

Shelter Population Index

Why

Millions of animals end up at shelters each year. Too many of these animals are euthanized. Often shelters are blamed for euthanasia figures when it's truly a community-wide issue.

Linking shelter data to the communities served emphasizes the *shared responsibility* of entire communities for companion animal homelessness. Challenges are different between towns, cities, states and regions of the country, particularly in terms of animal reproduction and lifespan. The Shelter Population Index (SPI) is designed to identify trends in shelter animal populations by region, to encourage communities to become more responsive to the factors associated with pet homelessness. The Index can also be used to track quarterly and annual trends, helping communities determine how seasonal changes should be considered when developing animal welfare initiatives.

What

In 2007, shelters recruited by three universities and a national humane organization, under the auspices of the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy, partnered to develop the SPI. Similar to the U.S. Consumer Confidence Index, which tracks consumer saving and spending, the SPI is intended to measure the overall inputs and outcomes of the sheltering system in relation to the human population in a region.

The range of the SPI is +1.00 to -1.00, with the neutral point being 0.00. A positive SPI suggests that a community is managing its surplus cat and dog population more effectively than would be indicated by a negative SPI.

The SPI is being developed in two phases. The first phase objective was to create and evaluate a standardized index. Intake and euthanasia data were gathered from 18 animal shelters in four Combined Statistical Areas (CSAs) as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Extraneous factors were eliminated to establish eight comparable measures from all participating shelters. The eight measures were totaled for all shelters within a CSA. Those totals were multiplied by a weighting factor representing the CSA's human population. The resulting figures were used in a formula comparing intakes and outcomes to generate that CSA's Shelter Population Index.

In Phase II, the SPI will be calculated for a much larger number of communities. This allows researchers to refine the Index while demonstrating the efficacy of the information.

Who

Animal shelters and agencies in 137 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), which serve approximately 54% of the U.S. population, will be invited to participate in the second phase. These targets represent 43 states and the District of Columbia. Data collection is being done in a confidential manner by the University of Tennessee's College of Veterinary Medicine with partial funding from the Winn Feline Foundation and the George Sydney and Phyllis Redmond Miller Trust.

The SPI will be calculated on a Census regional (multi-state) and division basis, as well as nationally. Comparisons will be made between regions and divisions but not between states or individual shelters. The research team will also assess whether the SPI can help identify factors related to shelter populations of cats and dogs as identified in other studies.

How Shelters Helped

Information was provided from shelters nationwide for Phase II of the SPI Study. Answering the one-page questionnaire took less than 10 minutes. Existing data that met the study requirements could also be submitted in any format (Word, Excel, PDF, etc.). A copy of the questionnaire is available at www.petpopulation.org/spi.html.

Participating agencies will receive the SPI for all Census regions and divisions, including the multi-state region in which their shelter is located, and the national SPI. Agencies can request the SPI formula to use when calculating the SPI for their communities. This powerful tool can be used with funders, government officials and animal lovers to help everyone understand how to focus their efforts.