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Cat admissions to RSPCA shelters in Queensland:
A pilot study to describe the population of cats entering shelters and risk factors for euthanasia.

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'Overview'

- PhD
- Pilot study
- Cat entry to shelters
- Risk of euthanasia
- Understand the problem!

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Why?

- Twice as many cats as dogs
- High cat euthanasia
- Moral and ethical implications
- Costs to the community

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Human 'cost'

- 50% people working with euthanasia develop symptoms of 'post traumatic stress' disorder*

*Rohlf, V & Bennett, P (2005) Perpetration-induced Traumatic Stress in persons who euthanise non-human animals in surgeries, animal shelters and laboratories. *Society & Animals*. 13(3): 201-219.

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Economic Cost

- $82 million spent annually on the management of unwanted pets*
- Local Queensland government spent $30 million in one year*
- This is a huge amount of resources

*Australian Companion Animal Council. 2006. Contributions of the pet care industry to the Australian economy. BIS Shrapnel, Sydney.

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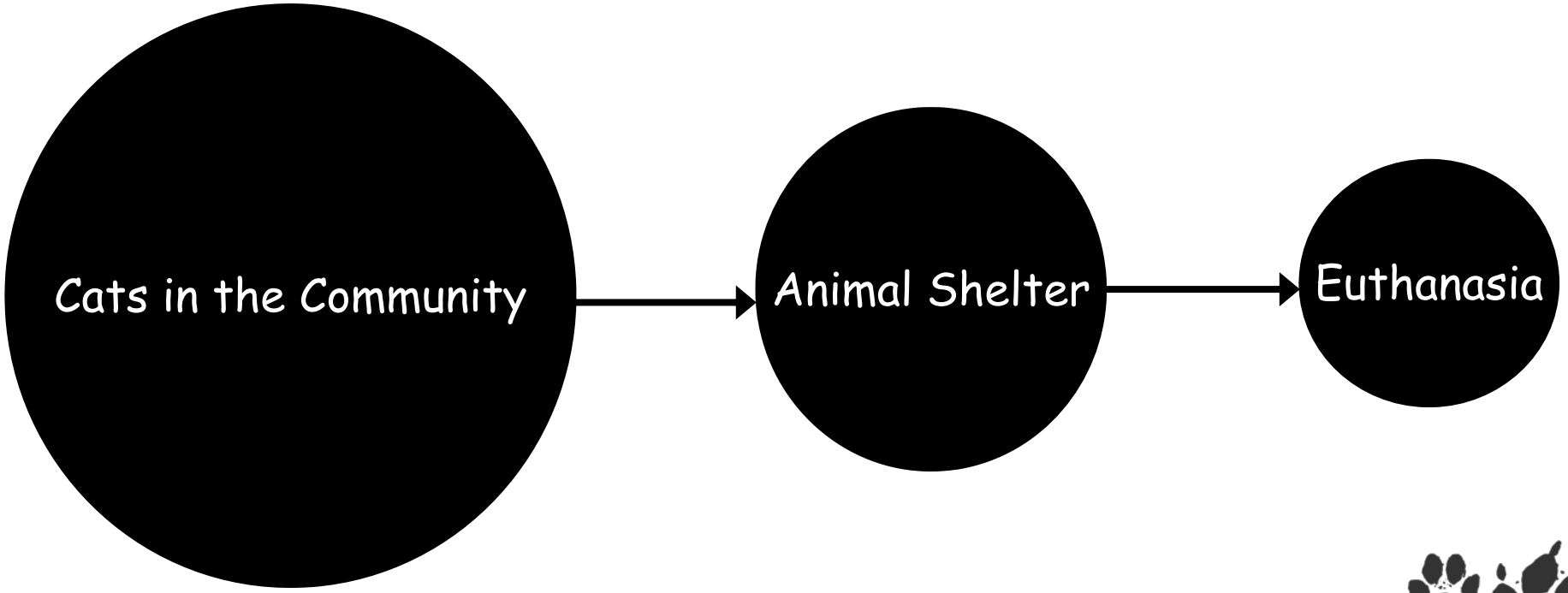
Study Aim

- To describe the characteristics of cats entering Queensland RSPCA shelters and identify risk factors for euthanasia after entry.



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Methods

- 24 month study period.
- RSPCA electronic database, ShelterMate©.
- All cats entering Queensland RSPCA shelters
- Data = year of intake, category of age at entry, gender, postcode of origin, method of admission to shelter, breed, and outcome.
- Univariable and multivariable risk regression analysis

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Results

General information:

- N = 26, 034 cats
- 66% adult cats, 34% kittens
- More than half (65%) of all cats were euthanised after admission.

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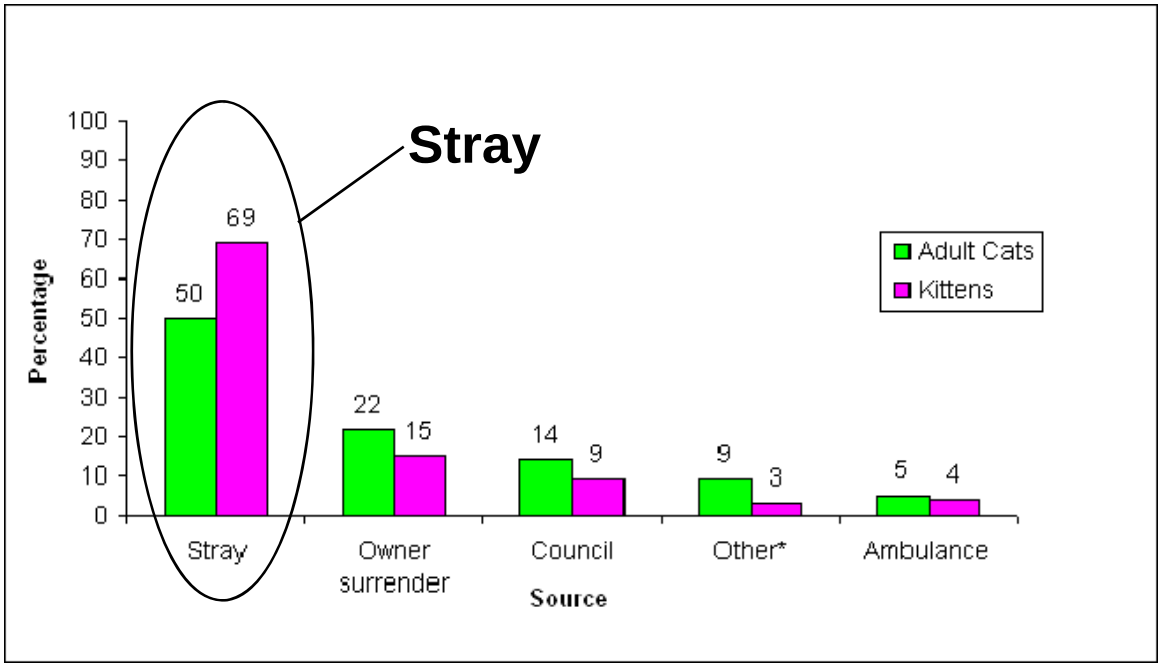
Results - Admission



- The most common admission source was as a stray
- Amongst kittens entering shelters, most (69%) were admitted as a stray.

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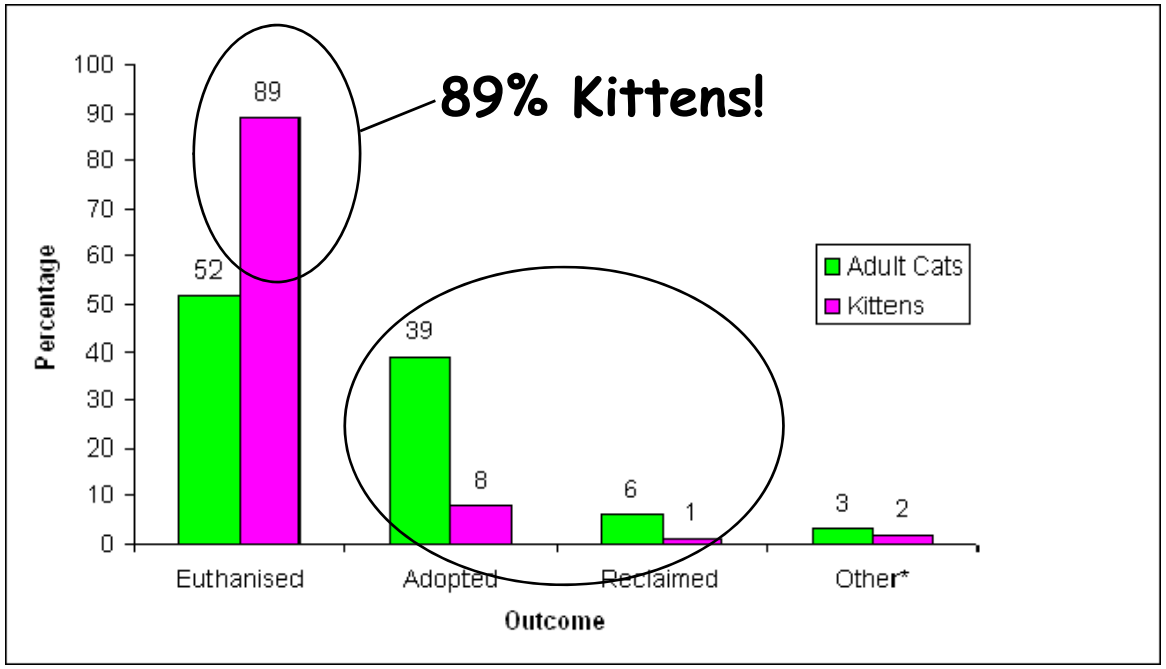
Results: Risk of Euthanasia



- Kittens (<6 months) being at greatest risk. (Risk Ratio 1.73; 95% CI 1.71 – 1.75. P = <0.001).
- Kittens were less likely to be adopted or reclaimed

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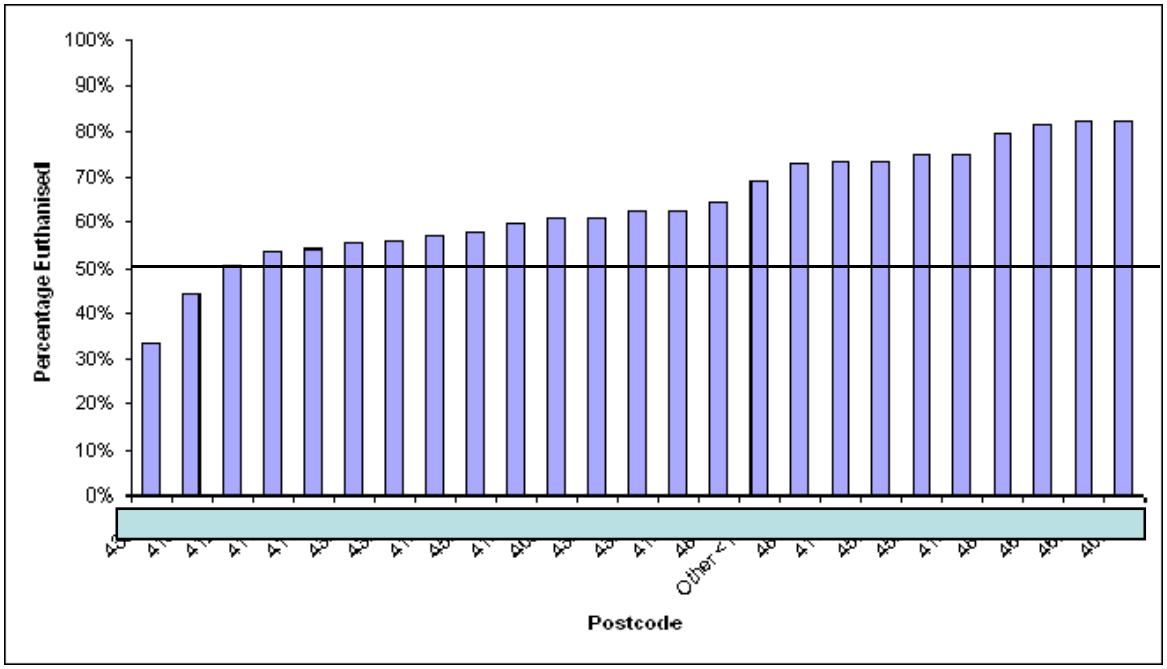
Results – Risk of Euthanasia



- After adjusting for all other variables, postcode was still associated with risk of euthanasia (P = <0.001).
- Only 2 postcodes had a euthanasia rate less 50%

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What does this mean?

- Kittens are 1.7 times more likely to be euthanised than adult cats
- It is unclear from this study why
- Seasonal influx and age of kitten admissions in warmer months is suspected as a causal factor.

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What does this mean?

- If stray admissions are truly un-owned cats, then strategies to reduce cat admissions to shelters that target owned cats will have limited effect on this population.

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What does this mean?

- As postcode is a risk factor for cats being euthanised it is possible:
  - shelter practice
  - local legislation
  - Environment/ climate
  - human demographics
- Influence euthanasia risk

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Conclusions

- More research is required to investigate the 'stray' population of cats.
- Further studies investigating the precise age and date of kittens at entry are required
- Further research is required to establish why postcode is a risk factor for euthanasia.
- A single database can provide useful information!

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Thank you

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