



Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets: State-Funded Spay/Neuter in New Hampshire



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Solutions to the Overpopulation of Pets

State Funded Spay/Neuter in New Hampshire



New Hampshire's state-funded spay/neuter program was launched on July 1, 1994. This statewide program is funded by a \$2 surcharge on dog licenses and provides for s/n of two populations: (1) cats and dogs of low-income pet owners can be altered and vaccinated for \$15; and (2) cats and dogs adopted from a NH shelter can be altered for \$25.

Stats

- From 1994-2002, the program altered 34,265 animals.
- New Hampshire's euthanasia rate declined 77%
- At 2.2 euthanasias per thousand people, they have the lowest euthanasia rate in the nation.

How Cool is That?

New Hampshire's program for public funding of spay/neuter services is highly successful in reducing pet overpopulation in New Hampshire. The program has also inspired individuals and groups in other states to craft legislation for similar programs. Sponsors of successful legislation in Maine and Delaware, among others, cite Peter Marsh's work in New Hampshire as a source of inspiration and encouragement.

Adopt or Adapt

This program is funded through a dog license surcharge as New Hampshire has state mandated licensing for dogs. Once you determine a reliable source of on-going funding for your state, the rest of the model can be applied to your situation.

Peter Marsh is happy to assist non-profit organizations interested in implementing or adapting this strategy. You may contact [Peter](#) directly.

If you are looking for grant support in your planning, consider applying for a [PetSmart Charities Curious Cat Grant](#).

Solutions to the Overpopulation of Pets

In New Hampshire, local humane societies spearheaded a legislative campaign for a state-funded spay/neuter program. With the guidance from Peter Marsh, this program was designed to provide for spaying and neutering of animals adopted from shelters and animals belonging to persons on public assistance.

The results are striking. By targeting their surgeries toward the populations who would not otherwise alter their animals, the state of New Hampshire reached the lowest euthanasia rate per thousand people in the United States.

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Who They Are and What They Do

Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets (STOP)

Peter Marsh - Executive Director

Spearheaded by Peter Marsh, this legislative effort began in 1991 and was passed in 1994. As a lawyer and veteran of the NH legislative process, Peter was well-equipped to draft the actual legislation as well as the strategy to get it passed. STOP Volunteers and members of the New Hampshire Federation of Humane Organizations (NHFHO) worked under Peter's guidance to lobby successfully for the bill. While labor intensive in the first few years of lobbying until passage, NH's program has required relatively few hours of attention since 1995, and continues to result in an average of 4,300 neuters each year at no cost to shelters.

New Hampshire's low-income spay/neuter program is available to resident cat or dog owners receiving Medicaid, food stamps or any of five other public assistance programs. The cost to the pet owner began at \$15. This increased to \$25 in 2005 to cover increased surgery costs.

The program pays the remainder of the fees for surgery, including any necessary pre-surgical immunizations (rabies and distemper). This makes it affordable for everyone.

All services are provided by licensed veterinarians in their own hospitals and clinics. Vets who participate in the program agree to accept a 20 percent reduction of their customary neutering fee. (The State Veterinarian sets maximum neutering fees each year, based on an average of the regular fees of all the veterinarians who participate in the program.)

The program has received across-the-board support from the veterinary community. About three quarters of all NH veterinarians participate, making the program accessible throughout the state. It's an ideal arrangement - people go to their own vets in their hometowns.

The program's funding comes from a \$2 surcharge on dog licenses. This fee is collected by town clerks who administer licensing in NH. 50 cents of the fee stays in the town to compensate for administrative costs, \$1.50 goes to a designated state fund.

About 150,000 dogs are licensed in the state each year, generating revenue of about \$300,000. These funds are held in a special account.

Dog licensing has increased over the course of this program from \$88,000 in 1993 to \$152,000 in 2003 largely through the adoption in 1994 of a state law which requires veterinarians to send copies of all rabies certificates to the local officials who license dogs.

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

A state funded spay/neuter initiative is dependent upon the following critical factors:

- State-mandated dog licensing to generate continuous revenue
- Someone who understands and can draft good legislation
- Someone who understands the political process in your state to teach and coach others
- Lots of people representing multiple animal welfare constituencies who will make phone calls, write emails and letters, and travel to the capital to testify in order to pass the legislation
- A good communications structure for these people with someone to coordinate the communications
- Good working relationships with: veterinarians, the state veterinary association, the Department of Agriculture, law enforcement and legislators

People

- The bulk of the record keeping is handled by an employee in the Department of Agriculture. This administrative cost is funded from the program. In 2005, the fund covered \$300,000 in surgeries and \$40,000 in administrative costs.
- Shelters distribute the forms for the program to adopters and to low-income residents who visit the shelter. In both cases, adoption counselors may take the time to help people complete the forms, but the information required on this half-page form is minimal.
- Shelters track their own admission, adoption and euthanasia statistics, which are compiled by the NH Federation of Humane Organizations.
- Peter Marsh and the legislative committee of the NHFHO keep track of potential legislative threats to the program and alert members accordingly for the appropriate lobbying response.

Time Line

Three years from beginning of the process to passing the legislation.

Step by Step

1. Gather current data for the region you want to serve

Gather data on the animals in your state, county or municipality. This assessment will tell you how many animals live in your region, how many of those animals are homeless, where the majority of the homeless animals are coming from, and what problems are leading to animal homelessness. In assessing the need in New Hampshire, Peter Marsh's research showed that shelter admissions were disproportionately coming from low-income households.

2. Target your program for the greatest impact

The program in New Hampshire was specifically targeted to low-income people and shelters at the outset. It was an essential component to target low-income people for whom the cost of spaying and neutering was out of reach. When the program was first enacted, most of the shelters in New Hampshire were not altering prior to release. In 2005, there are only 3 shelters who are still currently altering their animals through this program.

3. Build community coalitions

In 1994, since most of the shelters in New Hampshire were not altering their animals prior to release, they had much to gain from a state s/n program that would decrease the numbers of animals coming into their shelters and provide a way to increase adopter compliance with s/n. As of 2005, 3 shelters in New Hampshire still release unaltered animals, and they rely on the state s/n program to help ensure those animals get altered after adoption.

4. Establish a strategic alliance with veterinarians

One of the critical success factors of this program was the involvement of the veterinary community, which was involved in the process from the beginning. To work with veterinarians, STOP and the NHFHO:

- Asked individual shelters to talk with their own supportive vets
- Met with the State VMA on occasion (and found that home-made cookies could go a long way)
- Built alliances with individual vets on the VMA Board
- And they said thank you again and again - both publicly (through shelter newsletters and annual reports) and privately (with individual thank you visits and thank you letters)

5. Secure the public funding

The NH legislation is based upon similar legislation in New Jersey with some important differences. New Jersey's model never had enough money to run a year-round program and ran out of funds 6 or 7 weeks of every quarter. The goal in New Hampshire was to ensure that the program would be sustainable year-round, so a great deal of time went into calculating numbers of animals and costs to determine appropriate funding levels. The legislation called for the money to be set aside in a designated fund, which is unusual in NH (most of the state's funds are part of one "general fund.") Having the money in a designated fund protects it from being reallocated to other state needs.

One of the keys to success is continual oversight; these programs will not run themselves and need someone to make adjustments over time.

Results

The Numbers

More than two thirds of the state's licensed veterinarians participate - performing the surgeries in their offices and accepting 80% of their normal fees from the state program.

Since the program's inception, the admission rate in NH shelters has dropped by 26% and the euthanasia rate has dropped by 77%.

In 1991, when STOP and the NHFHO started working on this initiative, many of the shelters were euthanizing 40% or more of the animals admitted. For many shelter workers, this literally meant spending the first half of the workday killing animals prior to doing any other work in the shelter. Not only was it demoralizing to kill that many animals; it was a terrible drain on time. As early as 1995, some shelters started having days when no animal had to be euthanized. Within a year or two, there were sometimes full weeks with no euthanasia!

Critical Factors

- Targeted to low-income.
 - This is absolutely critical: to qualify, people need to show a state Medicaid or food stamps card or any of five other public assistance programs. Targeting keeps the vets from feeling as though the initiative is cutting into their potential income and ensures that the animals being neutered are those who would not be neutered without the program.

- Shelter Program.
 - It is important for shelters to practice what they preach by ensuring that all adopted animals are neutered; this program makes that possible without breaking the budgets of small organizations. Additionally, the shelter portion of the program was VERY important as incentive to veterinarians because shelter adopters are potential clients for them (in most cases, Medicaid recipients are not).

Thinking Outside the Box

How They Feel About What They Did

Perhaps no one realized just how dramatic the results of this initiative would be.

Their Next Steps

Local humane societies and the Pet Overpopulation Committee that oversees the state's neutering assistance program are working in 2005 to identify new sources of revenue to keep the program running at an effective level.

Some Words of Wisdom

What Worked

- Using dog licenses as the source of revenue. Once the program was in place, there was a guaranteed stream of income as a funding base.
- Targeting the program to low-income pet owners
- Using public assistance programs to determine eligibility
- Establishing a dedicated account for program revenue
- Finding someone with a strong legislative background and good relationships at the state house to guide the process
- Operating the program through a network of private veterinarians
- Establishing an oversight committee for the legislative process

What Didn't

- Trying to promote adoptions by offering neutering subsidies to adopters
- Not subsidizing the cost of presurgical immunizations in our original low-income program
- Using a complex fee structure for payments to veterinarians

If They Could Do it Again, They Would...

- They would provide a little more legislative and lobbying training for shelters and others. If shelter directors and animal advocates knew the in's and out's of testifying for legislation, more people could have shared the burden of getting back and forth to Concord for the hearings, and more legislators could have been lobbied.
- They would build-in a PR campaign to applaud veterinarians, legislators, and citizens of the state for having the commitment to being the state with the lowest euthanasia rate per thousand in the nation!

Be Prepared For

Concerns from the veterinary community. Initially veterinarians were primarily concerned that the program not interfere with their ability to make a living. Their concerns were met with a plan that

asked them to make a reasonable (20%) reduction in their fees for the program and a commitment from shelters to direct adopters to their practices.

Pleasant Surprises

Lobbying isn't rocket science. Everyone who became involved discovered that the same relationship-building skills they used every day could be used to great advantage in the legislative process to benefit animals, too.

Comprehensive spay/neuter made so much more possible for shelters. With the decline in admissions, shelters were freed up to work on better adoption programs, humane education and other successful legislative efforts.

Working with people on low income is rewarding. There were admittedly some initial biases about whether those on assistance would take advantage of the program. This proved not to be true at all. Everyone gained a deeper understanding of how much people on public assistance love their animals and want to care for them as family members.

Tell Us What You Think

With the information we've provided, can you start a program like this one in your organization? [Click here](#) to send an email to ASPCA® National Outreach with your feedback and questions.

STOP: Thumbnail Sketch

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STOP's mission is to end the homelessness of companion animals in the state of New Hampshire.

They measure success by the number of homeless animals in the state, including the number of free-roaming cats.

Staff

STOP is run by all-volunteer staff.

Business Type

501(c)(3) non profit organization