

Survey

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds



Survey conducted by Warren Young, Researcher
Report prepared by Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds

Introduction

CPG's new national survey of community-run greyhound rescue charities has revealed the racing industry is often handing over its dogs to these re-homing groups in a neglected and stressed state, despite telling the public 'they [love their dogs](#)'.

Charities say the health of dogs arriving at their door is mostly poor, yet state greyhound racing welfare codes require the exact opposite. The racing industry doesn't enforce these rules or penalise owners for failing to socialise dogs in preparation for rehoming.

Yet, it would be easy for greyhound racing bodies to screen dogs for socialisation when they do kennel visits - can a dog go up and down stairs, how does it react to a stranger, etc - but they don't do this because there's no profit in it.

Similarly, the industry rehoming bodies in each state euthanise greyhounds they deem unsuitable for rehoming because they won't invest the time and money to reverse the consequences of poor socialisation.

CPG has surveyed community-run rescues because they rehome more dogs than the racing industry and make extraordinary efforts to rehab and retrain greyhounds which are poorly socialised.

Also, these groups are no-kill, whereas the industry rehoming arm in each state (GAPs) euthanise¹ dogs they deem unsuitable for rehoming, i.e., dogs that would take too much time to rehab and retrain because their socialisation has been neglected by owners and trainers.



¹ All industry rehomingers euthanise some greyhounds, but often hide the evidence - here are some typical figures obtained via [FOI](#).

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

CPG's survey allowed rescues to speak anonymously as they routinely choose not to comment publicly for fear dogs will be killed rather than surrendered for rehoming. We also know some groups are not free to comment by law as there are racing bodies – like Greyhound Racing Victoria – which make rescues sign away their freedom to speak out in return for getting small dollar amounts per dog for medical costs.

This situation exists because despite state governments giving millions of [taxpayer dollars](#) to the greyhound industry, the burden of re-homing is funded mainly by the public through their support for community-run rescues. These groups run on the smell of an oily rag, while racing industry bodies have [millions](#).

CPG's recommended solution to this inequity is two-fold:

- greyhound sanctuaries would help relieve the burden on these rescues and could create thousands of new jobs in rural areas (read about sanctuaries [here](#)), while
- community rehoming groups should be funded by their state government's betting tax (read CPG's white paper on how NSW charity re-homing groups could be funded [here](#)).

You can read more about CPG's demands [here](#) and if you'd like to volunteer with us, please see [here](#).

Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds



Background

Purpose of the survey

The purpose of the survey was to gather the observations of people from greyhound rescue groups around Australia regarding the health and living conditions of dogs at the time of rescue from trainers and owners.

Use of Victorian standards in measuring results

Where possible, the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds were compared to the Greyhound Racing Victoria Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds, April 2018 (Victorian Code), which shows in detail the minimum standards expected.² This document states:

"The purpose of this Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds (Code) is to specify minimum standards for staffing, accommodation, management, breeding and care required to meet the physical and behavioural needs of a racing greyhound throughout its lifecycle. This Code is made under section 63AC of Part 4AA of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (Vic) and applies to the keeping of all racing greyhounds registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV). Compliance with this Code and its provisions is mandatory from 1 January 2020 for any person who keeps racing greyhounds."

Other codes include the [NSW Greyhound Welfare Code of Practice](#), [The South Australian Greyhound Welfare Code of Practice](#) and the [Racing and Wagering WA Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds](#).

² <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/dogs/greyhounds/code-of-practice-for-the-keeping-of-racing-greyhounds>

Format of the survey

The survey was designed on Google Forms and either emailed or sent by Facebook Messenger to 28 Australian rescue groups.

The survey began with the following statement:

This survey is being conducted by the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds (CPG). The purpose is to gather information about the observations of people from rescue groups in Australia about the living conditions and health of the dogs that are rescued. If you were not able to observe the greyhounds' living conditions at the time of a rescue, please focus on the questions relating to the dogs' health. You can make other comments relating to the dogs' welfare in the final open-ended question.

This information will be used to understand whether the welfare of greyhounds needs to be improved at the time of rescue, and whether there is a difference between Australian states.

You have been invited to participate in this brief survey because of your experience rescuing surrendered greyhounds from trainers or owners in the racing industry. Please be assured that you, the rescue group, and the trainers/owners who surrender the dogs will be completely anonymous.

To be eligible to complete the survey, the respondents needed to have rescued a greyhound at least once in the previous 12 months. Since some rescues were conducted in neutral territory away from where greyhounds were housed, some respondents couldn't comment on living conditions.

To minimise recall bias or error, the survey stated: *"If you can't remember clearly enough to make a confident response to a question, please indicate 'Not sure'."*

Many of the questions offered the following six multi-choice options:

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Not sure

Where appropriate, the total responses to questions are presented as charts.

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Responses

CPG received 18 responses to the survey.

Questions relating to the location and number of rescues undertaken by the respondent

The responses were broken down by Australian state/territory as follows:

- VIC - 8
- QLD - 5
- NSW - 2
- WA - 2
- TAS - 1
- SA - 0
- NT - 0

84% of respondents had conducted seven or more rescues over the previous 12 months.

Images

Most images in this report were kindly provided during 2021 by community-run rescue groups around the country with some other images sourced from veterinary references.

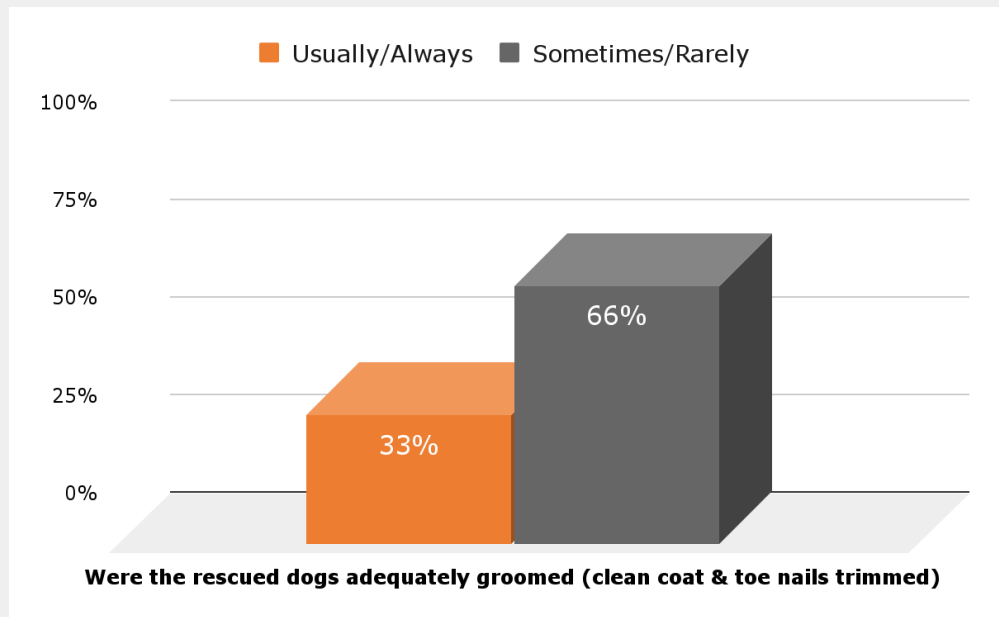
Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Questions relating to the health of rescued greyhounds

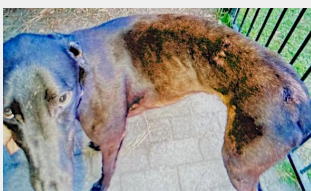
Victorian Code: 6.2.4 Grooming and other requirements. All greyhounds must be groomed by brushing or bathing, whichever is necessary, at a frequency that ensures coats are kept in good, clean condition. All greyhounds must have their toenails checked and trimmed at a frequency that prevents overgrowth.

Question: Were the rescued dogs adequately groomed (clean coat & toe nails trimmed)?

Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was generally not met with regard to adequate grooming of greyhounds.



Coat conditions at time of arrival at rescue



Poor coat with small wounds



Very poor skin and coat condition



Bad kennel coat full of mud



Shedding due to kennel coat

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 6.2.4 Grooming and other requirements (continued)

BEFORE
Condition of greyhound on reaching rescue group.



AFTER
Condition of greyhound two months after rescue.

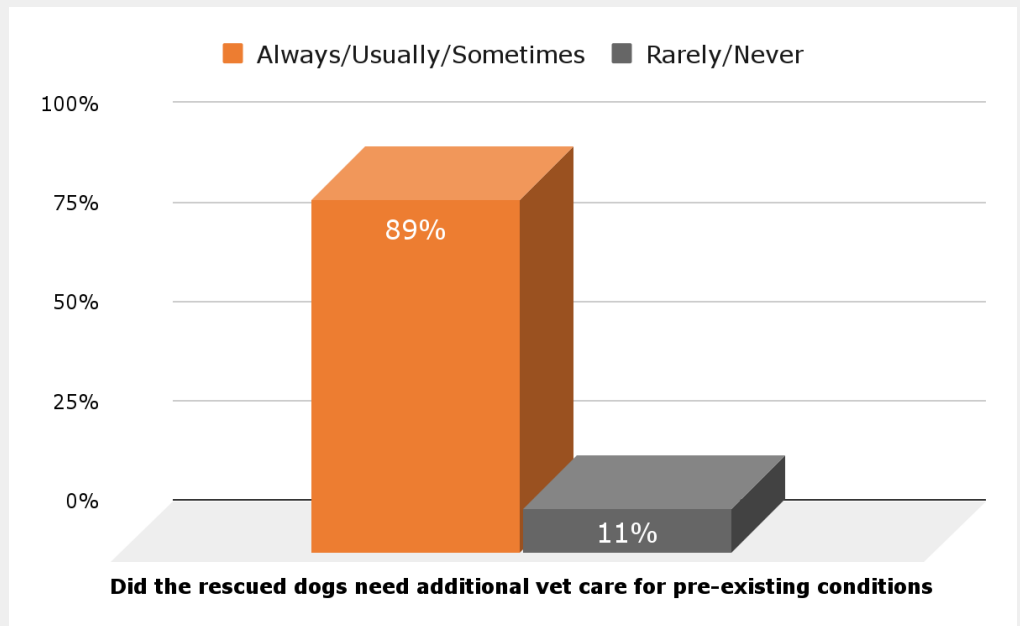


Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 6.2.3 Health checks and treatment plans. All greyhounds, regardless of breeding status, must receive an annual general health check by a veterinary practitioner (or more frequently as required). ... Any health issues identified must be recorded and evidence provided that a treatment plan was devised in conjunction with a veterinary practitioner and implemented.

Question: Did the rescued dogs need additional vet care for pre-existing conditions?

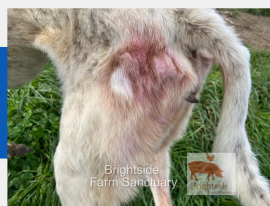
Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was generally not met with regard to provision of adequate vet care for greyhounds.



These two rescued greyhounds had been confined in tiny, filthy cages for 12 months. The 3m² cage size is approved by Tasracing.

The greyhounds, named Molly and Swaggy, were malnourished and severely emaciated. Covered in fleas, they were also suffering from muscle atrophy and pressure sores from being confined.

A vet allocated Molly & Swaggy body scores of 1.5 out of 5

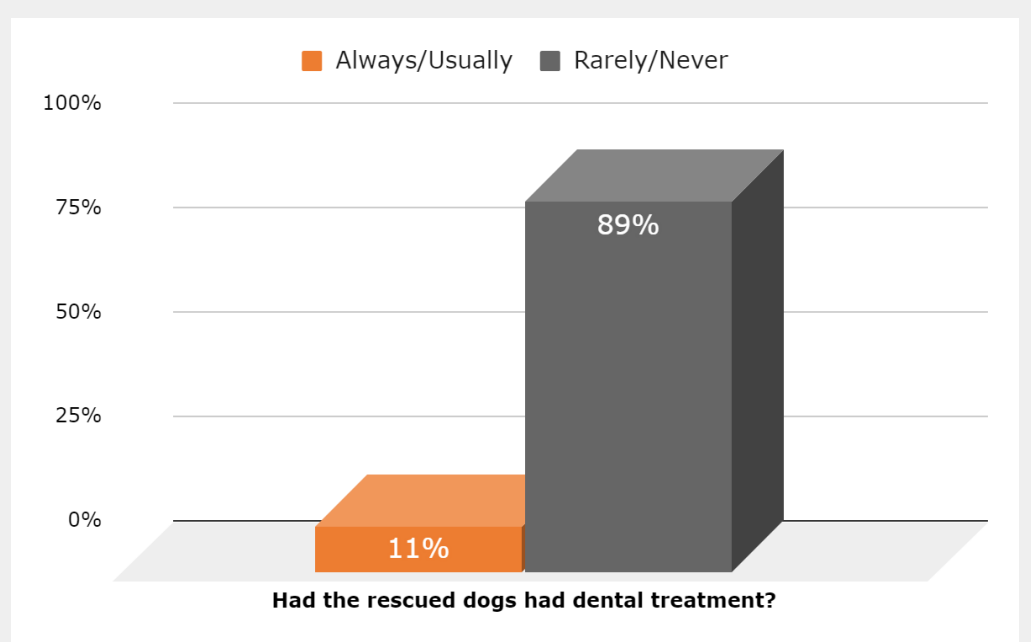


Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 6.2.3 Health checks and treatment plans (continued)

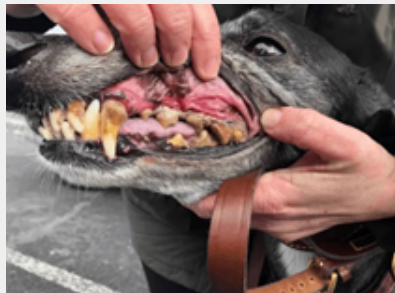
Question: Had the rescued dogs had dental treatment?

Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was generally not met with regard to dental treatment for greyhounds.



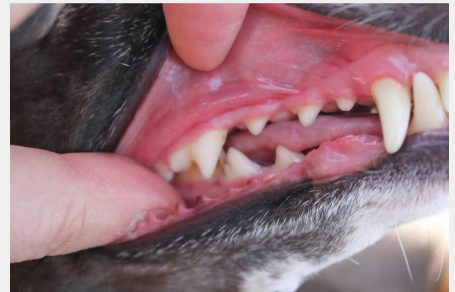
Neglected greyhound teeth

Image source: Dog Whisperer website



Clean greyhound teeth

Image source: Dog Whisperer website

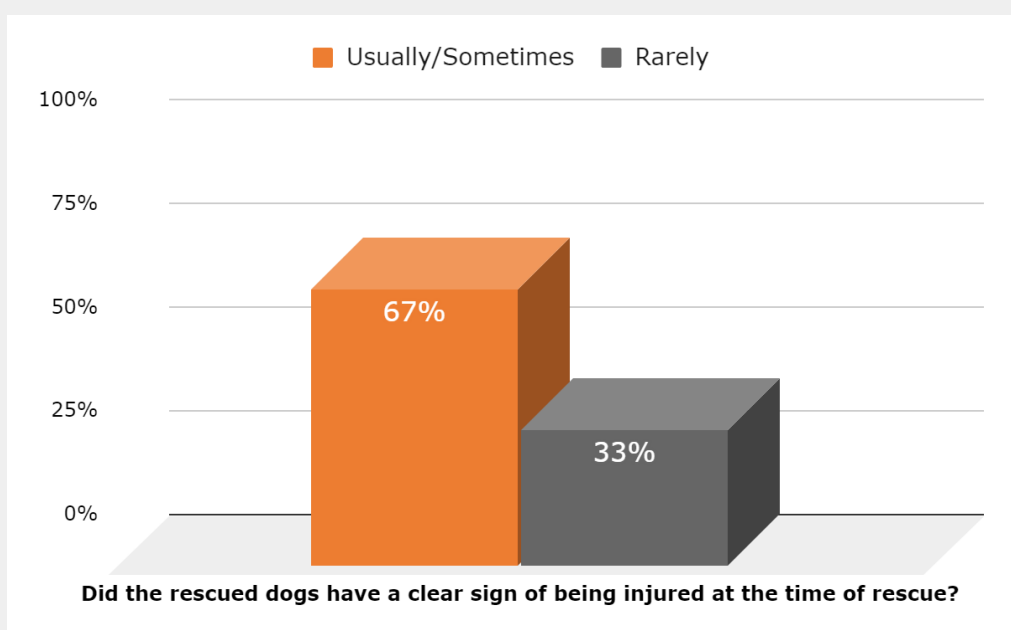


Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 6.2.3 Health checks and treatment plans (continued)

Question: Did the rescued dogs have a clear sign of being injured at the time of rescue?

Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was not met with regards to: the provision of adequate veterinary care for injured greyhounds; and/or time for rehabilitation before greyhounds are surrendered.



Note: No respondents indicated that dogs were 'Never' injured.

Untreated injuries identified at time of arrival at rescue



Tail bandaged as it was raw from hitting it on the kennels.



Untreated fracture



Poorly bandaged paw - arrived dirty and badly kept



Tail of dog had to be amputated as it was found to be broken in two places when the dog was taken to be desexed by the rescue group

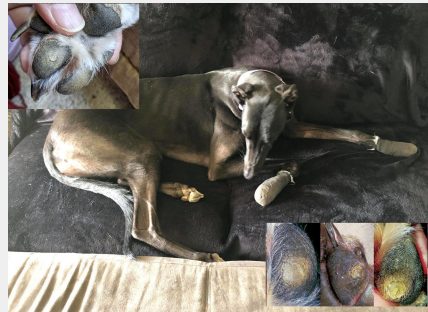
Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 6.2.3 Health checks and treatment plans (continued)

Untreated injuries identified at time of arrival at rescue (continued)



Dislocated toe



Female greyhound with bound paws post surgery for multiple untreated corns



Pannus - an inflammatory, and potentially blinding, disease of the cornea in dogs

Ben is three years old and was winning money for his trainer until he was injured. He was left untreated with no vet care and was dumped in a council pound.

Vets diagnosed 'proximal displacement of the accessory carpal bone due to previous injury'. This means his wrist has irreparable damage and causes him pain with every step.

A rescue picked him up from the pound and organised surgery for Ben with funds raised by the public.

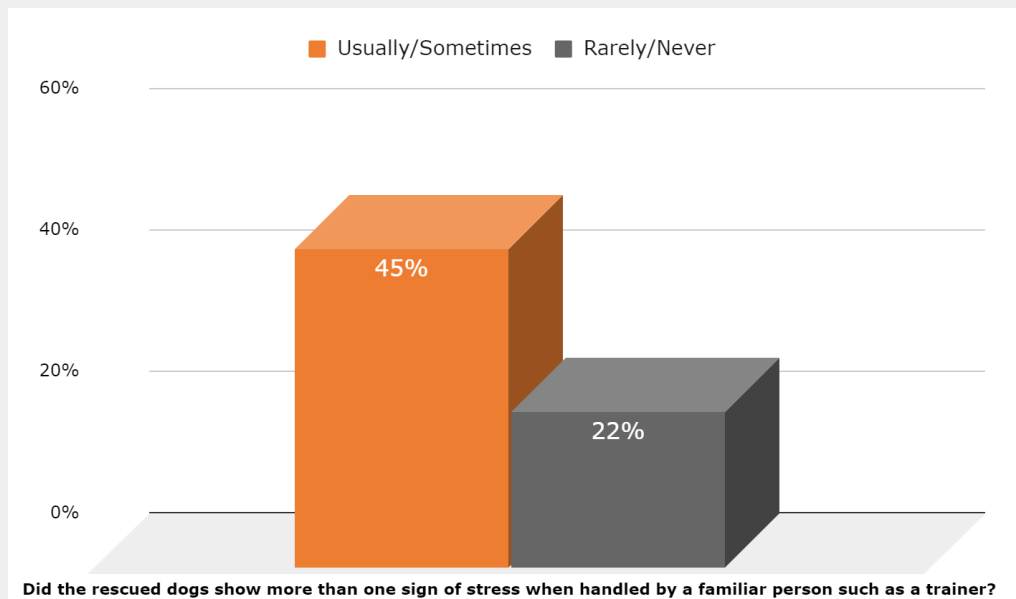
The surgery immobilised Ben's wrist joint so that he no longer has pain when he moves, although it also means he will never have full range of motion of the wrist.



Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: Management of stress in Greyhounds. If signs of stress, poor acclimatisation or development of behavioural stereotypes are recorded for more than two consecutive days, the possible source of stress must be identified and action taken to alleviate the stress.

Question: Did the rescued dogs show more than one sign of stress when handled by a familiar person such as a trainer? Signs of stress include shaking, cowering, tucked tail, ears back, avoidance, freezing, panting, tense, yawning, lip smacking, pacing/circling, salivating.?



Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was generally not met with regards to the alleviation of stress in greyhounds.

BEFORE
At owner's kennel - so scared she would not come near anyone.

AFTER
At rescue has gradually become more and more relaxed and happy.



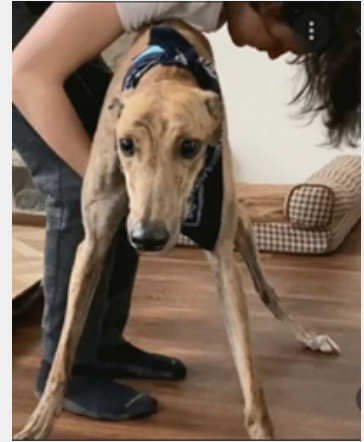
Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: Management of stress in Greyhounds (continued)

Greyhound showing signs of timidity.



Greyhound not accustomed to non-concrete kennel surfaces - very common when trainers fail to socialise properly.



Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 6.1.1 Food. Food must be provided in sufficient quantity and nutritional quality. Food must be canine appropriate and meet the daily requirements for the condition, level of activity, age and size of the greyhound.

Question: Did the rescued dogs appear to have a healthy body weight; that is not noticeably under weight with bones clearly visible?

72% of respondents indicated always or usually.

Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was generally met with regards to the quantity of food being provided to greyhounds. The question did not capture information about the quality of food being provided.

This male greyhound was very underweight and had multiple corns on his foot after injuring himself racing and having a toe amputated. The image shows how both his weight and coat recovered after being properly fed by the rescue group.

Read more in Appendix 1.



Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Victorian Code: 7.1 Movement, transfer or sale of greyhounds out of the industry.

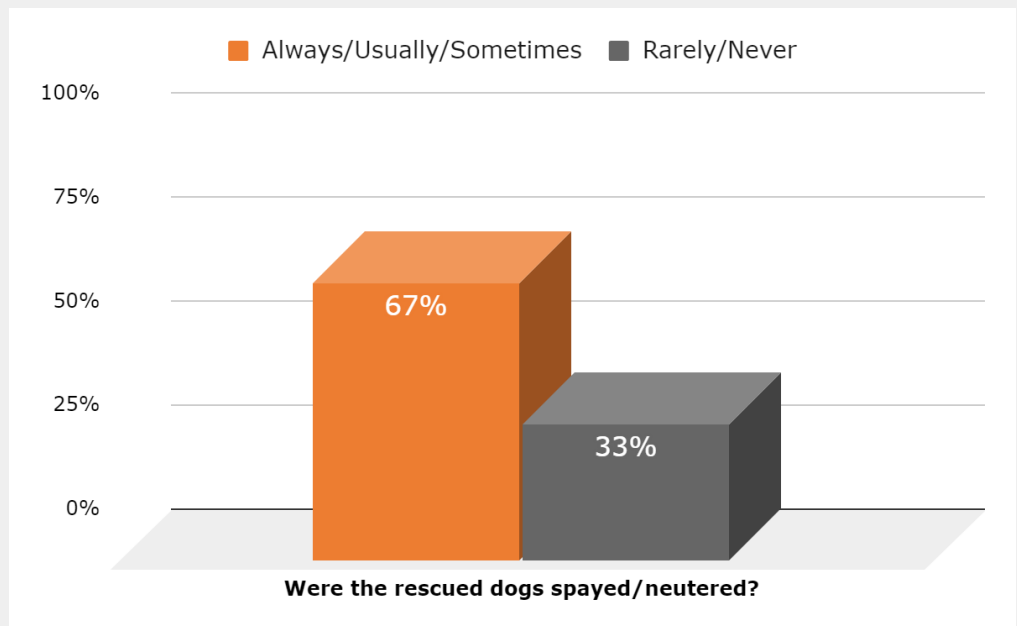
Greyhounds sold, given away or transferred to a person or moved to an establishment (including a registered shelter) that is not registered with GRV, or any other Australian or New Zealand greyhound racing jurisdiction, must

...

- be desexed before leaving the greyhound establishment, except if the receiving party has provided written agreement to desex the greyhound.

Question: Were the rescued dogs spayed/neutered?

Finding: The minimum Victorian Code standard was generally not met with regard to the spaying/neutering of dogs.



Note: Only 17% of respondents indicated that dogs were 'Always' spayed/neutered.

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Questions relating to the living conditions of rescued greyhounds

The survey also asked the following questions about the living conditions of rescued greyhounds:

- Did the rescued dogs have their own food and water receptacle?
- Were the rescued dogs' kennels/pens generally clean and not soiled?
- Were the rescued dogs' beds raised off the ground, large enough to fully stretch out, protected from the weather, and the bedding soft, clean, and dry?
- Did the rescued dogs have a pen that was large enough to move around; that is at least 3 square metres (eg 1.2m x 2.5m) per dog?
- Did the rescued dogs have an exercise area that was at least 20 square metres and safe (eg no sharp edges)?

We have not included the results due to the number of greyhounds collected at a location other than where the greyhounds were housed. This was confirmed by comments from respondents.

Comments from respondents

The final survey question was **"Please describe any other observations about the welfare (health and living conditions) of the greyhounds you have rescued in the last 12 months. Please be as detailed as possible"**.

The question was open-ended to allow respondents to add any observations not captured by the multi-choice questions.

Paraphrased comments included:

- Kennel coat was observed in some dogs [dull, coarse and patchy coat].
- The process of rescuing greyhounds can be stressful, but there is still a great need. More people are needed to help with the rescuing load.
- Trainers vary hugely with regard to the care they provide and the facilities they operate with. Some dogs are in excellent condition while others are badly injured.
- Greyhounds are delivered to foster carers by trainers/owners.
- One respondent said the standards of caring for dogs by trainers have improved in the last few years.

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

- We also take in greyhounds that may need additional veterinary care following a racing accident or injury as we are able to provide individual rehabilitation care. This means that we are taking on greyhounds with known problems and in these cases, we do receive some financial support from the Racing and Wagering Authority WA for their associated vet costs. This is also a recent initiative to reduce the number of injured greyhounds being euthanised.
- Often owners/trainers will utilise the grant scheme to desex, but won't have a dental done. The grant scheme can only be utilised once, so we are then unable to use it for the dental, vaccination or any other part not done prior to coming into care from the racing industry.
- Many dogs had an untreated eye condition, pannus.

CPG's concluding comments

One of the original aims of the survey was to compare responses between states. However, this was not possible due to the low number of responses from states other than Victoria.

Therefore, the results represent a snapshot from across Australia using the Victorian Code as the basis for measuring results. This led to the following findings:

- Comments and observations from rescuers indicated that the healthcare and living standards provided by trainers vary widely.
- Dogs were generally fed enough food to maintain a healthy body weight, but many surrendered dogs were not adequately groomed, had inadequate dental care, were injured, stressed, and were not desexed.
- Since rescuers were sometimes unable to view the facility where greyhounds were housed, the responses regarding living conditions were not clear. Observations were that the areas provided for dogs to move around in were generally adequate, although beds were not adequate.

Finally, the ideal situation would be for respondents to select the option 'always' to describe what they observed in relation to positive healthcare and living standards. As this was not the case, there is clearly a need to improve standards and therefore the welfare of greyhounds kept in the racing industry.

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Appendix 1

Additional feedback from rescues

BEFORE

This male greyhound male was very underweight and had multiple corns on his foot after injuring himself racing and having a toe amputated. After being surrendered, he needed further surgery to remove grit from his problem foot and it took about three months to heal.

This greyhound also had severe behavioural issues which required about six months of fluoxetine and training before he could be rehomed.



AFTER



Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

A community rescue was asked to take this female dog after she had weaned her last litter of pups. The owner said she had a little pink spot on her nose. The rescue had tried to get him to release the dog to them a couple of years previously, but he wanted to breed from her.

During this time, the owner went to check on the dog one day and he collapsed in her yard with a heart attack. He was apparently unconscious and the dog stood over him barking until someone came out of the house and subsequently called an ambulance. His life was saved, but he let this deadly tumour grow while the dog produced more pups.

Two litters later, the dog was handed over to the rescue. A vet diagnosed the pink spot (a cancerous tumour) and said it was inoperable because there were no margins for surgery.

Specialist vets put the dog on a drug to shrink the tumour to allow some margins for surgery, after which she had two operations and her life has been extended by about six to seven years. The dog came through surgery without missing a meal and now lives a happy life.

BEFORE**Mast cell carcinoma on nose****AFTER****Today after specialist vets extended her life by six to seven years**

Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

This female greyhound was taken to a local vet by her racing trainer to be euthanased because of the extent of her injury. The trainer did not want to pay and asked the vet to kill her by draining her blood for blood transfusions for other dogs.

The vet wouldn't kill her for no fee because the wound was infected and her blood was consequently not viable. The wound was days old and the greyhound had started to attack it because of the pain.

A member of the local pet rescue happened to be there and asked if they could take this greyhound. Even the rescue group's vet doubted that he could save the dog, but he tried. She survived the first two weeks with him and then was adopted by a rescue volunteer. The dog's wound had to be cleaned twice per day and it took two months to heal.

This greyhound went on to gain the Delta Good Citizen Award. She has attended Shut It Down rallies, mentored hundreds of greys coming into rescue and been a blood donor numerous times. She has visited aged care facilities, pre-schools and shopping centres promoting greyhounds, as well as doing remedial work with young offenders in detention.

BEFORE

Greyhound with wound left to fester for days



AFTER

Transformed into fit and healthy greyhound and winner of Good Citizen Award.



Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

This female greyhound suffered an untreated fractured leg which was strapped to her body by a NSW industry participant and calcified in that position.

After she was surrendered to a community-run rescue, vet advice was sought and the leg was amputated because all three leg joints were 'frozen' and nothing could be done.

The pathology report on the amputated leg stated that the fracture was at least two years old and she would have been in extreme pain the entire time.

The dog is now happily rehomed and doing well. The cruelty by the industry was reported to the relevant state-based authority.

BEFORE
All three leg joints frozen and no surgery possible

AFTER
Happily rehomed after amputation



Observations about the health and living conditions of rescued greyhounds

Broken legs



Greyhound with cast after being dumped at rescue with untreated fracture



Injured hock



Dogs with untreatable fractures can live a good life with three legs instead of being put down