

Facts & Figures

Results of the 2002 AVMA survey of US pet-owning households regarding use of veterinary services and expenditures

- ▶ Female household members of all age groups were primarily responsible for pet care.
- ▶ Between 1996 and 2001, the mean number of veterinary visits per animal increased for each type of pet.
- ▶ Sixty percent of expenditures on veterinary expenses in 2001 (among dogs, cats, birds, and horses) was for dogs.

Since 1983, the AVMA has periodically surveyed a large sample of US households to determine the rate of companion animal ownership, demographics of households that owned companion animals, and the use of veterinary medical services by those households. The most recent survey results are available in the AVMA's 2002 US Pet Ownership & Demographic Sourcebook.

Rates of companion animal ownership and estimated populations of animals kept as pets have been reported.¹ Survey respondents were asked to indicate how many pets they owned during the entire year and at year-end. For purposes of this analysis, a household was considered to be a pet-owning household if it owned a pet as of December 31, 2001. The person in the household most responsible for pet care was asked to complete the questionnaire.

Questions included the number of animals owned anytime during 2001, the number and ages of animals owned on December 31, 2001, the number of times animals were examined by veterinarians, and the total amount that was spent on veterinary services in 2001. Seven groups of animals were specifically listed: dogs, cats, birds, horses, fish, ferrets, and rabbits. Respondents were also asked to list any other species of animals that their households owned. For purposes of this report, only horses owned by households were considered, although it is acknowledged that horses

are commonly owned and cared for on ranches, farms, and other horse operations.

The number of US households that owned companion animals on December 31, 2001, was estimated by multiplying the estimated December 31 rate of pet ownership (percentage of households) in each geographic area (dogs and cats by state, birds and horses by region, and all other pets by nation) by the total number of households in each state, region, or the nation, respectively. The number of households in each geographic area was determined from estimates made by the US Census Bureau. The mean number of pets owned per household multiplied by the number of pet-owning households was summed across states or regions (when necessary) to determine an estimate of the total population.

Person Responsible for Pet Care

The person with primary responsibility for the care of a pet was much more likely to be female than male. Almost three-fourths (72.8%) of pet owners who had primary responsibility for pet care were females. This pattern was most pronounced in pet owners who were from 19 to 29 years old, among which 80.9% of primary caretakers were females. This difference was not as large in a younger age group (≤ 18 years), in which the primary caretaker was just slightly more likely to be female than male (54.9 vs 45.1%, respectively). Females were the predominant primary caretakers for each animal type for all age groups except horse owners ≥ 65 years old. Among this group, males were slightly more likely to be the person responsible for animal care (Table 1).

Use of Veterinary Services

Rates at which households used veterinary services during 2001 were determined. Dog-owning households (83.6%) were most likely to have used vet-

Table 1—Distribution (%) of female and male pet owners of various ages who had primary responsibility for their pets, 2001

Age (y)	All pets		Dogs		Cats		Birds		Horses	
	Female owner	Male owner	Female owner	Male owner	Female owner	Male owner	Female owner	Male owner	Female owner	Male owner
≤ 18	54.9	45.1	54.3	45.7	59.6	40.4	59.3	40.7	81.0	19.1
19–29	80.9	19.1	81.2	18.8	85.0	15.0	88.5	11.5	76.6	23.4
30–49	76.6	23.4	77.3	22.7	79.1	20.9	81.9	18.1	79.8	20.3
50–64	69.2	30.8	68.2	31.8	72.8	27.2	74.4	25.7	71.4	28.6
≥ 65	66.1	33.9	63.9	36.1	69.0	31.0	69.3	30.7	48.2	51.9

Table 2—Use of veterinary medical services by US households, 1996 and 2001

Type of pet	1996		2001	
	Mean No. of veterinary visits per animal	Mean expenditure per visit (\$)	Mean No. of veterinary visits per animal	Mean expenditure per visit (\$)
Dog	1.8	73.60	1.9	99.10
Cat	0.9	66.60	1.0	92.90
Bird	0.1	55.70	0.2	66.20
Horse	1.0	100.10	0.9	131.10

erinary services during 2001 and bird-owning households (11.7%) were the least likely. In addition, 65.3% of all cat-owning households and 54.6% of all horse-owning households received veterinary services during the same year.

Respondents were asked to report the number of veterinary visits their animals had in 2001 (Table 2). When 2 animals were taken to the veterinarian simultaneously, the number of veterinary visits was reported as 2 rather than 1. Respondents were also asked to report the total amount of money spent on veterinary visits in 2001. To compare visits and expenditures across time, statistics were calculated on a per-animal and per-visit basis, rather than on a per-household basis, to remove the influence of the increasing number of animals owned per household in recent years.

Between 1996 and 2001, the mean number of veterinary visits per animal increased for each type of pet. Veterinary visits increased by 5.6% for dogs, by 11.1% for cats, by 100% for birds, and by 10% for horses. Although the increase in visits for birds appeared to be substantial, the mean number of veterinary visits per

bird was much lower than for other types of pets. When multiplied by the number of animals in each population, this represented approximately 117 million visits to the veterinarian for dogs, 69 million visits for cats, 2 million visits for birds, and nearly 5 million visits for horses.

During the same period, mean expenditure per visit increased for each type of pet. Expenditures for dogs increased by \$25.50 (34.6%), a compound annual rate of 6.13%. Expenditures for cats increased by \$26.30 (39.5%), a compound annual rate of 6.88%. In addition, expenditures for birds and horses increased by \$18.90 (33.9%) and \$31.00 (31%), respectively, a compound annual rate of 3.51 and 5.54%, respectively.

Using census data and results derived from this survey, total expenditures on veterinary services for dogs, cats, birds, and horses were \$18.9 billion in 2001. Total expenditures on veterinary services were \$11.6 billion for dogs, \$6.6 billion for cats, \$135.9 million for birds, and \$608.4 million for horses. Dogs represented the majority of total expenditures (61.2%), followed by cats (34.8%), horses (3.2%), and birds (0.7%). During the period 1996 to 2001, total expenditures increased at a compound annual rate of 10.6% for dogs, 10.5% cats, 5.9% for horses, and 8.3% for birds.

From the AVMA Membership and Field Services Division: J. Karl Wise, PhD, CAE, Director; Brent L. Heathcott, CAE, Assistant Director; Allison J. Shepherd, MBA, Research Projects Manager.

1. Wise JK, Heathcott BL, Gonzalez ML. Results of the AVMA survey on companion animal ownership in US pet-owning households. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2002;221:1572-1573.