

ADOPTION DENIALS 2020



Adopt-a-Pet Data Summary



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background.....	2
Methods.....	2
Demographics.....	2
Gender.....	2
Age.....	2
Race/Ethnicity.....	3
Children.....	3
Housing Situation.....	3
Household Income.....	3
Location.....	3
Pet Acquisition Source.....	4
Adoption Denial.....	4
Reasons for Adoption Denial.....	4



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020 ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Prior to starting this project, CARE searched for research literature and pre-existing survey instruments on adoption experiences and denial and identified a major gap in the field. The lack of research literature led to [Project Implicit](#), which motivated and led to the [2024 Racial Disparities in Animal Welfare study](#). In 2025, CARE completed the study: [Gatekeeping pet ownership: the challenges and opportunities for Black, Indigenous, People of Color \(BIPOC\) pet acquisition in Atlanta, Miami, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia](#).

METHODS

This survey was designed around our lived experiences working inside the animal welfare sector, and through partnership with the Founder and former CEO of Adopt-a-Pet, David Meyer, and former Chief Operating Officer, Abbie Moore. CARE also utilized insights from a project for Maddie's Fund ("Breaking Bias") that focused on addressing the bias in pet adoptions. The "Breaking Bias" Project included interviews, personal stories, and expert opinions from Dr. Michael Blackwell, Zach Skow, Shane, Betsy McFarland, Stephanie Shane and Mary Hawe.

Survey responses were collected through SurveyMonkey from May 2020 to October 2020. Participants were recruited through the Adopt-A-Pet and Maddie's Fund email listservs.

DEMOGRAPHICS

(n = 1,077)

Gender

The study sample was primarily female (85.1%), with 13.6% male participants and 1.9% non-binary participants. Three participants (0.3%) did not respond to this question.

**Note: Participants were able to select more than one response for the question. Therefore, the total percentage may exceed 100%.*

Age

The study participants were primarily in the 65+ age group (30.6%), followed by 22.3% of participants in the 55-64 age group, 15.6% in the 35-44 age group, 15.5% in the 45-54 age group, 11.1% in the 25-34 age group, 2.6% in the 18-24 age group, and 2% in the under 18 age group. Four participants (0.4%) did not respond to this question.



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020 ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

Race/Ethnicity

The study sample is primarily non-Hispanic white or Euro-American (69%), followed by 12.7% of participants identifying as Other, 7.7% of participants identifying as Latino or Hispanic American, 6.6% identifying as Black or African American, 3.3% identifying as Native American or Alaskan Native, 2.8% identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% identifying as Middle Eastern or Arab American, and 0.3% identifying as South Asian or Indian American.

**Note: Participants were able to select more than one response for the question. Therefore, the total percentage may exceed 100%.*

Children

43.8% of participants indicated that their children are within the following age groups: 19 or older (50.9%), 5-12 years old (27.8%), 13-18 years old (22%), and under 5 years old (16.1%).

**Note: Participants were able to select more than one response for the question. Therefore, the total percentage may exceed 100%.*

Housing Situation

64.7% of participants indicated that they live in a single-family home, while 25.7% indicated that they live in an apartment or condo. 6% of participants indicated that they live in a rowhome, 3.4% live in a mobile home, 1% live in a room, and 1% indicated that they are 'homeless for the time being'. Two participants (0.2%) did not respond to this question.

Household Income

The participants indicated their household income as the following: Between \$30,000 and \$49,999 (19.8%), between \$50,000 and \$74,999 (19.1%), between \$75,000 and \$99,999 (18.5%), between \$100,000 and \$150,000 (15.4%), between \$15,000 and \$29,999 (11.5%), Over \$150,000 (10.4%), and under \$15,000 (5.4%). Thirty-one participants (2.9%) did not respond to this question.

Location

The study participants' locations spanned 50 different states. The states with the most respondents were in Illinois (11.8%), California (10.3%), and Pennsylvania (10.2%).



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020

ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

PET ACQUISITION SOURCE

Study participants indicated that they obtained their pets primarily from a shelter or rescue (71.1%), followed by a relative or friend (37.4%), a breeder (30%), the pet was unowned/stray (28.8%), and in-store or online purchase (17%). Sixteen participants (1.5%) did not respond to this question.

**Note: Participants were able to select more than one response for the question. Therefore, the total percentage may exceed 100%.*

ADOPTION DENIAL

The majority of study participants indicated that they had not experienced adoption denial (87.9%), while 12.2% of study participants indicated that they had been denied adoption.

20% of study participants indicated that they know someone who has been denied adoption, while 80% of participants indicated that they do not know someone who has been denied adoption. Two participants (0.2%) did not respond to this question.

Reasons for Adoption Denial

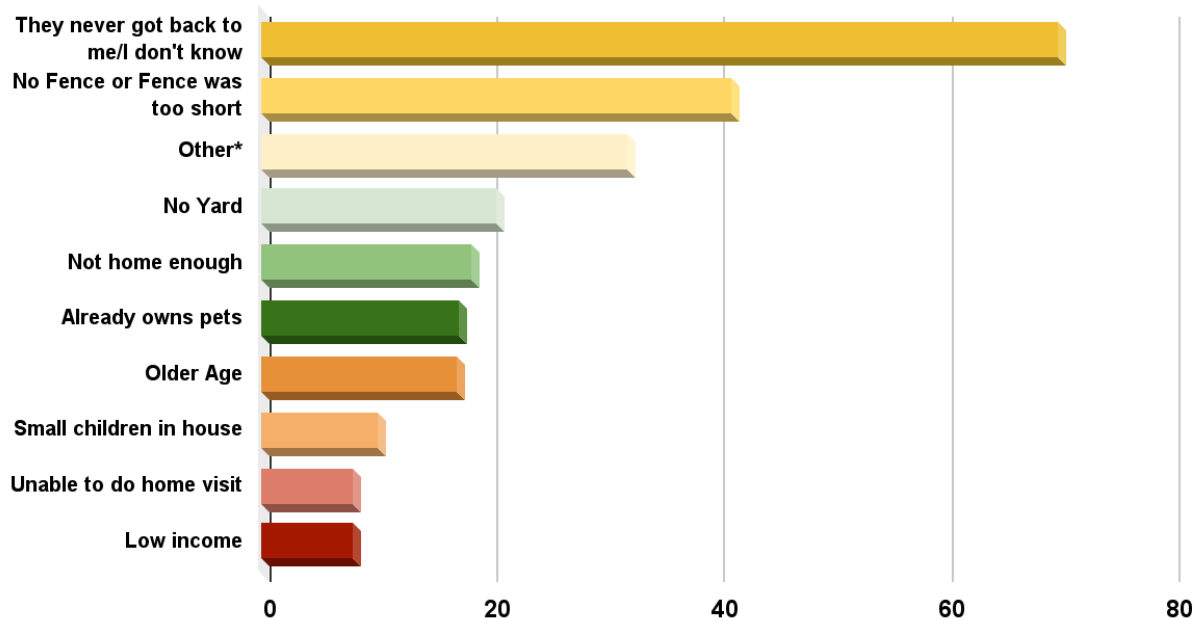
Study participants who had experienced adoption denial or knew someone who had been denied adoption (n = 87) indicated the following as the primary reasons for being denied: they never got back to me/I don't know (70.1%), fence issues (no fence or fence was too short) (41.4%), other (32.2%), no yard (20.7%), not home enough (18.4%), already own cats or dog in the home (17.3%), older age (senior citizen) (17.2%), small children in the house (10.3%), could or did not fulfill home visit requirements (8.1%), income was too low (8.1%).

**Note: Participants were able to select more than one response for the question. Therefore, the total percentage may exceed 100%.*



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020 ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

Reasons for Adoption Denial



The 'Other' reasons for denial (n = 79) included:

- **Housing or neighborhood (19%), including:**
 - Live in an apartment (4 responses)
 - Did not own home (2 responses)
 - Landlord issues/denial (3 responses)
 - Building breed restrictions (2 responses)
 - I live in an urban area and was trying to adopt a Great Pyrenees
 - Busy neighborhood and/or unspecified reasons
 - Living in urban area
 - I'd had a home visit in both my country house (I own and have a 4-foot fenced half acre and pond) and city apt (I rent but am 1 block from park and 5 blocks from fenced dog run), but they insisted on wanting to contact my landlord even though I'd had 4 dogs over 30+ years in my rental. My landlord does not like to be bothered and wants "mutual benign neglect", so I felt they had enough info, especially with my long history with dogs (Goldens, mostly), but they disagreed and denied my application



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020

ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

- **Access to vet care (16.5%), including:**
 - Other pets in the home are not spayed/neutered/vaccinated (7 responses)
 - Bought flea/heartworm preventatives at a garage sale so there were no vet records
 - Didn't take to vet enough (they thought)
 - My cats mother didn't have proof of FHV1
 - Bought flea/heartworm preventatives at a garage sale so there were no vet records
 - Did not have vet records for current pet. They never took the cat they had for routine care.
 - Heart worm medication. Dog has seizures and never leaves upstate NY
 - Money / vet issues
- **Concerns about well-being of pets (15.2%), including:**
 - Had a lot of animals and no way to adequately care for them
 - She couldn't prove how her last dog died
 - Previous dog was unfortunately run over by a car and they were told they were not "good" dog parents
 - Previously turned FIV+ cat outdoors
 - Wanted to train cat to use leash
 - Existing dogs not socialized
 - Said they would leave dog outside
 - Invisible fence and other negative reinforcement type equipment/training
- **Responsible pet ownership ideals (7.6%), including:**
 - Require cats to be indoor only (4 responses)
 - Perceptions on how animals "should" be kept did not meet org expectations
 - I was not a good fit for that animal
- **Outside of adoption area (7.6%), including:**
 - They only adopt locally
 - I lived out of town and even though I was one of the first to inquire about adopting the dog and was willing to pay for the training etc I was told that at 35 people from the area wanted to adopt and i wouldnt be given the first opportunity because I lived out of town only 4 hrs away. I ran up against this on every out of town dog I inquired about and so I just gave up on a rescue dog or shelter dog. I will purchase a dog if I decide to get one
 - Person applying lived outside the rescue's area
 - Pet was in the USA, I live in Ontario Canada. No pet transport.
 - Not located within 40 miles radius from adoption place
 - Outside home visit district



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020

ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

- **Pet was adopted to someone else (6.3%), including:**
 - Not fast enough to apply.
 - We applied at several agencies and went to in-person adoptions for 3 months and were not able to get any of the dogs we wanted. Every time we found one someone else would get the adoption first. It was the hardest process I've ever tried to do. We ended up purchasing a dog while shopping at a flea market of all places. A boxer/American bulldog mix.
 - I want a small dog and they toy with you by putting one up but as soon as you apply they say "Oops sorry it's adopted." Why are they so mean?
 - Too many people want the same puppy
 - Every pup I've inquired about ...I am told the pup is no longer available. I inquire immediately after I receive a notification from "find a pet" and other shelter websites.....
- **Did not have pet I wanted (3.8%), including:**
 - There are no small dogs except chihuahuas... or pit bulls. I do not want one of those dangerous dogs.
 - Wanting to adopt a blonde Pomeranian
 - I'm looking for Rotweiler puppy
 - No small 5-10 lb dogs are available who are basically healthy and trained to use puddle pads.
- **Age (too young) (3.8%), including:**
 - "College student" who didn't seem like the right fit
 - Too young
 - 18 vs. 21
- **Current pets (2.5%), including:**
 - Would not place cat in a home with a Border Collie
 - Too many animals
- **Person in home with disability (2.5%), including:**
 - Person in the home with a disability
 - Deaf
- **Previously relinquished a pet (2.5%), including:**
 - Said they've previously surrendered animals
 - Relinquished pet previously
- **Declawing (2.5%), including:**
 - We said we would declaw the cat
 - Declawed cats



ADOPTION DENIALS 2020

ADOPT-A-PET DATA SUMMARY

- **Lack of experience (2.5%), including:**
 - Not experienced for the behaviors the dog has displayed; unwilling to seek professional training
 - No experience with the specific breed
- **Miscommunication with shelter/rescue (2.5%), including:**
 - Had adopted a dog and not been told the truth about said dog. Was told they could no longer adopt from that rescue
 - Shelter said they turned in previous animals but they did not
- **Other (12.7%), including:**
 - Required another dog in the home.
 - I did not like that person in charge. Unprofessional & rude communication. Young volunteer
 - My neighbor was planning on adopting a pregnant female from a rescue. Puppies were birthed in her home
 - She brought her references to the shelter, they wanted someone at home with a phone
 - My husband did not want a cat
 - My kids have seasonal allergies
 - I was separated from my husband who had our 2 dogs. I was denied in case I went back with my husband
 - For asking too many questions, believe it or not. This was back in 2004
 - Breed-specific rescue group that I later read online denied adoptions to anyone that wasn't in their "inner circle" of pure-bred owners