

HAS THE MANAGEMENT OF STRAY DOG POPULATIONS AND RABIES CONTROL IMPROVED SINCE 2008?

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Stray and feral dogs pose serious risks to public health and safety. The prevention of zoonotic diseases, notably rabies, depends, *inter alia*, on effective control of stray dog populations, which should be considered as a priority. Dog culling alone has never had a significant impact on dog population densities and has never been effective in controlling or eliminating canine rabies. It is therefore not recommended as a rabies control strategy on its own.

At the 2nd OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare (Cairo, 2008), the OIE was asked to develop standards on effective and humane methods for control of stray dog populations. Terrestrial Code Chapter 7.7., adopted by the OIE in 2009, covers this topic. The control of dog populations and movements is integral to the implementation of effective canine rabies control and eventual elimination. The removal of unmanageable and unwanted stray dogs, linked with effective dog vaccination campaigns, can enhance the effectiveness of disease control.

Rabies elimination programs often resort to inhumane methods of dog population control. Removal of dogs must be carried out humanely and any campaigns that include removal or euthanasia of dogs should ensure that animal welfare principles are consistently adhered to throughout these programs. It is imperative that the measures employed are compliant with international guidelines and standards set by OIE, WHO and the Partners for Rabies Prevention.

The animal welfare community has a strong impetus for supporting rabies control programs that are effective and humane. Removal of unmanageable and unwanted stray dogs linked with dog vaccination campaigns can enhance the effectiveness of such programs.

This paper presents information showing that the management of stray dog populations and rabies control has improved incrementally since 2008. However, much remains to be done. The challenge remains to find the most humane approach to dog population management. The institutionalisation of responsible pet ownership (RPO) programs could include mandatory registration of dogs to establish dog ownership and facilitate traceability of biting incidents, strict imposition of penalties for negligent dog owners, integration of rabies and RPO education in the elementary school curriculum, continuous general public information and updating of local and national legislation pertaining to canine rabies elimination program.

Keywords: rabies elimination – dog population management – OIE animal welfare standards.