



# HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

## 2024 HASS Case for Change Report

**Executive Summary:** The following document outlines a data-informed, concise and compelling case for change within the animal welfare industry and the public. The goal of these statements is to clearly describe the collective call to reevaluate the sheltering system as it stands, identify opportunities to improve community support in this space and implement the specific progressive programming both the industry and the public is seeking. These statements illustrate how this collective call for change can be answered through the implementation of HASS.

### Industry Case for Change Statement

The shelter walls are crumbling. The front line has split. No calvary in sight. What does the animal welfare industry do when the outdated systems of care inevitably collapse? As we speak, thousands of front-line shelter staff grapple with over-filled kennels, make ends meet through severely under-funded operations, work around the clock hours, and face daily exposure to traumatic crisis situations that require expert, emergency care. The current substandard system often takes advantage of shelter care workers and yet their individual commitment to saving lives remains unwavering. Though their responsibilities are matters of life-and-death, the industry is left with pet services providers set up for failure both professionally and personally, having among the highest suicide rates among American workers nationwide. The HASS project philosophy, collaboratively built by hundreds of animal welfare professionals who believe it is the only hope forward, is that it's time to take action and address the desperate need of shelter staff. We do this by providing a new roadmap toward effective, measurable and impactful change in and out of shelter doors. It's all in the name: Human Animal Support Services, and it's time we, as an industry, exemplify who we truly are for our colleagues and communities in need.

### Supporting Evidence

- **Mental Health Decline & Suicide Rates of Animal Welfare Professionals:** Animal welfare professionals face crisis, traumatic experiences and [compassion fatigue](#) daily. With staff shortages and max shelter capacity nationwide, many work unprecedented hours in often inhuman conditions leading to a significant risk to mental health. In fact, animal rescue workers have the [highest suicide rate among American workers](#)—a rate only shared by fire fighters and police officers. In addition to the overarching industry challenges, one [theory for these alarming statistics indicates](#) that animal welfare professionals are in a uniquely difficult position of being responsible for both the care of and, unfortunately at times, the euthanization of the same animals. Because this issue [has gone virtually unnoticed](#) and the current system is not sustainable for shelter staff professionally or personally, HASS advocates to support professionals with targeted mental health education and resources, such as webinars on [Combatting Compassion Fatigue](#) or a united call for [shelter social workers](#) and [implementing case management](#).
- **The Industry's Call for Increased Government Funding:** Economic hardship continues to hinder animal shelters' abilities to provide the pet support services within communities. With increased cost of [food, veterinary care and decrease in shelter staff](#), the animal welfare industry continues its long-standing call for increased government financial support and community involvement. Chronically underfunded, organizations ranging from tiny rescues to nationally recognized corporations, have resorted to endless [calls to the community for adoption, fostering, or donations](#). This is why HASS works [with policy makers](#) and local governments to [advocate for supporting people and pets](#), grow funding or lobbying support and develop policies that increase industry protection and a shelter's ability to meet the public's needs.
- **The Industry's Call for New Avenues of Community Involvement:** Recent Shelter Animals Count (SAC) data shows that animal shelters are in [urgent need of community support](#), especially as 4% more animals entered shelters than left in 2022. This is the largest gap in the past 4 years and it's putting [positive outcomes at risk](#).

To bridge the gap that a lack of funding has left to meet this increased need, animal welfare professionals have turned to their community for support by developing creative [new programming](#), community ambassador opportunities, [alternative crisis sheltering options](#) and increased ways for the public to get involved. In fact, HASS saw more than 7,300 individual inquiries by animal welfare professionals to its [Resource Center](#), which houses guides and how-to toolkits to implement community-oriented programming, within a 90-day period alone. In addition, HASS found in its [Community Values Survey](#) that 81% of one community's respondents indicated overwhelming support for care provided in foster homes versus in-shelter care when asked their preference if they had to relinquish their pet.

- **Industry's Call for a United Welfare Approach:** Rather than utilizing a detached method of supporting people and animals in need of help, HASS, as the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) suggests, believes [animal welfare is a human responsibility](#). A goal of the Human Animal Support Services project is to emphasize the [importance of the "H"](#) by treating animal welfare with the same dignity and respect of other human services, prioritizing the [proven benefits of human-animal bond](#) (even in [times of crisis](#)) and improving upon the ecosystems to create a safe environment for all. [This integrated methodology](#) is in alignment with the [CDC's One Health](#) approach and with nationally recognized animal welfare organizations such as [Maddie's Fund](#), and [PetSmart Charities](#).

**Sources hyperlinked:** Shelter Animals Count (SAC), Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), U.S. CDC, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, National Library of Medicine, American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA), Human-Animal Bond Institute, Austin Pets Alive!, KC Pet Project, Maddie's Fund, PetSmart Charities, Bissell Pet Foundation, Human Animal Support Services | **Media Sources:** PBS, Vox Media, Psychology Today, Montgomery Advisor

## Public Case for Change Statement

We, as a community, are struggling. Many are grasping for the bare necessities like basic pet-inclusive housing, affordable healthcare, or enough food to fill empty plates and pet bowls. For some, the only moment of relief comes upon walking through their front door to find a wagging tail on the other side, and yet, the current support system fails to meet the full family's needs. When the barrier to entry for basic care is this unforgiving, it's time to hear their call for change. HASS imagines a world where the needs of people and pets are met without barriers such as out of reach veterinary care costs, no support when finding a lost pet, overly extensive pet adoption or fostering applications, or being met by shut shelter doors. Instead, it is our collective responsibility to care for the people and pets of our communities because the system as it stands, does not. HASS as a project seeks to build a new approach that, to put it simply, answers the community's call rather than letting the line go dead. Unanimously, communities seek well-established pet support programs and HASS aims to provide animal welfare organizations the programming development resources that prioritize the human-animal bond and support humans and pets in crisis.

## Supporting Evidence

- **Increased Need for Pet Support Services due to U.S. Housing Crisis:** Housing issues have been cited among the [top two reasons for pet relinquishment](#). No matter what part of the country you are in, reporting of housing or financial constraints are [affecting community members and their pets](#) is rising drastically. In fact, from 2019-2022, [HASS pilot shelter](#) communities across the U.S. reported housing issues forced families to [relinquish almost 30,000 pets](#). To address this need, HASS advocates for systemic changes to be made such as [pet-inclusive housing](#) legislation, [pet deposit financial support](#), or the development of digital tools like the [HASS eviction calculator](#) or [pets.findhelp.com](#). Specifically, [pets.findhelp](#) is the industry's first platform where the public can find pet support services within their local area. Within one year of its launch, the HASS-created platform saw [more than 173,000 searches](#), most of which related to housing-related challenges.
- **Increased Need for Pet Support Services due to Lack of Accessible Veterinary Care:** Accelerated by the pandemic, the U.S. is facing a deadly combination of [veterinary shortage](#), increased [cost of veterinary care](#) and increased [cost of human healthcare](#). These factors are making it extremely difficult for the [85 million](#) American families who have pets to stay together if/when health-related crises strike. With affordable veterinary care being the number one search on HASS platform [pets.findhelp.com](#), HASS recognizes the need for [increased accessibility to care](#), grant [partnerships with crowdfunding platforms such](#) as Waggle advocacy for [free or low-cost clinic](#) pop-ups and veterinary programming support [using a social-service](#) approach for our communities.
- **Public Call for Increased Funding of Municipal Shelters & Community Support:** With ongoing housing, healthcare, and economic crises in the U.S., increasingly, communities are calling on local governments to increase funding for pet support services. A HASS [Community Values Survey](#) revealed 91% of respondents support increasing the budgets of government-funded animal services. Expanding further, 67%, believe that the additional funding should come from taxpayer funds, rather than through donations alone. As a result of this public outcry, we've seen [major city mayoral candidates](#) and progressive administrations respond with [increasing funds for animal welfare](#). Therefore, HASS continues to provide pathways for shelters to increase funding support in their local communities.
- **Public Recognition of Capacity Crisis:** It's no secret that nationwide, animal shelters are [facing a capacity crisis](#). Widely reported by national outlets such as The New York Times or Washington Post and local media [constantly broadcasting pleas for support](#) within their own backyards. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be letting up either as Q3 2023 Shelter Animals Count (SAC) data indicates that [adoptions are down while intake continues to rise](#). As a result, HASS is supporting shelters to reevaluate their existing operations, [develop new programming](#), and focus on [decreasing adoption barriers](#) to increase capacity for care.

**Sources hyperlinked:** *Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Shelter Animals Count (SAC), Google Trends Report, Human Animal Support Services (HASS)* | **Media Sources:** *CNBC, Forbes, Los Angeles Times, The Week, Investopedia, Houston Public Media, Vox Media,*