

Pandemic pups: A FOUR PAWS Survey

In September 2022, global animal welfare organisation FOUR PAWS commissioned a survey of 247 Australians on puppy buying trends during the pandemic to better understand consumer actions taken when purchasing a puppy. The research highlighted loopholes for puppy farmers and online scammers to take advantage of people and profit from animal abuse. The survey was completed as part of a global survey of 3037 from nine countries.

Key Results in Australia

Researching to buy a puppy:

- Australia is the lowest among all countries surveyed to conduct research of breeder/sellers before buying, with almost **3 in 10 Australians (27%) not researching the supplier of the puppy they purchased from.**
- Puppies were most likely to have been bought from breeders, with private breeders (34%) being twice as likely as commercial breeders (17%). This was followed by family and friends (15%), pet shops (11%) and kennel club breeders (9%). Of those who specified where they had purchased their puppy (excluding family or friends), just over two thirds (70%) say they researched the puppy breeder or seller prior to purchase – over a quarter (27%) had not researched the breeder/seller.
- A majority of those who researched the breeder or seller were most likely to do so on the breeder's website (58%), followed by social media accounts (38%), despite Meta having a ban on advertisement of animals for sale on Facebook and Instagram, both sources leaving potential buyers vulnerable to fraud.
- 25% spending 1 hour or less researching the breeder/supplier, 35% spending 1-6 hours researching and 32% researching for more than one day. This is highly concerning given the high rate of online puppy advertising scams and the trend of puppy farmers to use online platforms such as online marketplaces and social media to advertise farmed puppies from poor welfare farms.
- A significant portion of buyers said they researched the breed of dog and how to take care of the puppy up to 6 hours – a total of 53%, with 33% researching between 1 - 6 hours and 18% researching for less than one hour, which is insufficient for making an informed decision about the key aspects of dog ownership.

Cost of buying a puppy:

- Two in five respondents in Australia paid between \$150 - \$1499 AUD for their puppy (40%), a similar proportion paid between \$1500 - \$4399AUD. In all, over 70% of survey respondents spent \$1,100 and more for a puppy with 1 in 3 Aussies spending \$2,900 and more for a puppy.

Location where puppy was purchased:

- Just over two in five (42%) of the respondents collected their puppy from the home of the breeder, with 13% meeting the breeder/seller at an agreed location, 12% said their puppy was delivered, with 11% collecting the puppy from the home of a previous owner and 11% from pet shop. Delivery of a puppy and agreeing a location to hand over the puppy that is not the breeding establishment are both tactics to hide that the puppy has been bred on a puppy farm.
- For the 25% of puppies collected this way, there is a high likelihood that they came from a puppy farm as these buyers most likely did not visit the premises where these puppies were bred. For comparison, this Australian percentage was much higher than the percent of puppies handed over in these ways in France, which was 13%. See info on common tactics of puppy farmers on page 2.

Age of puppy:

- 1 in 4 Australians surveyed (26%) bought puppies who were less than 8 weeks old, with 13% of those stating they brought their puppy home when the puppy was 6 weeks or younger. This is very concerning as it is illegal to purchase an animal under 8 weeks of age due to the welfare impacts on the puppy from early mother-pup separation.
- At the time of purchase, 61% of puppies were microchipped or tattooed and registered (a legal requirement in Australia), 18% were microchipped only, 15% of puppies had no microchipped or identifying tattoo nor registration, and 1% of survey respondents did not know if their puppy was microchipped or registered. The percentage of puppies who were not registered shows a serious gap in the traceability of dogs sold in Australia, leaving a door open for puppy farmers to sell puppies with hidden origins to unknown buyers.
- From the Australian survey respondents, 33% said that looking after their puppy was more work than they expected, primarily with those who purchased the puppy for child-related reasons (company for their kids), puppy behavioural and health issues, and that picking up the puppy was harder than expected (needing to travel to a meet up point to get the puppy).
- Health: Of all 247 Australians survey, 53 reported that the puppy had health issues after purchase, with the top three issues being allergies (32%) followed by behavioural problems (28%) and another quarter (25%) mentioned diarrhoea.

How does Australia compare globally?

- Compared to the average for all countries, Australians bought a puppy for company much more often – 51% agreed with this statement in Australia, with the average for the rest of the surveyed countries being 38%. At the same time, 35% of respondents in Australia also agreed that they purchased the puppy for child-related reasons, which is close to the average for the rest of the countries (38%).
- Australians spend the highest average price when purchasing a puppy by far – 42% paid between \$1500 - \$4399AUD and 13% paid \$4400 - \$8800 AUD, compared to only 18% of buyers in the UK who paid more than 1700 GBP for their puppy. The only country of the surveyed countries that comes relatively close to the prices in Australia is Switzerland.

- 1 in 10 survey respondents in Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands did not research the breeder/supplier of a puppy before purchase.
- Like Australia, multiple issues were identified throughout the global survey with buying a puppy online. 33% of survey respondents used online platforms to purchase their puppy, with 40% of respondents conducting this research via the seller's website where the puppies were being advertised, leaving them vulnerable to biased claims and false information. The breeder website was the most common place to research the breeder/seller from in Australia (58%), France (52%), the UK with 2 in 5 (42%) and Germany (44%), with Australia being an outlier.
- Of the Australian respondents who researched the breeder/seller prior to purchasing their puppy, a quarter (25%) spent an hour or less conducting this research. This rises to a third (33%) of those aged 55+. In contrast, French respondents spent comparatively more time researching the breeder/seller prior to purchase.
- 18% of respondents in all countries purchased a puppy that was advertised on Facebook and 10% on Instagram.
- The most common place where respondents bought their puppy was from a private breeder. For example, a third (34%) of Australian and (33%) of British respondents bought their puppy from a private breeder, as did 28% of Dutch respondents and 23% of French respondents. This is consistent across all of the markets surveyed, with the exception of Switzerland where most of the respondents purchased their puppy from a kennel club breeder (19%).
- While only 13% of Australians bought a puppy aged 6 weeks or younger compared to 25% average for the other countries, the percentage of dogs bought below 8 weeks of age was 26% which is still a very high number, meaning that each fourth puppy was separated from the mother too early in breach with legislation in Australia.
- Global results show that 27% of puppies experienced health problems shortly after purchase, with a slightly lower percentage in Australia of 21%.

About FOUR PAWS

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. Founded in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dungler and friends, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. The sustainable campaigns and projects focus on animals used for textiles, stray dogs and cats as well as pets, farm animals and wild animals – such as bears, big cats, orangutans – kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones.

With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Kosovo, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam, FOUR PAWS aims to help animals in need directly and quickly. www.four-paws.org.au

About the Survey

The survey was executed by the Savanta research agency throughout 2022 and was carried out in nine countries where FOUR PAWS has an office including Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Belgium. Respondents were people who had purchased a puppy between the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and September 2022. 3037 responses were collected across the nine countries.

The gender breakdown for the Australian market was 33% male and 67% female. Three in five respondents are aged 18 to 34 (60%), 35% are between 35 and 54, and 5% 55 or older.

Survey respondents lived in NSW (29%), VIC (29%), QLD (22%), SA (7%), ACT (6%), WA (5%), and TAS (2%).