

## Dangerous Dog Laws and Breed Restrictions

### **Position:**

The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) recognizes that aggression from dogs can pose a danger to humans and other animals. EHS does not support breed-specific legislation (BSL) and instead supports a breed neutral, multi-faceted approach with management decisions based on the individual dog to ensure public safety.

### Summary

- Judgement regarding an animal's safety should be made objectively using consistent and valid criteria and based on their individual behaviour.
- BSL does not guarantee safety and fails to address the factors which are likelier to prevent aggression from all dogs.
- EHS does not support the labelling of dogs as “aggressive”, “vicious”, “dangerous”, or any similar term based solely on breed or appearance in legislation or policies from governing or regulatory bodies, such as insurance agencies or housing authorities.
- Multiple agencies should collaborate to prevent and address the incidence of aggression by dogs through community-based programs, education, proactive guardianship, and breed neutral bylaws which apply to all dogs and guardians.

### Rationale

- All breeds of dogs are capable of aggression. Behaviour is influenced by multiple factors, and breed is not the sole determinant of behaviour.
- Factors which influence the expression of aggression include genetics, medical conditions, human behaviour, socialization history, training, living conditions, human failure to recognize stress, inadequate supervision and/or containment, and the context or environmental conditions related to incidents of aggression.
- BSL often uses vague or unrecognized breed classifications (for example, “pit bull type”) or terms that encourage phenotypic identification, such as “a dog that has an appearance and physical characteristics substantially similar to [pit bulls]”<sup>7</sup>. Visual identification is unreliable and this language:
  - punishes dogs who are not dangerous based on assumed breed or appearance;
  - leaves mixed breed dogs vulnerable to unfair and subjective applications of legislation;
  - reinforces stigma;
  - contributes to misunderstanding of dog behaviour and breeds; and
  - disregards individual behaviour.

- Bite rates per breed are sometimes used to justify BSL. This measure is not reliable as the data surrounding instances of aggression and dog demographics in an area are often flawed.
  - Not all instances of aggression are reported, as reports are reliant on the victim's or guardian's willingness to make a report.
  - Not all dogs are registered, and not all dogs have known or accurate breeds on record.
  - Breed popularity varies over time, which can skew statistics and makes accurate comparison of bite rate by breed difficult.
- Housing and insurance policies banning breeds create barriers to housing and can compromise keeping guardians and pets together.
- BSL does not prevent people from victimizing animals or treating them in a way that could lead to aggressive behaviour, nor does it address irresponsible guardianship. Education alongside stronger animal protection legislation is more effective and protects all animals.
- Breed-specific legislation is not an effective strategy to manage or prevent aggression. A more comprehensive, fair, and effective approach to promote safety is to encourage responsible guardianship from all dog guardians via public education and breed-neutral bylaws.
- Stakeholders like governments, animal control agencies, humane societies, dog training associations, and veterinary associations should collaborate to develop appropriate policy, public messaging, and resources related to the prevention and management of aggression in dogs.
- When managing and preventing aggression in dogs, government agencies should create and enforce policies which protect the public and encourage responsible guardianship.
  - These policies include the promotion of animal control laws, proper containment, spaying and neutering, humane care, licensing, and identification.
  - Policy which targets human-influenced factors that contribute to aggression, like tethering of dogs and proper containment, should also be created.
  - Conditions for dogs deemed as dangerous based on observed behaviour such as appropriate licensure, restrictions, muzzle use, and remedial actions like training or veterinary care should also exist.
  - Veterinarians and qualified animal behaviour professionals should be consulted when creating policy.
  - There should be opportunity for professional evaluation to determine if aggression from a dog was provoked or considered appropriate when deeming a dog as dangerous.
  - Conditions for the care of dangerous dogs must consider both public safety and the maintained welfare of dangerous dogs, including both the ability to live in a safe, humane environment and have a positive mental state.
- When managing and preventing aggression in dogs guardians are responsible for:
  - being aware of and abiding by local bylaws;

- proactively monitoring for and preventing aggression in their dogs; and
- being aware of individual and breed traits which may predispose dogs to show aggression at lower thresholds or in greater amounts towards people or other animals, such as being bred for guarding, and chasing and catching prey.

## References

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