

Using Data to Retain and Recruit Shelter Veterinarians



Poll question 1

- ♥ Does your shelter currently have at least one staff veterinary position?
- Yes and the position is filled/positions are filled
 - Yes but not all positions are filled
 - No we don't have a staff vet (type in the chat how else you are managing to get veterinary services – contract? Local clinics? Etc.)

Poll question 2

- ♥ Are your veterinarians expected to do community work?
- Never or rarely
 - Once in a while
 - Pretty often or always
 - What veterinarian 😞?

Question 3

- ♥ What do you experience as the biggest obstacle to recruiting and retaining veterinarians?

Responsibilities of a Shelter Veterinarian



Individual patient care

Population management and biosecurity

Medicine (GP) and Surgeon

Behavior evaluation and treatment

Protocol development

Cruelty Investigations

Community Services

Disaster Response

Policy Development

In addition...Many are the Premise Permit and DEA holders for shelters and are responsible for compliance and response to complaints

Crisis Level Problem

Popular Latest Newsletters

The Atlantic

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HEALTH

The Great Veterinary Shortage

There are not enough humans to take care of all the animals.

By Sarah Zhang



Erik Freeland / Corbis / Getty

KRIS 6 News Corpus Christi

Veterinarian shortage in the Coastal Bend causes local animal shelters to struggle

Local animal shelters are experiencing a shortage of veterinarians issue that is leading to overpopulation of shelters.

Oct 30, 2023



KCRA

Front Street Animal Shelter struggles with veterinarian shortage

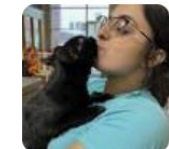
A national veterinarian shortage is making it harder for Sacramento-area shelters to meet the needs of the animals in their care.



Chicago Tribune

Vickroy: Vet shortage causing big problems for animal rescues and shelters, with one facing closure because of it

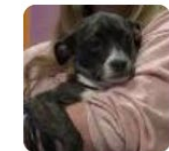
There's increasing demand for animal care and not enough vets to go around, a situation that's taking a toll on local animal rescues and...



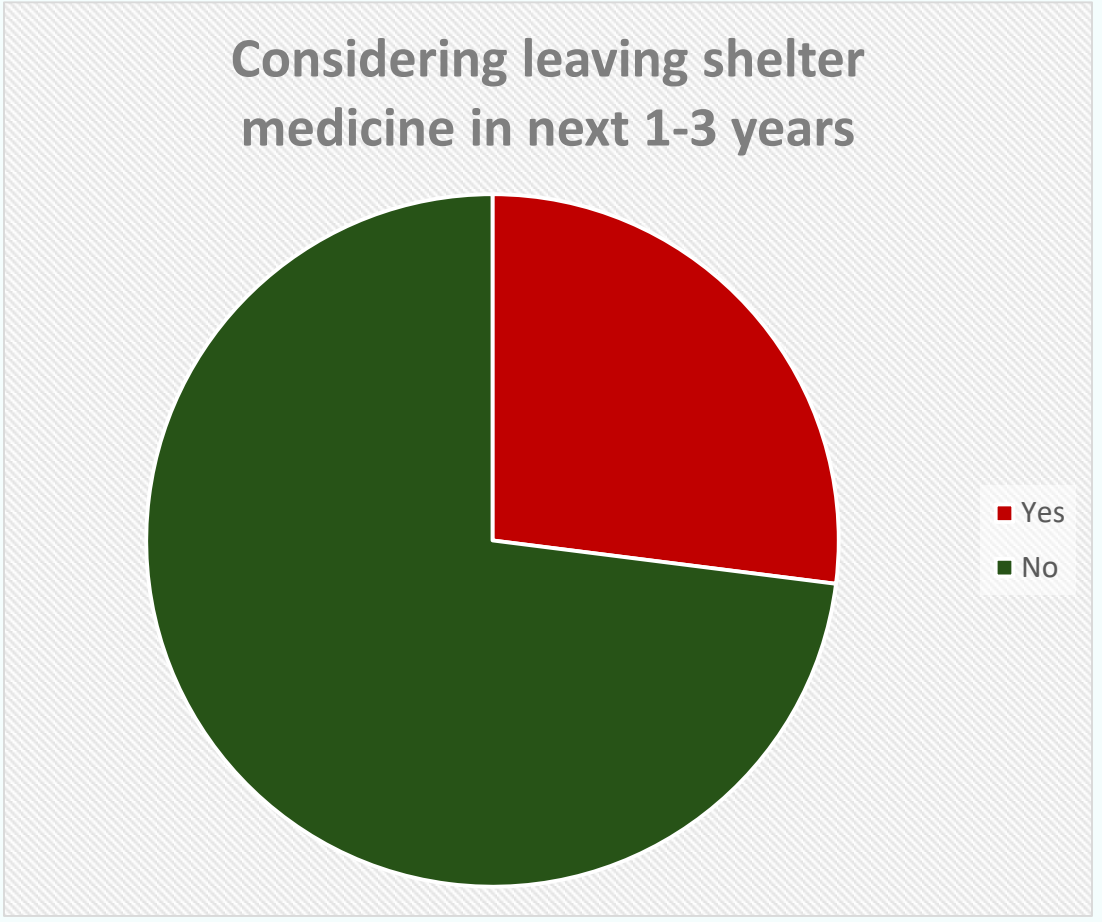
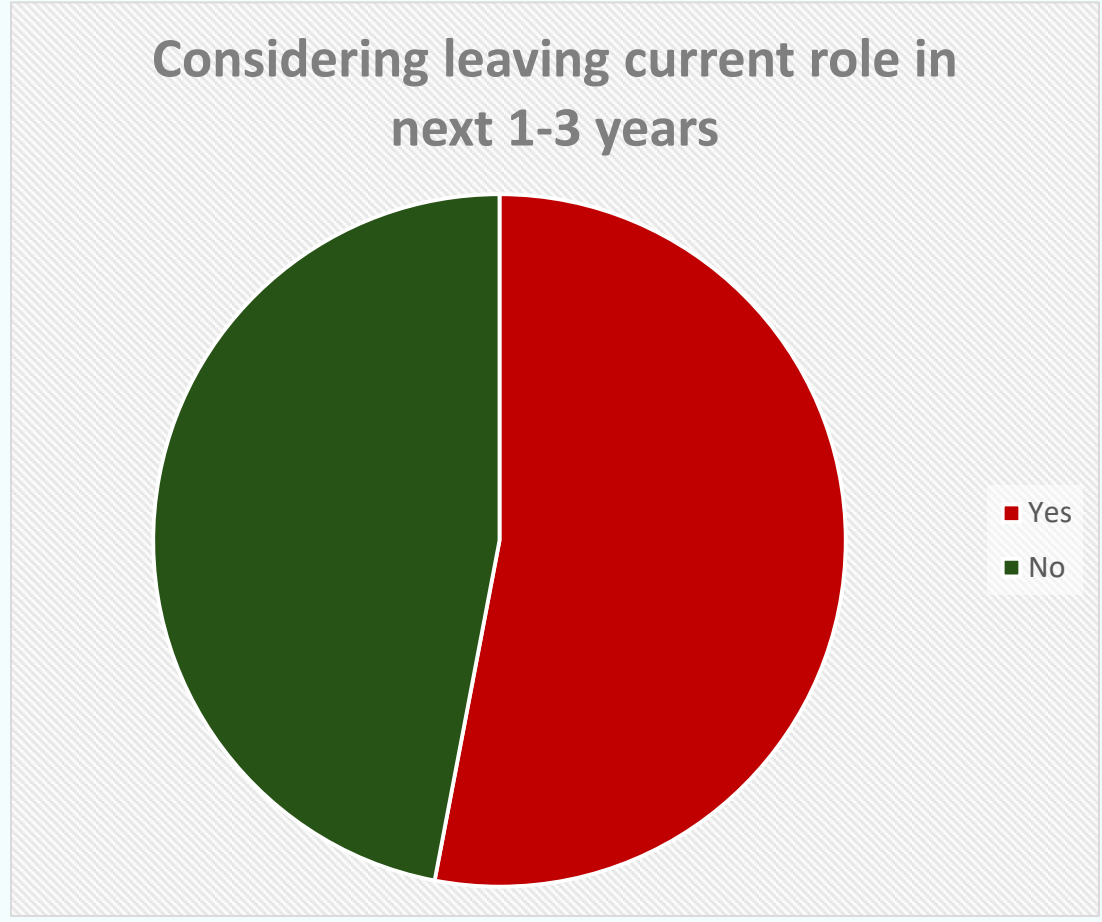
KFOX

El Paso Animal Services wrestles with veterinarian shortage affecting shelters

El Paso Animal Services continues to face an ongoing shortage of veterinarians, which is affecting shelters locally and nationwide.



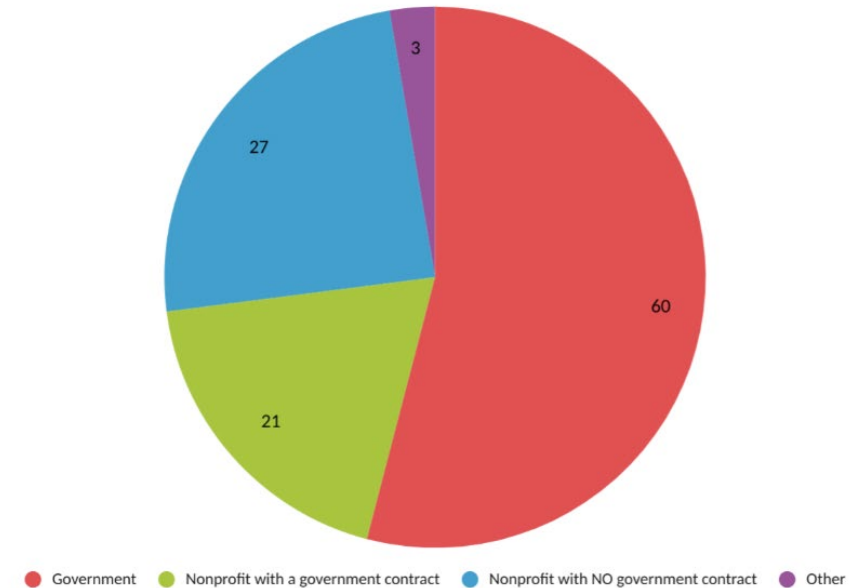
And poised to get worse 😞



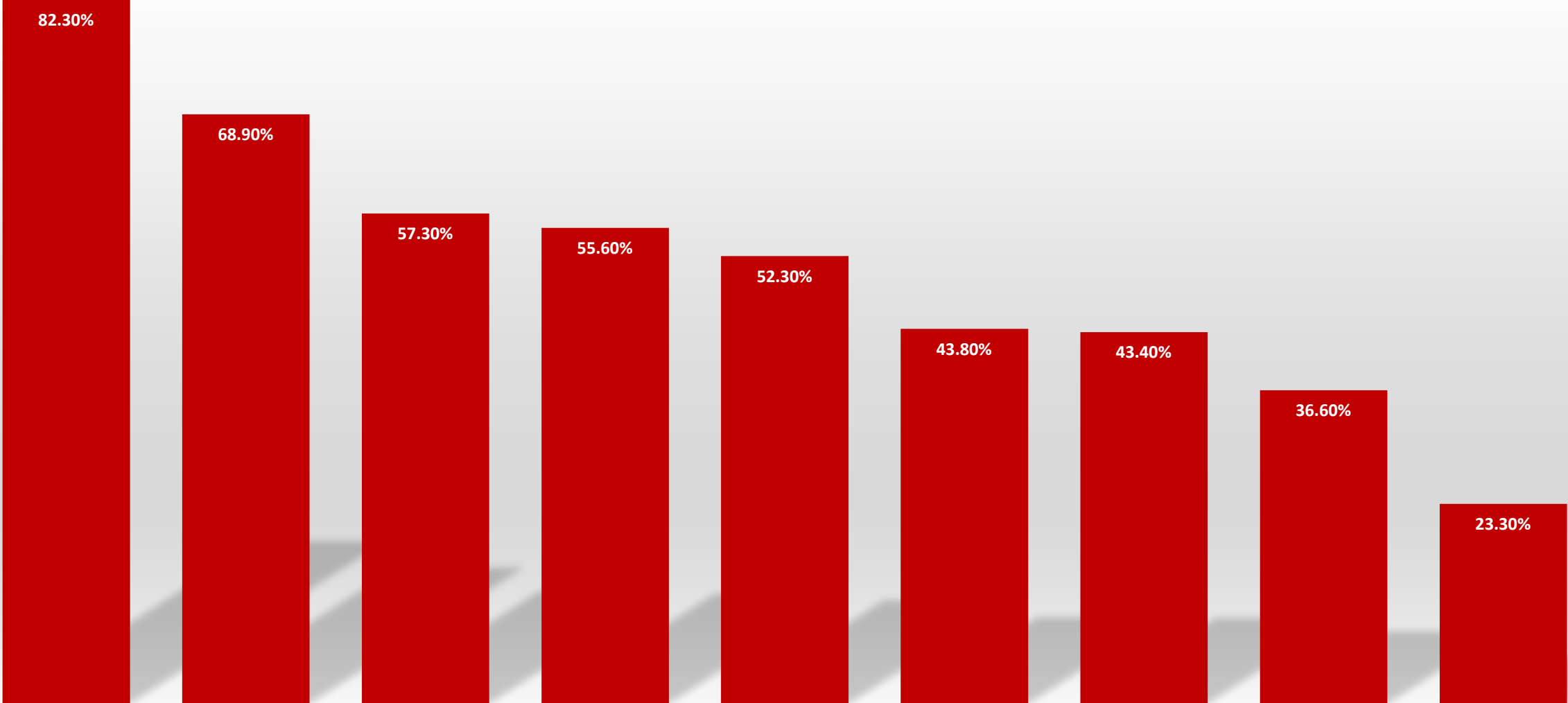
CA shelter leader survey 2023

- ♥ 111 animal shelters responded
- ♥ 60% reported unfilled veterinary positions
- ♥ 1 out of 5 veterinary position is unfilled
- ♥ Inability to recruit by far most common reason
- ♥ 344,460 cats and dogs passed through shelters with either no FTE or unfilled FTE veterinary positions

Respondents by organization type



Impact of lack of AVC (somewhat or strongly agree)



Increased LOS

Community cat program impacted

Intake prevention services impacted

Adoption program is limited

Foster program is limited

Limit to animals we can put up for adoption

Increased disease spread

Increased euthanasia of healthy or treatable animals

Zoonotic disease transmission



Proposed Solutions

Increase the number of schools and class size

Provide tuition support and debt relief

Dev

7 Ways to Alleviate the Veteri

For starters, let's free academia to admit and graduate more... reciprocity and support time-saving technology.

February 3, 2022 | Issue: February/March 20



Mark Cushing
JD



and licensed vet tech scope of practice

Expand telemedicine

Increase license reciprocity between states

What is the time frame for these to be impactful?

Shorter Range Solutions Needed

Keep the vets and medical staff already working in shelters

Improve shelters' ability to recruit new vets and staff

Bring vets that have left practice back in

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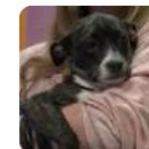
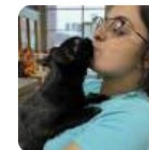
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Leverage roaming relief teams, part time, one time, task-specific contracts

Maximize training and use of non-licensed staff to top of their potential

Outsource veterinary activities where possible (e.g. vaccination clinics, ORE)

Keystone Strategy: Retention First

Already licensed,
already trained in
shelter medicine

Already live in the area
so no need to convince
them to move

Saves cost and time of
repeated recruitment

**Keep the vets and
medical staff
already working in
shelters**

Avoids vicious cycle of no
vet → increased LOS and
disease → harder to
recruit a vet

Conditions that retain vet
staff tend to be more
humane for all staff,
leaders and animals

What are the barriers to this?

- ♥ AAWA survey 2024
- ♥ 512 responses included
- ♥ Over 30% of govt or contracted shelters had open veterinary positions
- ♥ Asked respondents why

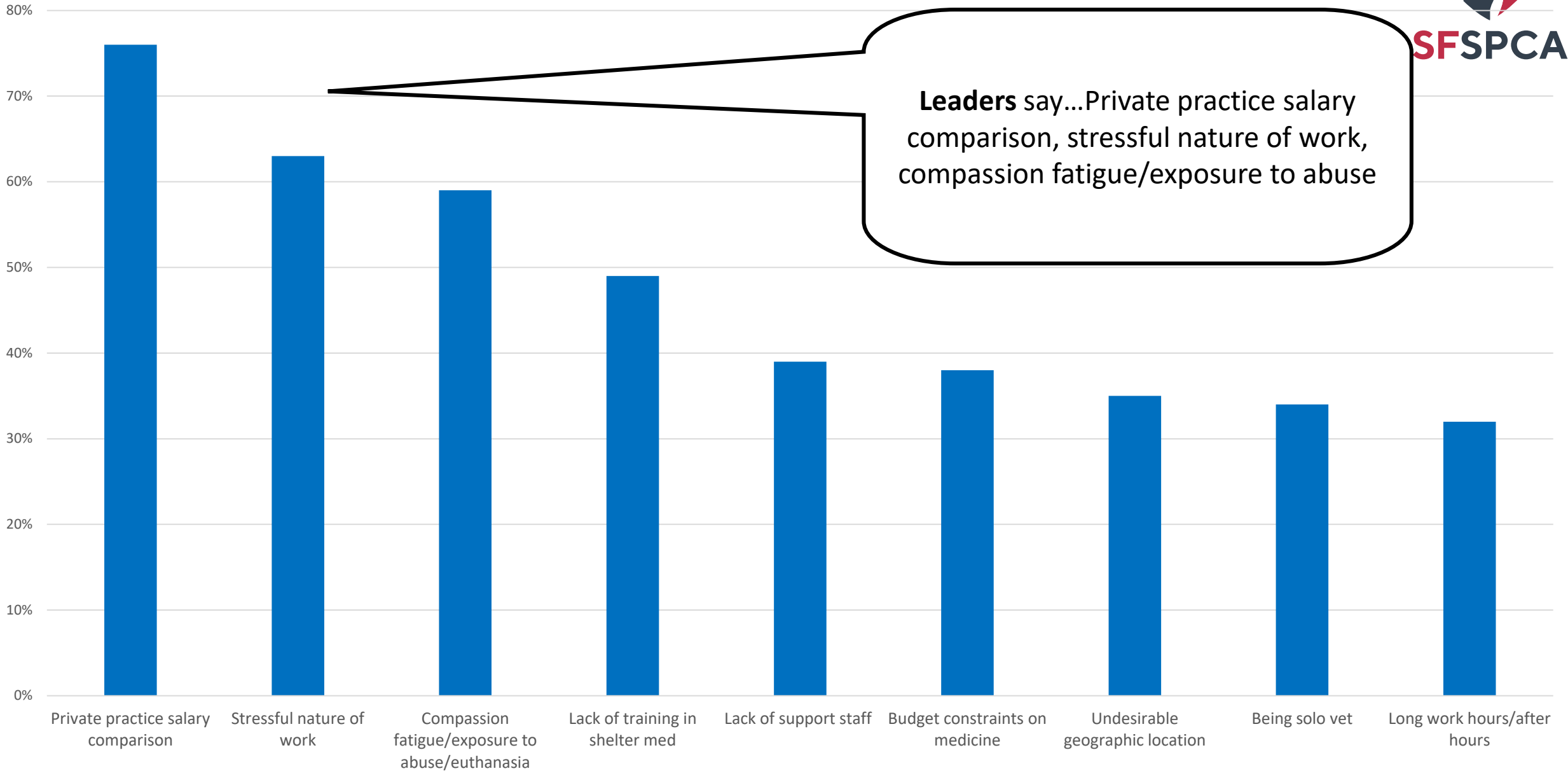
RESPONDENTS WHO SOMEWHAT OR STRONGLY AGREE FACTOR MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO RECRUIT VETERINARIANS TO WORK IN ORGANIZATION

	%
Private practice offers a higher salary	76.2
Stressful nature of the work	62.6
Burn-out, compassion fatigue, and chronic exposure to animal abuse/neglect cases	58.6
Lack of training in shelter medicine	49.4
Lack of support staff	39.3
Mandate to practice medicine within certain budget or policy constraints	38.3
Geographic area not desirable for residence	35.2
Being the only veterinarian on staff	34.0
Long work hours/on-call coverage after hours	31.9

AAWA survey results



SFSPCA



Now Let's Ask the Vets



This study is a follow-up to the [*California Shelter Access to Care Survey*](#) which documented the degree and impact of the veterinary shortage on our state's animal shelters. This survey has been developed by a committee of California shelter veterinarians, HR experts and the University of Tennessee's Pet Health Equity Program.

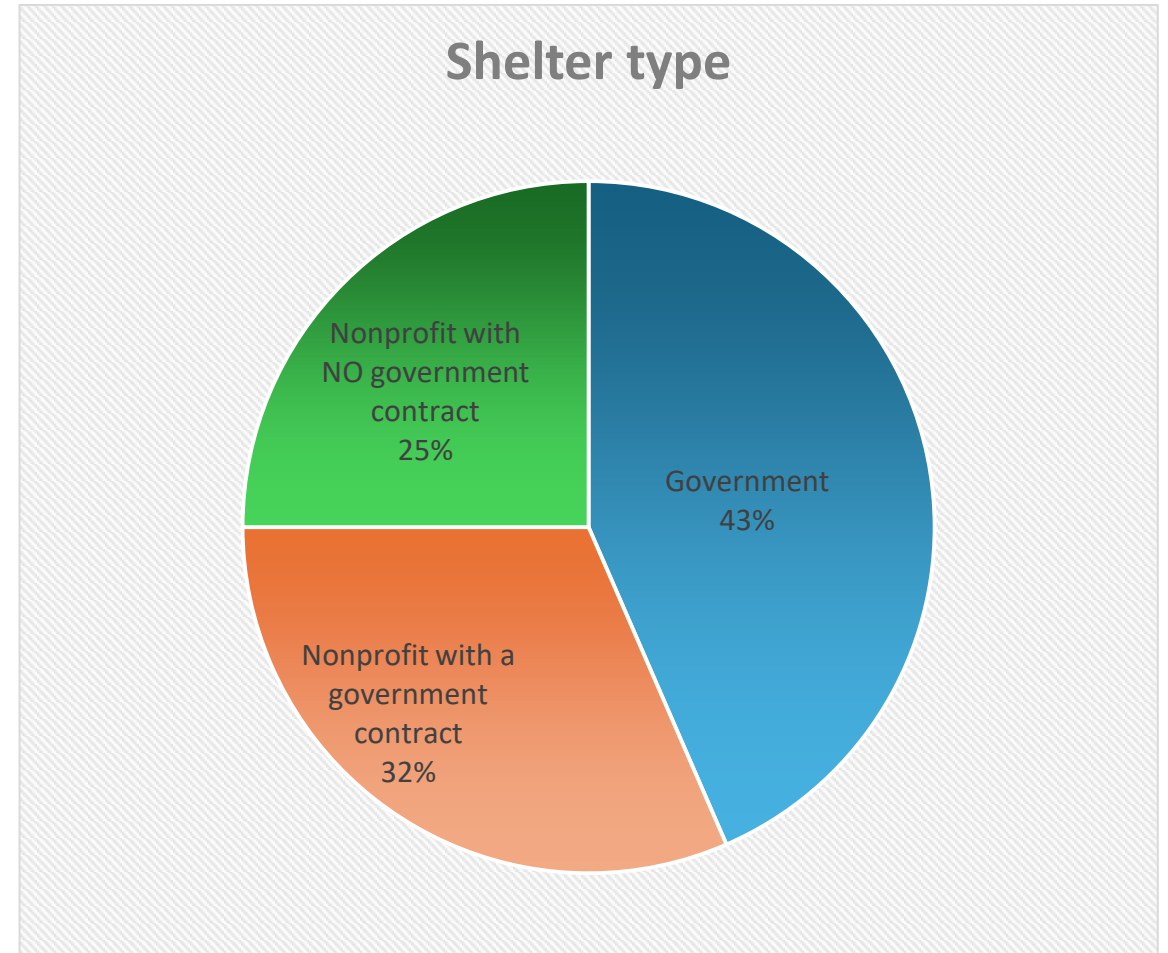
We need veterinarians who either currently or recently worked at a shelter in California, (whether full-time, part-time, contract or on-call) to complete the survey by February 9, 2024.

The data from this survey will be shared with Cal Animal members and used to inform strategies and initiatives to address the challenges of recruiting and retaining shelter veterinarians in California.

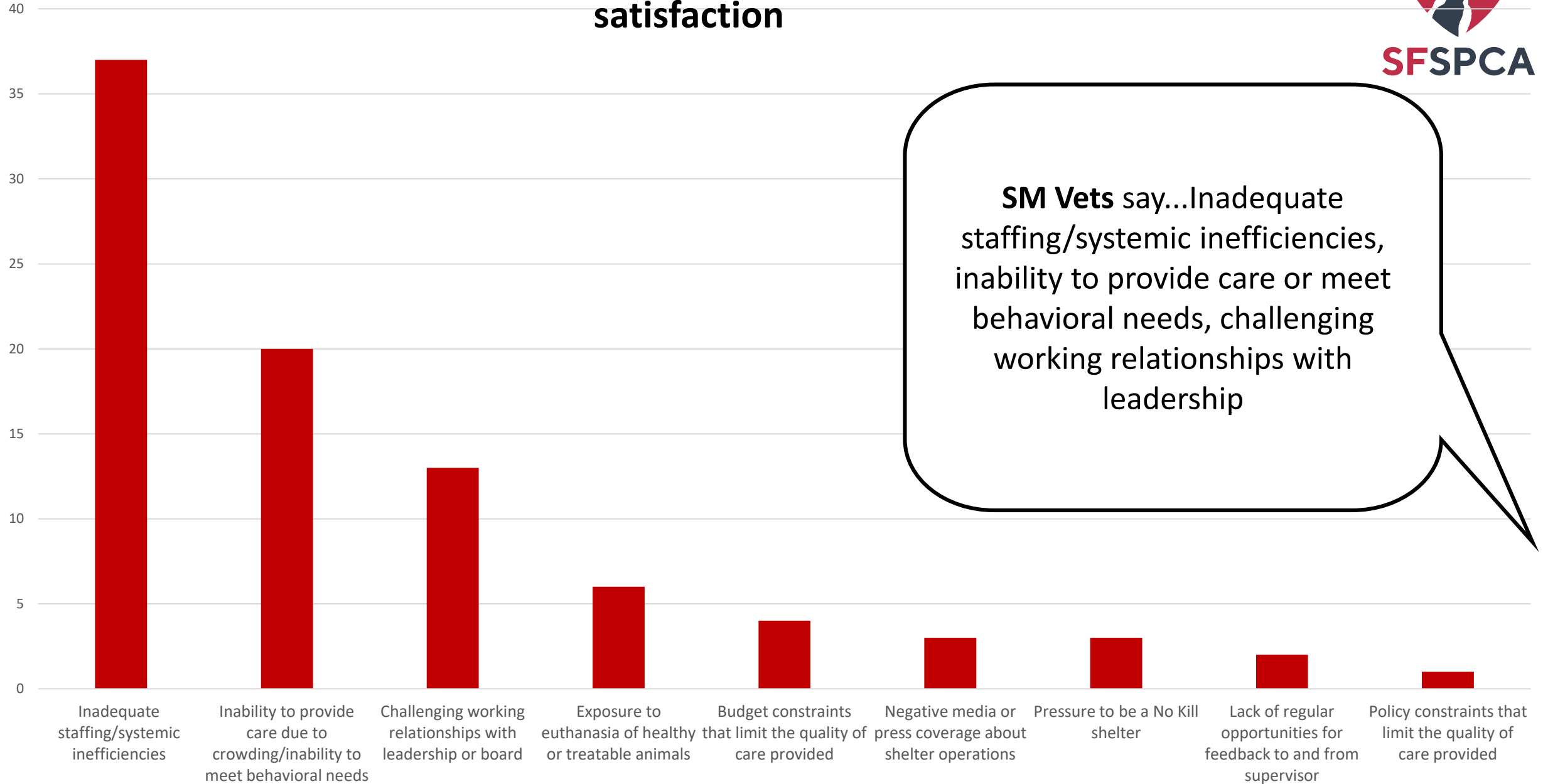
Vet Survey Details



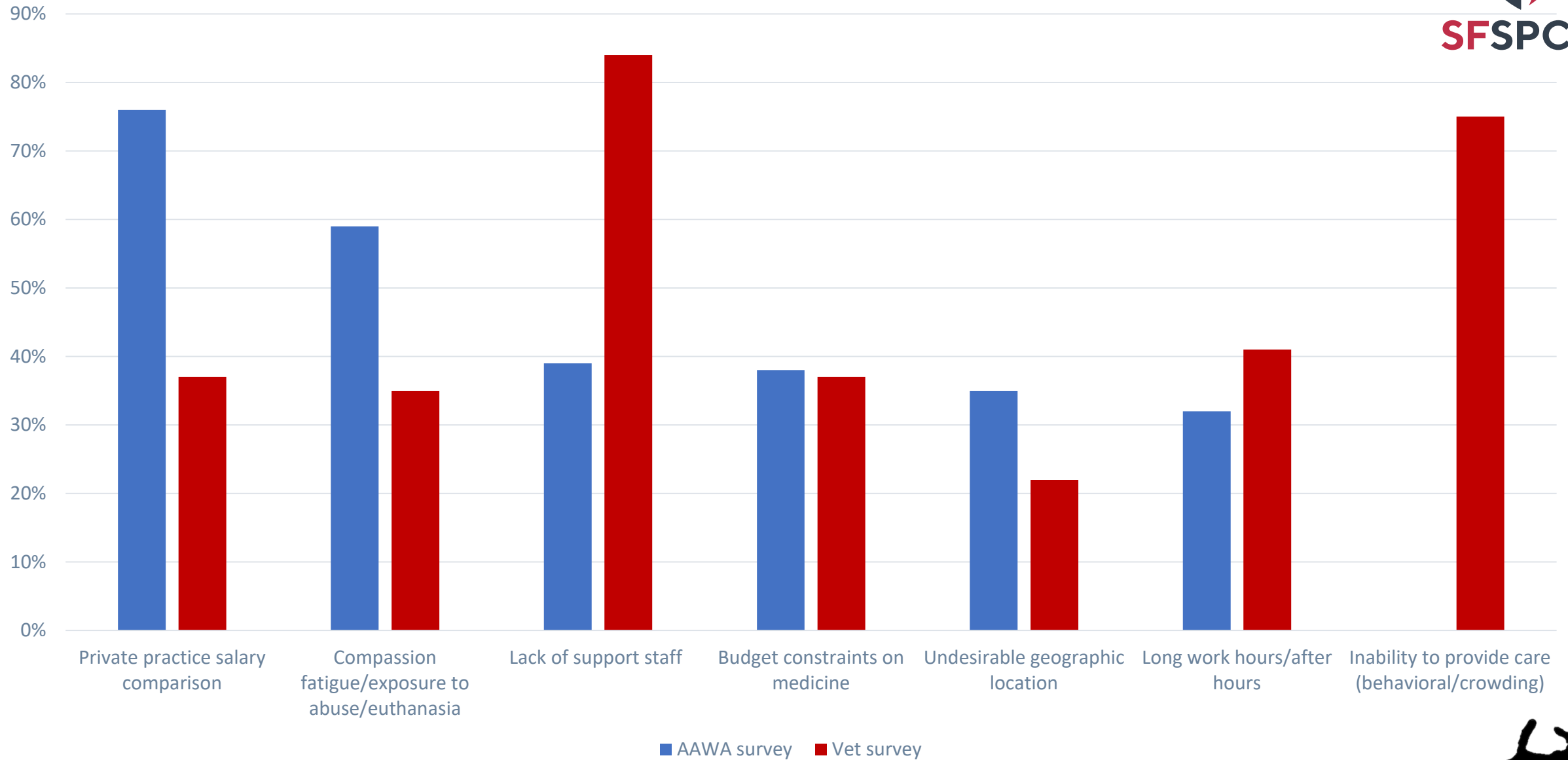
- ♥ 94 CA shelter veterinarians completed the survey
- ♥ Mix of staff vets, medical directors and contract vets
- ♥ Average years as veterinarian = 16, average years at shelter = 8
- ♥ Average outstanding debt = \$180,000



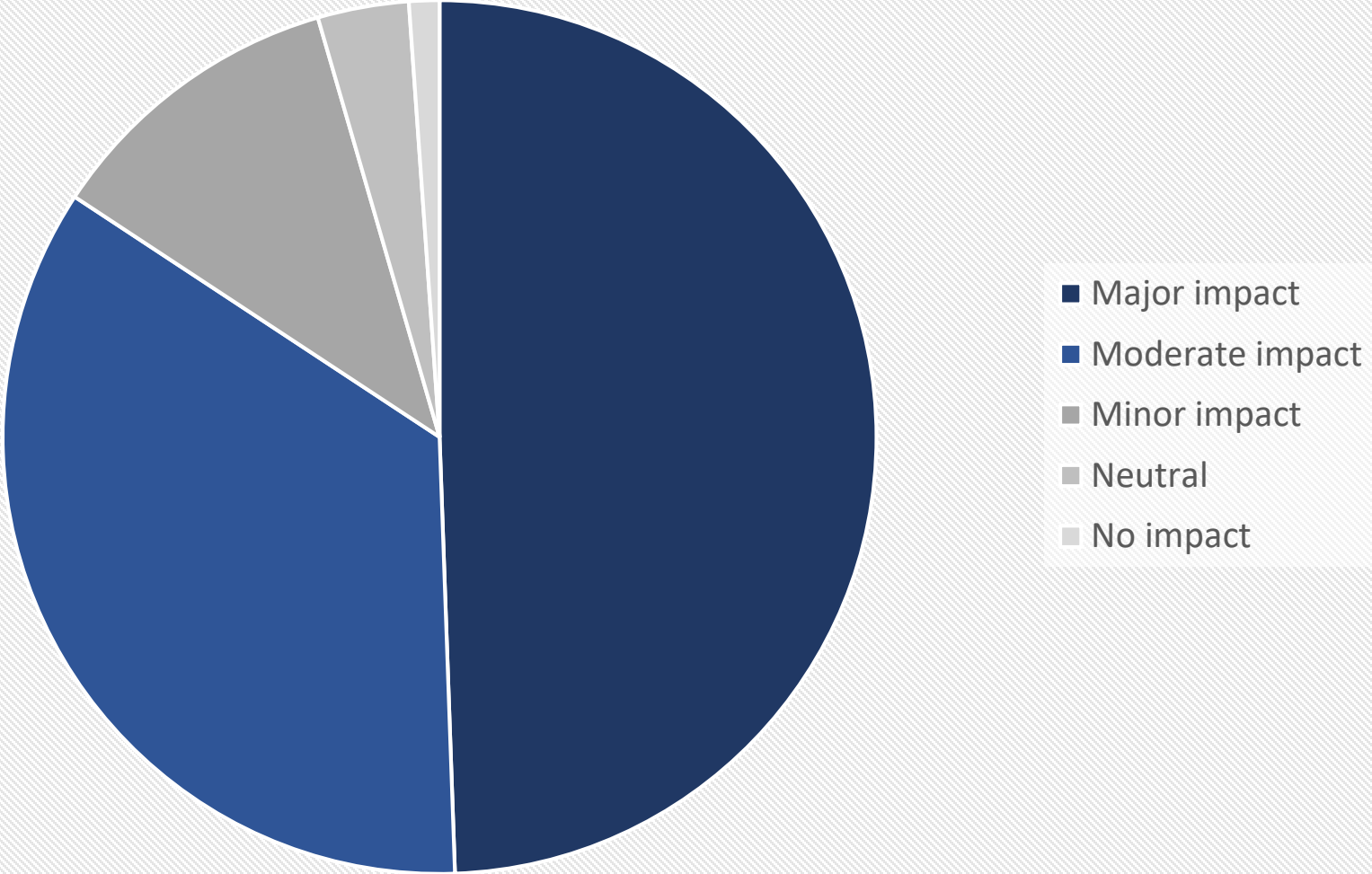
Organizational factors with biggest negative impact on job satisfaction



Comparing the AAWA and Vet Surveys



Impact of inadequate staffing on job satisfaction





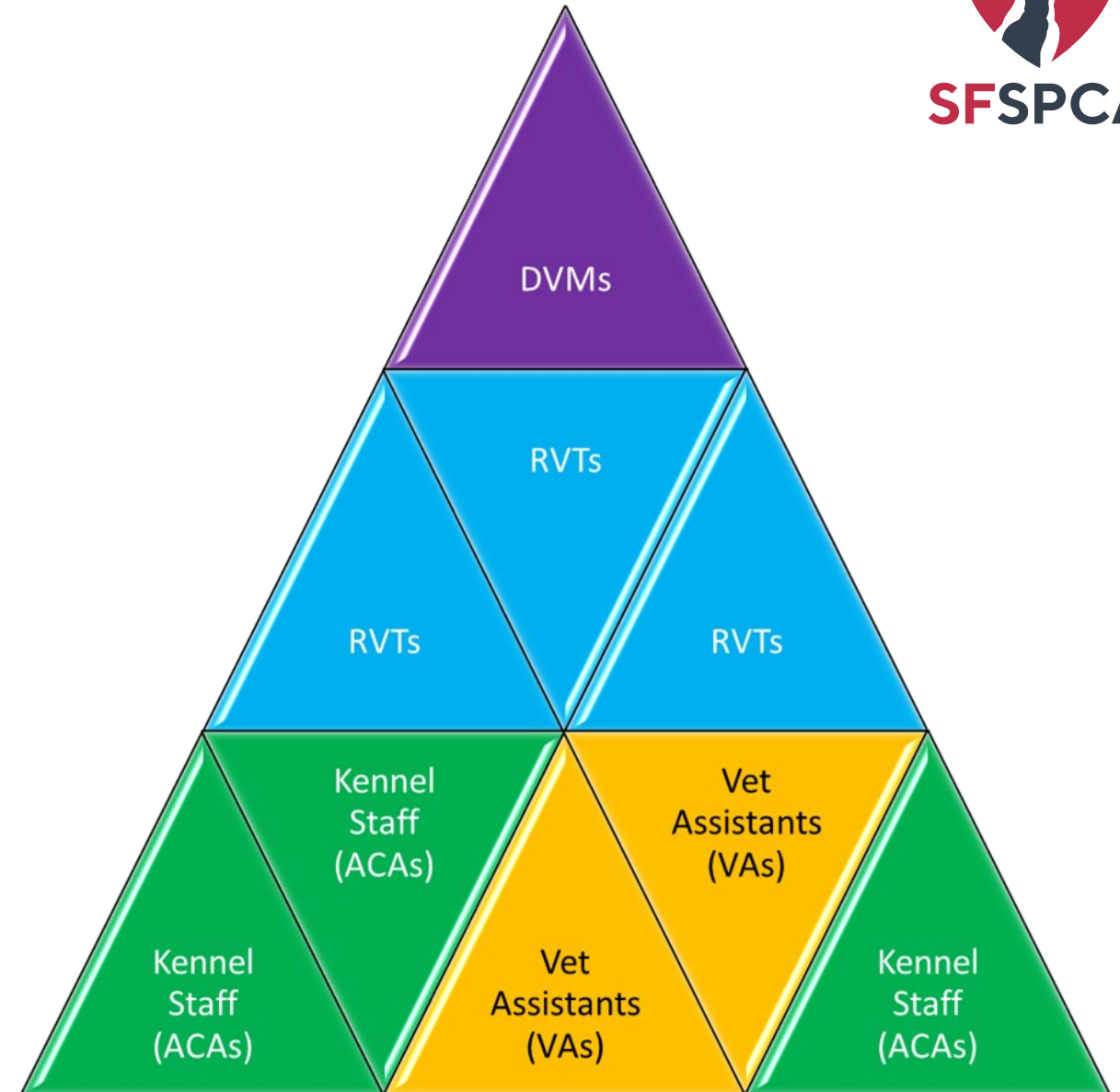
What would help the most?



It is much harder to monitor population health and prevent disease transmission if the kennel staff isn't fully and consistently helping to monitor appetites and eliminations and for other clinical concerns and following proper cleaning procedures. It is hard to initiate treatment plans and provide medical care if vet staff aren't doing their jobs. It's hard to set up the adopters for success if adoption staff is not appropriately counseling and communicating with adopters. ***Having a stable and well trained staff that is good at communicating between departments would make my job infinitely easier.***

Quick(ish) Solutions

- ♥ Build the *base* of the pyramid
- ♥ Think training as well as hiring and staffing
- ♥ Get clear on the law and what your staff can do in shelters. Train for highest use.
- ♥ Carefully align roles with licensing level
- ♥ Explore telemedicine to reduce or eliminate after hours calls
- ♥ Ask your vets and licensed techs – is there anything **less** you could be doing?
- ♥ Ask your VAs, kennel staff, +/- volunteers: is there anything **more** you could be doing?





What would help the most?

“Management engaging us in decision making and making an effort to understand our many duties without being dismissive.”

Triaging When Short Staffed



Triage work to align with capacity of entire medical and shelter team



Prioritize services to address injury, illness, reduce LOS and get animals out of shelter



Next prioritize *targeted* programs to keep animals from coming in to shelter



Decrease shelter population to increase ability to serve public

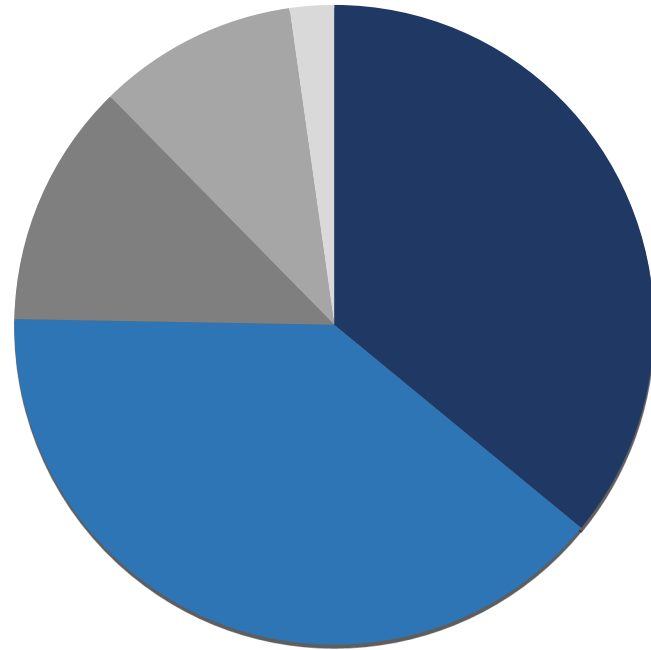


In partnership with medical staff, evaluate what can be outsourced or discontinued



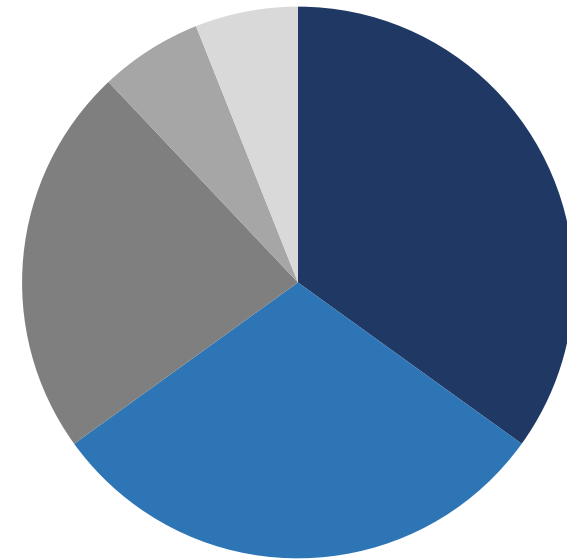
California Shelter Vet Survey: Importance of Animal Wellness

Impact of inability to provide for the behavioral needs of animals on job satisfaction



■ Major impact ■ Moderate impact ■ Minor impact ■ Neutral ■ No impact

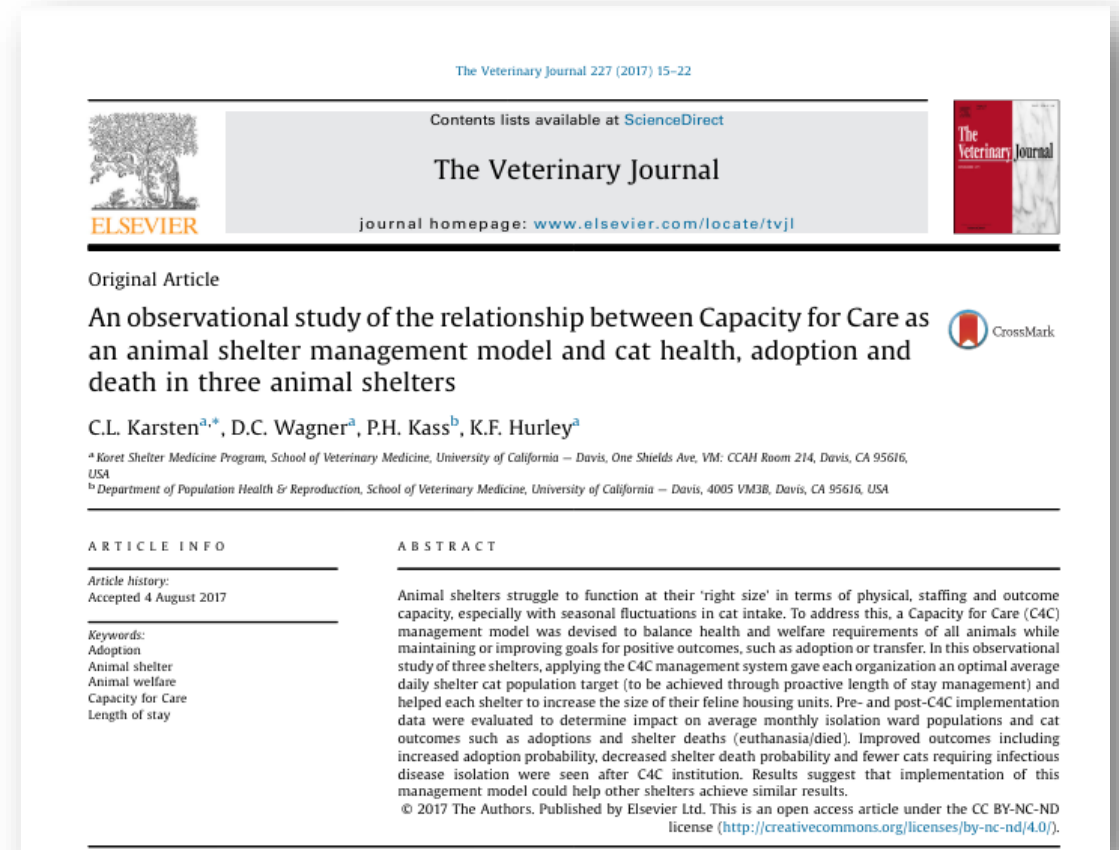
Impact of inability to provide adequate care due to crowding



■ Major impact ■ Moderate impact ■ Minor impact
■ Neutral ■ No impact

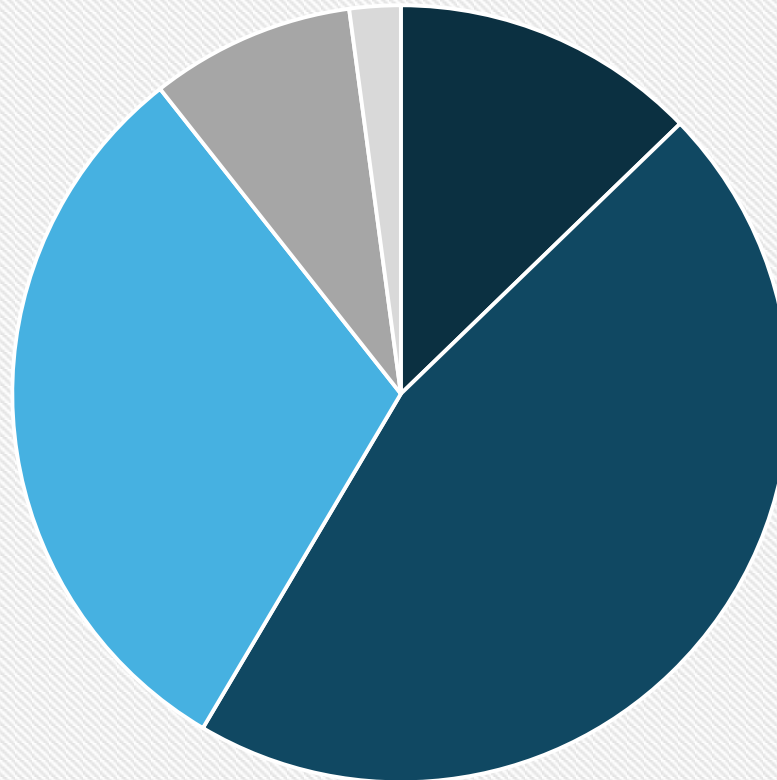
Fundamentals of wellness

- Every shelter deserves to be able to operate within capacity
- Lack of vet staff OR exceeding capacity creates vicious cycle
- Establish and communicate true capacity even if you aren't there yet
 - Housing, staffing, outcomes
 - Ask us for help
- Make time for daily population rounds
 - Work as a team to make *same* promotions and decisions *sooner*
 - Establish simple, agreed criteria



Key Factor

How much input in establishing shelter policies would you prefer?



- Extreme amount
- Great deal
- Moderate amount
- Small amount

90% of respondents wanted at least a moderate amount of input on shelter policies

Consequences of lack of input

“The welfare of the animals suffers. There is a lack of focus on best practices and AVS guidelines. There is overall poor husbandry, lack of efficient and proper protocols, avoidance of population management/capacity for care awareness, delayed decision making, and questionable outcome decisions.”

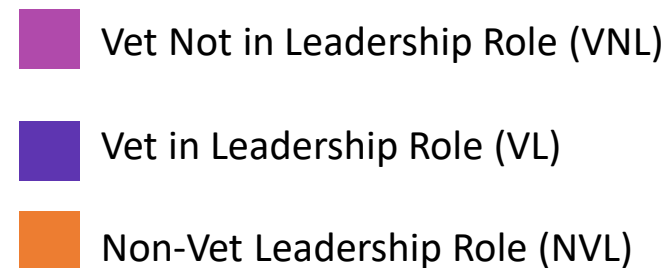
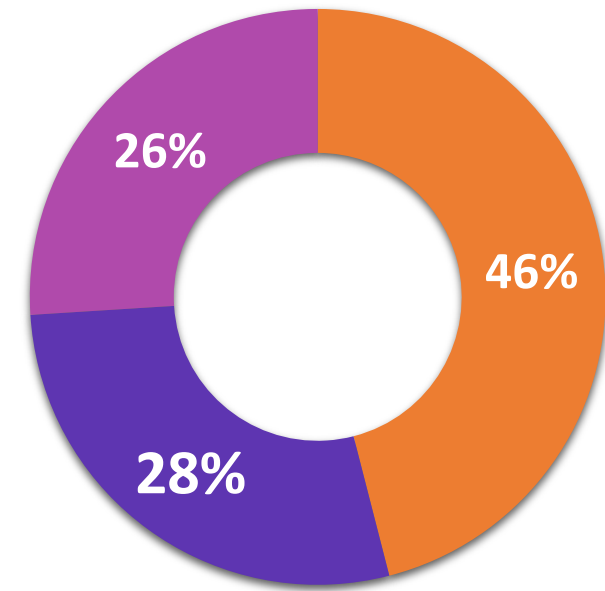


What would help the most?

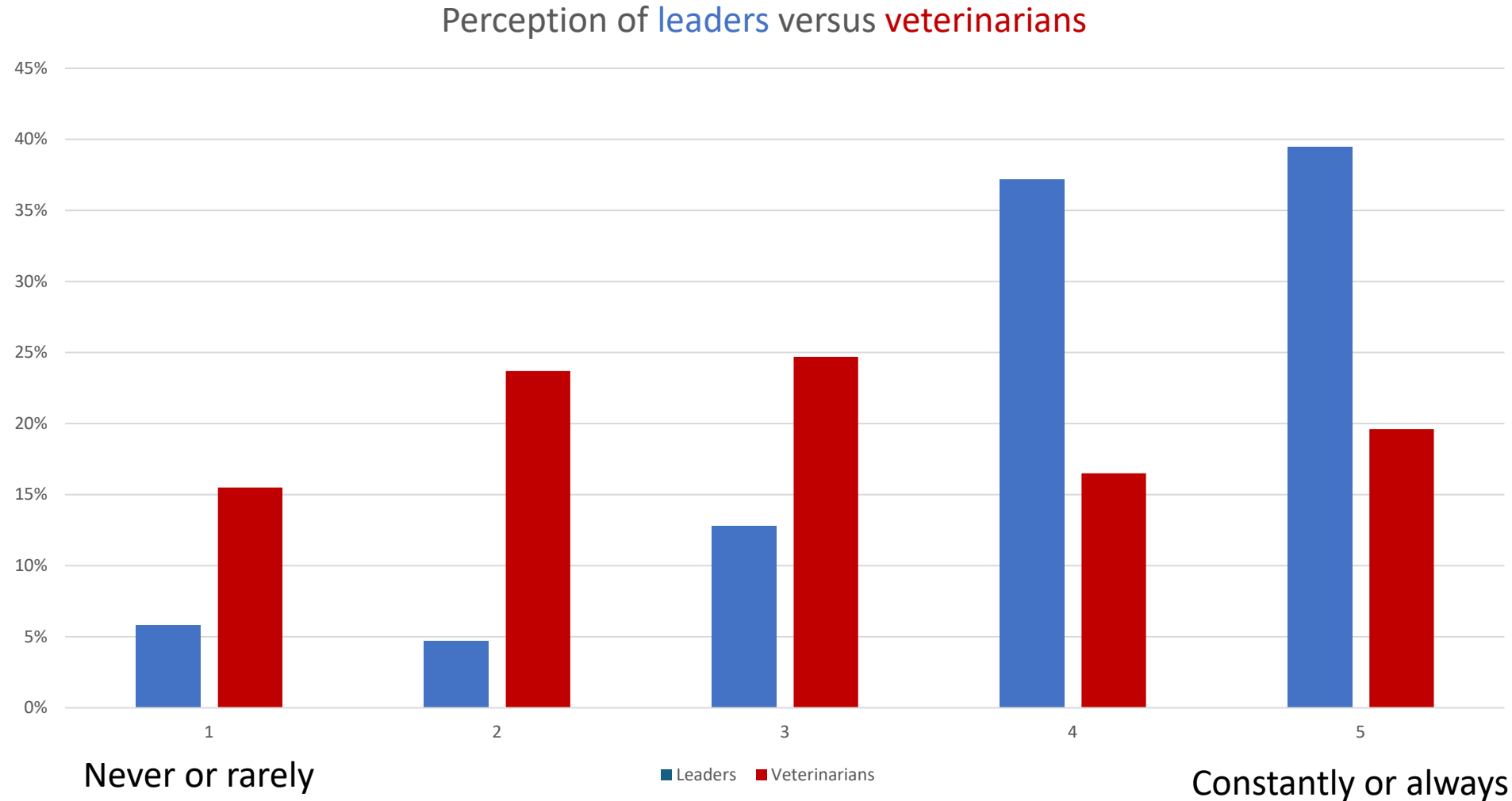
“More authority and capacity to make changes, to enable better efficiency in looking after the individual animals at the shelter, whilst protecting/caring for all the animals at the shelter as a whole.”

Vets and leaders survey 2023

- Dr. Jyothi Robertson
- 182 respondents: non vet leaders, vet leaders, non leader vets
- Comparing perceptions, factors in retention and communication



How often does leadership solicit feedback from veterinarians?



Navigating tough times

- A sense of agency helps manage even the most stressful situations
- Regularly seek input from veterinary staff
 - For real
- Back your vet on medical protocols
 - Ask us for help if you're not sure
- Create open communication channels to clarify reasons for policy and answer questions

Stress and the Perception of Control

[Perceived control, defined](#) | [Can we control perception?](#) | [Why it matters](#) |

[Stress and perception of control](#) | [Can it dictate behavior?](#) | [Summary](#)

When you perceive you have control, it can improve your overall well-being. And, when you lack perceived control, depression and learned helplessness can develop.



Multi-factorial temptation

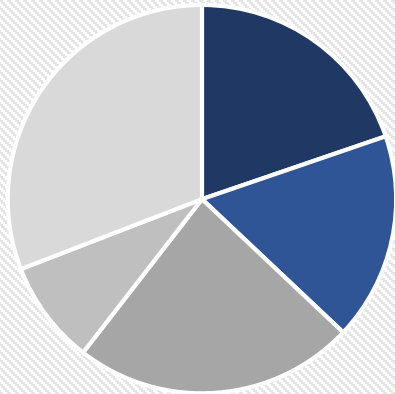


Bill Park • 10:28 AM

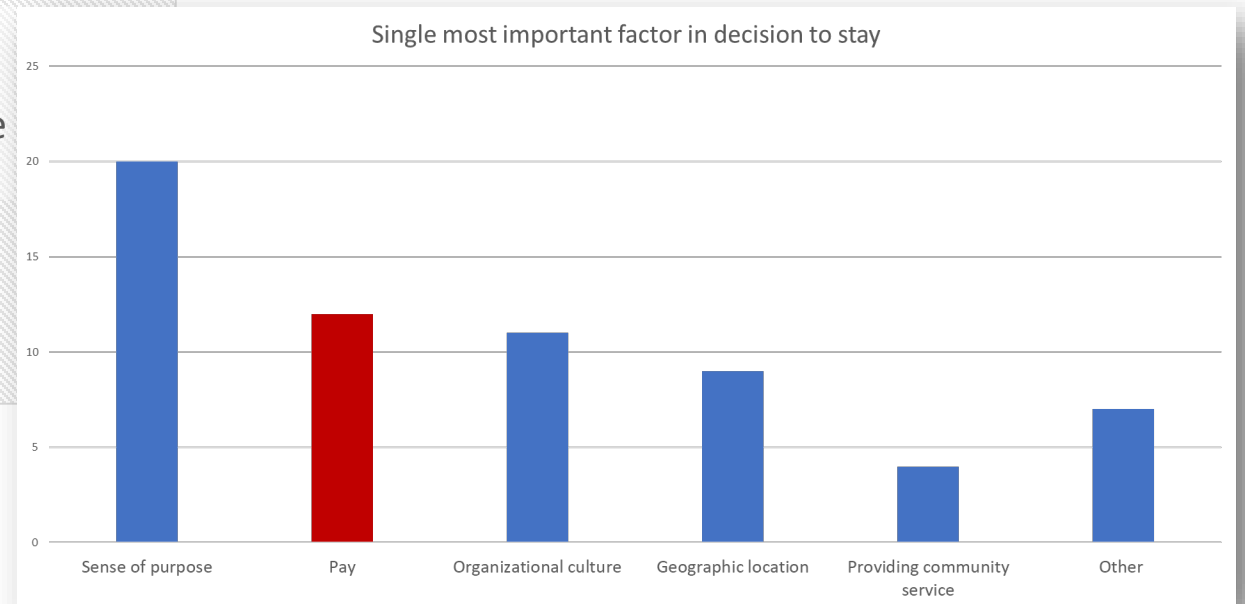
Hi Dr. Hurley, want a fulfilling relief career with exclusive perks: a guaranteed salary, full benefits, work/life balance, and a personalized concierge staffer? Enjoy a 3-day & 4-day paid trip for you and a plus one, a \$40,000 bonus, and MORE. Interested? Let's schedule a call this week to discuss – Bill, Evette.

Pay and working conditions still matter

Impact of private practice salary comparison on job satisfaction



- Major impact
- Moderate impact





What would help the most?

Improved work/life balance - humane hours with breaks/lunch/leaving on time and respect for off-duty hours and responsible usage of my on-call time.

Higher pay/salary and actually being offered benefits

Have staff policies apply to me equally (i.e. staff get holiday off automatically but I'm needed for surgery so expected to accrue a floater and still come in).

No fake work life balance speech that isn't implemented in real life.

Some (good) vet is better than no vet

- Choose your priorities
- Consider offering multiple part time positions
- Utilize telemedicine when appropriate
- Evaluate access to care capacity for community
 - Outsource e.g. vaccine clinics
 - Use RVTs and community volunteers where possible

THINGS TO DO > PETS AND ANIMALS - News

New California laws bring important changes in access to veterinary care



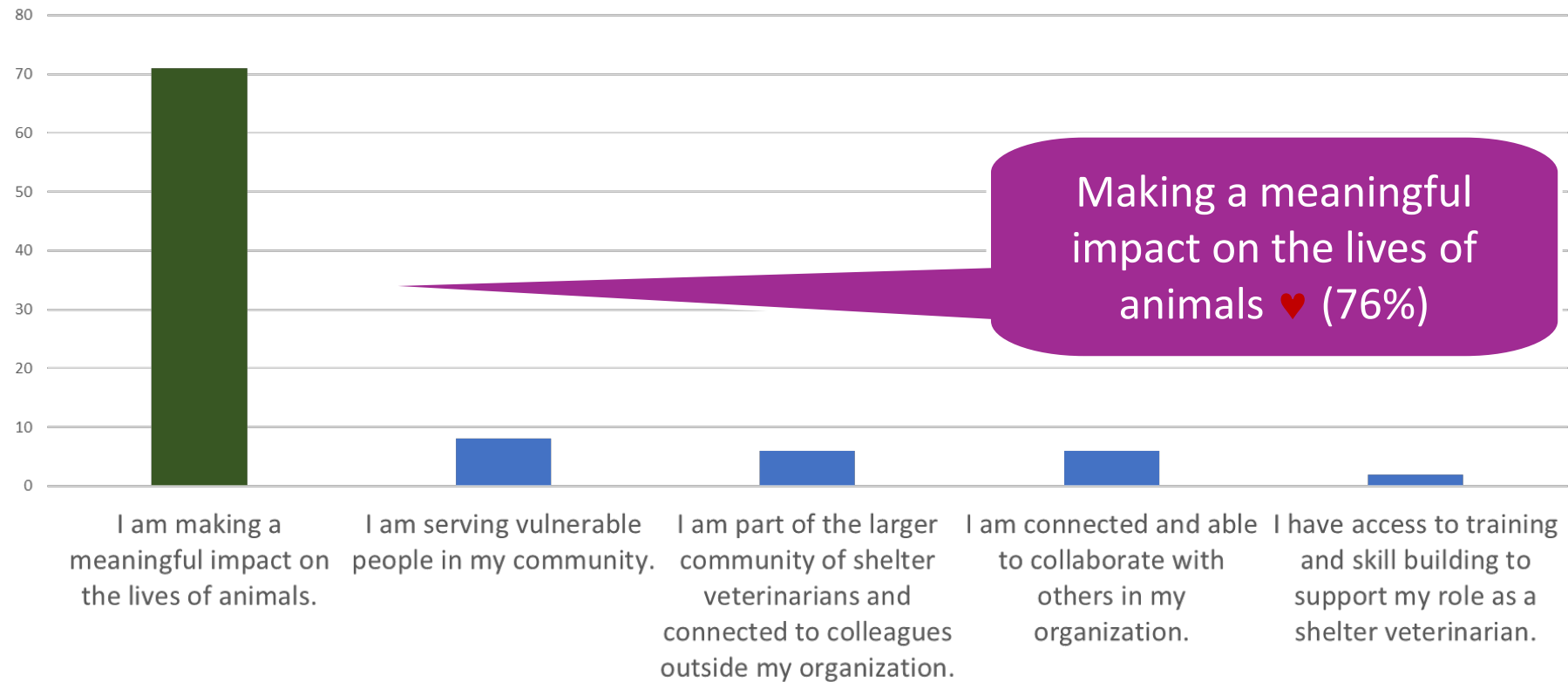
Marin Humane hosts regular free mobile clinics. (Courtesy of Marin Humane)

MOST POPULAR

- 1 Dear Abby: Now that I'm the bride, I need to have an awkward talk with my friend
- 2 Harriette Cole: Our daughter was never the same after the sleepover
- 3 Ask Amy: My friend's apology for the snub was nowhere near adequate
- 4 Dear Abby: The teens' father won't do anything about their swimwear
- 5 Miss Manners: How was I supposed to know her bathroom was off-limits?
- 6 Dear Abby: The conversation we had when my tenant was drinking could become a problem
- 7 Harriette Cole: My husband doesn't know I discovered his secret purchases
- 8 FBI raids home of Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao
- 9 Ask Amy: I'm not OK with my

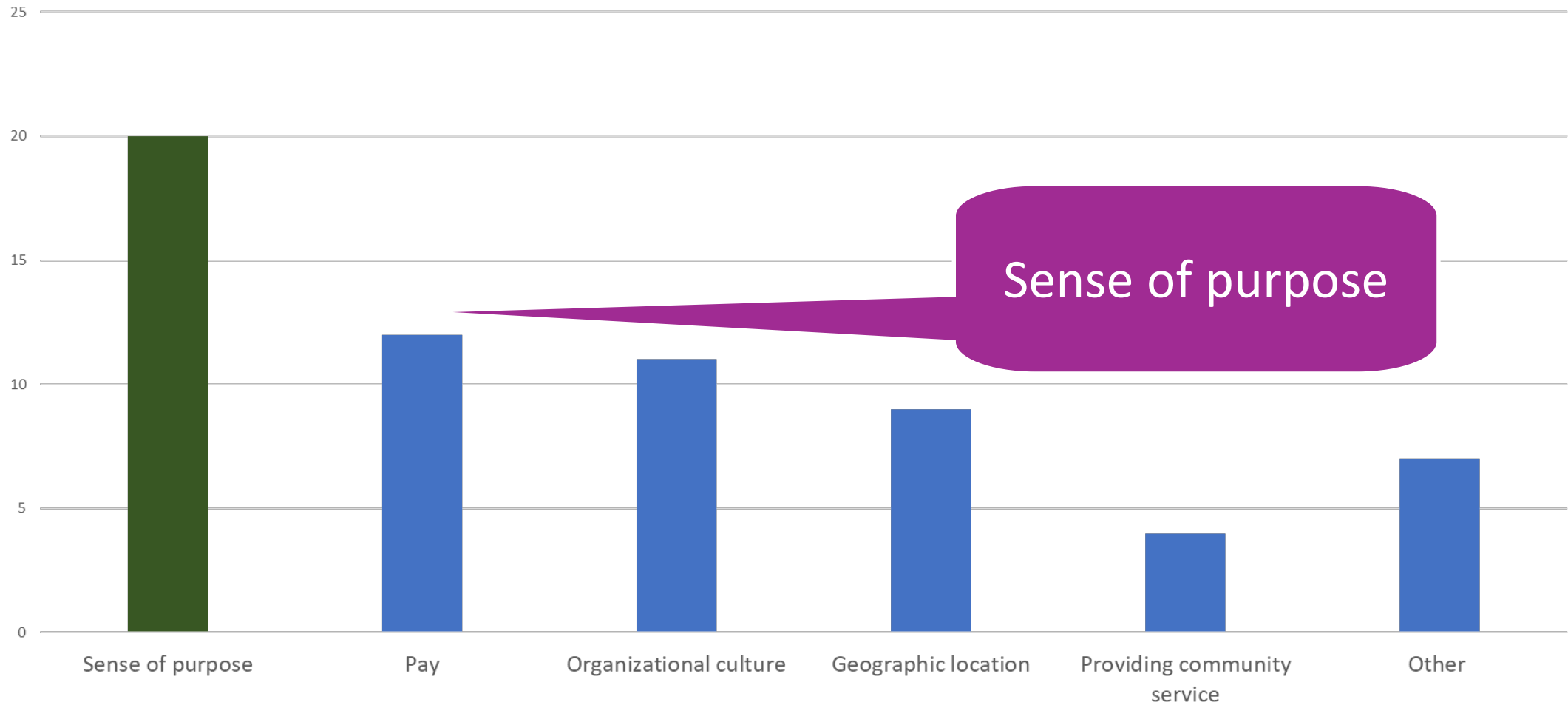
Good news (finally!)

Which of these factors has the greatest contribution to your positive job satisfaction?



Reason to stay

Single most important factor in decision to stay





SF SPCA DVM Employee Value Proposition

Powered by Purpose	Compassion in Action	Dare to Discover	Wellness First
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have pride in working at the SF SPCA., and our staff have high levels of satisfaction supporting a meaningful cause. • Our work will positively impact 5 million animal lives by 2030. • Generating revenue is important because it keeps our lights on and expands our reach, but we're not profit driven. • We see any client in need as our mission is access to care. We grant \$1M in financial aid every year, averaging \$1,500 per client in need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our facilities are located in ethnically diverse neighborhoods. We believe in delivering non-judgmental, quality medical care by embracing human variation and practicing cultural humility. • Nearly 11,000 people's lives are positively touched through our animal assisted therapy programs every year. • We aim to adopt 5k+ animals per year and we partner with shelters in California's Central Valley that have limited access to veterinary care to transport ~2,000 in-need animals to receive the treatment they need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the SF SPCA, you will face challenges that will allow you to grow your knowledge, technical skills, and your compassion. • As one of the largest GP hospitals and sheltering systems in San Francisco, you will see and experience a full array of clients and cases. With a large team, you never have to figure it out alone. • We know that real growth is about growing professionally AND personally. We have the programs to support your continuous development like continuing education support and manager training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We know this industry can be hard on its people at times. • We balance hard work and wellbeing through a culture of performance, accountability and total rewards. • We are constantly examining new initiatives and activities to improve our people's work- life balance and wellness. • We strive for our people to be happy and committed so they are engaged and ready to save animal lives. We measure staff satisfaction on a monthly basis to stay in front of our people's needs.

When in doubt...ask!

- How could working conditions be improved
- How could work efficiency be optimized
- How could communication be better supported
- How could animal wellness be improved
- What is one thing that is most frustrating?
- What is one thing that would help the most?