

## Humane Euthanasia

**Position:** The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) supports the use of humane euthanasia to relieve pain and suffering.

### **Definitions:**

**Humane Euthanasia:** As per the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), “Euthanasia is derived from the Greek terms eu meaning good and thanatos meaning death. The term humane euthanasia is usually used to describe ending the life of an individual animal in a way that minimizes or eliminates pain and distress.”

### Summary

- Humane euthanasia is a compassionate outcome which relieves animals from distress and suffering.
- Humane euthanasia is an acceptable outcome for animals who have significantly reduced welfare due to medical or behavioural conditions, or who pose a danger to themselves, people or other animals and cannot be adequately treated by EHS or a typical caring and responsible guardian.
- EHS evaluates all animals as individuals and does not euthanize based on breed, age, space or time constraints.
- Euthanasia procedures should be performed using humane methods by veterinary professionals or appropriately trained personnel if a veterinarian is unavailable to complete the procedure.

### Rationale

- Animals should have lives worth living. Humane euthanasia is a compassionate decision for animals who have future health or welfare needs that cannot be met by a typical caring and responsible guardian. This includes, but is not limited to, disease, injury or a severe behavioural problem that cannot be adequately treated by EHS while maintaining adequate welfare, and/or animals who pose a danger to the public or other companion animals.
- An animal’s life should not be prolonged when the animal is suffering or has a compromised quality of life with a low probability of improvement.
- EHS is a managed admission shelter that accepts companion animals which include but are not limited to, those that are ill, injured, behaviourally unhealthy and/or pose a risk to the community. EHS considers each animal as an individual and acts in the best interests of each individual animal’s current and future welfare status when determining their treatments and outcome in shelter.
- To support the successful placement of shelter animals in the community, EHS exercises every reasonable and safe option, which includes, but is not limited to, foster care, placement partners, surgical procedures that improve health and adoptability, behaviour modification and/or psychopharmacology, socialization and enrichment programs. However, when an

animal is suffering or has a medical or behavioural condition which impacts an animal's quality of life or places others at risk, humane euthanasia can be an acceptable and compassionate outcome.

- EHS does not euthanize animals based on breed, age, space, length of stay or time constraints. Outcome decisions are made with careful consideration on an individual, case-by-case basis, with EHS acting in the best interests of the animal's current and future welfare status. The decision to humanely euthanize requires agreement among a team of EHS experts who are qualified based on their extensive education, training and experience.
- EHS incorporates best practices in animal sheltering and evidence-based information into the development of programs and services aimed at reducing the need for euthanasia for animals in the community. Some of these initiatives include training classes, private behaviour consultations, animal behaviour and training advice, subsidized spay/neuter surgery programs and humane education on responsible pet guardianship.
- EHS supports guidelines for humane euthanasia, such as those established in the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' (ASV) Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters and the AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals.
- Euthanasia should be performed by trained veterinary professionals, such as a veterinarian. If euthanasia must occur without a veterinarian present, a protocol developed by a veterinarian should be implemented. All personnel involved must be trained on the protocol to maintain high animal welfare standards and ensure it is carried out appropriately.
- Humane euthanasia should be performed by trained personnel, ideally veterinary professionals, to ensure the animal dies humanely by:
  - using euthanasia methods that are species-specific and consider the individual animal's age and health;
  - utilizing a reliable euthanasia method;
  - minimizing pain and distress throughout the procedure;
  - ensuring loss of consciousness and death is rapid; and
  - verifying death has occurred.
- The potential hazards and psychological effects of humane euthanasia on animal caregivers should be considered. Along with preventative measures, supports should be provided to the persons involved in performing humane euthanasia.

## References

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3. American Veterinary Medical Association. (2020). *AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals (2020 Edition)*. <https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Guidelines-on-Euthanasia-2020.pdf>
4. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians. (2022). *The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters. Second Edition. Journal of Shelter Medicine and Community Animal Health*. <https://doi.org/10.56771/asvguidelines.2022>
5. Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. (2021, September 28). *Euthanasia*. <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/policy-and-outreach/position-statements/statements/euthanasia/>
6. Humane Canada. (n.d.). *Euthanasia*. <https://humanecanada.ca/about-us/frequently-asked-questions/position-statements/>
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