**

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