

This excerpt has been edited for length and clarity.

The major factor limiting intake in our rescue, and perhaps in most foster-based rescues, is availability of foster homes to accept dogs in need.

When foster availability is a constraint, it is due to two obstacles, each of which presents a unique path for improvement. The two obstacles are foster capacity (which can be improved by increasing the number of active foster homes) and the length of time that foster dogs occupy a foster home (which can be addressed by increasing the rate of adoptions). For the past several years we have worked to address the first of these problems by increasing our number of senior dog foster homes. However, given the nature of senior dog populations, we need to address both sides of the equation. For the purposes of this proposal, therefore, I will focus on length of stay as a problem, and will examine the major causes for senior dogs' increased length of stay.

On average, senior boxers remain in our care for significantly longer than adult dogs. Of dogs adopted in 2019, seniors were adopted after an average of 313 days, and adults were adopted after an average of 139 days.

One common strategy to incentivize adoption of senior dogs is reduced or waived adoption fees. However, this has proved insufficient incentive to overcome the barrier of anticipated veterinary costs for large senior dogs - especially for a breed that is prone to cancers, cardiac disease, ophthalmic issues, and orthopedic ailments. For at least the last 8 years our adoption fee for seniors has been only \$150, which is less than half the adoption fee for an adult dog.

We recently conducted a survey of NCBR adopters and volunteers to further evaluate perceptions about seniors and senior adoptions, and this survey confirmed that post-adoption veterinary costs are a major deterrent to people considering adopting a senior dog. The survey was shared within a closed group of 447 NCBR volunteers and adopters.

The survey asked respondents to gauge how closely a series of statements reflected their feelings about senior dogs and adoption. The statement with which respondents most strongly agreed was, "I would rather adopt an adult or younger dog so that I will be more likely to enjoy more years with him or her." The statement with the second highest agreement value was "I would hesitate to adopt a senior dog due to the increased cost of veterinary care for age-related issues." This shows that by far, the two most important factors influencing an adopter's decision not to adopt a senior are concerns about shorter lifespan and anticipation of increased veterinary costs. While we cannot change the fact that geriatric dogs are usually closer to the end of their lives than their younger counterparts, the cost of veterinary care is not a problem that is intrinsic to the dog, but rather is an external problem we can address.

We propose a program to alleviate adoptive applicants' concerns about the financial cost of adopting a senior. By reducing this barrier to senior dog adoption, we believe that we can accelerate the rate of adoption for senior dogs, encourage adoption of long-term senior fosters, and accommodate more senior dogs in our foster program. We will accomplish this by providing post-adoption financial support to adopters of senior dogs. Specifically, we will offer up to \$1,000 in reimbursement for post-adoption veterinary expenses (including medications or veterinary services) that are incurred within the first year after adoption.

To determine the \$1,000 limit of our post-adoption support, we evaluated the cost of our senior dogs after their initial intake vetting. On average, we spent just over \$2,100 in care (not including care

immediately post-intake) per adoptable senior dog in 2019. We did not including hospice dogs in this calculation, because those dogs were not available for adoption and would not have benefitted from this program. \$1,000 is therefore a sum that we anticipate would be fully used by adopters and would be perceived as significant support in their first year after adoption.

It is our hope and expectation that this financial support would incentivize adoption for people who have sympathy for senior dogs but have been reluctant to adopt them due to the anticipated costs of their veterinary care. The Grey Muzzle funds would be used for a pilot version of this program, where post-adoption support would be offered for to the first 10 adopters of senior dogs. We are asking for support for 10 dogs for two reasons. Firstly, we feel certain based on our senior adoption trends that 10 is a number of senior adoptions we can achieve even if the result of this pilot is that post-adoption support does not accelerate senior adoptions. And, secondly, for our volume of adoptions, it is a minimum number of adoptions we would need to comfortably draw conclusions about the program's value.