



Why did the Association of Shelter Veterinarians develop these standards?

The goal of the *ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* is to provide information that will help any shelter entity meet the physical, medical, and behavioral needs of the animals in their care. Animal sheltering has evolved dramatically over the past 3-4 decades, and knowledge of animal care in shelter settings has also grown by leaps and bounds. Today's sheltering organizations are diverse, ranging from large, well-funded "brick and mortar" facilities, to small, loosely organized grass-roots groups or individuals. A lot has changed from the time when shelters were intended to be primarily short-term housing facilities and may not have had a strong focus on meeting the full range of animals' needs or ensuring welfare. Many sheltering facilities were not designed to provide the conditions that we now know are necessary for animal health and wellbeing. Despite an increasing body of scientific knowledge about the provision of care for animals in shelters, much of what is done remains largely unstandardized and un-regulated. This white paper was developed in order that sheltering programs – whether a large organization, a small home based effort, or something in between – as well as communities would be able to identify minimum standards of care as well as best and unacceptable practices. The ASV saw a need for a group of experts to come together and create animal care guidelines written specifically for shelters that could continue to evolve as knowledge increases about the best way to meet the needs of animals in shelter settings.

What process was undertaken in developing these standards?

The Guidelines for Standards of Care is the result of an idea that was discussed in early 2001, when the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) first formed as a non-profit organization with a mission of improving the health and welfare of animals in shelters through the advancement of shelter medicine. For a variety of reasons, the timing was not right to begin a project of this scope at that time. In 2007, the ASV Board of Directors again discussed the need for such a document and formalized a Shelter Standards Task Force to initiate a comprehensive literature review and prepare a well-researched and referenced white paper identifying standards of care that would meet the needs of animals in shelters. The task force first convened in January 2009 in conjunction with the North American Veterinary Medical Conference. The 14 members of the task force hail from a wide variety of backgrounds in shelter medicine – from academia, to national organizations, to municipal sheltering, governmental organizations and the private sector. Collectively, this group represents several hundred years of experiences working in and with animal shelters! Members of the task force first worked in small groups to develop initial content from reference literature then all authors contributed, wrote, commented, and revised in each section as part of the larger group. Several thousand hours of work collectively went into outlining of content, writing, assembling,



reviewing, and editing the final content to ensure that it reflected best practices while still being achievable.

What are the “Five Freedoms” and why is this document based on this concept?

The foundation for the Guidelines is the “Five Freedoms”, which were developed in 1965 in the United Kingdom as a result of a report by the Brambell commission (which later became the Farm Animal Welfare Council) to address welfare concerns in agricultural settings. The Five Freedoms are now recognized to have much broader application across species and essentially speak to fundamental needs of animals that remain constant regardless of setting. The Five Freedoms are:

- Freedom from Hunger and Thirst – by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.
- Freedom from Discomfort – by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease – by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Freedom to Express Normal Behavior– by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- Freedom from Fear and Distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

How are practices identified as good or bad for a shelter in the document?

In the text, “unacceptable” is used to highlight practices that must be corrected as soon as possible to provide an acceptable level of care. For example, *“Failure to identify and provide analgesia for painful conditions is unacceptable and corrective steps must be taken immediately”*. Whenever a practice is identified as “must”, this indicates that it is believed that without adherence to this recommendation, the delivery of a minimum level of acceptable, humane care is not possible. *“A veterinarian must make the final decision regarding acceptance of any patient for surgery.”* Use of the word “should” implies a strong recommendation. *“Monitoring should include food and water consumption, urination, defecation, attitude, behavior, ambulation, and signs of illness or other problems.”* Best practices are also identified in the body of the text as “ideal” or “best”. As an illustration, *“Expert input on all policies and protocols related to maintenance of physical and behavioral animal health should be provided by a veterinarian. Ideally, this veterinarian would have training or experience in shelter medicine as well as knowledge about the particular population”*. It may not be possible to implement “ideal” recommendations in all circumstances, but it is recognized that it would certainly result in excellent care for animals if this were achieved. In short, shelters should



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strive to meet the “ideal” practices, but in order to provide acceptable minimum standards of care, they must adhere to practices that are identified as a “must”, and avoid any practice identified as unacceptable.

What areas will the standards address?

12 areas of sheltering that affect animal health and wellbeing or public health are addressed, including:

1. Management and Record Keeping
2. Facility Design and Environment
3. Population Management
4. Sanitation
5. Medical Health and Physical Well-being
6. Behavioral Health and Mental Well-Being
7. Group Housing
8. Animal Handling
9. Euthanasia
10. Spay-Neuter
11. Animal Transport
12. Public Health

What will the standards *not* address?

The standards are not a step-by-step operational manual for shelters. The right approach for implementing the standards will vary by shelter depending on their particular resources and challenges.

Who do the standards apply to?

The standards are meant to be applicable to a wide variety of situations in which care for companion animals is delivered in a group or population setting, including traditional brick and mortar shelters, sanctuaries, and home based foster or rescue networks.

How do you think these new standards will help shelters?

The authors hope that they will serve as a source of information and support as well as an impetus for continual improvement and demonstrate that the fundamental needs of animals are the same in all settings from a large municipal shelter to a foster home. Goals are to:

- Provide shelters and communities with a tool for self-assessment and improvement



Association of Shelter Veterinarian's Guidelines for Standards of Care

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- Increase the consistency of the care delivered to animals in shelters
- Promote the highest standards of welfare, for existing facilities as well as new construction
- Provide sound reference material for regulatory purposes when communities look for guidance
- Provide a benchmark for when corrective action is needed
- Create a living document that will be responsive to developments in shelter medicine and animal care
- Establish what is required for a decent quality of life for populations of companion animals
- Dispel notions that high morbidity and mortality from disease and injury is the norm in shelters
- Connect expectations of sanitation, medical care, and mental/behavioral well-being to acceptable sheltering, and dispel any notion that these essentials are frivolous “extras” or cosmetic
- It is our greatest hope that this document will serve shelter animals and those responsible for them by providing evidence-based, humane guidelines for their care.

How can copies be acquired?

A pdf of the document will be available for download at:

www.sheltervet.org

Who can I contact for more information?

Media contact: shelterstandards@sheltervet.org