

Early Age Desexing Statement of support for the "Getting 2 Zero" initiative Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics

Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics, supports the goals and principles of the "Getting 2 Zero" program, which aims to decrease the rate of euthanasia of healthy, treatable, and behaviourally-appropriate cats and dogs within communities.

Sentient recognises the important role that companion animals play in people's lives, but that there is a discrepancy between the number of cats and dogs in need of homes, and the number of responsible people able to provide this.

We also recognise that current scientific evidence has not demonstrated any significant short or long-term health risks to cats when desexing is performed at 12 weeks of age, compared to the traditional practice of desexing at 22 to 24 weeks. Similarly, early age desexing of dogs does not appear to increase the risks of behavioral or medical problems, although further research is necessary to address potential concerns regarding the incidence of urinary incontinence and hip dysplasia.

Sentient therefore supports targeted, early-age desexing schemes that prioritise the welfare of the individual animal while achieving the goal of desexing cats and dogs prior to sale or transfer.

Veterinarians should use their professional judgement when making decisions regarding the appropriate age for desexing individual animals. In non-shelter contexts, Sentient supports the desexing of kittens prior to sexual maturity (less than 16 weeks of age and after they have reached 1 kilogram in body weight), and the requirement for sellers, including breeders, pet shops, shelters and pounds, to desex animals prior to rehoming, normally by 12 weeks of age. In shelter environments, the practice of desexing kittens based on a minimum weight of 1 kilogram is accepted, provided that all necessary precautions are taken to minimise anaesthetic and surgical risks in these paediatric animals.

Such strategies should be nationally consistent, and supported by:

- Compulsory and subsidised microchipping and registration of all cats and dogs sold and transferred.
- A user-pays, government licensing and registration system for people breeding companion animals.
- A user-pays, government licensing and registration system for pet shops until such a time that the sale of animals in pet shops is phased out. This system should include

requirements for desexing prior to sale, pre-adoption interviews and post adoption support.

- National reporting by all pounds, shelters and rescue groups of the numbers of animals received, reclaimed, rehomed and euthanased, and the reasons for such euthanasia.
- The humane destruction of unwanted dogs and cats where rehoming is not an option.
- Programs to address the issue of compassion fatigue and post-traumatic stress, which has been revealed to have a high prevalence amongst those staff involved in the euthanasia of companion animals in these contexts.