



## Public Veterinary Hospitals SÃO PAULO

### INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO CARE FOR DOMESTIC CATS AND DOGS

## Summary

According to official data, in São Paulo, there are almost two million dogs and cats living in the homes of the city's over 12 million inhabitants. These animals are exposed to various health problems (viruses, bacterial infections, fractures...) and may require veterinary medical treatment that a significant number of their owners cannot afford.

This reality triggers a range of problems for the municipality, such as the abandonment of animals in public spaces, their suffering due to lack of assistance, and the worsening of their hygienic and sanitary conditions, which translate

into potential risks for the environment, animal welfare and human health.

For all these reasons, São Paulo City Council decided to intervene within the framework of its numerous commitments in terms of the health, care and protection of animals. Thus, in 2012, it set up Brazil's first Public Veterinary Hospital, offering free clinical and surgical care to the dogs and cats belonging to the city's residents.

The hospital offers its services free of charge to those owners who are facing financial difficulties, with the aim of ensuring that they can care for their pets on equal terms.

Due to the success of the initiative, two new hospitals were opened in 2014 and 2020 in different areas of the city.

**City:**  
São Paulo  
**Country:**  
Brazil

**Inhabitants:**  
12.000.000

**Topics:** Animal welfare, Public health, Social Inclusion

São Paulo organised the 10th International Congress of the IAEC in 2008, the first in Latin America, and has been a member of the Executive Committee



## Goals

- ▶ To provide access to free, quality veterinary care for pet owners (dogs and cats) from low-income households.
- ▶ To foster responsible pet ownership, preventing their suffering and/or abandonment.
- ▶ To raise public awareness of the responsibility involved in the care of pets in order to prevent their abandonment.
- ▶ To prevent potential risks to public health and the environment arising from the deterioration of pets' health and/or their abandonment in public spaces.



## Context

With its 12 million inhabitants and a total area of more than 1,500 square kilometres, São Paulo is the largest city in Brazil and one of South America's main financial, corporate and commercial centres.

São Paulo has extensive legislation on the care of dogs and cats, laws on the

protection and welfare of pets, and regulations on their sale, donation and reproductive control, among others.

Its municipal pet registry came into force in 2013, and has nearly two million registered dogs and cats.



## Methodology

The Public Veterinary Hospitals offer free consultations, surgeries, laboratory tests and hospitalisation for dogs and cats in seven veterinary specialities: ophthalmology, cardiology, endocrinology, neurology, oncology, orthopaedics and dentistry. On average, each centre employs around 30 veterinary professionals and 26 support workers (general assistants, nursing and administrative staff). Each hospital boasts a comprehensive structure, consisting of six consulting rooms, two infirmaries, three surgical units and two in-patient wards (one for cats and one for dogs), as well as a reception with capacity to seat 50 people.

In order to access the service, users must be over 18 years of age, be residents of the city of São Paulo and provide documents proving ownership of the animal through its registration in the municipal pet registry.

As one of the main objectives of the project is to democratise access to pet care, the hospital centres have been located in different areas at strategic points in the city. To ensure that those residents with limited purchasing power are assisted, it is verified whether they are beneficiaries of existing social assistance programmes.

The veterinary care service is provided within the facilities set up by São Paulo City Council. It is implemented through a

collaboration agreement with a civil society organisation selected through a public tender offer. The follow-up of this agreement takes the form of a monitoring plan ensured by a team of municipal veterinarians, which includes regular visits to the facilities and the control of electronic records.

The Public Veterinary Hospitals are integrated into the city of São Paulo's animal protection system, which is led by the Health and Protection of Domestic Animals Division. This body, created in 2017, has the mission of strengthening the fabric of associations in this domain, defining consensual strategies and protocols for action, as well as the professional training of civil servants.



## ★ Evaluation

An average of 80,000 consultations are carried out each year between the three public veterinary hospitals. In this sense, the success of the initiative provides clear proof of the need to democratise access to veterinary care, to ensure the welfare of dogs and cats living in economically vulnerable households.

It is worth highlighting that this model of free veterinary care has been pioneering across Brazil, and it has inspired other cities in the country to replicate the service. The initiative is part of a municipal strategy that, through public policies and regulations, is firmly committed to guaranteeing the dignity and care of animals. This has been recognised through various awards, such as the

Animal Friendly City award in 2019, a joint initiative of the NGO World Animal Protection and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO).

In addition to veterinary care, the work carried out in the centres has strengthened and generated synergies with other municipal services and programmes. Thus, the centres act as hubs to promote education on responsible pet ownership, acting as a platform to publicise the awareness-raising materials and campaigns developed by São Paulo City Council.

Similarly, they work in close collaboration with the Municipal Centre for the adoption of dogs and cats, leading to the creation of a special card that provides

preferential care attention to those who have adopted older animals, in a bid to overcome the difficulties that exist in finding homes for them.

The veterinary care offered by the service contributes to the health and well-being of pets, which has an impact on the emotional health and quality of life of their owners. It also helps to reduce the abandonment of animals and the spread of zoonoses (diseases transmitted from vertebrate animals to humans).

The main difficulty observed is the high demand for services, which means that they are often saturated.

## ➔ Future proposals

Looking ahead to the future, given the relevance of the work carried out and the great demand for it, it is planned to further consolidate the service by opening a fourth veterinary hospital.



## i Contact

- **Organisation:** São Paulo City Council
- **Contact Person:** Ms. Telma Rocha Tavares (Technical Advisor, Health and Protection of Domestic Animals Division)
- **E-mail:** telmartavares@prefeitura.sp.gov.br

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