

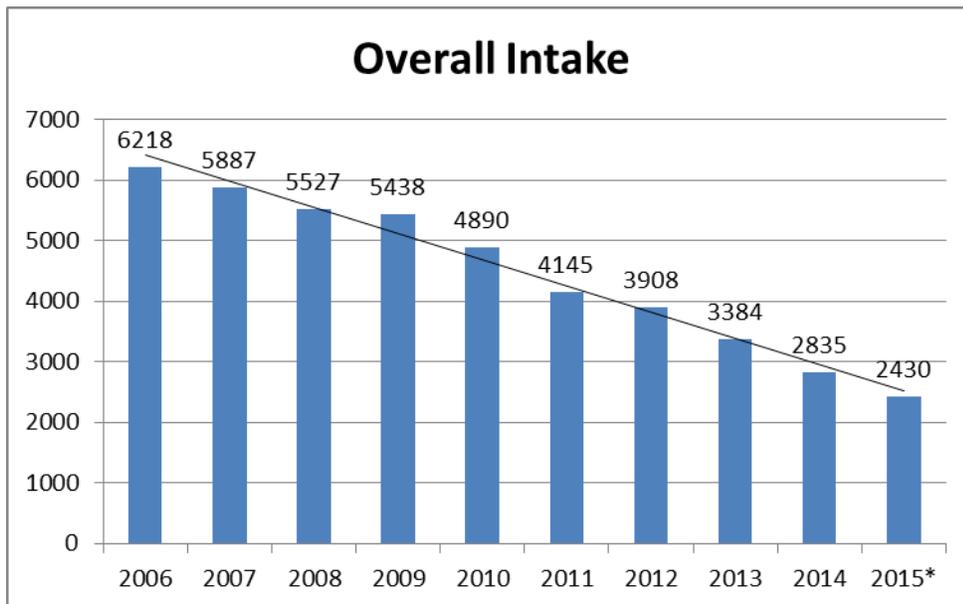
# What's Happening to Cats at HAS?

Mid-year 2015 Report Prepared by Rescue Hamilton Cats

At the 6 month (half way) point through 2015, a comparison of end-of-June 2015 stats with end-of-June 2014 stats was completed using data provided by Hamilton Animal Services (HAS). This report summarizes our analysis, provides graphs to illustrate trends and discusses how on-going changes at HAS are affecting Hamilton cats both inside and outside the City shelter.

## INTAKE

Intake was down from 1191 in 2014 to 1021 in 2015. This 14% drop thus far in 2015 suggests a continuation of a dramatic downward trend over the past 10 years. Assuming a continuation of this decline during the latter half of 2015, the total for the whole year (as indicated by 2015\*) can be extrapolated to 2430 admissions.



The decline in recent years is attributable to:

- limits having been put on the non-emergency pick-up service which, prior to 2012, had been provided on request 24/7 and is now restricted to specified times within business hours and provided only in special situations as determined on a case-by-case basis.
- the previously "open admission" policy, having been modified to allow for admissions to be restricted to emergency cases when volume is nearing capacity or the danger of spread of contagious illness is high. At these times "closed-to-admissions" signs are put on the door and people arriving with cats are turned away.
- the public now being advised that, prior to coming up to drop off strays or to surrender owned cats, they should phone to confirm that the Shelter is "open" (accepting admissions).

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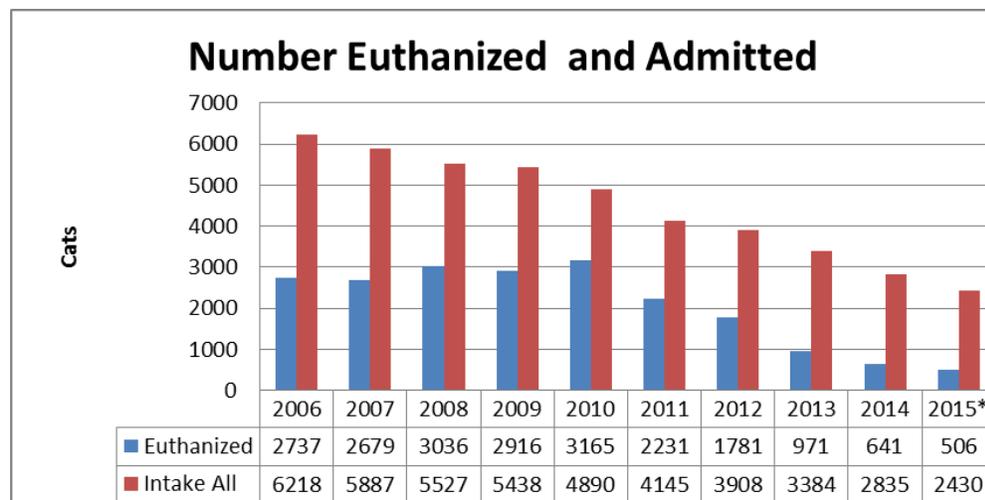
- the progressively more clearly delivered message to the public that HAS should be seen as a last resort to be considered an option only for sick, injured or aggressive animals and that healthy strays, including those who seem "lost", should not be brought in.

### EUTHANIZED

Reduced intake results in lower occupancy which means less crowded conditions and the possibility of reallocating budgeted resources to 'rehabilitate' those with health or temperament problems to prepare them for 'rehoming' by:

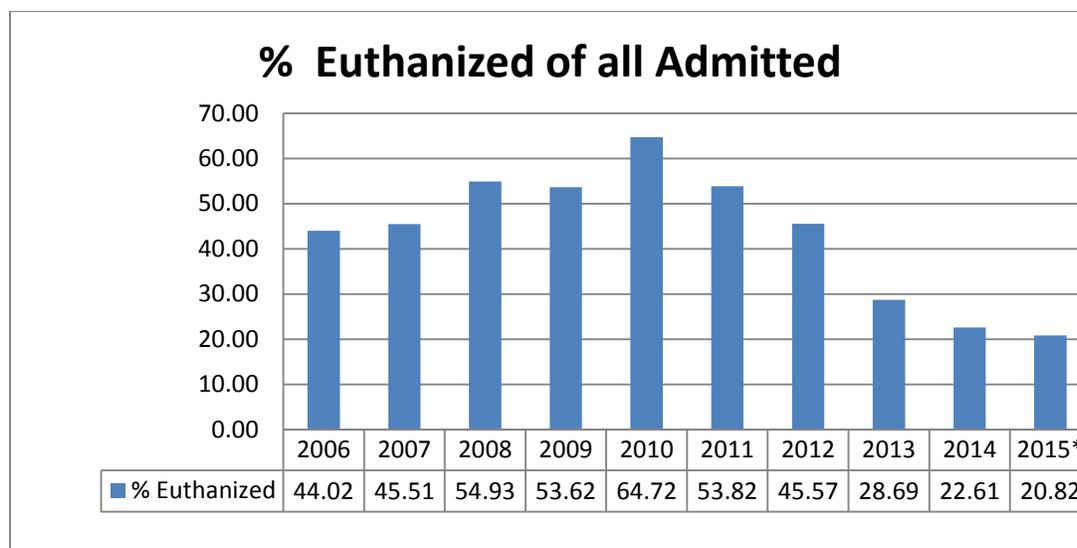
- redirecting veterinary services to preventive measures, such as the introduction in early 2012 of a procedure whereby all cats, on arrival, are given an FVRCP vaccine booster to decrease their susceptibility to several highly contagious diseases common in high volume shelters
- increasing availability of treatments (including meds and surgeries) to some of the incoming sick and injured cats, and
- devoting more staff time to the direct care of these animals and to cleaning protocols aimed at reducing the spread of illness.

A parallel decrease in the numbers euthanized (due, at first, simply to the drop in intake numbers and, over time, also to these related reallocation measures) has been evident since 2011. The euthanized # in the first 6 months of this year (down from 195 in 2014 to 154 in 2015) suggests a continuation of this decline. If this trend remains through to the end of the year, it will mean that this downward slope is continuing through a 5th consecutive year as illustrated in this bar graph.



A decline in the euthanized #s, though it may give the appearance that things are getting better, does not automatically signal any real improvement for the cats. It is only when the odds on "getting out alive" start to improve that the change means something to the cats inside. The % of intake that end up being euthanized has fluctuated over the years, with the odds hovering around 50/50. Those odds started to improve in 2013. The extrapolated 2015 data indicates that the downward trend in % of intake being euthanized is continuing through a 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year.

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The % euthanized at a shelter, while frequently used as THE measure of how well it is doing in comparison to municipally managed services in other cities, tells only part of the story. To interpret what this means one needs to examine the reasons given for euthanizing.

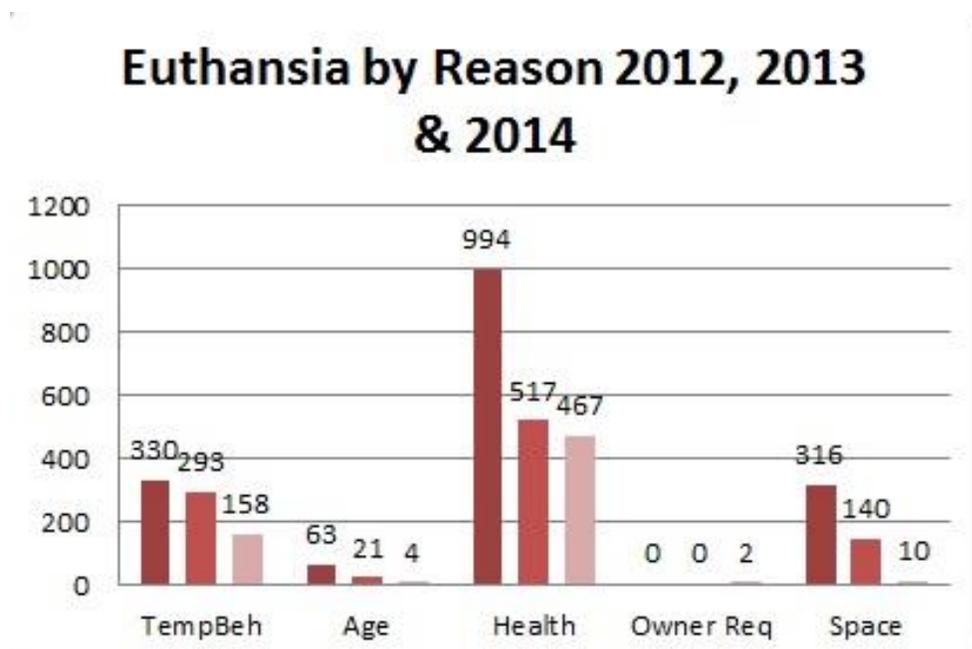
Since 2012, HAS has been providing some data on the 'reasons.'

A consistently small # (0 in 2012 and 2013; 2 in 2014 and 0 thus far in 2015) are reported euthanized "at owner request." Some city shelters, such as Calgary, have eliminated this category in their stats because they view the final decision to euthanize a surrendered cat to be based on the cat's current condition (and adoptability). Other city shelters have elected to offer euthanasia services at a low fee (e.g. \$30 in Toronto) to owners with sick/injured cats who can't afford to have them humanely "put to sleep."

A decreasing # (315 in 2012; 140 in 2013; 10 in 2014 and 0 thus far in 2015) are reported euthanized due to "lack of space." Many city shelters have eliminated this category on the basis that there is always some reason for selecting a particular cat to be euthanized when overcrowding becomes an issue.

A decreasing # (63 in 2012; 21 in 2013; 4 in 2014 and 1 thus far in 2015) are reported euthanized "due to age." This continuing decline may simply reflect a change in record keeping. As older cats are more likely to have medical issues, 'health' may be increasingly recorded as the reason. Also, local rescue group data point to an increased effort to transfer out the seniors, including those with health issues.

A decreasing, but still high proportion (330 in 2012; 293 in 2013; 158 in 2014 and 50 thus far in 2015) are reportedly euthanized due to 'Temperament/Behaviour.' It is not known how often these factors (including aggression and depression) are a reaction to being caged - and frightened.



Health has consistently been, and continues to be, the most frequently reported reason (994 in 2012; 517 in 2013; 467 in 2014 and 100 thus far in 2015). The trend downward likely reflects, along with the dramatic drop in intake:

- an improvement in the level of vet services, shelter conditions and care to the sick/injured cats
- co-operative efforts between HAS, HBSPCA and rescue groups to transfer out as quickly as possible those requiring immediate or long term care (e.g. orphaned kittens, pregnant, chronically ill or seriously injured cats) or high cost procedures (e.g. amputations, diagnostic testing, treatments, diets, monitoring), or seriously contagious cases (e.g. Ringworm) threatening to endanger the health of the shelter population

A significant proportion of cats at city shelters arrive with serious medical issues. Without knowing how often the decision to euthanize is made to provide humane end-to-suffering, it is not possible to know how much further reduced the euthanized % could be and what measures would result in further reduction. For this reason, some city shelters are collecting more detailed information, breaking the Health reason down into "untreatable, treatable, contagious, physical condition, unweaned."

The reality now at HAS, as clearly reflected in the data, is that the % euthanized is down to a level comparable to (or below) that at shelters in other municipalities and that the majority of cats admitted are being discharged alive.

## DISCHARGED

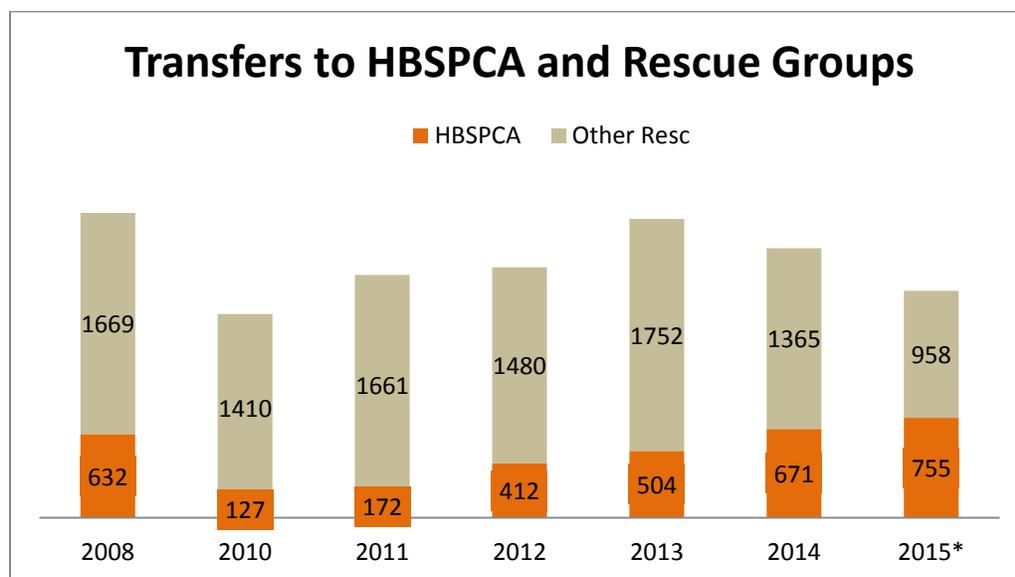
Return-to-owner (RTO) numbers, with 40 discharged back to owners in the first 6 months of 2015, appear unchanged. The % of total intake re-claimed, while it fluctuates year to year, has remained, and continues to remain, at under 4%. HAS makes an effort to contact owners whose cats have ID (including microchips.) As well, it encourages active searching by the public and the use of the free service Helping Lost Pets (HLP) where all animals brought in to the shelter are posted on HLP. Given that HAS also advises people not to bring in healthy possibly lost cats, thereby giving these cats the chance to find

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their own way home, there is little reason to expect the RTO rate to increase or to view that rate as an indicator of how many lost cats in Hamilton are getting re-united with owners.

The majority admitted to HAS (about 75%) end up being transferred to one of the privately funded organizations which run established (and effective) adoption services. Through these organizations, the cats receive vet services (treatments, dental work, spay/neuters, etc.) and ongoing care in a foster home or no-kill shelter until they are adopted into forever homes.

The # being discharged to the HBSPCA shows upward trending over recent years. The number in the first 6 months of 2015 (404) suggests that this trend is continuing through a 5th consecutive year. This is primarily due to changes within the HBSPCA (investment in an on-site companion animal hospital, increased capacity at their on-site shelter, the addition of off-site adoption locations and innovative adoption campaigns/events).



The increased (and increasing) importance to the City of Hamilton of the existing partnership with the HBSPCA is clearly affirmed by the data. And the message is further intensified by data pointing to an emerging downward trend in the # (and proportion) being discharged to other local and out-of-town rescue groups.

As the same graph shows, the transfers to these rescue groups declined substantially in 2014 and the data in the first 6 months of 2015, showing 391 discharges to these groups compared to 557 in the first 6 months of 2014, suggests a continued downward trend.

While there have been fluctuations in the #s over the years attributable to changes within these groups this emerging downward trend likely reflects some specific factors.

The out-of-town rescues, which just a few years back were playing a relatively larger role, may:

(1) with the euthanized rate having dropped so much, be perceiving less urgency to rescue from Hamilton and shifting their focus to other cities where the % euthanized is currently higher

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(2) being influenced to stay more focused on rescuing locally because of efforts being made in their own municipalities to strengthen the relationship between their animal services departments and the local SPCAs, Humane Societies and rescue groups.

Some local Hamilton groups have been, and continue to be, making an effort to rescue cats before they get into the HAS system, and several are reporting increased pressure to respond to a growing volume of requests from the public for help.

While the data to end-of-June suggest that changes underway at HAS are benefitting cats admitted to the City Shelter, there are broader consequences to be considered.

### **INSIDE/OUTSIDE**

While no-one is wanting to see a return to a time when the situation for cats inside HAS was very bleak, the rapid and continuing decline in intake that has made things better for them, may be making the situation worse for cats outside. The vast majority of Hamilton cats in need of help never enter the City Shelter.

So, while measures being taken by the City of Hamilton to limit Intake may be making things better inside the shelter, one needs to take into account how these measures, and the overall reduced intake at the City Shelter, are affecting the cats who remain outside.

For instance, during the slow, low volume, pre-kitten season of 2015, modifications were made to cages to make them more spacious/comfortable, and a separate space (previously used to house cats) was established to allow for out-of-cage time. The benefits to the cats inside were obvious. However, another consequence was reduced flexibility to shift toward accommodating more cats during the high volume months. Whether or not the current maximum is sufficient to meet the demand throughout the continuing "kitten season" remains to be seen.

The increasing restrictions on pick-up and limitations on admissions have, in recent years, raised concerns about what to do with (and for) the increasing numbers that remain outside - all the rest of the vulnerable (and desperate) cats and kittens abandoned, discarded, lost, or "born on the streets".

The same organizations which provide services to the ones transferred from inside HAS are striving also to help those on the outside, working to curb population growth and to provide an array of supports and services needed to improve the situation for Hamilton cats.

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Watch for News Alerts at [rescuehamiltoncats.com](http://rescuehamiltoncats.com) to follow what's happening to cats inside and outside the city shelter through the remainder of 2015.