

Capacity for Care (C4C)

Position:

The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) supports and practices Capacity for Care (C4C). This includes practices such as managed intake, diverting the intake of animals, and supporting pet retention to promote the welfare of animals both within and outside of the shelter.

Definitions:

Capacity for Care: Also known as C4C, this shelter population management model ensures all animals are provided with humane care. The basic premise of C4C is to meet the needs of every animal in shelter by ensuring adequate resources are available. Determining the number of animals that can be adequately cared for in shelter is based on the availability of resources, including enriched housing, staffing levels, and availability of veterinary care. Considered holistically, C4C means meeting the welfare needs of every animal admitted to a shelter, regardless of how they came in, when they came in, or their age, health status and personality. Every sheltering organization must acknowledge their C4C and function within it to allow them to be the best resource for the animals and people in their community.

Five Freedoms: A set of guidelines developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) which determine a basic standard for animals to be deemed as having good welfare:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury, or disease
- Freedom from fear and distress
- Freedom to express normal behaviour

Managed Intake: The practice of regulating intake and considering a shelter's capacity for care when admitting animals. Managed intake can include scheduled owner surrender appointments instead of same-day surrenders, limited admission hours, and providing alternatives to intake.

Summary

- Every shelter has a finite set of resources which affects the number of animals they can appropriately serve at any given time while meeting the welfare needs of those animals. The number of animals a shelter can responsibly care for based on these limits is known as a shelter's capacity for care.
- C4C is a management strategy which maximizes welfare through managing shelter populations and staying within a shelter's capacity. Practicing C4C:
 - promotes positive welfare of animals in shelter,
 - gives optimal housing to animals,
 - reduces illness in shelter such as Upper Respiratory Infections (URI),
 - reduces shelter euthanasia rates,
 - reduces animals' length of stay,
 - and provides alternatives to help animals avoid entering the shelter.

- Through these benefits, shelters ultimately help more animals overall by moving animals through the shelter and into homes faster.
- C4C allows for the Five Freedoms to be met for animals in shelter, along with a sixth freedom: freedom from euthanasia for animals who are not medically or behaviourally unsound.

Rationale

- The basic premise of C4C is to provide optimal care for every shelter animal by protecting their Five Freedoms through allocating shelter resources appropriately, providing enriched housing, and utilizing population management. This ensures a shelter's capacity for care is not exceeded and that animals spend a minimal amount of time in shelter.
- Exceeding capacity to care can negatively impact animals in shelter by leading to increased illness and a longer length of stay. When length of stay increases, it is detrimental to the individual animal's welfare by delaying their adoption into a home, and ultimately decreases the overall number of animals a shelter can serve.
- Physical holding capacity, or the number of kennels available, should not be the only factor which determines an animal's admission to a shelter. A finite set of resources, such as adequate staffing, enriched housing, availability of veterinary care, and the ability to minimize an animal's length of stay are crucial to maintaining animal welfare and must be considered when choosing to place an animal in a shelter or not.
- Controlling population numbers, or managing intake, allows for a shelter to operate within its capacity to care and can be achieved through scheduling or diverting animal intakes.
 - Scheduled intake: The practice of regulating or scheduling the intake of animals based on when the necessary space and resources will be available, as opposed to accepting any animal at any time when the shelter may not have the capacity to provide optimal care.
 - Diverting intake: Providing alternatives to an animal entering the shelter, such as assisting finders in locating owners, or foster placement for underage kittens. Pet retention can also be encouraged by providing owners with behaviour resources and referrals to other organizations, such as providers of affordable veterinary care.
- EHS offers alternatives to intake and community supports through programs like the free behaviour hotline, veterinary support for sick and injured animals through a partnership with Tails of Help, kitten co-op, and a trap neuter return program.
- The implementation of C4C at EHS and five other pilot shelters resulted in the following²:
 - reduced the number of sick cats by an average of 48%,
 - reduced the length of stay by an average of 20%,
 - and reduced euthanasia rates by an average of 34%.
- Following C4C is recognized as best practice by Humane Canada and the Association of Shelter Veterinarians.

References

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3. Million Cat Challenge. "Capacity for Care", n.d.

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10. UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program. "Length of Stay (LOS)", June 7, 2015.