

# Why are Minnesotans giving up their pets at record rates?

By Lincoln Roch | Jul. 2nd, 2025

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Pet rescues across Minnesota are overwhelmed, with many having to turn away surrender applicants.

The Minnesota  
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Stone, a 6-year-old white German Shepherd, is in a foster home in Minneapolis after his family surrendered him. (Richard Tsong-Taatarii/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

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Julie Koch has seen 31 dogs come and go from her Minneapolis home over the last four years. She's a foster for Ruff Start Rescue, which cares for animals across Minnesota.

Right now, she's caring for a lovable 6-year-old white German Shepherd named Stone. He came to her from Texas in 2021 and was adopted in 2022. But in August, his family had to give him back.

"He didn't get surrendered because he was a bad dog, or he was full of issues," Koch said. "He got surrendered because they were having a hard time, they knew he could be in better hands with someone else."

Stone is part of a concerning trend Ruff Start and other animal rescue organizations are facing. Ruff Start received a record 3,152 surrender applications in 2024, up from 1,117 in 2021. That doesn't account for every animal; applications frequently include multiple pets or litters.

But Ruff Start had to turn away half of those applicants. It, like many rescues, can only take as many pets as people are willing to foster.

"We barely can answer the phone," said Meghan Finch-Kleven, the operations manager at Last Hope Animal Rescue in Farmington. "People are begging with us to take their animals ... and you only have so much room."

Reasons why someone may need to give up a pet include skyrocketing costs for essentials like vet care and food as well as issues around housing. Organizations across Minnesota are left overwhelmed, at capacity and fighting to keep pets in their homes.

From last November through January, Gallup and PetSmart Charities spoke with 2,500 pet owners [across the U.S.](#) They found that 52% of pet owners skipped needed veterinary care in the last year. That includes 37% of owners who visited a vet, but declined recommended treatment.

Other studies put that number closer to 45% or 30% of the population. Dr. Graham Brayshaw, chief medical officer for the Animal Humane Society

headquartered in Golden Valley, estimates there are 1.5 million dogs and cats in the metro area.

“So there’s maybe a half million animals that don’t get regular vet care in the Twin Cities that probably need it,” he said.

Of the respondents who skipped needed care, 7 in 10 said it was because they could not afford it or that it was not worth the cost. Vet care costs have risen 38% since 2019 and bills over \$1,000 are not uncommon.

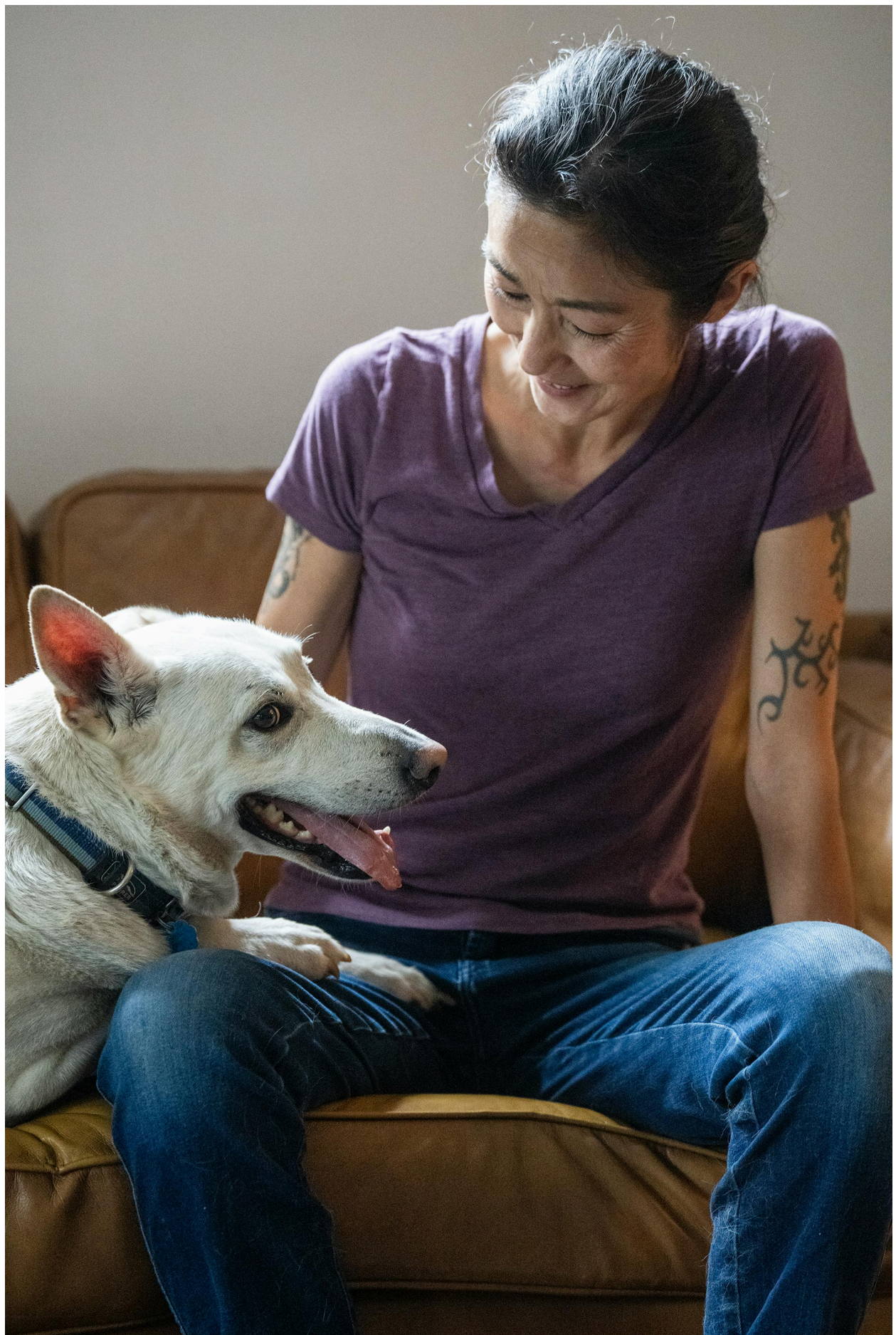
“That’s due to expanding labor costs, along with veterinary professional staff shortages, rising medication and supply expenses and ongoing and significant innovations in diagnostic and treatment tools,” said Anna Kucera, the One Health Clinic project manager at the University of Minnesota’s College of Veterinary Medicine.

Veterinarians make less than doctors who care for people, and often face significant college debt. That, paired with the stress and long hours that come with the job, has resulted in a significant shortage in vets and support staff.

The crisis has caused some clinics to shutter and left one-third of pet owners living in areas where vets are scarce or nonexistent. Rural communities are being hit the hardest, requiring hours-long trips for a visit.

They “live in what we call a veterinary desert, where, even if they could afford care, they don’t live anywhere near a practicing veterinary professional,” Kucera said.







Julie Koch of Minneapolis has enjoyed fostering Stone, who is a sweet, rambunctious 6-year-old mutt. (Richard Tsong-Taatarii/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

Stone is on an anti-anxiety medication, and has what Koch calls his emotional support squeaky toy that he turns to when stressed. The family that adopted Stone told Koch they had to give him up after losing their housing. Koch said his anxiety comes from being moved around so much.

Owners making less than \$100,000 a year are significantly less likely to find pet-friendly housing they can afford.

It's worse for those earning under \$50,000 — [a 2024 study](#) found that more than half are likely to have housing with at least one type of pet restriction. Of the study's respondents who surrendered their pets, 23% cited housing as the reason.

Kucera said growing research shows that when families do find housing that allows pets, they tend to stay in that housing for longer periods of time. She thinks that increasing the stock of affordable, pet-friendly units could be a solution that benefits both families and landlords.

“That means that many more families don't have to choose between securing a place to live and keeping their pets,” she said. “Not having turnover is a huge benefit to landlords.”

In addition to housing, income is not keeping up with the rising costs of essentials like dog food, which has [increased by nearly 50%](#) since 2020. Financial difficulties account for nearly a fifth of the Gallup poll's respondents who surrendered a pet.

Owning a pet has been shown to have a positive effect on mental health at all stages in life. Kucera said that's especially true for marginalized communities and families dealing with housing instability or economic hardship.

“The people who can benefit most from having a pet, are most at risk of having their bond with their pet broken,” she said.

With many rescues at capacity, some owners have ended up pleading for someone to adopt their pet on Facebook or Nextdoor. Kucera warns that not everyone willing to take in a dog has good intentions. She says that people engaged in dog fighting actively search for opportunities to acquire a free bait dog, which is used as practice for fighting dogs.

“To weed those people out, I would suggest people at least ask for a small fee of at least \$50 or something, because someone that’s looking for a free dog for a bait dog isn’t necessarily going to pay a fee,” she said.

While the Animal Humane Society does accept surrenders, its goal is to prevent them from happening in the first place. Its pet helpline provides help to owners and directs them to resources like the organization’s temporary pet housing, free pet food distribution and pop-up vaccine clinics.

Additionally, their clinic and the Mission Animal Hospital offer income-based pricing models. For many, that means a bill significantly less than one at a private practice.

These services are in high demand. During their 2025 fiscal year that ended June 30, the Humane Society’s helpline received about 110,000 calls. The clinic added staff and was able to provide around 18,000 services, up 4,000 from the previous fiscal year.

The Human Society is currently accepting surrenders via appointment. But that’s not the case for most rescues, which are at capacity. Graham, Finch-Kleven and other rescue organizers said that donations and volunteering can help, but to increase capacity they need more people willing to open up their homes.

“The main thing all rescues need more than anything is more fosters,” Finch-Kleven said. “We have half the fosters we used to, if not less.”

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