

# PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

# REPORT

# 2018

The essential  
insight into  
the wellbeing  
of UK pets



# 100 years of pet wellbeing

**As the UK's leading veterinary charity, PDSA is committed to identifying and addressing barriers to pet wellbeing.**

Animal welfare is at the heart of what we do every single day. During our centenary year, we can reflect on how far pet wellbeing has come in the 100 years since PDSA was founded: pets are now more than ever treasured family members, and owners want to do the right thing by them. PDSA will continue to strive to achieve further advancements in pet wellbeing in our next 100 years, and we look forward to seeing how far we can come once again.

The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report was created, and continues, to be the most rigorous and in-depth assessment of the wellbeing of our nation's pets. This year we have once again structured this Report around owners' knowledge and application of the Animal Welfare Acts 2006 (2011 in Northern Ireland) and the 5 Welfare Needs that are enshrined within them.

While there are improvements to celebrate since our first report in 2011, there is still much work to be done.

The findings of the PAW Report continue to provide a valuable insight into the wellbeing of our nation's pets, and highlights the many areas that still require improvement.

PDSA is at the forefront of pet wellbeing, but we can't win these battles alone. We hope the Report will provide a focus for campaigning, appropriate intervention and educational initiatives to help the animal welfare sector improve pet wellbeing, to give our nation's pets the great lives they deserve.



# Key findings



## 1.4 million dogs

(16%) are walked less than once a day, and 89,000 are never walked at all (1%)

## 40% of dog owners

don't know their pet's current weight and / or body condition score

## 1.1 million dogs

(12%) have received no training in any way

## 2.1 million dogs

(24%) are left alone for five or more hours on a typical weekday

## 91% of dogs

are microchipped

## 90% of dogs

are currently registered with a vet



## Environment

**Daily exercise is vital for a dog's physical health and mental wellbeing.** 32% of owners walk their dog once a day, which is consistent with data from previous years. Nearly half of dogs (49%) are walked more than once a day, but, again consistent with recent PAW Reports, 89,000 dogs (1%) are never walked at all.

Why are some owners choosing not to walk their dogs at all? Top answers given were:

- Garden is big enough for exercise (40%)
- I have health problems (19%)
- My dog has health problems (17%)
- Restricted areas to exercise a dog where I live (16%)

With recent consultations on Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) there has been some concern about whether there could be widespread bans on walking dogs in public spaces. Should this be the case, there would be a great risk that the numbers of dogs not being walked at all could increase, especially as 78% of dog owners say that they rely on public spaces (e.g. parks, beaches) to be able to walk their dog.

And while 47% of owners who walk their dog had no concerns at all about walking them, others expressed concerns which included:

- being scared of their dog being attacked by another dog (17%)
- time restrictions (13%)
- concern over their dog's behaviour on a walk (10%)
- that their dog doesn't come back when called (10%).

Yet, as we can see from our dog behaviour section in this report, 1.1 million dogs (12%) have received no training in any way. Aside from daily exercise, we were interested to know how pets are occupied, and what steps, if any, are being taken by owners to keep them physically and mentally fit.

1.4 million dogs (16%) are walked less than once a day

**We asked dog owners ...**

Which of the following does your dog regularly do?



It's encouraging to see many dogs able to play in some way on a regular basis, however with 2.4 million dogs still regularly having sticks thrown for them, this is an area where more education is required to help owners understand the associated dangers.

89% of veterinary professionals agree that the welfare of dogs will suffer if owners are banned from walking their dogs in public spaces (e.g. parks, beaches) or if dogs are required to be kept on leads in these spaces.



80% of dog owners stated their pet was an ideal weight, but 40% knew neither their pet's weight nor body condition score.



## Diet

**Pet obesity continues to be one of the key welfare issues facing pets in the UK.** It remains as one of the top concerns identified by veterinary professionals, with 50% of those surveyed predicting that pet obesity will have the biggest health and welfare implications in ten years' time.

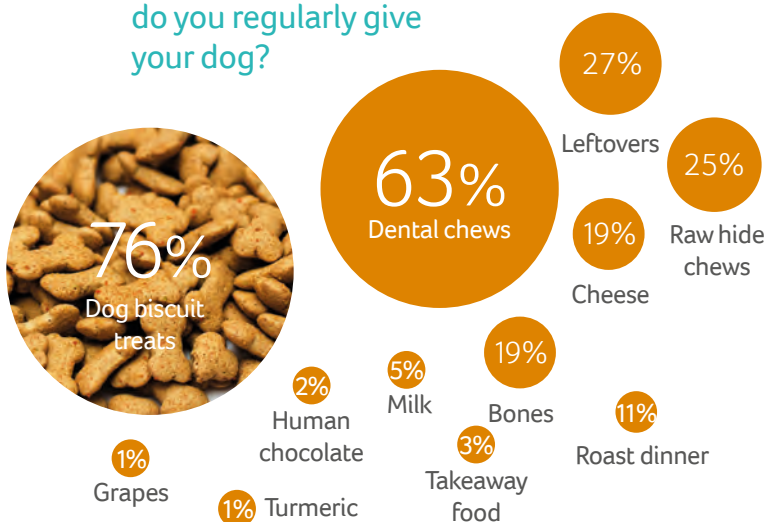
Many pet owners perceive their pet to be an ideal weight but admit to not knowing their pet's current weight and/or body condition score (BCS). As in 2017, we asked owners to match an outline of a dog's shape (ranging from BCS 1-5) with the shape of their dog. 5% of owners selected BCS 5 (obese). Despite this, when asked, less than 1% described their dog as being obese. This indicates more help is needed for owners to understand what a healthy body shape would be for their dog.

Despite 32% of veterinary professionals stating that they typically only discuss weight or body condition score with owners whose pet is overweight or obese, the majority of veterinary professionals (98%) also said that there should be more focus placed on preventing obesity rather than treating it. This suggests that there needs to be more focus on weight and BCS conversations with all dog owners.

Alongside lack of exercise, treats are a likely contributory factor when it comes to pet obesity. 91% of owners give treats to their dog – this is higher than both cat (81%) and rabbit (83%) owners.

### We asked dog owners ...

Which of the following do you regularly give your dog?



## BVA and BVNA surveys



**Vets and vet nurses estimated that 46% of the dogs they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese (mean value).**

Almost half of the vets and vet nurses surveyed (40%) said they felt the proportion of overweight or obese dogs they see in their practice has increased in the last two years, and a similar amount felt that it had stayed the same (41%).

**On average vets and vet nurses estimated that around half (47%) of the overweight and obese dogs they see in their practice have health issues which could be related to their weight.**

The most common weight-related health issues for dogs identified by vets and vet nurses are:

- Musculoskeletal problems (99%)
- Respiratory problems (49%)
- Diabetes (28%)

Most common reasons for excess weight in dogs identified by vets and vet nurses:

- Owner's lack of recognition that their pet is overweight or has obesity (55%)
- Feeding treats, in addition to their base diet (53%)
- Feeding human food, in addition to their base diet (50%)
- Portion size (49%)

When asked what influences them to give their pet a treat the top reasons given by dog owners were that it makes their pet happy (43%), it provides variety for him/her (37%), and that treats are a part of their daily diet (37%).

We've identified that many dogs are not receiving daily walks, and when combined with a lack of awareness of pet's weight and/or body condition score and an inappropriate diet, it's evident there are a combination of factors causing the problem of obesity in the UK dog population.