

Guidance on Co-Sheltering People and Animals: Considerations and Resources

Research has shown that interacting with animals can have a profound effect on a person's blood pressure, heart rate and overall well-being. Bonding with a pet or support animal is an important source of love and companionship for many people. This essential support can be even more critical for the mental health and well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness. The human-animal bond is so strong that many people experiencing homelessness will not accept being separated from their animal, and consequently cannot or do not access services like emergency shelter that are not prepared and equipped to accommodate animals.

As local and statewide efforts rapidly progress to advance strategies for providing non-congregate shelter options for the sick and medically vulnerable homeless populations in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, this resource is intended to maximize opportunities for individuals to be sheltered with their animals. It is important to note that at this time there is no evidence to suggest that dogs, cats, and other animals are either susceptible to infection with the COVID-19 virus or can serve as a source of transmission to people. However, because animals can harbor other diseases that may affect people, emergency shelters must implement physical facilities and operational procedures by which residents' animals may be housed in a safe and hygienic manner.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH)'s *Keeping People and Pets Together* includes the following considerations when co-sheltering people and pets in emergency congregate shelters. This guidance can be applied to hotels/motels and other interim shelter for the purpose of the COVID-19 response.

- **Incorporate accommodations for human-animal bonds in planning phases of the shelter response**
 - For the health and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness during this time, consider the need for human-animal bonds and plan accordingly while engaging critical wrap around services.
- **Co-shelter people and their pets in the same room whenever possible.**

Many persons experiencing homelessness are accustomed to having their animals with them at all times. This increases well-being and outcomes for both people and their animals. They may resist relinquishing the animal to a separate enclosure even if it is nearby and on the same property. Work with property owners and animal welfare partners to come up with solutions to accommodate cohabitation of people and their animals whenever possible. If this is not possible, animals may also be housed in an indoor or outdoor kennel as appropriate. It is important to keep people and animals on the same property.
- **Establish policies and procedures in partnership with local public health, environmental health, and animal services agencies.**
 - Rules for animals, as for people, should begin with all applicable state laws and local ordinances, including temporary health orders for emergency situations such as COVID-19. Care must be taken to ensure that potential residents understand the rules, agree to abide by them, and appreciate the repercussions for them and/or their animal, should they fail to comply.

- Similarly, property owners and housing providers must be aware of their liability and avenues for recourse should the animal either cause or suffer illness or injury while in residence.
- Other people who have allergies or fear of animals can be protected by adding a few simple questions to check-in and strategically placing people and their animals in specific areas.
 - **Homeless service providers should partner with local animal welfare organizations.**

Local organizations (SPCA, Humane Society, animal shelters, etc.) often can provide assistance/best practices in establishing co-sheltering policies, in addition to reduced-cost or free veterinary services (e.g. vaccines, spay and neutering, wellness checks – sometimes mobile), supplies, education and training for staff, access to legal training and education addressing liability concerns when co-sheltering people and animals together, and more. Additionally, as some local laws and insurance policies on certain properties may require animal vaccination, licensure, or being spayed/neutered, where they do, these partnerships are essential to ensuring immediate access to veterinary care so that these matters do not become a barrier to entry.

Resources

- [Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Emergency Response Actions: Cohabitated Human/Household Pet Sheltering Toolkit:](#)
This toolkit provides functional guidance to aid in the establishment, operation and maintenance of Cohabitated Human/Household Pet (CHHP) shelters in response to an emergency associated with a disaster.
- [National Alliance to End Homelessness \(NAEH\): Keeping People and Pets Together:](#)
Provides best practice guidance for establishing and strengthening animal-friendly homeless services.
- [Sheltering Animals & Families Together \(SAF-T\) Program / SAF-T Program Start-up Manual:](#)
While this publication is aimed at establishing a “Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T) Program” for co-sheltering survivors of violence and their animals, it provides practical considerations, examples, and recommendations for establishing co-sheltering of people and animals.