

The bond factor

Elevating veterinary care
through the human-animal bond

chewy
Health

habri
human animal bond
research institute

Table of contents

- 2** Foreword
- 3** Introduction
- 4** Anatomy of a bond
- 7** The bond effect: challenges impacting the bond
- 14** Build-a-bond: improving the vet-client-pet relationship
- 21** The bottom line





Foreword

The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) and Chewy Health partnered to better understand the real-world challenges pet owners face surrounding care, the direct impact these issues can have on the human-animal bond, and how tech-driven innovations are presenting new solutions for both veterinary teams and pet owners.

The Pet Health Challenges Study is based on a nationally representative survey of 2,005 U.S. dog and cat owners over 18 years old who were identified as the primary decision makers for their pet's health. The study provides insights that highlight the emotional, financial, and logistical challenges pet owners face, as well as key opportunities for veterinary teams to support pet owners throughout the pet care journey.

The bond factor applies the insights gathered through this research into a practical guide for veterinary professionals to better understand the needs and concerns of pet owners and includes key actionable takeaways to help increase client satisfaction, leverage technology, and foster stronger bonds throughout the pet care experience.

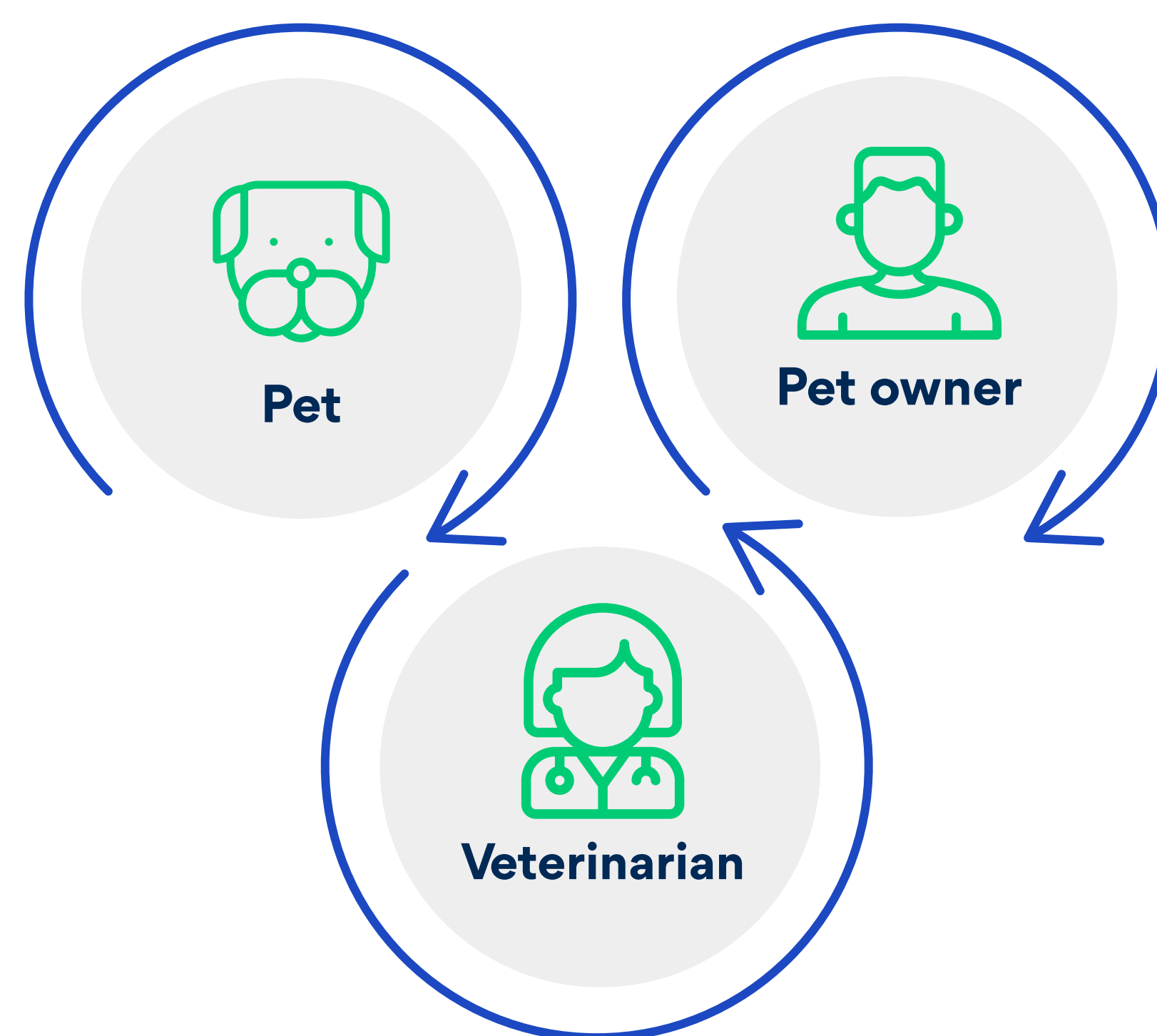


Introduction

In today's evolving pet care landscape, one truth remains constant—the human-animal bond is a key driver of pet owner decision-making.

While medical expertise is the foundation of veterinary medicine, the future of pet care and the strength of the relationships between veterinary teams and clients depends on acknowledging and nurturing the human-animal bond.

There is an opportunity within the profession to help more pet owners recognize and connect with the valuable care provided by a trusted veterinary team. By offering support on topics that matter most to clients and identifying their preferred touchpoints, veterinary teams can build even stronger relationships that pave the way for lasting veterinary-client bonds.



Anatomy of a bond

Understanding the human-animal bond

The human-animal bond

Noun

- 1) The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial relationship between people and animals. It's influenced by behaviors essential to the mental, physical, and social health and wellbeing of both. The veterinarian's role is to maximize the potential of this relationship and to promote the wellbeing of people and animals.
- 2) To measure the bond, HABRI developed the Human Animal Bond (HAB) Score, an aggregate measure of 14 statements that examine the bond across four distinct dimensions: attachment, humanization, commitment and integration. Statements range from “I miss my pet when I’m away,” to “My pet understands how I’m feeling,” to “My pet is allowed on the bed”.
- 3) Bond Scores are classified as: **strong bond, stronger bond, strongest bond.**

The human-animal bond is stronger than ever.
The overall HAB Score for pet owners in the Pet Health Challenges survey was **60 out of 70**, the highest average bond score ever recorded in a survey of U.S. pet owners.

As pets are increasingly viewed as family members, best friends, and sources of support, the strength of the human-animal bond becomes a representation of the essential and highly beneficial role pets play in both our physical and mental health.

The strength of the human-animal bond also correlates to the people behind the bonds, their behavior as it relates to pet care decisions, and the subsequent impact on the veterinary-client relationship.

Survey findings

77%

77% describe their pet as their best friend.

90%

90% report that their pet has had a positive impact on their mental or physical wellbeing.

97%

97% consider their pet a member of the family.

Meet the humans



The devoted dog mom

Represents pet owners who see their pet as a central emotional figure—like a child. They are highly invested, both emotionally and financially, **prioritize quality of care, and are comfortable with digital tools** that enhance their pet’s health and happiness.

- **Bond Level:** Strongest
- **Age:** Millennial (29-44)
- **Gender:** Female
- **Income:** <\$100K (avg \$61K)
- **Pets:** Only owns dogs
- **Average pet age:** 5

Relationship with pets:

Considers their pet to be part of the family **(99%)**, celebrates their pet’s birthday **(91%)**, willing to make major life changes to accommodate their pet **(90%)**, struggles to leave the pet **(54%)**.

Approach to care:

Money is no object when it comes to their dog **(52%)**, sacrifices personal purchases to meet pet needs **(74%)**, visits the veterinarian at least once a year **(89%)**.

Tech preferences:

Highest tech adoption, uses apps **(41%)** and smart devices **(41%)**.

Priorities include:

Convenience and affordability through loyalty programs, pet insurance, and credit options.



The family-oriented multi-pet caregiver

Represents a practical, family-minded pet owner who balances affection with frugality. Their strong emotional connection is evident, but they seek **smart, affordable care solutions** and occasionally adopt tech to simplify pet ownership.

- **Bond level:** Strong
- **Age:** Gen X (45-60)
- **Gender:** Male/Female split
- **Income:** <\$100K (avg. \$64K)
- **Pets:** Owns both cats and dogs
- **Average pet age:** 5.7

Relationship with pets:

Sees pet as part of the family **(92%)**, engages with pet daily through play and interaction **(76%)**.

Approach to care:

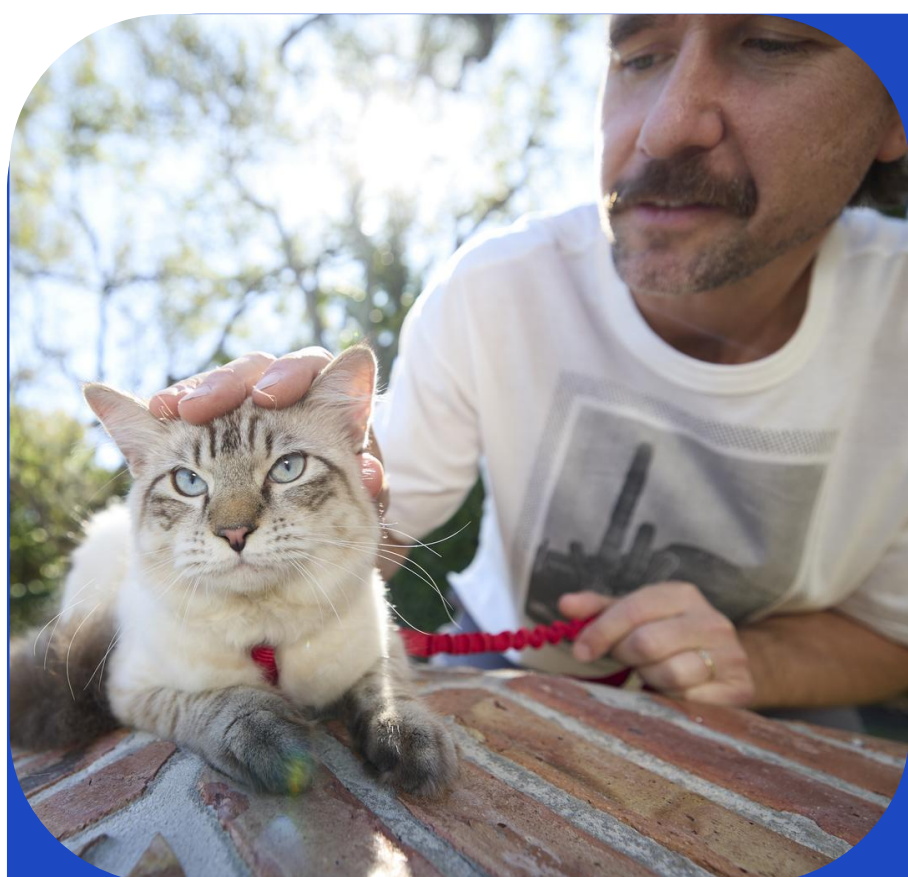
Spends a moderate amount on pet care **(52%)**, open to cost-saving and affordability-focused tech **(89%)**.

Tech preferences:

Familiar with tech but doesn't utilize often, includes digital tools like apps **(41%)** and telehealth **(13%)**.

Priorities include:

Behavior management **(33%)**, veterinary-related needs **(41%)**, physical and mental health **(31%)**.



The independent senior cat companion

Represents a low-engagement, cost-conscious pet owner who values companionship but limits investment in care. Overall, there is a lighter bond than others. Tech-averse and challenged by the cost and logistics of care, this group may need **simplified, affordable solutions** to increase engagement.

- **Bond level:** Not as strong
- **Age:** Baby Boomer (61-70)
- **Gender:** Male
- **Income:** Mixed, some high-income retirees (avg. \$68K)
- **Pets:** Multiple cats (46%)
- **Average pet age:** 5.8 years

Relationship with pets:

Views pet as more of a companion **(21%)** or just a pet **(9%)**, views pet as part of the family **(51%)**, rarely travels with pet **(4%)**.

Approach to care:

Budget conscious **(35%)**, concerned about affording veterinary care **(45%)**, visits the veterinarian less than once a year **(18%)**.

Tech preferences:

Low tech usage.

Priorities include:

High concern about travel logistics and boarding **(80%)**, very high concerns over veterinary costs and access **(91%)**.

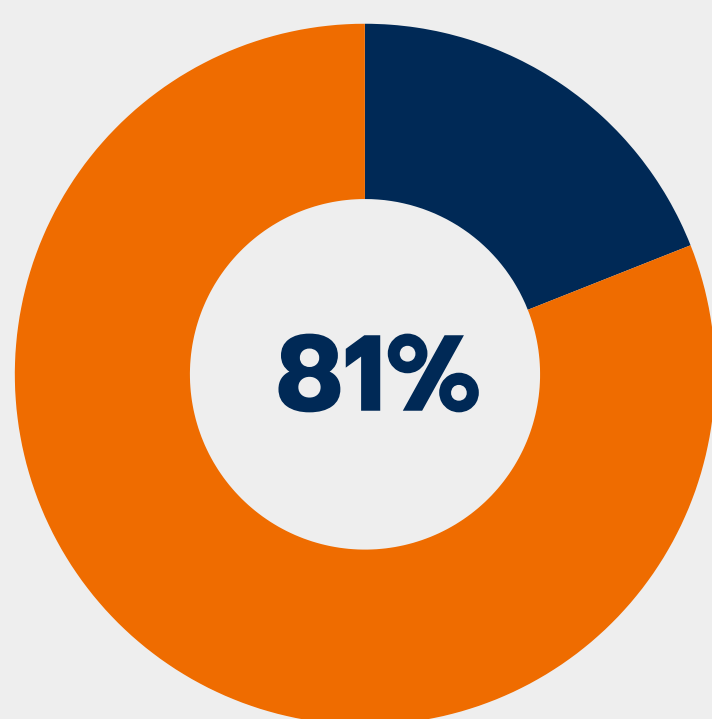
What does the human-animal bond mean for veterinary care?

The human-animal bond profoundly shapes attitudes and behavior related to pet care decisions. Pet owners with the strongest human-animal bonds visit the veterinarian more often. While **81%** of all pet owners reported visiting the veterinarian once a year or more, **89%** of those with the **strongest bonds** reported the same.

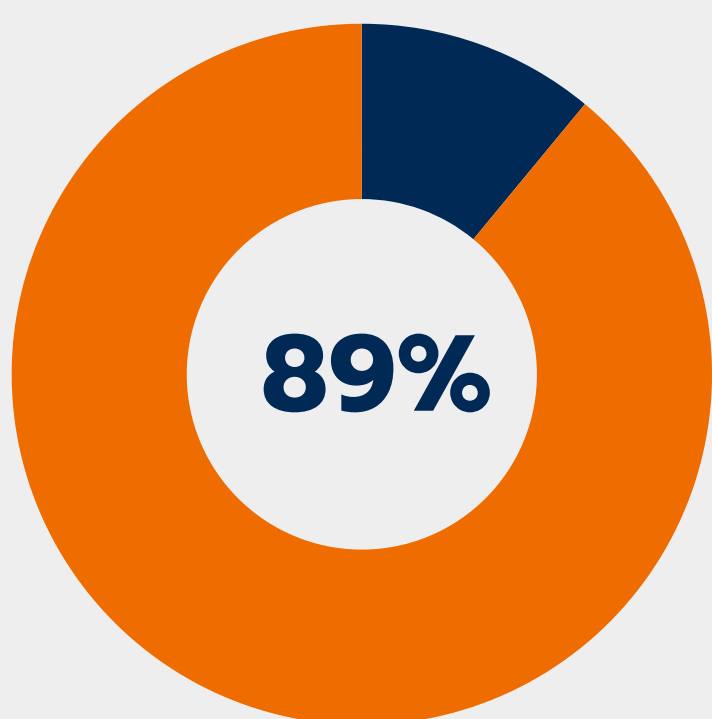
A stronger bond also correlates to a higher willingness to spend on veterinary care. When it comes to paying whatever it takes should their pets need extensive veterinary care, **83%** of all pet owners agreed while **99%** of pet owners with the **strongest bonds** agreed.

This provides powerful insight into how veterinary teams can connect more deeply with pet owners by tapping into the human-animal bond to help unlock deeper trust, collaboration, and better care for pets.

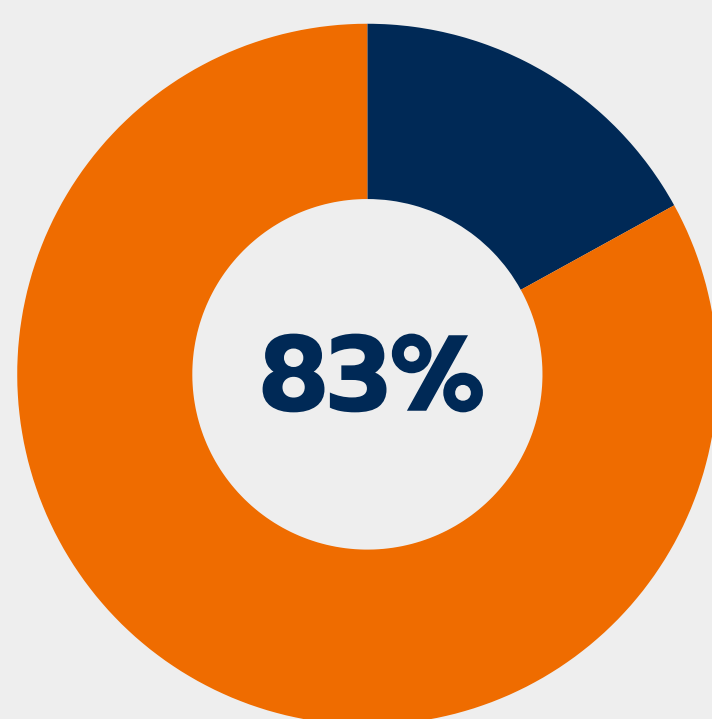
Survey findings



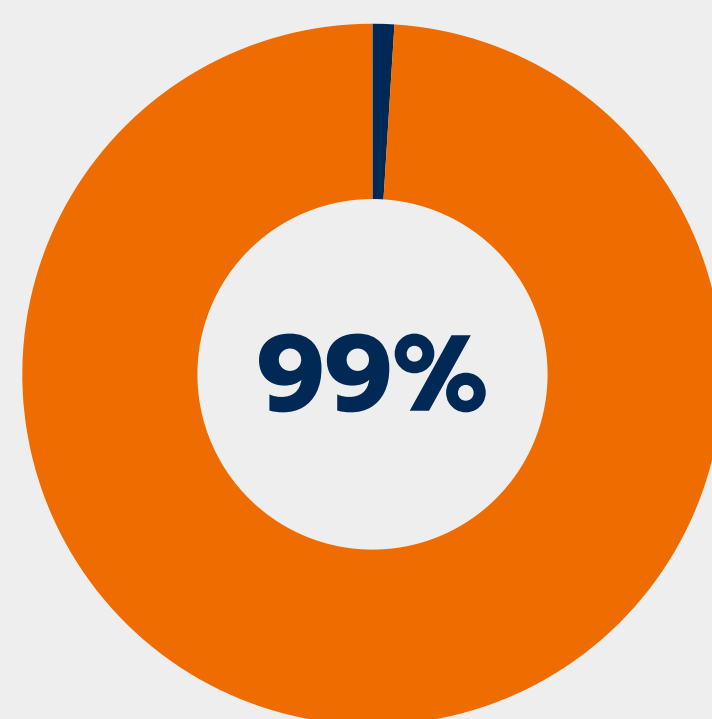
81% of all pet owners reported visiting the veterinarian once a year or more.



89% of those with the **strongest bonds** reported this level of visitation.



83% of all pet owners said that they would pay whatever it takes if their pets needed extensive veterinary care.



99% of pet owners with the **strongest bonds** would pay whatever it takes should their pets need extensive veterinary care.



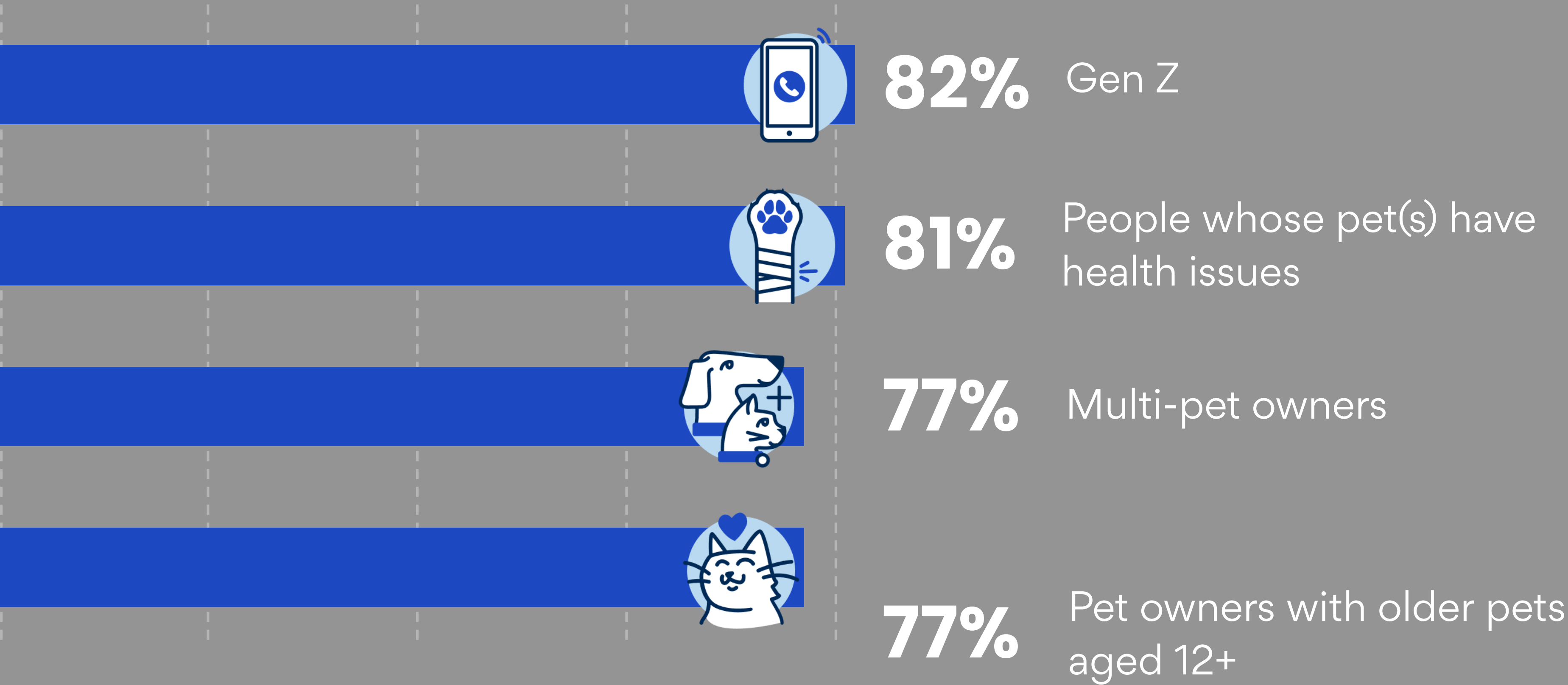
The bond effect

Challenges impacting the bond

There is often a disconnect between how much pet owners want to do for their pets and the real-world challenges they face. Furthermore, these challenges can often occur simultaneously, highlighting the complex, interconnected nature of pet ownership. Understanding the range of challenges pet owners face can help inform veterinary teams how to support clients and further strengthen that bond.

74%
of pet owners consider at least one aspect of pet ownership to be extremely or very challenging.

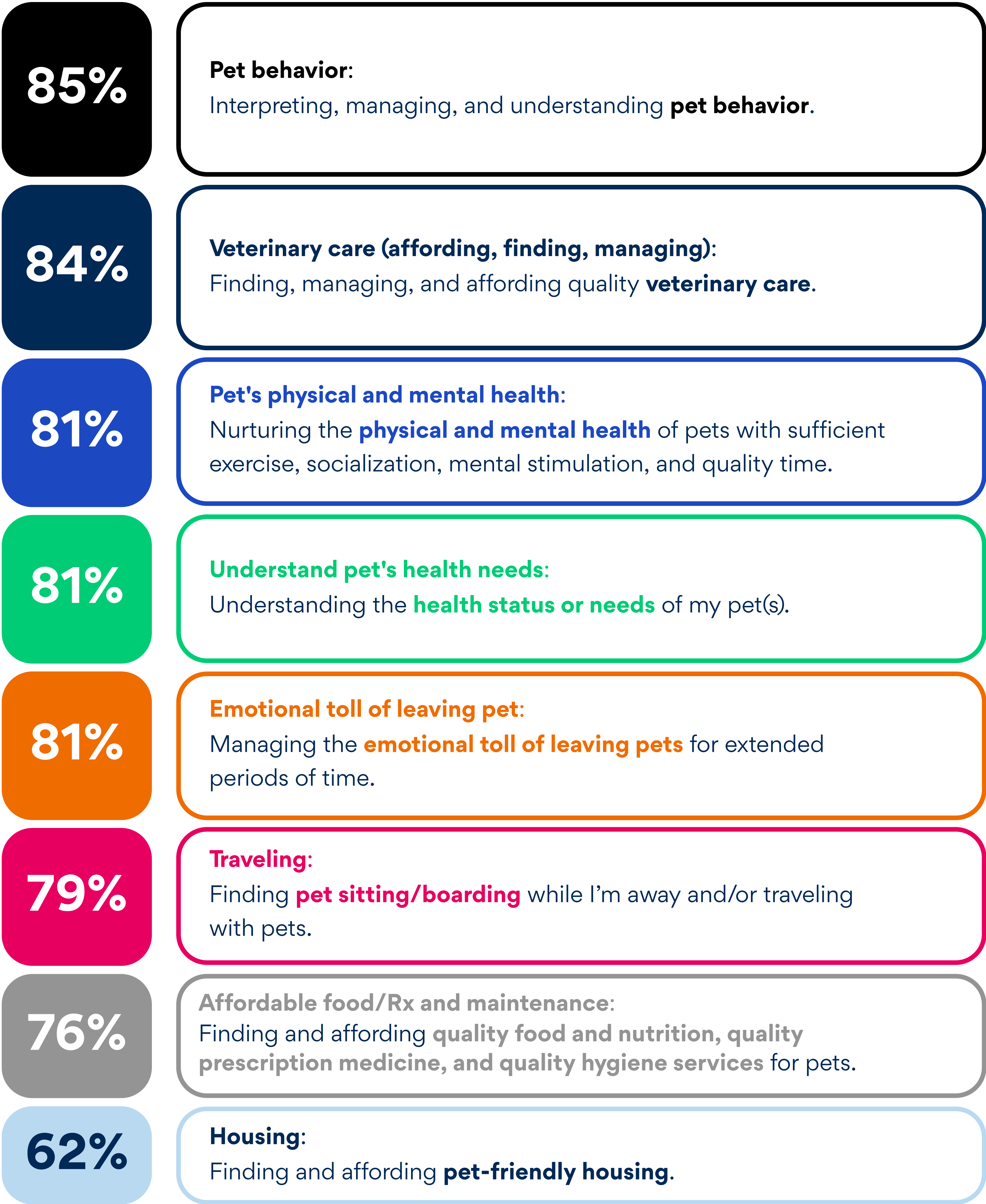
Groups that face the most challenges



The core eight pet owner challenges

We asked: How challenging do you find the following aspects of being a pet owner.

All were seen as at least slightly challenging.



Breaking down key challenges

1

Understanding pets: Pets can often experience symptoms that are vague or easily misunderstood. And if the patient can't speak, that's where the veterinary team comes in. When pet owners don't feel equipped to identify potential problems or know when to seek care, treatment may be delayed which can lead to increased stress for owners and potential harm for pets.

2

Affordability of pet care: While affordability is among the top challenges overall, it disproportionately impacts those with fewer financial resources, multi-pet households, and pets with health issues. This creates an opportunity to explore cost-effective solutions to make care more accessible, even for more vulnerable pet owners.

3

Emotional toll of leaving pets: This is a universal hurdle for pet owners transcending income, household status, type of pets, and number of pets. This shared experience signals an opportunity to implement technology solutions rooted in empathy to help ease the stress of separation for animals and humans alike.

Survey findings

82%

82% of pet owners struggle to understand their pet's health needs.

83%

83% of pet owners say they are willing to pay whatever it takes to take care of their pets.

47%

47% report health-related struggles with Gen Z (57%) and Millennials (48%) feeling it most.

Challenges to the veterinary-client relationship/bond

Although **92%** of pet owners have a veterinarian and **98%** report being satisfied with their veterinarian, only **36%** said they were **extremely** satisfied.

This demonstrates significant opportunity to improve the veterinary-client relationship by focusing on the top three factors that affect veterinary-client satisfaction—trust, access, and understanding.

Understanding what pet owners are looking for from their veterinary team opens the door for solutions like communication strategies, digital tools, and educational content that can help empower pet owners to interpret symptoms, track health patterns, and understand when to seek care with more confidence and less stress.

Survey findings

In-person visits (**82%**) and phone calls (**75%**) are strongly associated with higher satisfaction.

Top 5 elements influencing veterinary satisfaction

- 1

Finding a veterinarian I like.
- 2

Trusting that the veterinarian will only recommend treatment that the pet actually needs.
- 3

Finding a veterinarian that understands me and my pet's needs.
- 4

Affording veterinary bills for regular checkups.
- 5

Receiving clear instructions from my veterinarian.

The role digital tools play in modern pet care

Younger pet owners and those with the strongest bonds are especially tech-savvy and already use or would like to use technology solutions to meet their pet care needs. Willingness to adopt tech solutions jumps from **24%** among strongly bonded pet owners to over **50%** among those with the strongest bonds.

Technology plays an important role in addressing the common challenges that pet owners face—today’s pet care industry offers a whole host of tools to help track medications, monitor vitals, and triage symptoms without compromising pet health or replacing veterinary expertise. These resources empower clients to play an active and effective role in their pet’s care in between veterinary visits.

Nineteen different types of technology solutions for pet owners were available throughout the pet ownership journey were evaluated and grouped into five categories—apps, telehealth, electronic data tools, smart devices, and affordability solutions.

Overall, there is a strong desire for technology solutions that support the human-animal bond, help pet owners understand pet health and behavior, and empower veterinary-client communication.



Survey findings

63% of pet owners noted they are willing to adopt more technology to improve care for their pets.

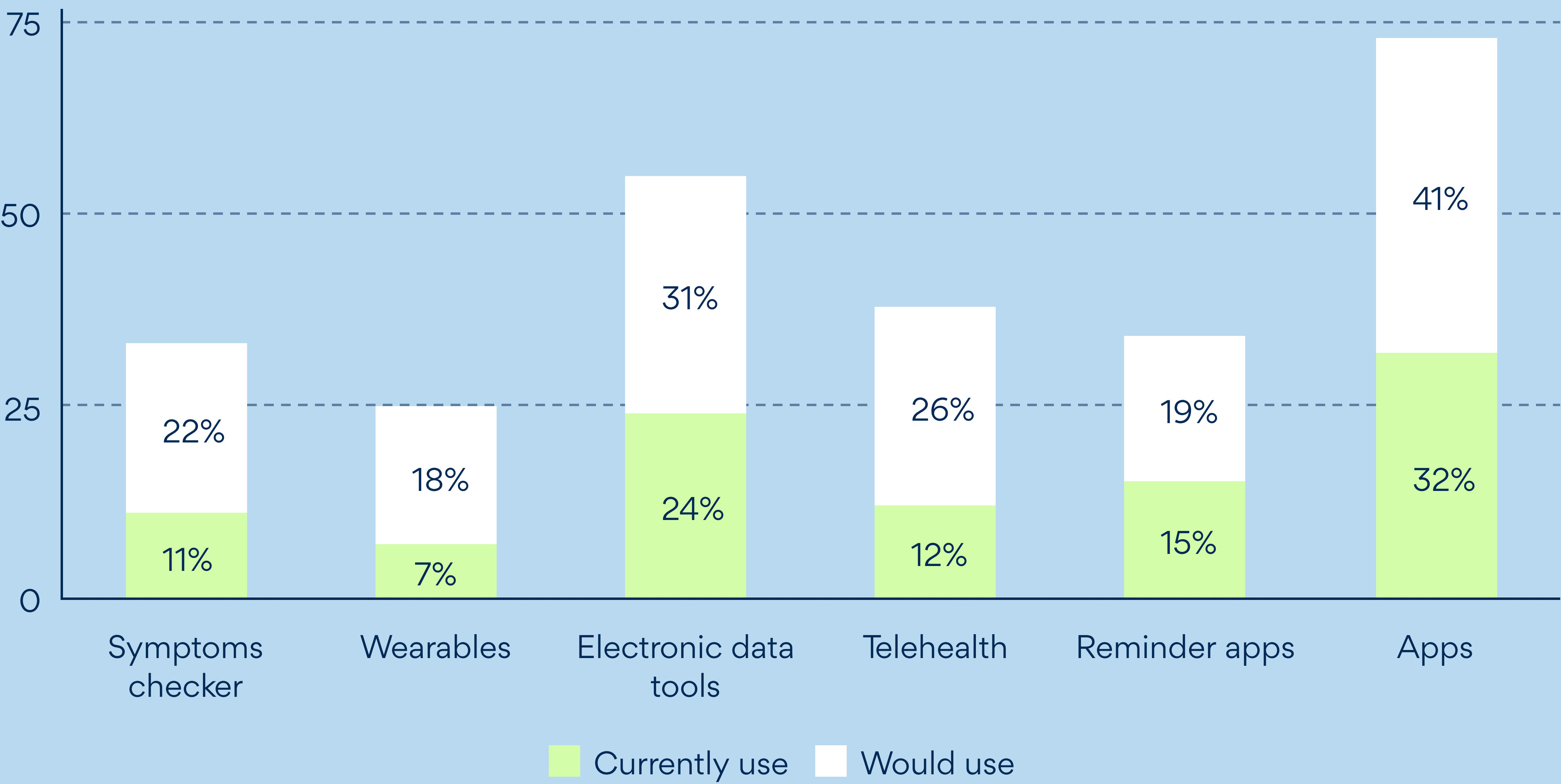
Willingness to adopt tech solutions jumps from **24%** among strongly bonded pet owners to over **50%** among those with the strongest bonds.

Pet owners are most willing to adopt technology solutions that are focused on affording (**45%**), finding (**44%**), and managing (**43%**) their pet's veterinary care.

On average, pet owners are currently using **2.3** technology solutions to help them take care of their pet. Those with the strongest bonds are using **3.3** solutions.

The tech to care about

We asked: What is the current usage and willingness to adopt technology-forward solutions?



Breaking down key challenges

- 1 Understanding pet health:** Pet owners are increasingly receptive to digital tools, especially those that help fill the gap in understanding pet health. Solutions that support proactive and preventative pet health were consistently rated as the most helpful with symptom checkers topping the list, followed by GPS trackers, and pet health apps.
- 2 Improving access to veterinary care:** Pet owners are eager to adopt solutions such as pet insurance, loyalty programs, payment plans, and discount cards that help make pet healthcare more affordable. However, despite strong interest in these solutions, adoption remains relatively low. This highlights a gap between intention and action as well as the opportunity to better connect pet owners with affordability solutions.
- 3 Reducing the emotional toll of leaving a pet:** There is growing demand for solutions like trusted pet sitters, cameras, and other tools that offer peace of mind and a sense of connection when pets and owners are unable to be together.

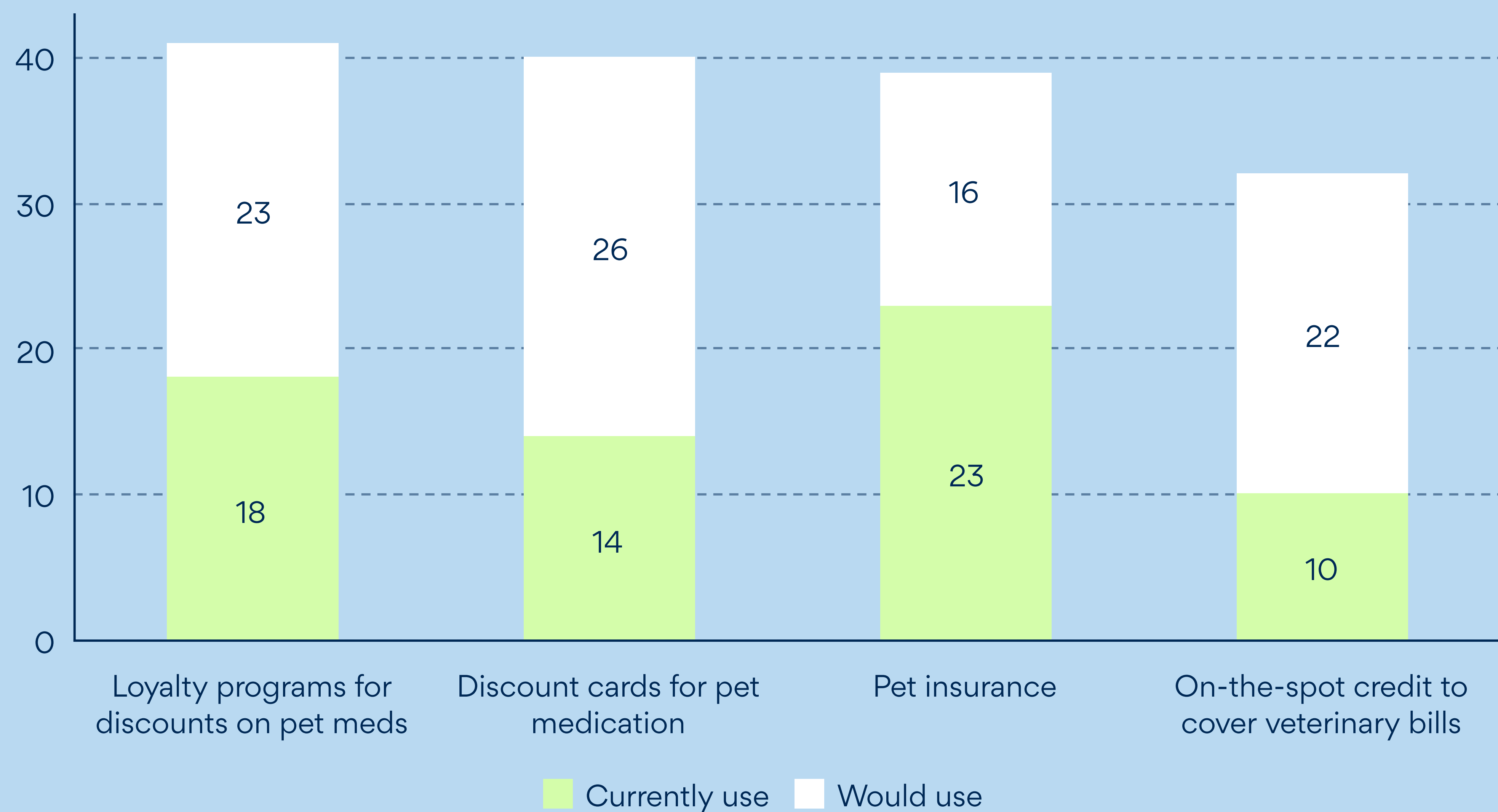
Survey findings

Pet health tools were rated as “very” or “extremely” helpful by **64%** of Gen Z, **50%** of Millennials, and **38%** of Boomers.

Gen Z stands out for both higher current usage and stronger intent to use a wide range of pet health solutions — averaging **3.6** tools in use and interest in **4.8** tools, more than any other group.

Adoption of financial tools

We asked: How likely are you to use the following solutions to help you take care of your pet?



Improving the veterinary-client relationship

Technology has the potential to serve as the connective tissue that binds the elements of care together and enables veterinary teams and pet owners to collaborate more seamlessly.

With today’s pet owners already depending on technology for daily tasks, and with **63%** of pet owners willing to adopt new technology for their pet’s care, veterinary teams have an opportunity to incorporate technology and other tools into daily practice to help pet owners overcome common pet care challenges while strengthening the veterinary-client relationship.



Build-a-bond[🐟]

Improving the veterinary-client-pet relationship

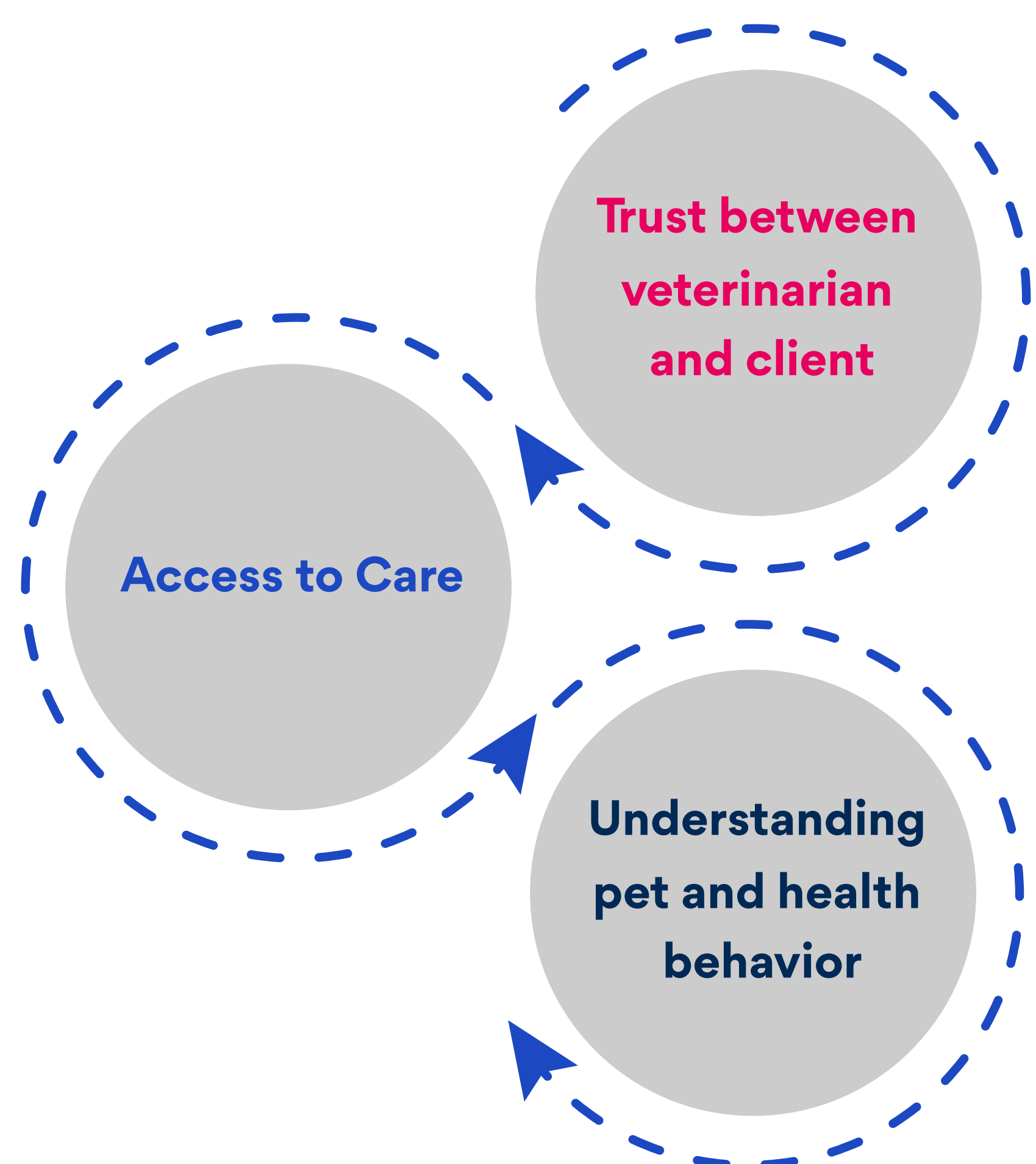
Today's pet owners are looking for more than just medical expertise; they're looking for partners in care. Nurturing the veterinary-client bond doesn't begin and end in the exam room—it relies on consistent, thoughtful connections in the everyday moments that show pet owners they're seen, supported, and always have someone in their corner.

Pet owners' attitude towards veterinary care is most deeply influenced by whether they feel understood and supported. When space is created for conversation and proactive education, the veterinary-client bond is strengthened and, by extension, so is the human-animal bond.

By embracing innovation and leveraging technology to deliver care that is more accessible, personalized, and responsive, veterinary teams can better meet pet owners where they are while preserving the bond that lies at the heart of every veterinary visit.

However, implementing more technology doesn't necessarily mean a complete overhaul. Instead, it requires an intentional strategy that keeps in mind how pet owners prefer to engage and learn while aligning with the systems veterinary teams already have in place.

Let's break down how veterinary teams can support the complex and evolving needs of their clients to build stronger relationships with them, while providing great pet care along the way.



Adopt a bond-first mentality

Support and acknowledge the bond

Pet owners want to know that their veterinary team can be trusted to help them understand their pet’s care needs. Asking questions that are bond-focused is an easy way to get a sense for the strength of the bond and relationship between client and patient.

This can be as simple as asking: “What do you do together with Luna?” or “Do you consider Luna like your child?” or “How does Luna make you laugh?”

Know and understand the bond

Each client has a unique relationship with their pet, which means the bond can look different for everyone. Once there is an understanding of the client-patient bond as well as the client’s preferences, the veterinary team can provide more customized recommendations.

This can lead to more impactful care for the patient, a stronger bond between pet and owner, and a relationship between veterinary team and pet owner built on trust and partnership.

Communication boosts satisfaction



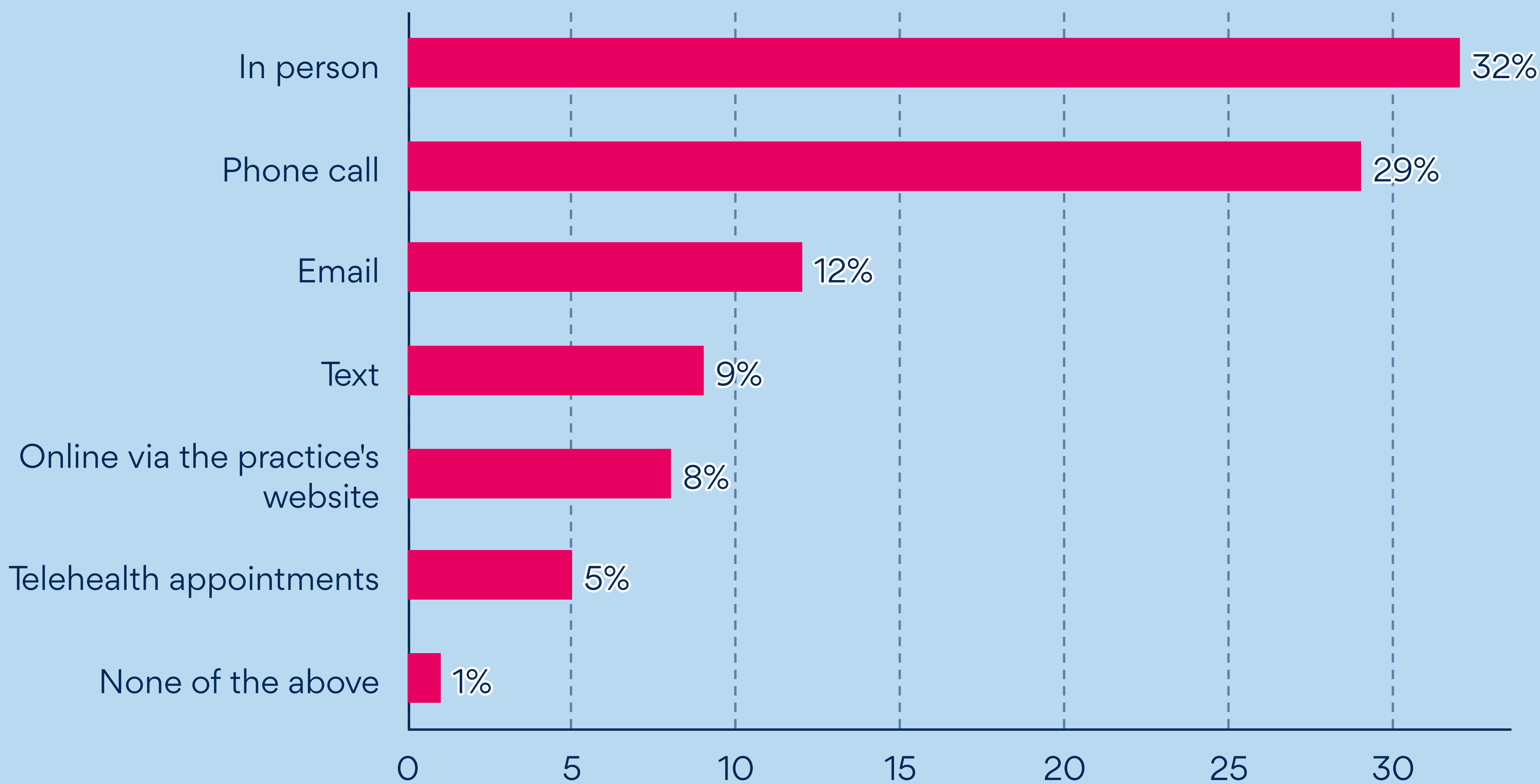
Communication emerged as the most impactful factor in positively boosting veterinary satisfaction.

Pet owner satisfaction significantly increases when they have more than two ways to communicate with their veterinary team, with real-time communication such as in-person visits **(82%)** and phone calls **(75%)** having the strongest impact.

But the highest satisfaction was reported by clients with veterinarians who supplement these traditional means of communication with a third option that is usually more tech-forward like email, text, telehealth, and other healthcare apps.



Modes of communication that result in highest veterinary satisfaction



Turning insight into action

Offer at least three ways to communicate

Offering multiple ways to communicate with the veterinary team is invaluable when it comes to increased client satisfaction. Veterinary teams don't have to be available 24/7, but thoughtfully implementing certain communication solutions can help extend the reach of care and enhance pet owner satisfaction without stretching the team thin. In fact, there is a simple formula to reference when exploring adding communication tools to the team's current arsenal.



Most practices already rely on in-person communications and phone calls as their primary methods of communication. However, offering additional communication options—such as telehealth, app-based messaging, email, or text—creates more convenient and accessible touchpoints for pet owners.

Introducing even one or two additional methods of communication allows clients to choose what works best for them. By choosing to prioritize pet owners' preferences, veterinary teams can foster an open and transparent communication that is foundational for strong veterinary-client relationships.

In action

1

Add a contact form to your website.

2

Set up a real-time chat feature on your website or via a pet portal.

3

Create a template for a post-visit summary via email or text.

4

Integrate an online scheduling portal via website or app.

5

Offer text or phone calls as options for contact.

Talk to clients about technology

Pet care doesn't stop when a visit is over — it continues in the car, the backyard, on the hiking trail, and at home. It is an ongoing journey, and supporting pet owners every step of the way ensures that clients can receive optimal care, even without a visit. That's why it's imperative not to leave clients armed only with Google or ChatGPT to determine whether an unexpected limp or allergic reaction requires urgent care. Instead, offer reliable ways, outside the exam room, to help guide pet owners with confidence and peace of mind.

Highly bonded pet owners as well as younger pet owners are not only particularly engaged with technology, but also seek education, reassurance and support from their veterinary teams. Discuss the kinds of digital tools available for tracking or monitoring pet health. Many of these solutions can provide relevant medical data to the veterinary team while also helping clients understand how to interpret the information collected. Encouraging clients to utilize these tools and interpret the data so they better understand when to reach out to the veterinary team can help support pet health while also providing peace of mind to the pet owner. Arming pet owners with the right tools —and providing guidance on the best ways to use them—strengthens the veterinary-client relationship. Not only does it reinforce trust, but it enhances continuity of care for pets.



In action

- 1 Start by asking clients about the pet technologies they are already using — from wearable trackers to smart litter boxes. What have pet owners learned from using these devices? Have they noticed any changes in pet activity or behavior?
- 2 Recommend a trusted symptom checker for preliminary at-home triage.
- 3 If your practice doesn't offer tele-advice services, recommend available veterinary-operated services for clients.
- 4 Encourage wearables like smart health trackers.

Leverage technology to improve accessibility and connection

Accessibility goes beyond affordability or geography, it requires creating reliable and trusted systems that offer guidance, reassurance, and care.

It's not just about access to veterinary care, it's about feeling supported, even in between visits.

Incorporating communication strategies and digital tools into your workflows can help create multiple touchpoints with clients and reinforce trust between you.

Pet owners are eager to adopt tools that help make healthcare more affordable (like loyalty programs, discount cards, pet insurance and payment plans), but adoption remains relatively low.

Making it clear what options are available through your practice at the front desk, on your website, and in the exam room can help ensure clients understand their options when it comes to affording care.



In action

- 1 Ensure clients are aware of pet insurance and its long-term value.
- 2 Share information about payment plans, credit and other options to help afford care.
- 3 Share digital content or wellness calendars for at-home support.
- 4 Recommend reminder apps to help clients stay on track with medication and appointments.

Be the trusted resource clients go to

Ultimately, what matters most to pet owners is feeling confident that they can trust their veterinary team, navigate understanding their pets, and access care when needed. Taking what pet owners care about most and turning it into effective educational content is a great way to expand communication and support the human-animal bond. When veterinary teams help pet owners better understand their pets' health and behavior, it doesn't just help prevent potential issues, it actively builds the veterinary-client bond.



In action

- 1

Share educational content via blog articles, social posts and newsletters on:

 - ✓ Common health and behavior topics
 - ✓ Early signs of illness
 - ✓ Preventative care
 - ✓ Aging support
- 2

Share care guides for new pet owners.
- 3

Include follow-up educational material in discharge notes.
- 4

Take it one step further than just virtual educational content. You can offer to consult on common issues like travel, separation anxiety, or managing chronic illness. By helping clients feel more confident in caring for their pets, you're increasing your role a trusted partner in the pet care journey.

The bottom line +

The veterinary-client bond is driven by consistent, accessible, and effective care which is essential for the human-animal bond. More than anything, pet owners want a partner in care who is as invested in them as their pet. Building lasting veterinary-client relationships requires trust, access, and understanding. Today, technology plays a critical role in addressing common pet owner challenges and strengthening the relationships between veterinary teams, pet owners, and pets.

Ultimately, the future of veterinary medicine depends on acknowledging that the human-animal bond is at the heart of every pet care decision and depends not only on clinical expertise, but on how effectively veterinary teams can communicate, connect, and collaborate with clients. That starts by embracing technology as a tool to enhance understanding and communication, support affordability and accessibility, and build trust and connection. As the landscape of pet care continues to evolve, those who integrate bond-focused solutions will be best positioned to deliver care that is both medically excellent and deeply meaningful to the families they care for.

