

Pandemic pet boom has increased the demand for pet-friendly workplaces

March 3 2023, by Tina Sharifi and Souha R. Ezzedeen



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

About [one in three Canadian households have adopted a pet](#) since the start of the pandemic. Around one-third of these are first-time pet owners. These "pandemic pets," along with their pre-pandemic counterparts, have brought a great deal of comfort during the lockdown, with [owners reporting a deepening of their bonds with their pets](#).

However, as workplaces gradually return to pre-pandemic office schedules, many [pet owners](#) are struggling to find available, affordable and quality pet services, such as dog walkers, pet sitters and daycare.

In 2022, calls to return to the office, [combined with rising pet-related costs, increased the number of pets surrendered to Toronto shelters by 75 percent](#) compared to 2021.

Consequently, pet-owning employees have been considering their employer's stance on pet-friendliness. A OnePoll survey from March 2022 [found six in 10 pet-owning workers left their job for a pet-friendly workplace](#) and seven in 10 were willing to trade pay for a pet-friendly office.

If employers want to retain their employees, considering pet-friendly options for the [workplace](#) is a must.

Pet-friendly workplace trend

According to a [survey of 500 senior executives](#), over 70 percent expect workplaces will be pet-friendly after the pandemic, with half planning to allow pets in the workplace upon return to the office.

Pet-friendliness approaches fall along a continuum of [low and high commitment](#). Low-commitment approaches include providing pet health insurance to employees, while high-commitment policies include allowing pets in the workplace.

Even though the [trend of pet-friendly workplaces began before the pandemic](#), the rise in pet ownership during the pandemic lockdowns, coupled with the challenges faced by many pet owners post-pandemic, have re-energized the discussion around pet-friendliness.

The trend was spearheaded by large tech firms such as [Google](#) and [Hootsuite](#), as well as many smaller, independent businesses where owners and founders bring their pets to work, forming the basis for a pet-friendly workplace.

For example, [Rogers Insurance welcomes dogs](#) in offices and meetings, extends bereavement leave for loss of pets, and [houses a "Chihuahua Corner" in the office](#). [Mars Canada hosts a courtyard for dogs](#) at its headquarters and extends paid time off for new pets or veterinary care. Hootsuite, pet-friendly since 2008, [credits its pet-friendly workplace for their "laid-back friendly" culture](#).

Benefits of workplace pets

In seeking to attract and retain workers, and encourage their return to the office, employers have been ramping up their pet-friendly credentials. Some are even opening the workplace to pets.

But beyond retaining employees, there is another reason workplaces might consider pet-friendly policies: workplace culture benefits. Like generous maternity benefits or progressive flextime policies, pet-friendliness provides employees and employers with numerous advantages.

Both [business news reports](#) and [scholarly findings](#) indicate that pet-friendly workplaces provide a more welcoming workplace culture and [enhance the employee experience](#), resulting in greater [employee](#) productivity and commitment.

By acting as icebreakers, pets elevate mood, boost morale, increase feelings of trust, and improve coworker interactions, enhancing inclusion and collaboration.

Suggestions for workplaces

There are different ways for organizations to respond to the needs of pet-owning employees. If organizations are considering welcoming pets at work, as human resource experts we recommend they work closely with landlords or leasing agents to ensure that the spaces allow pets.

Companies should ensure that green spaces, such as parks and courtyards for exercise and play, be located near or on workplace premises.

Human resources should keep supplies such as treats, toys, waste bags and cleaning products available on site. Additionally, we recommend pets be blocked off in offices and cubicles, behind baby gates, in crates or exercise pens, or be leashed using chew-proof tethers.

Organizations should also explore certifications such as the [Canine Good Citizen certification](#) offered by the American Kennel Club, or the [Canine Good Neighbour program](#) offered by the Canadian Kennel Club to help screen workplace dogs.

Organizations don't need to welcome pets on premises to be pet-friendly and responsive to employees with pets. Simply recognizing pets as a legitimate non-work responsibility goes a long way in supporting pet-owners.

As well, organizations can help educate pet owners on the responsibility of pet care, provide pet benefits, allow occasional pet visits and emphasize flexibility around pet care.

Pet policies should outline how various aspects of human resource management such as hiring, compensation, equity, diversity and inclusion, as well as health and safety, will be aligned with the company's stance on pet-friendliness. Pet-friendly policies should be created in

collaboration with staff members, considering all needs and concerns, and reviewed regularly.

Pets are family

The rising importance and number of pets have prompted organizations to respond to the growing demographic of pet-owning employees. As [companion animals](#) continue to play a central role in employee family lives, organizations must consider their responsibility towards employees with pets.

Pets are considered family for millions of employees, customers and community members. Organizations should carefully consider their stance on pet-friendliness in light of their goals, workforce values, and fit with workplace and industry cultures.

Because organizations play a key role in whether employees can keep their companions, they are also central to [the ongoing crisis of pet homelessness](#).

Organizations should respond to the animal care and companionship responsibilities of their employees, recognizing the importance of pets in people's lives.

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