



2017-2018 Edition

**AVMA PET OWNERSHIP
AND DEMOGRAPHICS
SOURCEBOOK**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the collective voice of American veterinarians from all disciplines and walks of life, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) regularly conducts the largest survey of pet-owning households in the United States. *The Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook (PDS)* reports that research, providing the most comprehensive and authoritative information available examining pet ownership and related habits of U.S. pet-owning households.

In this edition of the *Sourcebook*, readers will find an abundance of data on pets and their owners, identifying trends and attitudes attached to pet ownership in the United States. This includes insights into the size and distribution of pet populations, how these pets are viewed by their owners—and who these owners are, described in terms of where they live, and characteristics of their households. This 2017 edition features responses to questions not asked in any previous AVMA Pet Demographics surveys—on topics including compliance, sterilization and specialist care.

The new survey includes important changes to how the data were sampled, weighted and screened to eliminate potential sources of bias and provide the best and most accurate source of pet data to the veterinary profession. As a result, while comparisons will be made to the 2012 and prior year surveys, such comparisons must be taken carefully. As an example, although the 2017 survey will show a lower population of cats in the United States, one cannot strictly conclude that the cat population is falling, because the changes made in the 2017 survey on sampling, weighting and screening were not in place in the 2012 survey.*

Total Pet Ownership and Pet Populations

The rate of pet ownership in the United States inched up in the time since the previous Pet Demographic Survey: At year-end 2016, 57% of all U.S. households owned a pet, up 1.4% from 2011, when the last survey was conducted. The number of U.S. households owning at least one pet at year-end 2016 is estimated at 71.5 million, while the number owning pets at any time in 2016 was somewhat higher, at 74.4 million. At 59%, the rate of households owning at least one pet sometime during the year was down moderately from 2011, a change attributed to the growth in the general population.

Dogs continue to dominate in popularity among American households. At the end of 2016, some 38% of households nationwide owned a dog—the highest estimated rate of dog ownership since the AVMA began measuring it in 1982. Both

the share and number of dog-owning households grew in the five years since the previous survey, bringing the population of pet dogs to nearly 77 million—up 10% from 2011. Shelters and rescue groups remain the source of the largest share of dogs.

While the rate of cat ownership appeared somewhat static and that of horses and birds has dropped, interest in other, less common pets has taken off. Specialty or exotic pets—fish, ferrets, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, other rodents, turtles, snakes, lizards, other reptiles, poultry and other livestock as pets, and amphibians—have seen a jump in rate of ownership, with more than 13% of households now counting such animals as pets.

Of note, and perhaps indicative of a rising interest in backyard chickens, the incidence of poultry owned as pets climbed 23% in five years. In the most recent survey, 1.1% of all households claimed poultry as pets, and the poultry population was 15.4 million. The average number of poultry per household was 11.

Where do America's pets reside? The report finds that the states with the largest number of pet-owning households and the highest pet populations are those with the largest number of households: California, Texas and Florida. Pet-ownership rates, though, remain highest (62%) in the East South Central region, comprised of Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee. By comparison, the Middle Atlantic region has a 51% rate of pet ownership.

Wyoming, however, was the top state based on highest percentage (72%) of pet-owning households in 2016, followed by West Virginia and Nebraska (71% and 70%, respectively). At 38%, the District of Columbia had the lowest rate of pet ownership, and the state with the lowest percentage of pet-owning households was Rhode Island (45%).

Pet Owner Demographics

Examining the demographics relative to pet ownership, the survey shows a connection between community type and the likelihood of pet ownership: The rate of pet ownership is lowest among city dwellers and highest among people who live in the least urban areas or near/in urban areas with populations below 100,000.

The type of dwelling a household occupies also is related to pet-ownership rates. The highest rates of pet ownership are found among households living in mobile homes (73.8%), followed by houses (65.8%). The lowest rates appear among those living in apartments, condos, duplexes and other multiple-family residences. In 2016 homeowners were more likely to own a pet than were renters.

The composition of a household also has bearing on pet ownership. The survey finds that “family” households remain more likely to own pets than “non-families.” The phrase “the more the merrier” certainly seems to apply to dog, cat, bird and pet horse ownership: The highest rates of dog ownership (55.5%) and cat ownership (32.7%) continue to be among the largest households by size. And, overall, as household size increases, so does the likelihood of owning a pet bird.

Pet ownership differs among racial and ethnic groups. The highest rate of pet ownership overall in 2016 was seen among White households (64.7%), with Latino/Hispanic (61.4%) households next. The lowest rate was found among Black/African-American households (36.9%).

The findings vary, however, for different pet species. Latino/Hispanic households reported the highest rates of dog ownership (44.6%) and pet bird ownership (4.2%). White households showed the highest rate of cat ownership (31.8%), while the highest rate of pet horse ownership was among Native Americans/Asian/Pacific Islanders/Aleutians/Eskimos.

Household income was only slightly higher among pet-owning households compared to all households. Half (50%) of pet-owning households reported incomes of \$55,000 or greater. Across all households, slightly less than half (48%) made more than \$55,000. A higher share of horse owners (56%) and dog owners (52%) had incomes of more than \$55,000, while a smaller share of cat (47%) and bird owners (41%) had incomes above \$55,000.

Pet Health, Veterinary Care Use and Expenditures

The 2017–2018 edition of the *Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook* also looks at who visits a veterinarian, how frequently, and under what circumstances. Survey findings show that dog owners have a higher propensity to obtain veterinary care than do owners of cats, horses, birds or any other type of pet. On average, in 2016, dog-owning veterinary clients made three visits to the veterinarian. Other pet owners sought out the veterinarian, too: Cat-owning veterinary clients made 2.4 visits, and horse-owning clients 2.8 during the year.

More than four-fifths (83%) of all dog-owning households reported visiting the veterinarian at least once in 2016, and 78.8% said they obtain routine/preventive care for their dogs at least once a year. But not all care happens at a veterinarian’s office. Of the dog owners who reported getting routine care sometime in 2016, 21% said this occurred at pet superstores, shelters and humane societies, mobile vans or publicly sponsored clinics.

The study also analyzes how much pet owners paid for veterinary care in 2016, finding that a quarter of pet-owning households spent between \$200 and \$500 at the veterinarian. More than two-thirds of households spent something at the veterinarian. Total household expenditures at veterinary clinics and hospitals in 2016 are estimated at approximately \$28 billion, with three-quarters of this revenue coming from dog-owning households.

The survey findings on dog-owning veterinary clients who reported obtaining routine care show that a routine-care canine visit costs about \$145 on average. The amount paid for routine-care visits in other settings (pet superstores, shelters, mobile vans, etc.) was lower, apparently because providers did not perform all of the services included in canine preventive care guidelines.

Finally, the survey reinforces the importance of the special relationship that pet owners have with their veterinarian. The overwhelming majority (85%–90%) of all pet owners who visit the veterinarian have a “regular” veterinarian they prefer. These clients cite the quality of the care provided and the manner in which the veterinarian handles the animal as reasons they favor this pet-care provider. This is true across species. Dog, cat and bird owners all chose “knowledgeable, high-quality care” and “kind, compassionate” handling of their pets as the top two reasons they preferred their regular veterinarian.



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