

# Facts & Figures

## Selection of a veterinarian by US pet-owning households

- ▶ More than three-fourths of dog, cat, and horse owners used their regular veterinarian during their most recent veterinary visit.
- ▶ For selection of a veterinarian, location was generally the most important factor among pet owners.

Every 5 years, the AVMA surveys a large sample of US households to determine rates of pet ownership, the demographics of households that own pets, the use of veterinarians, and expenditures for veterinary medical services.<sup>1,2</sup> 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.

### Selection of a Veterinarian

Owners whose pet had at least 1 veterinary med-

ical visit during 2001 were asked to consider their pet's most recent veterinary medical visit and indicate reasons that prompted them to select the veterinarian for that visit. Most respondents indicated that regular use of their veterinarian was the primary criterion for choosing that veterinarian for their pet, including dog owners, cat owners, and horse owners (Table 1). Although fewer bird owners (52.0%) regularly used the same veterinarian, the regular use of a veterinarian had increased nearly 9.2%, compared with 1996 (42.8%).<sup>2</sup> The regular use of a veterinarian increased from 1996 to 2001 for all species except horses (1.4% decrease).

With the exception of bird owners, location was the most often listed factor for selecting a regular veterinarian. However, location embodies many dimensions including distance, travel time, accessibility, proximity, and convenience. As in 1996, dog and cat owners cited

Table 1—Reasons that clients chose a particular veterinarian for their pet's most recent veterinary visit, 1996 and 2001

Reason	Dogs		Cats		Birds		Horses	
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
Regular use of that veterinarian	78.7	82.2	73.7	75.7	42.8	52.0	76.8	75.4
Fees	18.5	16.0	19.7	16.8	10.0	9.3	16.9	10.5
Location	35.8	34.2	36.5	34.9	20.7	22.3	24.5	17.6
Hours	17.0	15.3	17.6	15.6	9.8	8.4	12.0	9.0
Advertising	1.6	1.0	1.9	1.1	1.4	0.0	0.5	0.2
Personal recommendation	11.9	10.1	12.9	10.4	22.1	9.6	14.0	10.5
Yellow page listing	1.7	1.2	2.2	1.8	3.9	1.2	0.7	0.8
Outdoor sign	1.4	1.2	1.5	1.3	2.1	1.0	0.5	0.4
Internet Web site	NA	0.1	NA	0.1	NA	0.0	NA	0.2
Specialist	NA	2.0	NA	2.8	NA	24.2	NA	7.3
Other	3.2	0.3	3.4	2.5	8.0	2.5	4.3	2.5

NA = Not available. Columns may not total 100%, because respondents could indicate multiple reasons.

Table 2—Reasons that clients chose a particular veterinarian who was not their regular veterinarian for their pet's most recent veterinary visit, 1996 and 2001

Reason	Dogs		Cats		Birds		Horses	
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
Fees	20.7	15.5	20.2	16.5	6.0	16.7	12.8	12.7
Location	33.3	34.1	30.5	36.8	13.2	32.1	16.3	20.3
Hours	12.7	15.8	11.6	17.2	5.2	14.3	5.0	10.6
Advertising	4.9	0.5	4.4	0.6	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.3
Personal recommendation	19.1	8.3	18.6	8.6	23.5	8.3	28.4	9.4
Yellow page listing	4.5	0.7	4.9	1.0	5.6	0.6	1.4	0.8
Outdoor sign	2.8	0.8	2.3	1.1	1.6	1.2	0.0	0.3
Internet Web site	NA	0.2	NA	0.1	NA	0.0	NA	0.3
Specialist	NA	2.5	NA	2.5	NA	28.6	NA	7.6
Other	12.7	2.7	11.1	0.3	13.6	1.2	15.6	0.0

See Table 1 for Key.

location as a factor in selecting a veterinarian more often than bird and horse owners. Having a specialist was an important consideration for bird owners. Fees, hours of operation, and recommendation were also important in selecting a veterinarian. Fees and hours of operation were more important for dog and cat owners, whereas personal recommendations were more important for bird and horse owners. There were fewer mentions of fees in selecting a veterinarian in 2001, compared with 1996.

Approximately 25% of all dog, cat, and horse owners and nearly half of bird owners reported that their pet's most recent veterinary medical visit was to a veterinarian who was not their regular veterinarian. Reasons given were similar to respondents who regularly used the same veterinarian. Location was the most important factor in selecting a nonregular veterinarian

for all owners. Although fees and hours of operation were frequently mentioned by each type of pet owner, seeking a specialist was the second highest reason for selecting a veterinarian for bird owners. Recommendations were not cited as often as selection criteria in 2001 as they were in 1996.

### References

1. American Veterinary Medical Association. *US Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook*. Schaumburg, Ill: AVMA, 2002.
2. American Veterinary Medical Association. *US Pet ownership & demographics sourcebook*. Schaumburg, Ill: AVMA, 1997.

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