



Working together to save more lives

G2Z statement of support for call for amendment of the holding period for dogs and cats in shelters and pounds

Getting 2 Zero supports the call to amend the mandatory Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds (the Code)ⁱ, and the Domestic Animals Act (DAA)ⁱⁱ. The Code was last fully amended and updated in 2011 and since then there has been significant progress made in shelter research, management, and medicine, as well as in companion animal management. The internationally recognised, evidence-based, Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters 2010, produced by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, are considered to represent best practice for short term care of dogs and cats in animal shelters.

One of the priority areas that G2Z would like to see reviewed is the current requirement for an 8-day statutory holding and quarantine period for stray pets. There appear to be two main reasons for the holding period; to provide time for owners to reclaim their pets, and to quarantine intake populations of unknown vaccination history, for disease purposes. The current holding period is not in line with current international best practiceⁱⁱⁱ, or with other state requirements across Australia. The current requirements have several negative impacts on both the animal involved, and the organisation caring for it. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that a quarantine, or holding period of this length is of benefit to the animal involved, any potential owner looking for the animal, any potential new owner of the animal, or the organisation caring for the animal. Intake quarantine is not as effective as other preventative measures such as a health evaluation and vaccination at time of intake^{iv}.

The results of a survey that G2Z conducted amongst the main shelter organisations tasked with holding pets for Council as part of a pound contract, made it clear that cats and dogs are reclaimed by their original owner by the end of day 3 of their holding period. In addition, Marston et al (2004)^v found that most dogs are reclaimed within 4 days. Marston et al (2009)^{vi} found that 80% of cats admitted to one large shelter are strays and that less than 1% of these cats are reclaimed. The Humane Animal Control Manual^{vii} states “When considering stray hold time periods, individual communities should look at the data for pet reclamation time periods for dogs and cats at their local shelters. While a longer stray hold period may seem beneficial for people looking for their lost pets, if an analysis of lost pet reclamation data reveals that pets are rarely reclaimed after day three, holding lost pets longer than three days before transferring them to rescue groups or adopting them out only increases animal care costs and the probability of illness and behavior issues related to stress in confinement.”



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Disadvantages of a mandatory 8-day holding period

- Pet cannot be available for rehoming, foster, or transfer prior to the fulfillment of the holding period
- Pet cannot be available for desexing or microchipping prior to the fulfillment of the holding period
- Pet is isolated for the holding period meaning that there is no interaction with animals of its own species, or humans (in general) beyond the minimum time taken to clean and feed the pet each day.
- Pet is exposed to shelter conditions, for longer than necessary, that include stress caused by social deprivation, loss of control, noise, lack of sleep, dietary changes, boredom, frustration confinement, leaving a familiar environment and being handled by unfamiliar people.^{viii}
- Increased risk of pet being exposed to infectious disease, for longer than necessary.^{ix, x}
- Adding extra animals in care, and days in care per animal, places unnecessary pressure on the resources of a facility resulting in less positive outcomes for animals served and less animals served overall.^{xi}
- Veterinary care and grooming beyond that required to immediately stabilise the animal's health is generally withheld until the mandatory hold is complete.

Advantages of reducing the holding period

- The organisation caring for the pet can implement pathway planning, including fast track solutions, to enable a positive outcome for the pet. If it is determined that euthanasia is the appropriate outcome for the pet, a reduced holding period ensures the suffering of the pet is reduced.
- Resources conserved by preventing, rather than treating, illness and behavioural issues can be better spent on preventative programs to further the organisations animal management and welfare goals.
- Forms of enrichment involving social contact, training, and physical care that cannot be provided to the pet until after the statutory holding period, happen sooner, improving the pet's welfare.^{xii}
- A reduced holding period does not prevent a pet from being held back from an outcome pathway longer, where appropriate, i.e., tracing owner details etc. Further to this, if an owner wants to reclaim an animal that has already been medically prepared for adoption, they can still adopt the animal back, desexed and microchipped - this will likely be cheaper than reclaim fees and any potential fines, and results in a better outcome for all.



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- There is a strong relationship between length of stay, illness, housing, and stress (which can produce long-term negative effects on behaviour).^{xiii,xiv} Reducing the length of stay, and reducing any unproductive waiting time, reduces the impacts of the other factors the pet is exposed to.
- Reducing length of stay increases the capacity for humane care of the organisation ensuring there are enough staff and organisational resources available to provide optimal care for the pets being sheltered. Resources are also then available for those pets requiring extra resources and/or care.^{xv}
- There is a reduced requirement for animal housing space determined decisions i.e., euthanasia for space.
- There is an increased opportunity for effective population management.

G2Z suggests reducing the holding/quarantine period to 4 days with a requirement for pounds and shelters to rehome or transfer animals to rescue organizations unless irremediably suffering or have caused harm to other people or companion animals. Implementing a policy of physical examination and vaccination on intake will work towards ameliorating the risk of infectious disease and would be in line with best practice. G2Z would also support further research into length of stay vs. reclaim outcome for Local Government run animal shelters and pounds.

Current holding periods across Australia

Victoria

Dog/cat - 8 days or 14 days for an abandoned animal

Queensland

Dog/cat - Identified - 5 days

Dog/cat - Unidentified - 3 days

New South Wales

Dog - Identified - 14 days

Dog - Unidentified - 7 days

Australian Capital Territory

Dog - 7 days

Tasmania

Dog/cat - Identified – 5 days

Dog/cat - Unidentified – 3 days



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Northern Territory

Dog/cat - 4 days

Western Australia

Dog/cat - Identified – 7 days

Dog/cat - Unidentified – 3 days

South Australia

Dog – 3 days

Resources

ⁱ <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/domestic-animals-act/codes-of-practice/current-code-of-practice-for-the-management-of-dogs-and-cats-in-shelters-and-pounds>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/domestic-animals-act-1994/081>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.shelternvet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>

^{iv} <https://humanepro.org/magazine/articles/importance-isolation>

^v <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15066769/>

^{vi} <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20183474/>

^{vii} https://resources.bestfriends.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/08812_Animal%20Control%20Manual_Interactive_FINAL%20PAGES%20lowres.pdf?VersionId=.TpvHPaO89XAkOimoJOONvWJhgQaAlqX

^{viii} <https://www.shelternvet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>

^{ix} <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9272654/>

^x <https://www.bsavalibrary.com/content/book/10.22233/9781910443330>

^{xi} *ibid*

^{xii} https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_sas_etds/95/

^{xiii} <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33171805/>

^{xiv} <https://journals-sagepub-com.ez.library.latrobe.edu.au/doi/abs/10.1016/j.jfms.2009.03.001>

^{xv} <https://www.shelternvet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>