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## **KNOWLEDGE OF BENEFITS KEY TO MORE CATS BEING DESEXED**

Providing information about the health benefits of early-age desexing (between 8 and 16 weeks) could increase the rate of cat desexing by up to 11%.

Research conducted by Ipsos for the Cat Protection Society of NSW has found that while the majority of cat owners in NSW are responsible (89% of cats are desexed, 78% are vaccinated and 73% are registered) there is still scope to significantly improve feline welfare.

The survey compared the likelihood of desexing cats before and after health messages about early-age desexing were provided. It found that people would be more likely to desex their cat or kitten if they knew of the benefits.

“Because cats are remarkably fertile, even a small increase in the number desexed before sexual maturity will have a big impact on the number of kittens born,” Cat Protection CEO Kristina Vesik said.

“This will mean fewer kittens being abandoned or surrendered to pounds and shelters.”

There are proven health and welfare benefits to early-age desexing: it reduces the risk of a number of feline cancers; prevents the development of behaviours associated with sexual maturity such as wandering, ‘spraying’ (urine) and fighting; promotes socialisation; and there is a faster recovery time from surgery. And of course, it prevents unplanned litters.

“Two decades of evidence show that early-age desexing is medically and behaviourally safe, however, many people remain unaware of its benefits,” she said.

“Those of us in the animal welfare and veterinary sectors need to do more to educate people about the benefits of early-age desexing if we are to manage feline population growth.”

Cost can be an issue: of the surveyed undesexed cat population, one in five (20%) had not been desexed because their owners considered cost to be a barrier. Interestingly, people who had not desexed all their cats estimated the cost to be higher than those who had.

Another finding was that people who have not desexed all their cats are more likely to feed stray cats.

“This is not surprising,” Ms Vesik said. “Their undesexed cats act as a magnet to stray undesexed cats looking for mates ... and sadly the result will be even more homeless cats.

“On the whole, the research has lots of good news: most people thinking about getting a cat would adopt from a pound or shelter; most cat owners do the right thing and desex, vaccinate and register their cats.

“But we need to increase compliance with these fundamentals if we’re to improve feline welfare.

“The outbreak of Feline Panleukopaenia Virus in Sydney earlier this year was a devastating reminder of what happens when ‘herd health’ is not maintained through adequate population vaccination.

“Reuniting lost cats with their owners is practically impossible if the cat is not registered and we know that there are simply more cats and kittens than homes, so we have to tackle population management.

“This survey gives us a foundation to work from and importantly, to recognise that cat owners are responsive to information to help them make decisions that are positive for their cats and for feline welfare generally,” Ms Vesk said.

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### **Further resources**

*The Cat Protection Society of NSW developed a CPD-points accredited education package for veterinarians on early-age desexing, which is available free of charge for vets at Cat Protection’s website for professionals: [www.catcare.org.au](http://www.catcare.org.au)*

*A program on responsible cat ownership – The Good Neighbour Project – is available at Cat Protection’s website: <https://www.catprotection.org.au/index.php/responsible-cat-ownership>*

*Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery Open Reports article “Effect of age and surgical approach on perioperative wound complication following ovariohysterectomy in shelter-housed cats in Australia” can be downloaded from that page*

*A video on the benefits of early-age desexing is also available from that page*

### **About Ipsos [www.ipsos.com.au](http://www.ipsos.com.au)**

*Ipsos conducted an online survey of 519 men and women aged 18+ years, living in New South Wales. The research was conducted between 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. The sample comprised of 363 cat owners (who collectively own a total of 554 cats) and 156 non-cat owners.*

*Ipsos is an independent market research company, ranking third world-wide with presence in 87 countries. Ipsos delivers insightful expertise across six research specializations: advertising, customer loyalty, marketing, media, public affairs research and survey management.*