CITY OF SAN ANTONIO 🟧🟨🟩🟦
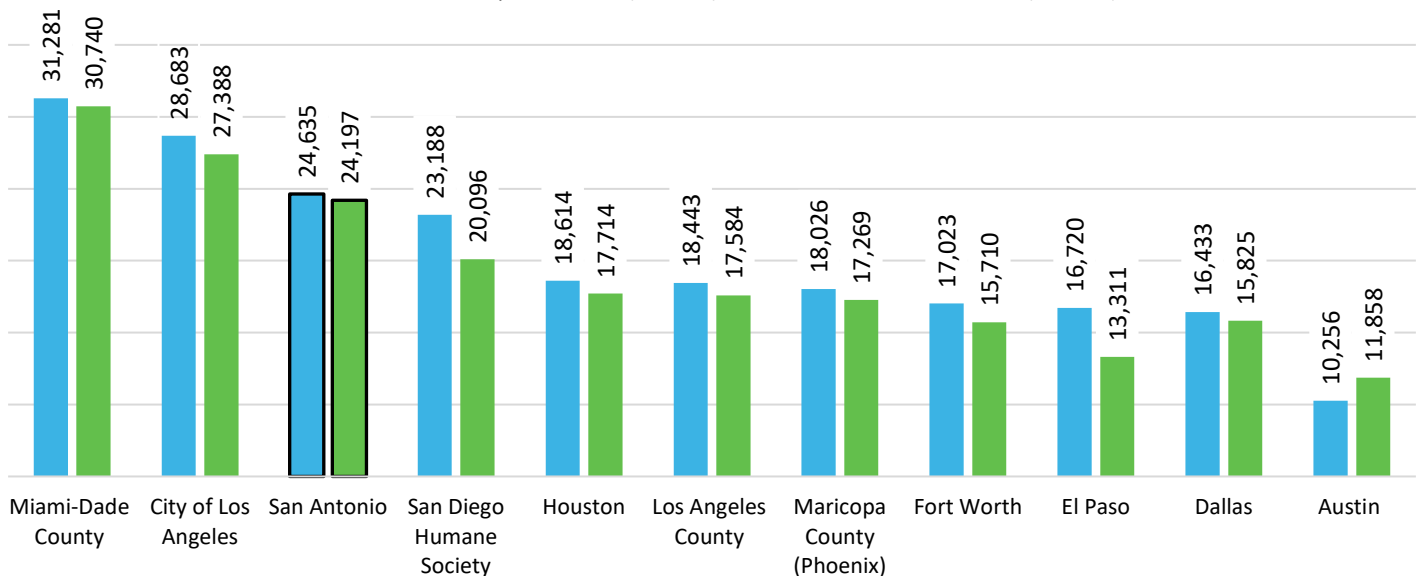# ANIMAL CARE SERVICES

Best Practice Research Summary

The following report summarizes interviews that were conducted with other shelters deemed comparable through population size, intake, per capita, and live release rate. Cities and counties interviewed include Austin, Fort Worth, El Paso, San Diego Humane Society, and Maricopa County (Phoenix). Additional research was conducted on Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles County, the City of Los Angeles, and Miami-Dade County.
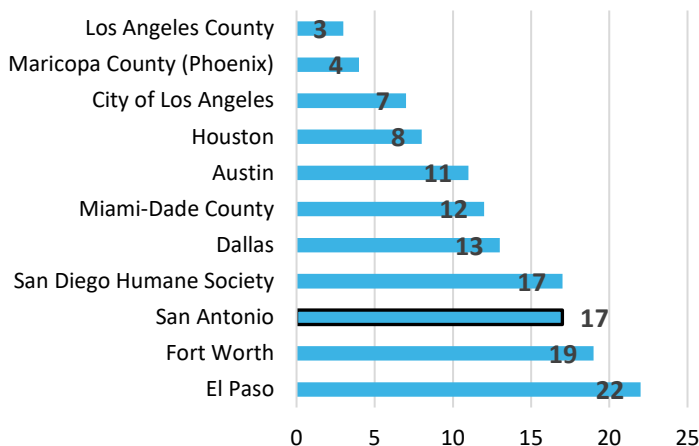
Shelter Statistics
Below are some key statistics for the cities/counties included in the research, which may provide additional context for this summary report.
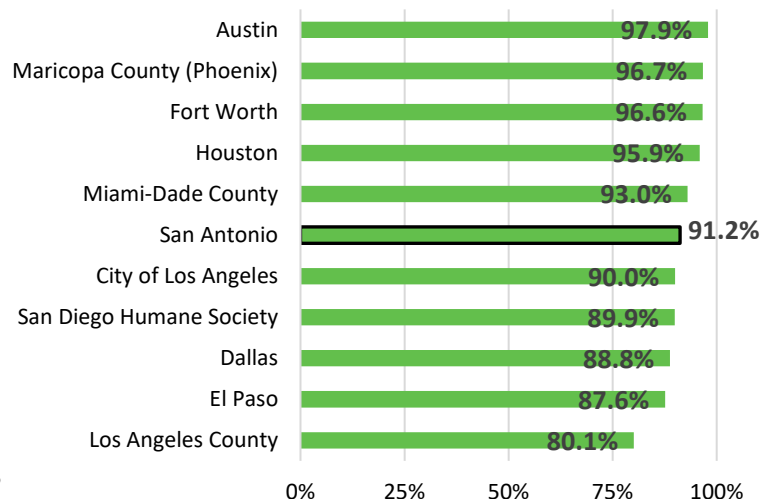
FY21 Total Intake vs Total Outcome

■ Sum of Total Impoundments (FY 2021)   ■ Sum of Total Outcomes (FY 2021)

City/County	Total Impoundments	Total Outcomes
Miami-Dade County	31,281	30,740
City of Los Angeles	28,683	27,388
San Antonio	24,635	24,197
San Diego Humane Society	23,188	20,096
Houston	18,614	17,714
Los Angeles County	18,443	17,584
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	18,026	17,269
Fort Worth	17,023	15,710
El Paso	16,720	13,311
Dallas	16,433	15,825
Austin	10,256	11,858

FY21 Intake Per Capita
(Intake per 1,000 Residents)

City/County	Intake per 1,000
Los Angeles County	3
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	4
City of Los Angeles	7
Houston	8
Austin	11
Miami-Dade County	12
Dallas	13
San Diego Humane Society	17
San Antonio	17
Fort Worth	19
El Paso	22

FY21 Live Release Rate

City/County	Live Release Rate
Austin	97.9%
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	96.7%
Fort Worth	96.6%
Houston	95.9%
Miami-Dade County	93.0%
San Antonio	91.2%
City of Los Angeles	90.0%
San Diego Humane Society	89.9%
Dallas	88.8%
El Paso	87.6%
Los Angeles County	80.1%

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Partnerships for Placement

Fort Worth, El Paso, and Maricopa County utilize out-of-state transport opportunities to manage overcapacity. El Paso credited their thriving foster program as having the most significant impact on their ability to increase capacity in their shelter. They had about 1,700 pets in foster care through an extensive and committed foster community (Parra, 2022). Fort Worth contributes an increase to their live release rate through collaborative mega-adoption events, transport programs, and returning pets to their owners in the field (Lirette, 2022).

Community Outreach and Assistance

Austin and Los Angeles have indicated that keeping pets in the home is a priority and utilize a "community policing" approach for families in need, such as providing food (Austin) or repairing fences (Mayeda, n.d.). Austin encourages its animal care officers to resolve pet-related issues in the home and not issue citations unless there is no cooperation from the resident. Maricopa County engages areas with a high stray population through adoption and "wellness-focused" outreach events to provide exposure to adoptable pets and educational resources for members of the community. According to organizations interviewed many times, people in their communities do not know what is available. These missing resources include low-cost vaccinations, free microchips, and spay/neuter resources.

Spay/Neuter Policies

All shelters reviewed have a policy in place which requires sterilization before the pet can be released for placement (including adoption and owner reclaims). However, some exceptions noted include medical exemptions from a licensed veterinarian or in instances where there are no available veterinarians within a certain radius, as seen in Maricopa County (Carl, 2022). Austin requires that an owner pay a deposit at the time of reclaim, should the owner prefer their pet sterilized through their personal veterinarian instead of at the shelter (Austin). In Fort Worth, owners who refuse to have the animal altered at the facility must sign a spay/neuter contract, stating they will complete surgery at a private veterinarian (Lirette, 2022).

Mandated Sterilization

Austin City Council voted to impose restrictions on the sale of dogs and cats related to sterilization. These regulations require that sellers spay/neuter each dog or cat before the sale or pay a $50 animal processing fee to register the animal with the City of Austin (City of Austin, 2022). Fort Worth requires that all female dogs and cats over the age of 6 months and male dogs and cats over eight months of age shall be spayed or neutered, or the owner must obtain an intact pet permit (Lirette, 2022). El Paso's ordinance states, "All dogs and cats over the age of four months that are transferred to a new owner shall be spayed or neutered…" (Parra, 2022). Dallas also requires all dogs and cats over the age of six months to be sterilized and if an owner is not in compliance, the City of Dallas issues criminal, and civil citations accordingly. Owners can receive a "compliance dismissal" and bypass going before a judge if they submit proof of compliance directly to the court (either online or in person).

Houston's ordinance mentions that if an unsterilized animal is impounded two or more times, it is required that the animal be sterilized prior to redemption of the animal from the BARC (Houston) animal shelter, and the owner is responsible for the purchase of a "sterilized pet registration" along with the fees for the performance of the sterilization at BARC (City of Austin, 2022).

"No-Kill" or "Open Admission"

Most city shelters do not use the "No Kill" label because it is not a clear message. Fort Worth and Maricopa County do not perceive this language as helpful. The council mandated Austin to maintain a 95% live release rate, and they use "No Kill" (Austin). El Paso attempted to follow the Austin model of using folding wire kennels to house pets to prevent euthanasia. This resulted in overcapacity of 260%, which was described as an "untenable situation" (Parra, 2022). All the cities interviewed self-described as "Open Admission" and accept any pets or strays from those customers they service. El Paso is addressing its overcapacity and staffing issue by partnering with the local jail and training inmates to care for the pets in their care (Parra, 2022).

Stray Population and Strategies to Mitigate

Stray populations are prevalent in all cities interviewed and multiple shelters expressed noticeable pockets of areas in their communities where stray dogs are most prevalent. Many cities said they respond to "complaint-driven" calls and only pick up stray dogs when input into the 311 systems. Austin utilizes the "go home method," where an Animal Care Officer will clap their hands and firmly tell the dog to "go home" after exhausting every attempt to return the pet to its owner before bringing it to the shelter. Austin also uses city vehicles to return dogs to their owner once they are at the shelter (Austin).

Trap-Neuter-Return

All the shelters interviewed utilize a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program for community cats. Maricopa County does not have a TNR program of their own; however, they do use and promote the TNR program run by the Animal Defense League of Arizona (ADLAZ) (Carl, 2022). ADLAZ asks for, but does not require, a $25 donation per cat from the individual who trapped it. Fort Worth, Austin, and Dallas also use partner organizations to perform TNR surgeries, while El Paso and San Diego perform TNR surgeries at their facilities. All other shelters appear to offer TNR as a free service to their residents; however, a deposit to rent a humane trap is required at most places. TNR services in Fort Worth are provided as capacity and grant funding allows (Lirette, 2022).

Other Programs of Interest

Austin subsidizes Animal Emergency clinics where citizens can drop off injured pets as strays to get treatment. The City of Austin picks up these pets from the veterinarian clinics and takes ownership as stray animals. Austin also has partnered with boarding facilities to temporarily house dogs, allowing more time to prepare for transport or those who have adoption contracts, which frees up kennel space (Austin).

San Diego Humane Society utilizes behavioral programs to help keep pets in homes, as well as to make shelter pets more placeable (Chavarria, 2022). The behavioral programs include training classes, lectures, events, consultations, and a free Behavior Helpline, which gives pet owners direct access to professional trainers. All adopters receive a free one-hour behavior session with a trainer and all members of the community have access to in-person and online training resources. San Diego Humane Society has a Behavior Center for shelter pets who display severe behavior issues in the shelter environment. The behavior teams works with the

animals to overcome behavioral issues, such as extreme fear or anxiety, to prepare them for transition into permanent homes (San Diego Humane Society, 2022).

Los Angeles County reduced their intake by 45% through the implementation of a "Managed Intake Program". This new intake strategy was adopted as part of Los Angeles County's implementation of its sheltering model known as Socially Conscious Animal Sheltering (SCAS). "Managed Intake" allows shelters to reduce the flow of pets into their care by partnering with the community to identify other options for stray or unwanted animals. These options include offering resources to help an owner reconsider surrendering their pet and encouraging people who have found a lost pet to attempt to reunite the pet with its owner before bringing it to the shelter. The shelter has also moved to appointment-based services with a case management approach to find alternative solutions that keep pets out of the shelter (Mayeda, n.d.).

Next Steps: Additional Research

ACS staff identified several types of programs and topics that warrant further research as ACS moves into Phase II of the strategic plan development. General topics include:

- Specific education and outreach programs and strategies, including social media usage
- Case management-like programs and tools such as managed intake
- Accessibility to free/low-cost spay/neuter
- Sterilizations performed on owned animals
- Methods to keep animals in their homes

The above topics are congruent with many of the themes that came out of other Phase I activities, such as the public input survey, Advisory Board and Leadership interviews, and the ACS staff survey. Topics and themes from best practice research will help shape the conversations in Phase II of the strategic plan development, where ACS staff will bring together various stakeholders to inform the goals that will ultimately make up the new strategic plan.

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
ANIMAL CARE SERVICES

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