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# **PET-INCLUSIVE HOUSING**

**survey results & recommendations**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the summer of 2025, after hearing stories of how difficult it is to find rental accommodations in Manitoba as a pet owner, the Winnipeg Humane Society (WHS) issued a survey to Manitobans regarding their experiences with pet-inclusive housing. The survey was launched to gain a better understanding of the actual landscape facing Manitoba tenants with animals.

A total of 313 people responded to the survey, with 87.54% of the respondents identified as living inside the city of Winnipeg. A further breakdown indicated the majority of respondents (50.48%) fell within the 25–44 age range.



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The survey results support anecdotal reports that people with animals do indeed experience more barriers in finding rental housing in Manitoba and confirm that there is a need for change. Among those findings are:

Quantitative results, while significant, did not show the entire picture. Qualitative data indicated that respondents who had replied “no” to an issue impacting them personally often added anecdotal evidence of the issue negatively impacting family or friends.

The shortage of pet-inclusive housing often disproportionately and negatively impacts those searching for affordable housing units.

Many survey respondents described their pet as family and cited the mental health benefits of animal companionship.

93.89% of respondents felt that there should be standardized rules for landlords and tenants across Manitoba that would allow for pets within reasonable limits in lease agreements.

Many survey respondents highlighted the need for responsible pet ownership to ensure a balance between landlord and tenant rights.

Recommendations emerging from this survey’s data include a need for legislative and policy reform at both the provincial and municipal level.

# WHAT IS PET-INCLUSIVE HOUSING?

Pet-inclusive housing can be defined as rental accommodation that involves the following components:



No arbitrary restrictions on breeds, weight, or size



No extra costs such as non-refundable pet fees or monthly pet rent



Pet-specific amenities such as dog-washing stations, pet waste stations, or dog parks



A sense of community that welcomes pet owners



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# WHY IS PET-INCLUSIVE HOUSING IMPORTANT?

## I. The family we choose

Over 60% of Canadian homes have pets, and 70% consider them family members.<sup>1</sup> Pets are often more than just companions; they offer emotional grounding, structure, and a sense of purpose in people's lives, as well as being one good reason to smile every day. However, in Manitoba, only 20-40% of rental units accept pets, which demonstrates a significant need in our province.<sup>2</sup>



## 2. Pets are lifelines, but housing isn't keeping up



Pets are powerful partners in mental wellness. According to general studies, companion animals help in many aspects of one's mental health, like alleviating stress, anxiety, depression, and more.<sup>3</sup> For many, especially those living alone, a pet offers daily purpose and unconditional love. When housing rules force people to give up their animals, it's more than a loss; it's a disruption to their well-being. By supporting pet-inclusive housing, we can help more people keep the companions that care for them.

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Animal Health Institute. (2022). Latest Canadian Pet Population Figures. Available online: <https://www.cahi-icsa.ca/fr/press-releases/2022-latest-canadian-pet-population-figures-released>; Angus Reid Institute. (2022). Fifi, Fido & Affordability: As cost of living rises, pet owners praise veterinarian care but say it costs too much. Available online: <https://angusreid.org/canada-pandemic-pets-veterinarians-insurance/>

<sup>2</sup> Avrom Charach, Professional Property Managers Association (Manitoba), Pet project – Winnipeg Free Press

<sup>3</sup> Human Animal Bond Research Institute. Mental Health Research. Available online: <https://habri.org/research/mental-health/>



### 3. Security and safety for all

In a recent study, 56% of Canadian women delayed leaving abusive homes because they could not secure housing with their pets,<sup>4</sup> and another 60% said they felt they had no choice but to leave without their pet.<sup>5</sup> Leaving a pet behind often isn't an option, yet finding a safe, pet-inclusive home can feel impossible.



### 4. Homes, not shelters

Animal shelters across Canada are feeling the strain as more pets are surrendered due to housing restrictions. At the Winnipeg Humane Society, the second-highest reason for a surrender is due to the lack of pet-inclusive housing. Many shelters are operating beyond capacity, impacting both animals and the dedicated people who care for them. With the right support, we can ease the burden on shelters and keep more pets where they belong - at home, with the people who love them.



### 5. Fair housing for all! Pets included.

Everyone deserves the chance to experience the joy of having a pet, no matter whether you rent or own your home. But the shortage of pet-inclusive housing disproportionately impacts groups such as seniors, youth, people with disabilities, and those facing major life changes. By embracing pet-inclusive housing, we can level the playing field and ensure that all Canadians, regardless of housing status, have the opportunity to build a loving home, pets included.



<sup>4</sup> Barrett, B., Fitzgerald, A., Peirone, A., Stevenson, R., Cheung, C.H. (2018). Help Seeking Among Abused Women with Pets: Evidence from a Canadian Sample, Violence

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, et al. (2017). Animal maltreatment as a risk marker of more frequent and severe forms of intimate partner violence. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, pp. 1-26. DOI: 10.1177/0886260517719542



# WHAT DO MANITOBANS THINK?

The following provides a summary of both quantitative and qualitative survey results. It is critical both pieces are taken into account in the overall analysis to ensure a complete picture of barriers faced by renters seeking pet-inclusive accommodations in Manitoba.

## Q1. Do you feel that you have been denied rental accommodations by Manitoba landlords in the past only because you had a pet or pets?

A majority of 50.5% respondents answered “yes” (39.02%) or “maybe but unable to prove it” (11.48%) to this question. However, the supporting comments indicated that some “no” answers came with caveats such as:

- No, but the respondent had experienced denial in other Canadian cities
- No, but the respondent had only applied for rental accommodations that explicitly stated that they were pet-inclusive
- No, but the respondent is a homeowner

Respondents shared the following stories:

- “We had to give up our cats to move into an apartment.”
- “I was denied a 55-plus place because I had a cat, which I had a letter from my doctor she was my emotional support animal. The landlord asked me how I trained her to be my emotional support animal. This was many years ago, it was a special program which is not avail at the time. I found other accommodations that allowed my cat.”
- “When I was 18, my mom got in trouble with her landlord for my cat living there, and I was forced to rehome them. I didn’t have anywhere else I could live...My dad also had so much trouble finding an affordable place to live with a small dog.”
- “In 2017, it took me and my husband several months to find a rental property that would accommodate a large dog and a cat. In the end, we ended up renting a four-bedroom house that was way out of our price range and much too large for the two of us, because we couldn’t find anything cheaper or smaller that would allow a large dog. This choice made us go deep into debt, debt that we are still recovering from today.”



- “Yes, I’ve been denied rental housing in Manitoba solely because I have a pet. I have a dachshund and have been actively looking for over two years.”
- “When selling my home and downsizing, it was difficult to find pet-inclusive rental housing. Added to an already stressful situation, fearing I’d have to give up my pets.”
- “From the ages of 18-24, I struggled to find affordable housing while owning a cat. This got worse when I got a dog, and I had to live in some unsafe conditions to keep my family together.”

**Q2. Do you believe that your Manitoba landlord attempted to evict or intimidate you into leaving your rental in the past only because of your pet or pets?**

While only 16.45% of respondents said “yes” (9.40%) or “maybe but unable to prove it” (7.05%), many respondents shared experiences of others in their lives who had experienced such treatment:

- “Yes, I was renting an apt in St. Boniface, the landlord asked me (after having an argument with her) how many cats did I have. I told her one, she was 10 years old and spayed. I also told her that she was on the lease (her manager put it on the lease but she was unaware of it). It ended the intimidation.”
- “My mom was threatened with eviction for the time my cat stayed with us when I first moved in with her.”
- “Was told by the caretaker I could have a cat, but then the rental agency threatened to evict me if I didn’t rehome my cat.”
- “No, but this happened to my mother, who lived in her rental unit for over 10 years but was intimidated into leaving when new owners took over the building. She, too, was forced to get a rental property that was over her price range in order to keep her cat.”



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**Q3. In the past five years, have you felt that you were barred from applying for or attempting to obtain rental or temporary accommodation because the listing or property website explicitly stated or implied “no pets?”**

53.51% of respondents answered “yes” to this question, while sharing the following anecdotes:

- “Finding a rental that allows pets is difficult because it can be competitive. Everyone with pets applies to the few rentals that allow them. Many private landlords also don’t allow pets, and it can be extremely difficult to find a place. I looked for several months and feel I can’t leave the place I’m in because there are so few options.”
- “Many times I have not pursued applications due to pet restrictions in the listing.”
- “Absolutely yes! It’s made looking for a place to live near impossible, and almost homeless just because I have pets. It’s honestly disgusting and very sad and caused my mental health to decline. This is why people give up their pets so easily. It’s a serious real-life problem. But I am an animal lover, and I would never abandon my pets, ever. But it’s become very hard to find a home, and it makes you lose interest in looking because almost all houses for rent now are not pet-inclusive.”

While not directly relevant to the question, respondents also shared the difficulty in finding affordable housing that is pet-inclusive:

- “It’s difficult to find affordable pet-inclusive housing in my budget since I am on social assistance/disability.”
- “Just recently receiving EIA. Does not give enough money to rent a place that will allow pets/pet deposit, etc. So the rentals are above EIA budget. There should be more low-income rental spaces that would allow family pets.”
- “When I was searching for apartments initially when moving to Winnipeg, the supply in my price range was cut down from -440 to -100 apartments once I filtered by units that allowed animals.”



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#### **Q4. Have you ever had to surrender or rehome a pet or pets because you were unable to find housing that would accept pets?**

While only 12.09% of respondents said “yes,” many respondents shared experiences of others in their lives who were forced to make this difficult choice, or shared their experiences of other options that they chose instead of surrender:

- “No, I couch surfed while I was looking for a small house I could afford to house my dog.”
- “I would never give up my pet even if I have to live on the streets.”
- “Had to switch ownership of my dogs to family (luckily a trustworthy switch) as I needed to move into a rental unit and couldn’t find an affordable place with a medium/large breed friendly pet policy.”
- “Yes, when I moved to Winnipeg, due to losing my job in my small town community, I had to leave my dog with someone, because I could not find affordable housing that allowed me to bring my pet with me. It was a terrible time for me. Just lost my job, and my beloved pet. My mental health suffered more than I care to admit.”
- “I put my senior dog down so I would be able to get an apartment... it has been years but I still cry.”
- “I have had to help temporarily with dogs because of friends going through that situation in Winnipeg.”
- “When me and my husband broke up, I couldn’t bring my pets with me where I had to go so I had to donate them to humane society.”
- “I would sleep on the street before I would surrender my dog. He is a support that I really need.”
- “I had to ask family and friends, and even pay for boarding to find help temporarily until I could find a place that would let me have my dog.”
- “Instead, I stayed longer in an abusive situation so as not to lose my dog.”



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**Q5. Do you feel that there should be standardized rules for renters and landlords across Manitoba that would allow for pets within reasonable limits in lease agreements?**

Respondents felt strongly that standardized rules should be adopted, with 93.89% of respondents answering “yes” to this question:

- “Caring for pets is a symbiotic relationship; it improves quality of life for both parties. This is a huge necessity for both people and animals right now. People should not have less housing options because they have pets in their family.”
- “Absolutely – affordable housing for people of any socioeconomic background and current (or desiring) pet owners should be significantly more accessible. Current locations are limited already, and many Manitobans are already struggling to pay rent without having to look for the places that are more expensive and pet-inclusive.”
- “Pets are so common that it seems cruel to outright ban them in certain rentals. The majority of pet owners are responsible and care well for their pets. The place I’m in rarely has issues, and most tenants have multiple animals, including large dogs. It creates a welcoming environment...To force someone to abandon a family member so that they can find housing is truly unacceptable, and it’s devastating that this is the reality for so many people.”
- “As a landlord myself, I strongly believe pets should always be accepted into a lease. Noise and damage concerns are outdated concerns. Domesticated animals are no worse in terms of noise or damage than any other occupant...”
- “Yes, it is appalling that landlords are allowed to deny pets to tenants, both upon applying and while currently living in a unit. I firmly believe that much of our cat and dog overpopulation problems would be significantly eased if landlords were not allowed to deny tenancy based on whether the person has a pet or not. With so many pets needing homes, opening up potential adopters to those living in rental homes will significantly decrease the amount of cats and dogs in rescues, shelters, and the pound...Standardized rules would decrease the overpopulation of stray and adoptable cats and dogs, make housing for pet owners more accessible, and decrease the amount of pets surrendered due to lack of suitable housing.”



# RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear more pet-friendly housing, especially in affordable housing units, is a necessity within the city of Winnipeg and, more broadly, the province of Manitoba.

This change can best be accomplished through a series of legislative amendments and policy changes that: (i) add new pet-friendly housing stock; and (ii) ensure that landlords are unable to refuse rental accommodations to tenants who have pets. Legislative amendments are also required to ensure that affordability is not a barrier to pet-friendly housing.

## **The Winnipeg Humane Society makes the following recommendations to the Government of Manitoba (the “Province”):**

1. That the Province amend *The Residential Tenancies Act* to: (i) ban no-pet clauses in rental agreements; (ii) eliminate the ability to charge a pet deposit for affordable housing units.
2. That the Province adopt a policy that requires all developers accessing provincial grants or tax credits for housing developments to dedicate a minimum of 50% of the total housing units as pet-friendly.

## **The Winnipeg Humane Society makes the following recommendations to the City of Winnipeg (the “City”):**

1. That the City adopt a policy that requires all developers accessing municipal grants or tax credits for housing developments to dedicate a minimum of 50% of the total housing units as pet-friendly.



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