

USCHomelessness Policy Research Institute



Understanding the Impact of California's Pet Assistance and Support (PAS)

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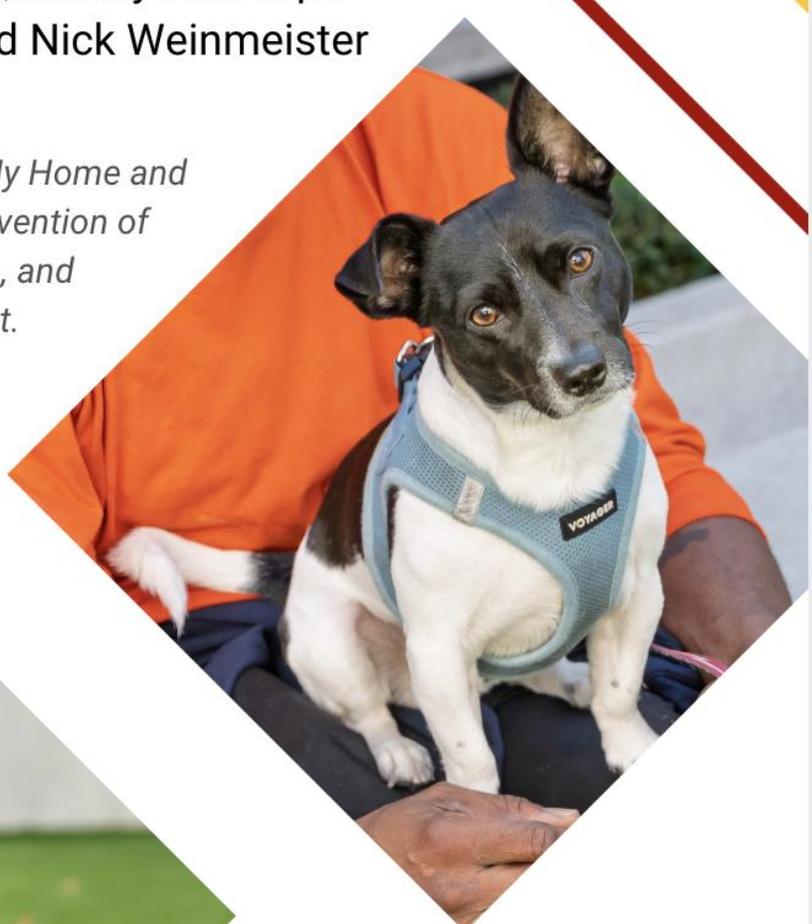


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Executive Summary

In 2019, California established the Pet Assistance and Support (PAS) program, which provided shelters and service providers with the necessary funding to accommodate pets. Prior to the program, most providers prohibited pets from their facilities for reasons like insufficient staffing, physical space constraints, lack of pet-friendly infrastructure, liability concerns, and other budget-related constraints. These pet-exclusive policies meant many people experiencing homelessness with pets were forced to decide between receiving housing and services or remaining unsheltered with their pet, many opting for the latter.

California disbursed \$15.75 million in PAS funds to 61 distinct sites across the state, enabling them to open their doors to 489 unhoused pet owners, on average, annually. HPRI analyzed spending and outcome reports from 2020-2024, finding increased access to shelter among pet owners, substantial provision of pet healthcare, and 886 exits to permanent housing (approx. 20% of program participants). Grantees spent PAS funds on items like pet food and supplies, veterinary services, crates, kennels, infrastructure improvements, vaccinations, insurance, and staffing. Investments in staffing often enabled a staff person to focus exclusively on serving clients with pets, connecting them to relevant resources and managing the organization's PAS program funds and operations. Spending on crates and kennels empowered shelters to allow pets inside shared spaces to not be separated from their owners. Funds used for food and veterinary services greatly improved outreach to persons with pets who were more likely to come indoors knowing that the provider had food, health resources, and facilities that would support their pet in addition to providing shelter.

Qualitative interviews with provider awardees were resoundingly positive, all stating that PAS expanded access to previously unreachable clients. PAS changed several provider organizations' willingness to accept pets, and the funds for infrastructure, staffing, and pet-specific resources enabled them to start accepting clients with pets. Interviews also revealed some anxiety about how organizations will continue to serve clients with pets after the program funding expires, given the overall environment of funding challenges. The success of PAS demonstrates the critical need to foster a more pet-inclusive homelessness response system.

Key Findings

1. PAS enabled providers to serve more unhoused clients, many of whom were previously unreachable due to pet-prohibitive policies or budget constraints.
2. PAS helped providers to serve participants with pets to a higher standard, providing them with animal care essentials, veterinary services, behavioral support sessions, and pet-friendly amenities.
3. Providers used PAS funds to hire additional staff, who were solely focused on pet-owning clients, leading to more individualized, supportive services. The cost of staffing was high but also critical to the program's success.

4. Insurance liability is one of the biggest perceived barriers to accepting pets, yet spending analysis showed those costs to be one of the smallest expenses. Some providers still mentioned encountering some difficulty finding pet-inclusive insurance, though.
5. PAS helped providers make infrastructural improvements to their physical spaces (e.g., dog runs, kennels, pet relief areas, pet washing stations) that will serve clients well into the future.
6. Jurisdictions considering replicating PAS should consider making funding more flexible to include expenses like dayboarding for pets or routine grooming appointments. Establishing clear data collection and reporting expectations can also reduce the administrative burden and make for more robust program evaluations.
7. California policymakers should explore ways to make the homelessness response systems more pet-inclusive. The closing of PAS marks another challenge for service providers who want to provide personalized housing and services following the Housing First model but are not funded adequately to do so, particularly for participants with pets.

Background

Pets play an important role in the lives of pet owners, regardless of housing status, but for people experiencing homelessness, the benefits and challenges of ownership can have a profound impact on their well-being. Approximately 67% of American households and roughly 10% of the national unhoused population own pets (American Pet Products Association, 2024; California HCD, 2022). Pets can improve an unhoused owner's quality of life in many ways, with animals providing companionship to decrease isolation, mental health benefits (like reduction in stress or anxiety), alerting for threats to increase safety, and providing motivation to regain housing (Kerman, 2019). However, pet ownership can also present difficult trade-offs that may inhibit a person's ability to obtain stable housing. Most shelters and service providers do not permit pets, often forcing unhoused owners to choose between meeting their pets' needs and accessing housing and supportive services. A homeless response system that is not pet-inclusive can stall pet owners' progress toward re-housing or exacerbate the challenges they face, potentially dramatically increasing their time experiencing homelessness.

The existing literature on pet ownership among the unhoused population is quite limited, leading to some imprecise estimates. While the National Coalition for the Homeless estimates a 10% pet ownership rate among the unhoused, other estimates suggest that the percentage is anywhere between 6% and 24% (Irvine, 2012; Rhoades, 2016). For example, recent studies surveying unhoused people in Los Angeles found 23% of youth and 9-12% of adults owned pets (Rhoades, 2016; Henwood, 2020). These estimates vary because they are often geographically constrained and use relatively small sample sizes. This target population is also difficult to reach due to its transience, which is a common challenge in data collection among unhoused communities. These challenges make it difficult to arrive at findings that are generalizable to a large or national population with a high degree of accuracy. HPRI's analysis of the Los Angeles Demographic Survey data also highlighted an overall increase in the number of unhoused individuals with pets between 2019-2024. After dipping from 11.25% in 2017 to 8.55% in 2018, pet ownership rebounded steadily, reaching 10.68% by 2020. Following a gap in 2021 data, the percentage rose sharply to 14.18% in 2022 and continued to climb, peaking at 15.79% in 2024. This growth of over four percentage points since 2020 suggests that pets are playing an increasingly significant role in the lives of unhoused individuals, underlining the importance of pet-inclusive housing and services.

Pets can confer a wide range of benefits to their owners, but the form they come in and the level of their impact can be much different for people experiencing homelessness. Pets provide their unhoused owners "emotional support, including friendship, companionship, 'unconditional acceptance', comfort, reduced loneliness, decreased social isolation, and love" (Rhoades, 2016). While the same can be said for owners with housing, these benefits can be more impactful for those who are unhoused. For example, the implied mental health benefits from companionship and love are amplified when considering how much isolation unhoused people experience, as well as how much being unhoused can strain mental well-being. In California, approximately two-thirds of the unhoused population experience some type of negative mental health symptoms, including serious depression (48%) and anxiety (51%)

(Kushel, 2023). Pet ownership has been found to help counteract some of these challenges through companionship and emotional connection. Unsurprisingly, this type of connection can encourage individuals to obtain housing. Focus group interviews exploring the personal strengths and resiliency of unhoused street youth revealed that caring for a pet gave owners purpose in life and motivated them to meet their basic needs and ultimately find housing (Bender, 2007).

Issue

While more providers are beginning to accept individuals with pets into their facilities, many still maintain a no pets policy, with the exception of licensed service and emotional support animals, who are exempted by the Americans with Disability Act. Pet-exclusive policies in the housing and social services systems can prevent unhoused pet owners from receiving services or re-entering housing in two intertwined manners: 1) Shelters and service facilities lack the resources necessary to accept and treat pets and their unhoused owners, and 2) The strong bond between pet and owner makes people reluctant to accept offers of housing or services that do not allow for their pets. While some shelters do accept pets, many across the country do not for a variety of reasons. Key impediments commonly cited by providers are liability concerns, exclusionary insurance plans, physical space/infrastructure constraints, animal behavior and health risks, policy barriers, insufficient staffing and training, and increased budgeting costs (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020).

Many providers are fearful of pets without proper training who may become destructive to the facility or, more concerningly, exhibit aggressive behavior towards other people or pets on-site. This latter concern is particularly troublesome when weighing legal liability for residents injured in a provider's shelter. Additionally, other residents could have their own challenges being around animals, like allergies to pet dander or histories of trauma associated with animals. Outside of interpersonal challenges, many interim housing facilities are in older, cramped buildings that do not have the flexible indoor-outdoor spaces required for animals to flourish. These tight quarters make it very challenging to offer space for kennels, crates, dog runs, pet waste stations, or other amenities that are important for people living with pets. Lease agreements may also prohibit pets on the property or require additional renter's insurance coverage (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2024). Lastly, even organizations that wish to welcome individuals with pets to their facility may need to make changes to their physical space, like those previously mentioned, as well as budget for staff trainings to help serve folks with pets. Shelters may also wish to provide resources for pets like food, collars, vaccinations, or microchipping, and these items are not supported by the vast majority of federal, state, or local homelessness response funds. Private and philanthropic funders may also restrict spending to a provider's unhoused clients, not their pets (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2024). Any number of these constraints may prevent an organization from serving clients with pets.

This incompatibility between providers and unhoused pet owners creates a difficult dilemma for all parties involved. When shelters do not have the proper resources to take in pets, they can ask owners if they would be willing to surrender their pet, and are forced to turn away those who say no. When

unhoused owners are confronted with this decision, there is a strong likelihood that they will choose to remain unsheltered and untreated. Qualitative interviews and surveys consistently found that most owners would refuse any housing that excluded their pet, opting to sleep outside rather than be separated from them (Rhoades, 2016). In the aforementioned Los Angeles-based studies, nearly half of pet owners, both unhoused youths and adults, reported being turned away from shelters or experiencing difficulties accessing services (Henwood, 2020; Rhoades, 2016). The end result is a stalemate. Shelters cannot accommodate pets, and unhoused owners are unwilling to relinquish them.

Unhoused owners' decision to prioritize their pets over housing and services is rooted in the familial bond between the two. Regardless of an owner's housing status, research shows that owners resoundingly consider pets as part of their family, making separation that much more difficult (HABRI, 2022). Housing offers conditioned on separation from family members or partners is a common barrier to accepting housing, especially for unhoused families, who need additional space that pushes housing costs outside of their budget or are discriminated against by property owners for their familial status (Kushel, 2023). Results from the University of California San Francisco Benioff Homeless and Housing Initiative's statewide survey of unhoused people found three critical criteria for accepting housing offers: proximity to public transit, employment, healthcare and social networks; permission to have family members, partners, friends, and pets as roommates; and no overly restrictive regulations that they would not face otherwise on the private rental market (Kushel, 2023).

In other words, surrendering or losing a pet is similar to losing a family member and a piece of an unhoused owner's life. At times, this loss is literal, not figurative. Interviews with unhoused owners often compare the relationship between them and their pet to that between a parent and a child (Scanlon, 2021). In addition to the familial bond, providers across the medical, physical health, and social services fields reported that unhoused owners might refuse services because they prioritize their pet's needs over their own health (Kogan, 2025). Unhoused owners have shared that they will meet their pet's health needs before their own, including food, medical care, and treatment (Rhoades, 2016). The cost of meeting their own basic needs can worry owners that they will not have enough resources available to properly care for their pet. Another factor shaping this dynamic is the logistical barriers to accessing services. Unhoused owners typically do not have a secure location or person to leave their pet with, making owners unwilling to leave their pets even for short periods of time (Rhoades, 2016).

PAS Program

To address this gap in California's homeless response system, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) established the Pet Assistance and Support (PAS) program in 2019. The program was designed to provide shelters with the necessary funding to shelter and serve unhoused owners and their pets. Eligible program expenses included crates, kennels, pet food, veterinary services, general pet supplies, pet-focused infrastructure improvements like dog runs or waste stations, and the added costs of staffing and liability insurance (California HCD, 2019). The intended goals of the program

were to meet the housing and health needs of unhoused pet owners who otherwise would remain unhoused in the absence of a shelter that was able to serve them.

To be eligible for funding, applicants had to be a nonprofit organization authorized to operate in California or their local city or county. They also had to commit to program conditions, including establishing a code of conduct policy for pets and their owners, offering veterinarian services, and providing shelter and food for pets (California HCD, 2019). HCD disbursed funds starting in 2020, with each awardee receiving anywhere between \$100,000 and \$600,000 per round. Overall, 37 organizations were awarded funding, servicing 61 different sites. There were three total funding rounds, totaling approximately \$16 million. The last funding round was in 2023, and providers must spend their funds by June 2026.

Research Design & Methodology

To evaluate this program, HPRI employed a mixed-methods approach, securing and analyzing spending and awardee reports from HCD, and conducting qualitative surveys with PAS awardee provider organizations in a series of interviews.

HPRI received hundreds of biannual PAS spending reports from HCD via a public records request. Our team compiled these reports into one functional database focusing on the universal data elements around awarded amounts, spending, budgets, services, and clients/pets served. Utilizing simple descriptive statistics, the team identified and examined patterns and trends in these data over the reporting periods received from HCD. After checking data entry and primary analyses, the team generated several visual aids that best capture notable features of award, budgeting, spending, service delivery, and housing outcome data associated with PAS funds. There are two major limitations to our quantitative data: our sample data is missing two potential years of spending (2024-2026), and information on infrastructure budgeting and spending was not included in the reports that were received. The research team only had access to biannual reports spanning from July 2020 to the end of 2024. We also estimate that infrastructural spending consisted of several million dollars' worth of PAS funds. This unaccounted-for time and spending data constrain our ability to analyze the program and its impacts as a whole.

As for qualitative interviews, HPRI worked with partner organizations My Dog Is My Home and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to identify and reach out to 10 PAS awardee provider organizations requesting interviews, 7 of whom agreed to participate. In our selection process, we sought to interview a diverse range of organizations representing counties across the state, urban and rural areas, housing typologies, and clientele served. The research team conducted hour-long interviews with at least one staff member who directly worked with the PAS program. We then conducted a thematic analysis of meeting recordings and notes, identifying the most commonly discussed themes and those of the highest import to interviewees. Before summarizing these findings, our team executed an inter-rater reliability check to ensure congruence in identifying themes.

Results

Quantitative Results

Our quantitative analyses can be conceptually divided into two sections: one focused on financial data (award amounts, budgets, and spending) and the other examining service delivery and client outcomes. As previously mentioned, our quantitative data was sourced from the biannual awardee reports submitted to HCD, and for this project timeline, we were only able to secure reports from the first half of 2020 to the first half of 2024. Additionally, these spending reports focus on spending on services and do not include infrastructural improvement projects. We do, however, have data on the reported total spending, which frequently exceeded the reported spending on services. For the 2020-2024 observed period, a total of \$14.1 million was made available to providers, with verified spending across budgeted service categories of \$6.5 million. We presume the gap between these two is explained by the unobserved infrastructural spending and the remaining balance of funds available until the program's sunset in 2026. Infrastructure likely accounts for most of the spending gap since those expenses are much more costly than service spending per project. Recognizing these limitations, the following analyses will focus on the observed award amounts, service spending, and outcomes data.

Financial Analysis

Throughout the life of PAS, HCD disbursed \$15.75 million in funding. The average grant award per organization hovered around \$160,000 from 2020-2022 before rising above \$180,000 in late 2022 and over \$200,000 in 2023. The average award dropped steeply at the end of the observation period. This aligns with the fluctuating amounts of funding disbursed per round, with \$5 million in late 2019, \$10 million in 2022, and \$1 million in 2023. Figure 1 reflects this pattern well, showing that while average grant awards stayed relatively stable across the observation period, the total spending across all organizations rose substantially through the first two funding cycles, before declining in 2024 during the final, smaller funding cycle.

Average Award versus Total Spent

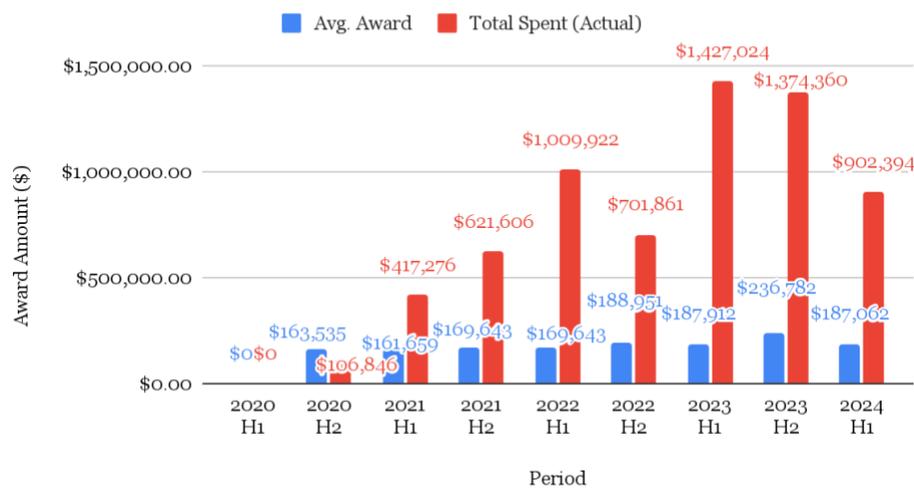


Figure 1: Average PAS award amounts and spending

To evaluate organizational spending, the research team built a data set of budgeting and spending indicators. These variables notably included spending on crates/kennels, pet food/supplies, veterinarian services, staff assisting pets, independent audits, and liability insurance. Across the observed 2020-2024 reporting periods of PAS, average total annual spending on these services was \$729,032.08. The highest category of spending for each reporting period was to cover staffing costs for provider staff serving clients with pets, at 55.82%. The next two highest spending categories were crates and kennels and veterinary services, at 17.24% and 17.01% respectively. A significant but smaller allocation was spent on pet food and pet supplies (8.49%), which are essential resources for pet care and have ongoing recurrent demand. The smallest portion of the budget went toward administrative costs like liability insurance (1.04%) and independent audit support (0.40%). This is promising given that one of the key concerns preventing providers from accepting pets is liability; yet, providers were able to move past this barrier without spending large amounts on new or additional liability insurance. Figure 2 illustrates this by-category spending breakdown.

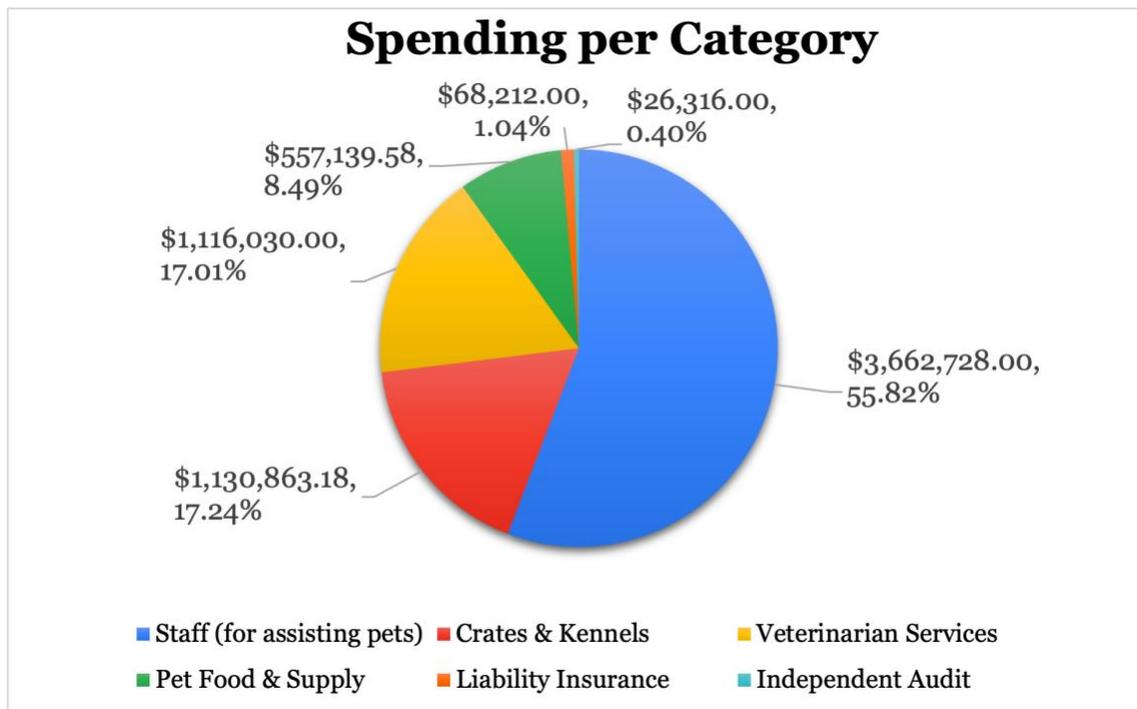


Figure 2: PAS spending by approved category

Table 1 provides a look at this categorical spending, ranked by total spent. The consistently high spending across the top three categories shows providers' ability to use funds to offer clients more resources for their pets (food and supplies) and supportive services that may not have otherwise been possible (veterinary services and pet-specific case management). In the qualitative portion of this project, the research team learned that provider organizations often hired staff who handled caseloads specifically of participants with pets, helping them with veterinary appointments and many other pet-related supports. While some may be concerned about high levels of spending on staff positions given the temporary nature of the PAS funds, providers shared that having case managers dedicated to serving participants with pets was very helpful, increasing the quality of service for those participants and reducing the burden on other staff. Interviews also reinforced the power of funds to support crates, kennels, and veterinary services. These were the types of spending that often made accepting pets, even those with high health needs, possible. Without these resources and accompanying staff coordination, participants may not have entered housing or may have lost their pets to health complications.

Service Provided	Total Spent
Staff (for assisting pets) (PAS)	\$3,662,728.00
Crates & Kennels (PAS)	\$1,130,863.18
Veterinarian Services (PAS)	\$1,116,030.00
Pet Food & Supply (PAS)	\$557,139.58
Liability Insurance (PAS)	\$68,212.00
Independent Audit (PAS)	\$26,316.00
Total Spent	\$6,561,288.76

Table 1: Ranked spending per service category

Table 2 provides some cost-effectiveness indicators, showing that overall, providers were able to serve participants at a consistent rate. Costs per participant started just under \$1,000 (2020 H2), peaking above \$2,300 in 2022 H1, then steadily declined to \$1,150 in 2024 H1. The outlier period of the first half of 2022 seems to be driven by a particularly high level of spending on staffing without an equivalent increase in participants served. This could be due to any number of Human Resource constraints, including hiring or training staff to prepare for incoming PAS funds. We would label this an outlier, as the second half of 2023 saw even higher levels of staff and overall spending, with a substantially lower cost per participant served.

Period	Amount Spent	PAS Participants Served	Cost per participant served
2020 H1	\$0.00	0	\$ -
2020 H2	\$106,846.00	107	\$998.60
2021 H1	\$417,275.76	248	\$1,682.60
2021 H2	\$621,606.00	382	\$1,627.20
2022 H1	\$1,009,922.00	437	\$2,311.00
2022 H2	\$701,861.00	549	\$1,278.40

2023 H1	\$1,427,024.00	942	\$1,514.90
2023 H2	\$1,374,360.00	959	\$1,433.10
2024 H1	\$902,394.00	783	\$1,152.50

Table 2: Spending and participants served per reporting period; Cost per participant served

Table 3 offers an alternative way to understand this cost-effectiveness data, measuring the volume of participants served by \$5000 of PAS funding spent on services. We see the same trends reflected in this table, with a cost-effective burst of service at the beginning and end of our observation period and relatively stable cost-effectiveness in between.

Period	Number of Participants per \$5,000 Spent
2020 H1	0.00
2020 H2	5.01
2021 H1	2.97
2021 H2	3.07
2022 H1	2.16
2022 H2	3.91
2023 H1	3.30
2023 H2	3.49
2024 H1	4.34

Table 3: Participants served per \$5000 spent

Outcomes Analysis

Over 4 years, PAS served 4,407 participants across a provider network of 37 organizations. Statewide, service providers assisted 489 clients on average, annually. The program showed steady growth from 107 PAS participants in late 2020 to a peak of 959 in 2023 H2, then dipped slightly to 783 in 2024 H1. Figure 3 shows this data for both total clients served and total pets served. This figure shows that increased funding reflected a rapid increase in participants and pets served, a nearly tenfold growth from 2020 to 2023. This data also reflects that participants sometimes own multiple pets, which can increase stress on providers' physical spaces and resources. PAS funds made it easier to help these clients in particular. Having kennels, crates, food, and other supplies enabled providers to accept these clients and helped those clients trust that their animals would be well cared for in their new housing.

Total PAS Pets Assisted and PAS Participants per Period

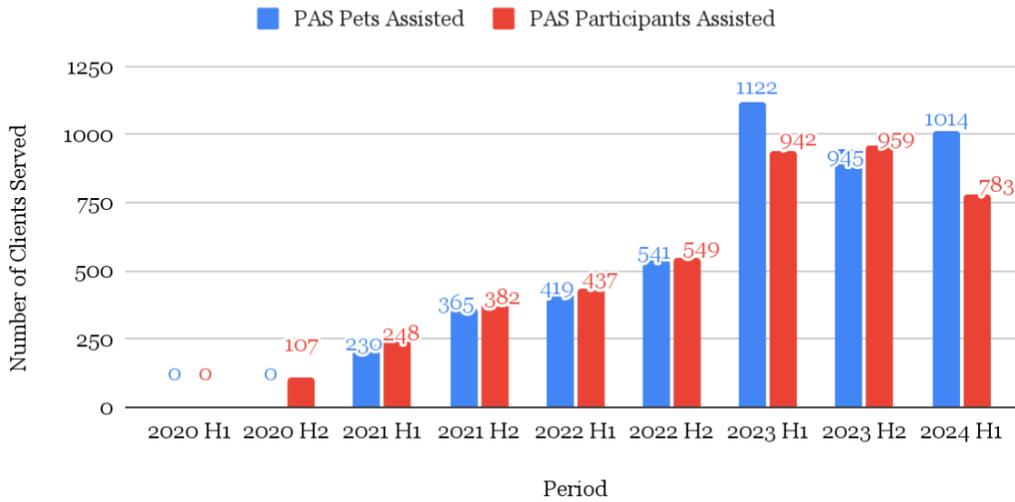


Figure 3: Number of Pets and Participants served per period

As for services delivered to pets with PAS funding, vaccinations were the most frequent service, followed by behavioral support, with spay/neuter trailing. However, behavioral support spikes rapidly in 2023 and 2024, reflecting that funding continuity also enabled a movement from basic access to vaccinations, and onto more complex preventative care. Figure 4 shows these patterns over the observation period of 2020-2024.

Services Provided per Period

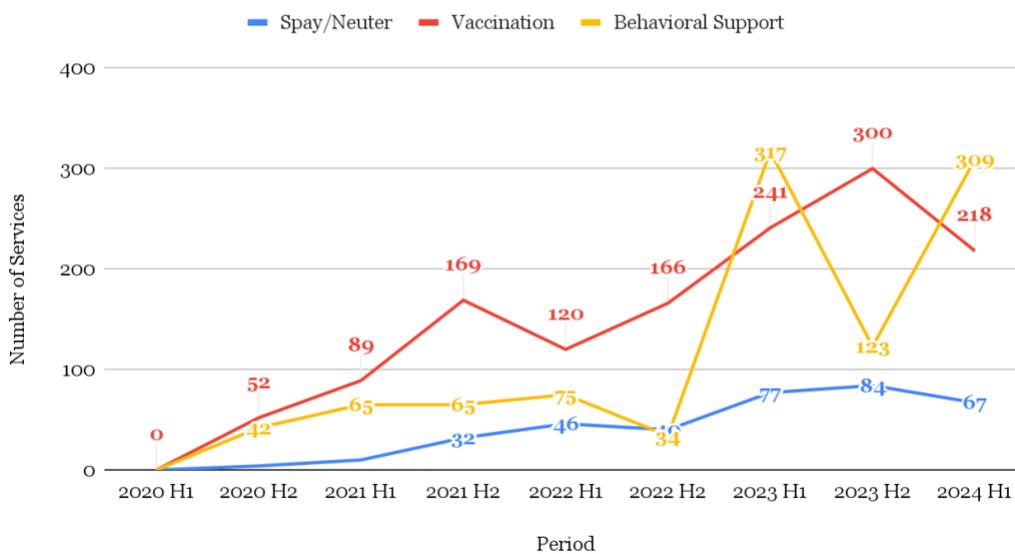


Figure 4: Distribution of Services Provided by PAS

The consistently high number of vaccinations is worthy of celebration, as over 1000 pets were vaccinated during the four-year observation period, effectively preventing disease and the spread of infection. While spay/neuter numbers were lower, this is anticipated given their one-time nature. Both are great achievements in helping participants’ pets access preventive care that not only benefits them but also the broader community of humans and animals. Additionally, behavioral support services were key tools in PAS programs. Conversations with providers revealed that these services could range from simple obedience training to addressing separation anxiety, enabling participants to leave their interim housing to go to work. Many providers reported working with local pet stores and humane societies that sometimes even provided on-site training.

The PAS program also provided modest improvements in housing outcomes, with 606 total exits to homelessness and 886 exits to permanent supportive housing in the observed period. As money began to flow from HCD to provider organizations, exits improved steadily (up to 145 in 2023 H1 and 147 in 2023 H2; refer to figure 5). There is a noticeable outlier in the second half of the 2020 reporting period, with the highest number of placements recorded in a given six-month period (245). This outlier is the result of three separate agencies placing over 30 clients in permanent housing. While this may result from certain housing sites opening or special housing placements due to encampment resolutions, the awardee reporting data does not contain information on placements to confirm the causes of such high placement levels.

PAS Total Exits to Homelessness and PAS Total Exits to Permanent Housing

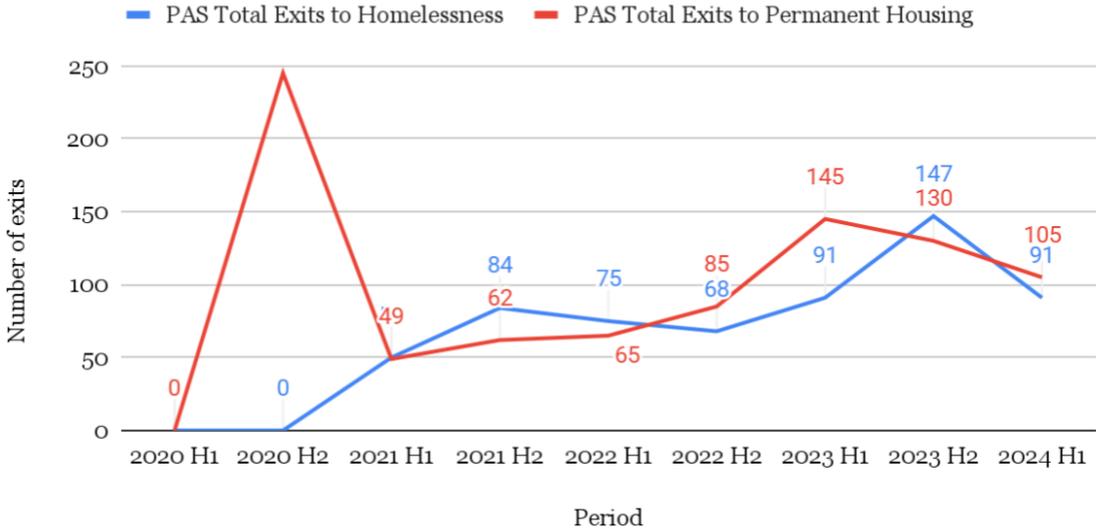


Figure 5: PAS Exits to Homelessness and Permanent Housing

The peak in average award size in 2023 H2 aligns with one of the strongest performance periods in terms of permanent housing placements. The average annual permanent housing placement over the whole observation period was 98, while the average exits to homelessness were 67. These data are

promising, but also incomplete. While additional funding to support PAS clients with animal-friendly housing location services was essential in getting participants permanently housed, there are also myriad factors external to PAS funding that could influence the availability of permanent placements in a given region.

Qualitative Results

The interviews with awardee provider organizations provided crucial insight that amplified the program's positive impacts while also providing constructive feedback on areas where the PAS program could improve. The common positive themes we heard throughout the interviews were expanded access for pet owners, improved quality of life, enhanced services and infrastructure, increased engagement between clients and staff, and flexibility of the funding. The difficulties with program funds were generally related to administrative and operational challenges.

Successes

PAS funds opened the door to more unhoused individuals who would have otherwise remained unsheltered or in precarious living conditions. With the exception of one grant recipient, every organization shared that they were unable to accommodate pets prior to the program. They frequently cited insufficient staffing, increased costs, and a lack of infrastructure to house the pets. By enabling these shelters to accept and accommodate pets, providers were able to reach a larger number of people. Provider outreach teams frequently knew of individuals eligible for services and interim housing who refused such offers due to limitations on pets. PAS also opened doors for some of the most vulnerable among the unhoused pet-owning community, including domestic violence survivors who had difficulty finding pet-friendly housing to leave their toxic environments. One grantee, a domestic-violence-focused shelter, shared, "We've had so many survivors call with their pets, and we had to deny them [access] to our shelter because we were just not equipped for pets. That is just heartbreaking to know that survivors will stay with the person that harms them because they can't [find care for their pet]." Many domestic violence survivors become unhoused after experiencing intimate partner violence and face barriers to securing new housing, whether due to some shelters offering housing limited to women with children, shelter capacity limits, or limited knowledge about services targeted toward their needs or how to access them (Kushel, 2023). In this way, PAS funding removed a barrier for domestic violence survivors, both housed and unhoused, to finding healthier, permanent housing.

Making care and services available to pets also became an effective outreach strategy, convincing more owners to accept housing and services. A study surveying social services, emergency medical services, and human health providers found that pet ownership significantly affects an unhoused owner's decision-making process on whether to seek or accept treatment (Kogan, 2025). Typically, unhoused owners are concerned about the possibility of losing their pet while accessing services, not having the financial resources to take care of their pet, or agreeing to long-term care settings that would force them to relinquish their pet. These concerns often result in delays, refusals, or completely forgoing service utilization and treatment (Kogan, 2025). Our interviews with grantees revealed that their outreach teams were more successful in getting unhoused individuals to accept offers of housing and services when care for their pets was offered up front. Many unhoused owners can be reluctant to

receive care and treatment for themselves, but may be more agreeable to offers that meet their pets' needs first, like food, medical treatment, spaying and neutering, etc. Program participants would visit shelters, receive care for their pets, and build trust and rapport with case managers in the process. One grantee stated:

“By offering these vital services for both pets and their owners, we’ve seen an increased engagement from pet-owning guests who may have otherwise avoided shelter or support programs. This approach not only supports the well-being of the animals but also helps build trust and connection between clients and staff. In turn, this relationship encouraged clients to work more closely with case managers and take meaningful steps towards achieving their personal goals.”

Furthermore, pet care was open to day clients who were only temporarily accessing the facilities and were not longer-term shelter residents. When these owners returned to their unsheltered living situation, they sometimes spread the word about shelters and facilities offering pet care through their informal social networks, making it easier to reach more clients.

In a similar vein to the increased trust and rapport between client and case manager, grantees unequivocally agreed that PAS funds helped them serve their clients to a higher standard of quality. Prior to the program, case managers relied on donations or had to find resources out in the community, like food pantries that might have had pet food available. Having pet food, kennels, collars, and other supplies available on site made it much easier for providers to care for animals quickly and affordably. One provider stated, “We weren’t able to supply any of the food and resources that a client might need to care for their animal, but of course, we helped them find those things in the community. So, having the dollars [for] cabinets full of pet supplies when someone came into the program, we could hand them exactly what they need[ed]. Not having to help them find it has been a game-changer, for sure.” Streamlining this process benefited both the client and animal, who received immediate care, and the case manager, whose workload was reduced and whose capacity to serve other clients increased.

The program’s funding flexibility allowed providers to cover a wide range of expenses, from emergency medical procedures to behavioral training classes. This flexibility helped providers respond more effectively to each animal’s situation – a common theme heard throughout our interviews. Providers were able to spend funds on things beyond routine services or supplies. For example, a couple of grantees shared that they admitted pets who were in life-threatening conditions, whether due to a disease like heartworms or physical injuries. Providers were able to use program funds on vaccinations and emergency medical procedures that saved pets’ lives.

Infrastructure improvements and behavioral training classes yielded higher returns on investment than one might anticipate. Dog runs, kennels, pet relief areas, and bathing stations were typically very large, one-time expenses, but these investments can serve clients with pets for the foreseeable future, even if the PAS program ends or funding becomes more limited. Similarly, the benefits of behavioral training classes extend well beyond the immediate term. Pets, regardless of their owners’ housing status, can

benefit from behavioral training. These classes help pets learn basic obedience, self-control, stress management, social skills with other animals, and how to manage unruly behavior like excessive barking, jumping, and hyperactivity. This education is particularly beneficial for pets with unhoused owners. Disruptive behavior is a major concern for providers who want to accommodate pets, especially in congregate shelter settings where animals are in closer proximity to each other. Interviewees regularly mentioned how helpful these classes were for creating a positive, controlled shelter environment. The skills pets learn in behavioral training classes set them up for success in future permanent housing settings. Their owners can safely leave their pets unsupervised while they are out searching for employment, for instance. Otherwise, their pets will disturb neighbors while they are out, something that can threaten an owner's housing security. Providing necessary food, medical treatment, and veterinary services for people's pets has stabilized the lives of unhoused owners. It reduced the mental and physical strain of prioritizing their pets' needs over their own, enabling them to start working towards personal goals like improving their health, obtaining job training, and working with housing navigators to secure housing. Program participants were now able to focus on themselves without having to filter out potential housing and service situations that were not pet-inclusive. One grantee attested, "[PAS] helped us create a more inviting, safe environment – a place where people feel like 'okay, I can actually relax and feel safe and feel seen to start working on these items that I need to work on.'" Other providers echoed that sentiment in our interviews, many of them implying that pet-inclusive services were critical to restabilizing clients' lives and set them up for success in the long term, regardless of whether they exited to permanent housing or not.

Challenges

While interview responses from grantees were resoundingly positive, they also shared a few challenges associated with PAS funds, mostly from an operational and administrative standpoint. The common issues revolved around data collection and reporting, staffing, capacity, insurance, and eligible expenses. Providers faced challenges collecting data and meeting reporting requirements, particularly early on in the program. HCD required biannual reporting to monitor program expenses and ensure compliance, but at times that involved collecting data that some providers were not previously tracking, e.g., how many clients were transition-aged youth and what specific services they received. These reporting challenges were particularly pronounced at the onset of the PAS program. HCD devoted large amounts of technical assistance and guidance to help build providers' understandings of reporting requirements and strengthen collaboration with HCD's monitoring team.

The other widespread challenge faced by providers is the temporary nature of the funding. The PAS funds were essential to providers' ability to accept and serve participants with pets, often because their normal annual budgets do not have any items for pet-specific work. This type of funding is missing from local, state, and federal programs outside of PAS. Homeless service providers are often asked to do so much with very little funding, and in this environment of scarcity, it is very challenging to prioritize funds that serve pets when they can serve other individuals experiencing homelessness. This tradeoff has been all too common for providers. While PAS filled this gap in population-specific funding, providers are now facing the same funding gap. Most interviewees said that their organization plans to continue accepting pets, but all of them expressed concern about the implications of losing PAS funding. Salaries

for pet-dedicated staff members and training for existing staff were major line items and accounted for the majority of providers' spending. However, these expenses were also key components of the program's success. Some providers intend to fundraise specifically for pet-related expenses, while others anticipate difficult budget sacrifices once the program sunsets in 2026.

Many grantees appreciated the flexibility that came with the funding, but there was some ambiguity around what expenses were eligible, which created inefficiencies and challenges with managing the program's funds. Some providers were uncertain whether a specific cost, like emergency veterinarian services, grooming, and dental care, would be eligible under funding guidelines. While the research team has learned that all of these services were approved by HCD under the "Veterinarian Services" line item, several providers reported that due to their uncertainty of its status as an approved cost, they did not submit such budget items. Furthermore, pet dayboarding was not an eligible expense, which was a barrier for those working or seeking employment. For example, most overnight shelters require clients and their pets to vacate in the morning for cleaning and service purposes. Having to vacate meant losing a safe and secure place to leave their pet while people attended classes, work, job training, interviews, or services that were pet-exclusive – a common barrier unhoused owners faced prior to the program.

Discussion

By enabling shelters to accommodate both pets and their unhoused owners, California's PAS program addressed a critical gap in its homeless response system, one that extended people's episodes of homelessness and prevented providers from helping them. In total, providers were able to serve 4,407 unhoused people and 4,636 pets in the span of four years, many of whom would have likely remained unsheltered and unassisted. These funds ended the stalemate between service providers who did not have the necessary resources to accept pets and unhoused owners who were unwilling to accept any housing or service offers that ruled out their pets. Program participants and their pets were provided food, shelter, medical care, and veterinary services that were previously out of their reach. By meeting their basic needs, participants were given a stable platform to start regaining control over their lives through case management, housing navigation, and medical treatment. They no longer had to choose between feeding and caring for their pets or themselves. Approximately 20% of program participants, totaling 886 people, exited to permanent housing. Pet assistance and exits to permanent housing cannot be directly correlated, but testimony from service providers and the quantitative results of HPRI's research suggest that funding meaningfully contributed to participants' ability to obtain housing.

Providing pet assistance is certainly not a panacea for reducing unsheltered homelessness for this target population, though. Over the course of the program, 606 people exited back to homelessness, totaling roughly 14% of all participants. However, this is likely more attributable to broader systemic housing issues than a specific failure of PAS. None of the grantees reported problems unique to the program that might have driven clients' exit to homelessness in our qualitative interviews. While pet ownership can confer specific risk factors contributing to an exit, this is a widespread issue across the unhoused population at large. Client-specific issues unrelated to pet ownership could have easily played a role in a

person's exit to homelessness. In California, 44% of people placed in interim housing statewide returned to homelessness according to a 2023 audit (Parks, 2023). Housing of any form, interim, permanent, or otherwise, does not preclude people from returning to homelessness. This is why time spent experiencing homelessness is often described as episodic because, in many cases, being unhoused is not a one-time occurrence. Exit data tracking is also a notorious obstacle in homelessness research and policy design writ large, making it hard to infer conclusions with a high degree of confidence. Furthermore, the PAS program coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically impacted providers' ability to serve their clients. During that period, many shelters, especially congregate ones, had to reduce their capacity for health and safety reasons.

From an efficacy standpoint, PAS demonstrated strong cost-effectiveness over time. The average cost per program participant was around \$1,500, which steadily decreased over time, serving more participants at a lower cost year over year. Analyzing spending patterns revealed that staffing was the largest cost driver. However, qualitative feedback confirmed that staffing investments were critical to building trust, enhancing engagement, and supporting clients through housing navigation. The connection between case managers and clients can be a crucial factor in a person's rehousing. The spending patterns also showed a diversification of services over time, which generated efficiency gains. This is likely explained by providers making large, one-time investments in infrastructure early on in the program and gradually reallocating funds to meet client-specific needs, though we do not have the infrastructure spending to confirm this.

The feedback heard throughout the interview process from grantees also suggests that our financial and outcomes analysis does not fully capture the beneficial impacts of PAS. Our analysis is limited to the award, service spending, and outcomes data and does not incorporate valuation methods for the program's intangible benefits. One grantee felt the awardee reports focused too heavily on measurable outcomes required for funding viability and missed the opportunity to capture how impactful the funds were on a personal level for clients. Some program participants may not have fully exited to permanent housing yet, but have made significant strides in building trust with case managers, regaining the motivation to end their episode of homelessness, or remediating long-term health issues that hindered their previous attempts to find employment or housing. Similarly, the surveys could not fairly represent how many lives these funds might have saved. Vaccinations were a major expenditure throughout the program, and providers shared anecdotal evidence that many of the individual success stories, like animals making a full recovery from critical conditions or lethal diseases, would not have been possible without these funds.

Despite any program flaws or difficulties, providers emphatically stated that PAS funds expanded access to shelter and services for unhoused pet owners and improved the quality of care provided. The program provided remarkably strong evidence that incorporating animal welfare in homelessness intervention can bring more people indoors, where they can get the help they need. The need for a more pet-inclusive shelter and services system is apparent. Across all of HPRI's interviews, grantees were worried about the implications of program funding coming to an end. Failing to renew funding would revive the stalemate between providers and unhoused pet owners, hindering the state's ability to

rehouse people. Currently, grantees have to spend all remaining program funds by June 2026. There is no clear indication whether PAS might continue after that. To preserve these gains, policymakers must address how they might sustain program funding, whether that be through new or additional funds similar to PAS, or future budget disbursements supporting flexible program costs, inclusive of those associated with serving pets.

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