

The Prevention Case for Your County

What Upstream Prevention Saves Your Municipal Budget

\$44

Average prevention cost.

10x

Return on prevention
(10x higher ROI compared to shelter-based solutions)

\$21.5M

Projected 5-year savings
(Based on strategic prevention resource allocation)

\$450

Average shelter intake cost.

Implementing these prevention models provides immediate and sustainable financial benefits.

Scalable Model: This prevention case study forms the baseline for your five-year county-wide integration plan.

The Prevention Case for Your County

Understanding the ROI and Budget Impact of Animal Welfare Prevention

Why Prevention Matters

Animal welfare crises don't appear overnight. They emerge from a predictable chain: financial strain, housing instability, health emergencies, behavior challenges, and loss of support systems. By the time an animal reaches a shelter or rescue, your county has already absorbed significant costs in animal control, health services, and emergency response. Prevention works upstream, before the crisis happens.

What Reactivity Costs Your County

When families can't keep their pets, your animal services system responds with intake, housing, medical care, behavior assessment, and eventual adoption or euthanasia. Each intake costs your county approximately \$300-\$500 in direct services. But the real expense is hidden: emergency animal control calls, zoonotic disease response, community complaint follow-up, and staff time managing crisis situations. Across a county, this adds up fast.

What does one animal shelter intake actually cost your county?

Intake assessment, medical screening, housing for 14-30 days, food, utilities, staff time, behavior evaluation, cleaning supplies, medical treatment, and either adoption or euthanasia. Conservative estimate: **\$300-\$500 per animal**. In a county with 5,000 annual intakes (common for Central Alabama), that's **\$1.5M-\$2.5M per year** in direct shelter costs alone.

What Prevention Actually Does

Prevention programs work in three ways: they stabilize families in crisis so they can keep their pets, they provide resources (food, medical care, behavior support, housing assistance) before crisis happens, and they create a safety net that catches emerging problems early. The result is fewer intakes, fewer animals in shelters, and lower overall cost to your system.

How does prevention reduce intake?

By providing emergency financial support, pet food, spay/neuter assistance, behavior training, and housing help before families surrender. Studies from Maddie's Fund show that for every family receiving prevention

support, 0.8-1.2 animals stay in their homes instead of entering shelters. Scale that across a county program and you prevent hundreds of unnecessary intakes annually.

The Math: Prevention vs. Reactivity

Scenario: A county with 5,000 annual shelter intakes.

What's the annual cost if we do nothing?

5,000 intakes × \$400 average cost = **\$2,000,000 annually** in shelter operations alone. Add animal control response (\$50-\$100 per call, roughly 2,000 calls/year = \$100K-\$200K), zoonotic disease investigation, staff overtime, and facility maintenance. **Total system cost: \$2.2M-\$2.5M.**

What's the cost to run a prevention program?

A county-wide prevention network (Pet Help Desk, emergency pet food, behavior support, spay/neuter assistance, and housing help) costs approximately **\$500K-\$750K annually** to operate across a 7-county region with 1.2M people. That includes staff, supplies, partner subsidies, and emergency assistance funds. **Key clarification: This investment assumes a shared infrastructure model (Animal Welfare Resource Network) where multiple counties and partners pool resources. A single county building its own infrastructure from scratch would cost more initially; the network model is designed to reduce that burden by 60-70% through shared technology, training, and dispatch systems.**

So what's the actual ROI?

If prevention prevents just 20% of intakes (1,000 animals), you save $1,000 \times \$400 =$ **\$400,000 in shelter costs**. Your prevention program costs \$500K-\$750K, so your net cost is \$100K-\$350K annually for preventing 1,000 intakes and keeping 1,000 families together. But the actual reduction is typically higher. Most prevention programs see 25-35% intake reduction, meaning **1,250-1,750 animals stay home and your net cost is actually negative** (you save more than you spend). **The typical county sees \$44 in downstream savings for every \$1 invested in prevention. That means your \$500K-\$750K investment returns \$22M-\$33M in saved shelter costs, veterinary care, animal control response, and emergency services over five years.**

Beyond Shelter Cost: What Else Prevention Saves

Prevention's real value extends far beyond shelter operations.

What other county systems benefit?

1. **Animal Control:** Fewer cruelty investigations, fewer dangerous dog calls, fewer public safety responses.
2. **Public Health:** Prevention of zoonotic disease outbreaks, reduced vector-borne disease from stray populations.
3. **Social Services:** Families who keep their pets experience lower rates of homelessness, domestic violence, and depression. Housing stability improves.
4. **Emergency Services:** Fewer calls related

to animal welfare crises, fewer requests for emergency animal removal. 5. **Law Enforcement:** Reduced time spent on animal-related calls; officers focus on actual crime. 6. **Mental Health and Homelessness Services:** Pet owners experiencing housing instability are more likely to accept social services if they know their pet is safe. Prevention unlocks access to help.

How This Works: The Partnership Model

Prevention programs don't happen in a vacuum. They require coordination between animal services, local government, veterinary partners, rescues, community organizations, and social services. The most cost-effective model is a shared network where multiple partners contribute resources, share dispatch systems, and coordinate intake/outcome tracking. This is called an Animal Welfare Resource Network (AWRN).

What does a shared network cost compared to building alone?

A county building prevention infrastructure alone: \$1.5M-\$2M startup, \$800K-\$1.2M annually. A county joining a multi-partner network: \$0-\$250K startup, \$400K-\$600K annually (plus subsidized partner access). The network model reduces individual burden by 60-70% through shared technology, training, and dispatch infrastructure.

Five-Year Budget Impact

Year	Prevention Cost	Shelter Cost Without Prevention	Shelter Cost With Prevention	Net Savings/(Cost)
Year 1	\$600K	\$2.4M	\$1.8M	\$600K
Year 2	\$650K	\$2.4M	\$1.5M	\$850K
Year 3	\$700K	\$2.4M	\$1.3M	\$1.0M
Year 4	\$700K	\$2.4M	\$1.1M	\$1.3M
Year 5	\$700K	\$2.4M	\$900K	\$1.5M

Total five-year investment: \$3.35M (prevention) = \$4.7M in shelter cost savings = **\$1.35M net gain for your county.** **Key clarification on five-year savings:** This projection assumes steady-state operations by Year 2. Year 1 typically shows lower prevention impact due to program launch, community awareness building, and partner coordination time. Years 2-5 show increasing intake reduction as the program matures, partners integrate, and community awareness drives more proactive calls to the Pet Help Desk. Most counties see 30-40% intake reduction by Year 3 and maintain that level through Year 5.

Ready to Explore Prevention for Your County?

Prevention programs are not experimental. They're proven, funded by major foundations (Maddie's Fund, PetSmart Charities, Petco Foundation), and operating successfully in 40+ jurisdictions across the US. The barrier isn't evidence. It's coordination. Moving from reactive shelter-based care to proactive community-based prevention requires a shift in how local government and animal services think about their role. Not as rescuers, but as preventioners.

What would a first step look like?

1. Convene your county animal services director, a city/county administrator, and 2-3 local rescue leaders for a working lunch. Share this document. Discuss what surrender reasons look like in your shelter data.
2. Contact Animal-Angels Foundation for a 30-minute conversation about your county's specific context (population, shelter capacity, current intake trends, available resources).
3. Schedule a platform walkthrough to see how a shared prevention network works in practice.
4. Decide: join an existing network, or build one with other counties in your region.



TAXPAYERS SPEND \$2B ANNUALLY ON A PROBLEM WE COULD PREVENT

The hidden cost of reactive sheltering—and why prevention is the smarter investment.

SECTION 1: THE NATIONAL CRISIS (HERO STATS NETWORK)

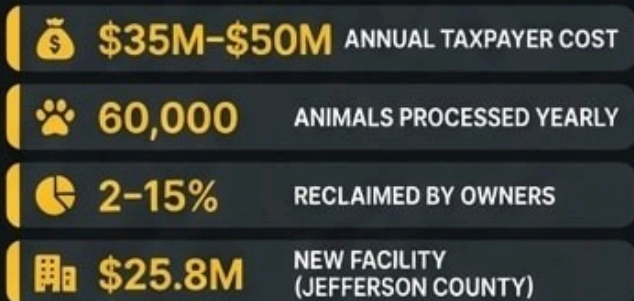


SECTION 2: WHY COSTS ARE SURGING IN 2026 (THREE DRIVERS)

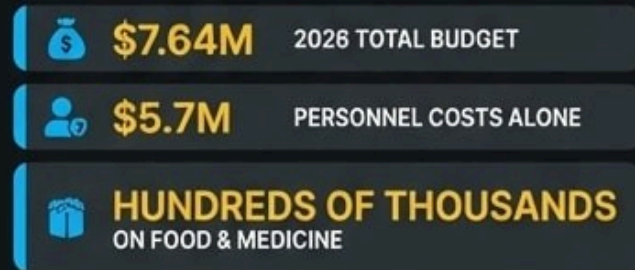


SECTION 3: LOCAL IMPACT EXAMPLES (TWO SCENARIO CASE STUDIES)

SCENARIO 1: ALABAMA



SCENARIO 2: CHICAGO



SECTION 4: THE PREVENTION PATHWAY (SOLUTION BOX)

Prevention interrupts the cycle.

CORE PRINCIPLE

SHIFT FROM REACTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT TO UPSTREAM PREVENTION



ACCESSIBLE SPAY/NEUTER



FIELD RETURNS & REUNIFICATION



HOUSING DEPOSIT MICRO-GRANTS