

GUIDE TO ASSESSING REHOMING SUITABILITY

CATS



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide provides information and resources to help with assessing the suitability of cats for rehoming.

It aims to support pet rehoming organisations as well as teaching and research organisations that use cats.

This guide advocates holistic behavioural assessments of cats over time, and the adoption of consistent record-keeping practices. Organisations are encouraged to draw on the expertise, judgement and resources of their staff and volunteers, and external professionals as required, to enable them to make informed decisions that align with their specific circumstances.

The guide does not provide advice on how to assess the physical health of cats. However, the health and welfare of animals should be considered alongside behaviour as part of the holistic approach to making rehoming decisions. Health assessments and advice about medical treatment and euthanasia should always be sought from a qualified veterinary practitioner.

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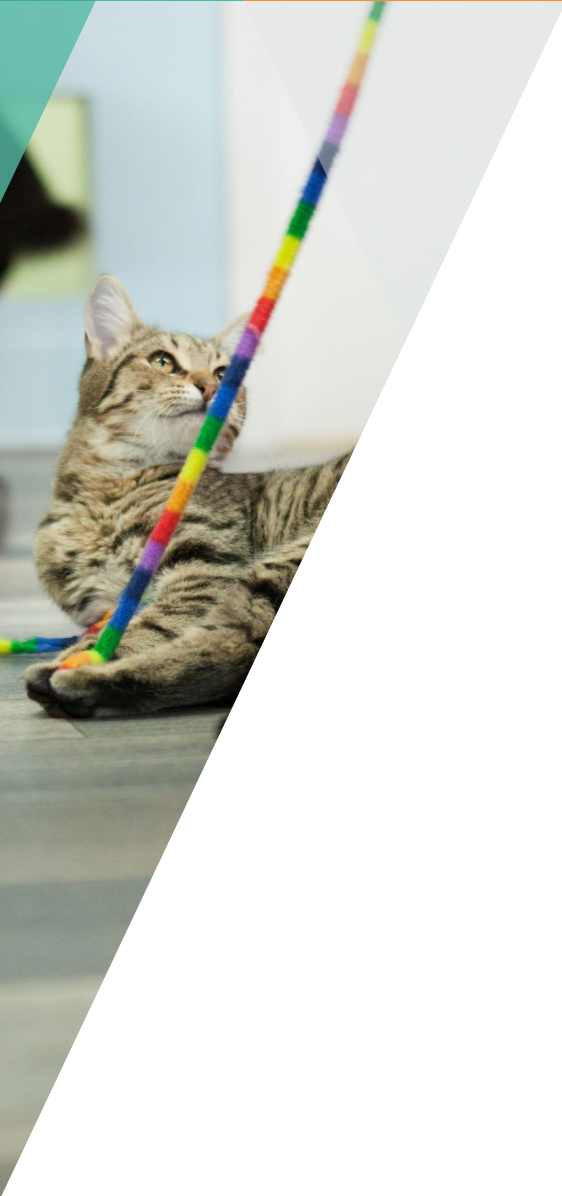
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Glossary

Animal shelter	a facility established for the purpose of providing temporary care and finding new homes for stray, abandoned or unwanted cats and dogs. Some animal shelters are operated by local council, whereas others are operated independently.
Council pound	a facility established for impounding seized, stray and abandoned cats and dogs. Under the <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> , local councils must provide pound services to their community. The Act also requires that pounds (and animal shelters operated by council) must accept animals kept in its local government area if the owner is no longer willing or able to care for the animal.
Feral cat	cats that are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans, and reproduce in the wild. Feral cats are a declared pest species on specified public land under the <i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i> .
Foster care	the temporary care of stray, abandoned or unwanted cats or dogs for the purpose of finding a permanent home for the cat or dog. Foster care conducted on behalf of an animal shelter or council pound must be undertaken with a written foster care agreement between the facility and foster carer.
Owned cat	cats identified with and cared for by a specific person and directly dependent on humans. These cats are typically well-socialised, although this can vary.
Nuisance animal	a dog or cat may be considered a nuisance animal if it injures or endangers the health of a person or creates noise by barking or otherwise which persistently occurs or continues to occur to an extent that it unreasonably interferes with the peace and comfort of a person or the community.
Pet rehoming organisation	an organisation that arranges temporary housing and care for cats and dogs in foster care and seeks permanent housing for the cats or dogs. These organisations may include community foster care networks, rescue groups or adoption groups. Some pet rehoming organisations focus on specific breeds, particular age groups, or animals that have previously been used in activities such as racing, or research and teaching.
Semi-owned cat	cats that are fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider themselves the owner. They are of varying sociability, with many socialised to humans, and may be associated with one or more households.
Serious injury	means an injury caused to a person or animal requiring medical or veterinary attention such as a broken bone, a laceration or partial or total loss of sensation or function in a part of the body. A serious injury may also be an injury that requires cosmetic surgery.
Unowned cat	cats that are indirectly dependent on humans, with some having casual and temporary human interaction. They are of varying sociability, including some being unsocialised, and may live in groups (e.g., at rubbish tips, shopping centres and other urban environments where they can scavenge for food).



1. INTRODUCTION

This guide is for organisations that rehome cats in Victoria. It aims to help these organisations assess the suitability of animals for rehoming.

Cats are taken into temporary care by council pounds and shelters and pet rehoming organisations, with a shared goal of finding a safe and loving home for them.

These organisations all operate differently with different regulatory requirements, levels of resources and expertise. Many rely on dedicated volunteers, including foster carers who take on the temporary care of cats while efforts to find them new homes are made. The efforts of these organisations and individuals make an immense contribution to the rehabilitation and rehoming of cats in Victoria.

This guide acknowledges that based on individual circumstances, resourcing, expertise and regulatory requirements, each organisation will assess an animal's rehoming potential differently, but that every organisation – whether they be a pound, shelter or volunteer run network – shares the same goal of successfully placing animals in safe and caring homes.

For these reasons, the guide **does not** advocate a one-size fits all approach that must be followed. Rather, it provides guidance and templates (Appendix 1) for gathering information about an animal's behaviour at different stages of its journey through rehoming so that a decision about whether an animal is suitable for rehoming can be made. It also offers guidance about post adoption follow-up, including check-ins and post-adoption support networks, acknowledging the importance of using this information to continually improve approaches to assessing rehoming suitability and ultimately rehoming outcomes.

The guide also advocates for a consistent approach to collaboration and information sharing between organisations in the pet rehoming sector, acknowledging the importance of building and maintaining trusted relationships between pounds, shelters and pet rehoming organisations as they work towards a shared goal of rehoming animals across Victoria.

Rehoming cats and dogs used in research and teaching

The Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (the Code) promotes the ethical, humane and responsible care and use of animals used for scientific purposes. The Code is adopted into legislation in all Australian states and territories. The Code states that opportunities to rehome animals should be considered wherever possible, especially when the impact of the project or activity on the animal has been minimal and their physiological condition and behavioural attributes indicate they can be introduced to a new environment.

Observations and record-keeping about a cat can be helpful in assessing their suitability for rehoming in the future. This process can begin well in advance, while they are still being used for research or teaching activities.

Staff at Victorian research and teaching organisations that use cats are encouraged to review the information in this guide and consider using the suggested approaches and record-keeping processes.

Mandatory requirements for rehoming animals

In Victoria, all pounds and shelters must comply with the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds (the Code). The Code includes mandatory requirements for pounds and shelters related to the health, behavioural assessment and rehoming of cats and dogs.

Under the Code, pounds and shelters must have protocols in place to assess the health, behaviour and sociability of animals for rehoming. This guide is one such resource that pounds and shelters may choose to implement to support behaviour assessments of animals prior to rehoming.

Animals admitted to pounds and shelters must also be examined by a veterinary practitioner or experienced person to classify their health status. Health assessments are a crucial component of the rehoming decision-making process and animals may be euthanised due to health concerns. Animals with specific health and/or physical issues that do not significantly affect their quality of life may be rehomed and this decision must be made by a veterinary practitioner. Unidentified cats that are wild, uncontrollable or diseased can be euthanised upon entry to the pound or shelter in accordance with the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

The Code also sets out types of animals that **must not** be rehomed by pounds and shelters including aggressive animals (such as declared dangerous dogs), anti-social animals and animals with known vices such as excessive barking or habitual escapees.

Pet rehoming organisations, while not captured under the Code, should also consider the above factors as part of their health and behaviour assessment process. Pet rehoming organisations have a responsibility to ensure animals that have or may cause serious injury to a person, or another animal, are not rehomed.

Anyone utilising this guide as part of their pound, shelter or pet rehoming organisation's behaviour assessment protocols must ensure ongoing compliance with Victoria's relevant legislation and the codes of practice (see Appendix 2).



2. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ASSESSING REHOMING SUITABILITY

What is a holistic approach to assessing rehoming suitability?

Every cat who arrives to temporary care is experiencing a major change in their life. This can impact their behaviour and influence subsequent decisions about their suitability for rehoming.

As such, this guide advocates a holistic approach to assessing an animal's suitability for rehoming **over a period of time and in a range of circumstances**, rather than relying only on a one-off behavioural test or observation. A holistic approach is appropriate except in circumstances of extreme behaviour that clearly indicates an increased risk associated with the animal.

While structured tests provide useful insights into an animal's behaviour, they typically only provide for a one-time assessment. They don't account for the transient effects of trauma a dog or cat may have experienced before entering temporary care, or their reactions to facilities like pounds, kennels, catteries or other facilities.

The focus of a holistic approach to assessment is on building a better understanding of an animal's suitability for rehoming. This may include identifying any opportunities for improving an animal's behaviour to improve suitability for rehoming.

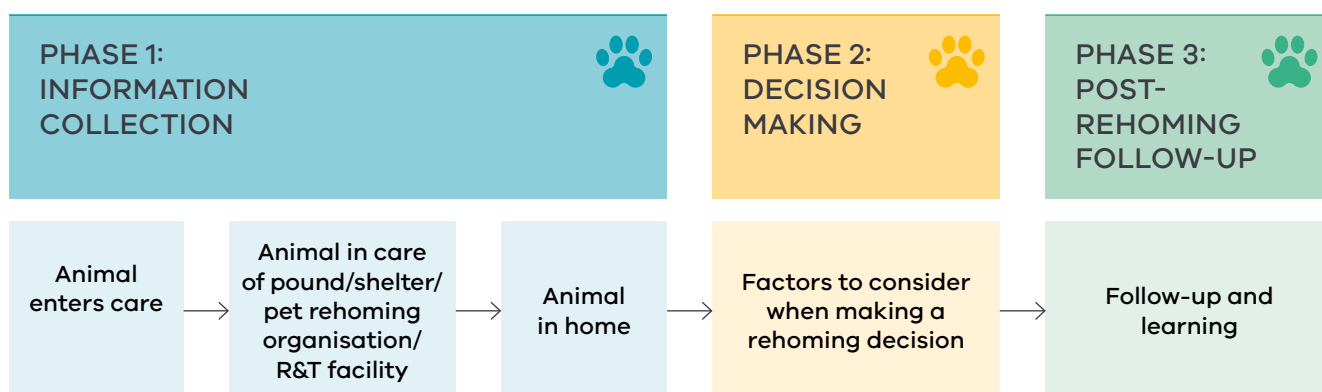
A holistic approach also takes into account the multiple perspectives of volunteers and shelter staff, trainers, behaviourists and veterinarians, to contribute to a more comprehensive and accurate assessment.

Please note, in situations where the animal has caused, or is at risk of causing, serious injury to another animal or person, the animal **is not** suitable for rehoming. Pounds and shelters must ensure ongoing compliance with the Code when drawing on the approach and methods suggested in this guide. Similarly, pet rehoming organisations must also ensure dangerous or potentially dangerous animals are not rehomed.

What does a holistic approach to assessing rehoming suitability look like?

This guide proposes a holistic approach that begins at the point an animal enters the care of a pound, shelter or pet rehoming organisation, continues through its foster care and to the point of adoption into a new family. It also advocates for post adoption follow-up, to check in on an animal's progress and provide a feedback process for learning and improving on the suitability assessment process for future animals in the organisation's care.

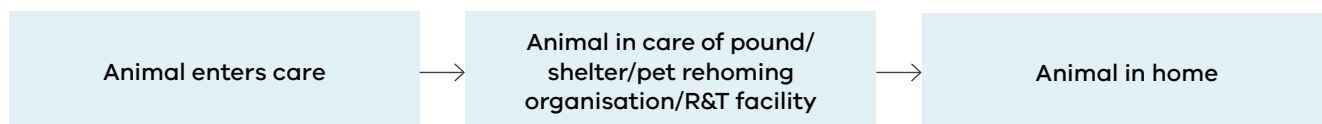
The holistic approach is summarised below, with more detail on each "Phase" provided in sections 3–6 of this guide below.



A person wearing a blue uniform with a "STATE OF VICTORIA" patch is holding an orange tabby cat. The cat is looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting. The top left corner features a geometric design with overlapping triangles in teal, yellow, orange, and gold.

3. INFORMATION COLLECTION

PHASE 1: INFORMATION COLLECTION



To make well-informed decisions about rehoming a cat, information about that animal's behaviour should be gathered from all available sources, and over as long a period of time as possible.

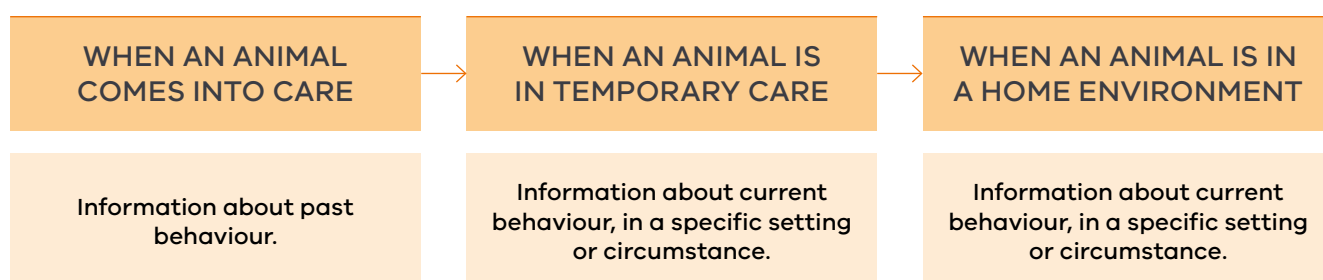
Who collects the information?

Rehoming organisations should set up processes to ensure their personnel can collect all available information about an animal's behaviour. It is essential for these individuals to be trained to understand what information to gather and how to accurately record the animals' behaviour.

In some circumstances, information can also be gathered on behalf of the pet rehoming organisation by a range of qualified individuals with expertise in assessing and assisting with animal behaviour. These individuals have different qualifications and specialisations that can be considered by the pet rehoming organisation when making assessments of animal behaviour or seeking assistance to rehabilitate or support cats and dogs to be rehomed. Further information about these specialists, and their qualifications, is provided in Appendix 2.

When can information be collected

Information about an animal's behaviour should be collected from the point of surrender and through care. The amount of information that will be available through this time will vary, depending on how the animal has been admitted to the shelter, pound or pet rehoming organisation.



Section 3.1 below provides further information about how information can be collected at each of these times, along with templates that can be used to record information. The templates are also available as full page, print-ready resources in Appendix 1.

The templates outline key opportunities for collecting information about an animal's behaviour and suggest what information could be useful for assessing the animal's suitability for rehoming. There are strengths and weaknesses associated with collecting information at each of these points, which are also captured below.



When can information be shared?

Any information collected about an animal's behaviour should be shared with other rehoming organisations that may assess the animal's rehoming suitability and if possible, rehome the animal. Sharing the information will help support informed rehoming suitability assessments and determine the best home for an animal.

Information should also be shared with anyone that is going to come into contact with the animal – for example, vets, animal attendants and/or behavioural specialists. Information about the animal's behaviour should also be shared with prospective new owners to ensure they are aware of and can manage the animal's needs.

Common scenarios when this information should be

shared include:

- A council pound transferring an animal to an animal shelter
- An animal shelter transferring an animal to a rescue group
- A rescue group transferring an animal to another rescue group
- An animal shelter, pound/rescue group placing an animal in foster care

Information collected about an animal's behaviour should also be shared with any potential adopters. This can help them to prepare, understand and support the animal as it settles into its new home environment.

3.1 Collecting information when an animal comes into care

Strengths and weaknesses of collecting information when an animal is surrendered or impounded	
Strengths	Weaknesses
• Provides for continuity of care and early identification of special needs. • Can highlight risks. • Can provide detailed information about the animal's life, preferences and behaviours. • Those surrendering an animal may appreciate the opportunity to provide information about their animal. • May provide information about how the animal behaves under stress.	• People may not complete the questionnaire or refuse the interview. • Information may be inaccurate or include biases. • People may not know the animal's history. • Time constraints.

An animal's past behaviour can provide valuable insights into its potential future behaviour in its new home.

Rehoming organisations could collect information through discussions with, or written questionnaires from surrendering owners and individuals who have interacted with the animal, such as those who found it or transported it. For animals that were housed in research institutions, this information can be gathered from laboratory technicians or animal handlers.

Information collected might include the animal's daily routine and general history (including any known previous injuries or illnesses) and how the animal:

- behaves in familiar and unfamiliar environments.
- interacts with known or unknown people (including children) and animals.

- behaves during feeding, play, walks and handling; and
- responds to requests or cues such as sit or drop

It could also include any health conditions of the animal that might impact their behaviour.

Template questionnaires for rehoming organisations to use when receiving an animal are provided below. These templates are designed to capture past behavioural observations of the animal only and would be used in conjunction with existing admissions paperwork used by the rehoming organisation that captures required information about the animal such as age, desexed status, medical information, microchip number and source of the animal.

Cat pre-admission template

(for use by pounds and shelters when someone has found the cat/does not know their history or the cat has been impounded)

	Questions	Answers
1	Where did you find the cat?	
2	Did the cat approach you in response to being called or when it saw you? If not, what did the animal do when you approached?	
3	Did the cat eat when offered food (if applicable)? If so, how did they approach the food?	
4	Were you able to pat and hold the cat? If so, how did they respond?	
5	Who transported the cat to the rehoming organisation and how?	
6	What did the cat do during transportation?	
7	What did the cat do when it saw another animal (if applicable)?	
8	What did the cat do when it saw another person besides you (if applicable)?	
9	What environments did you expose the cat to? (your backyard, closed room in a house etc)	
10	How long was the cat in your care?	
11	Is there any other information about the cat you would like to provide?	





Cat surrender template

(for use by a previous owner/owner agent surrendering the cat)

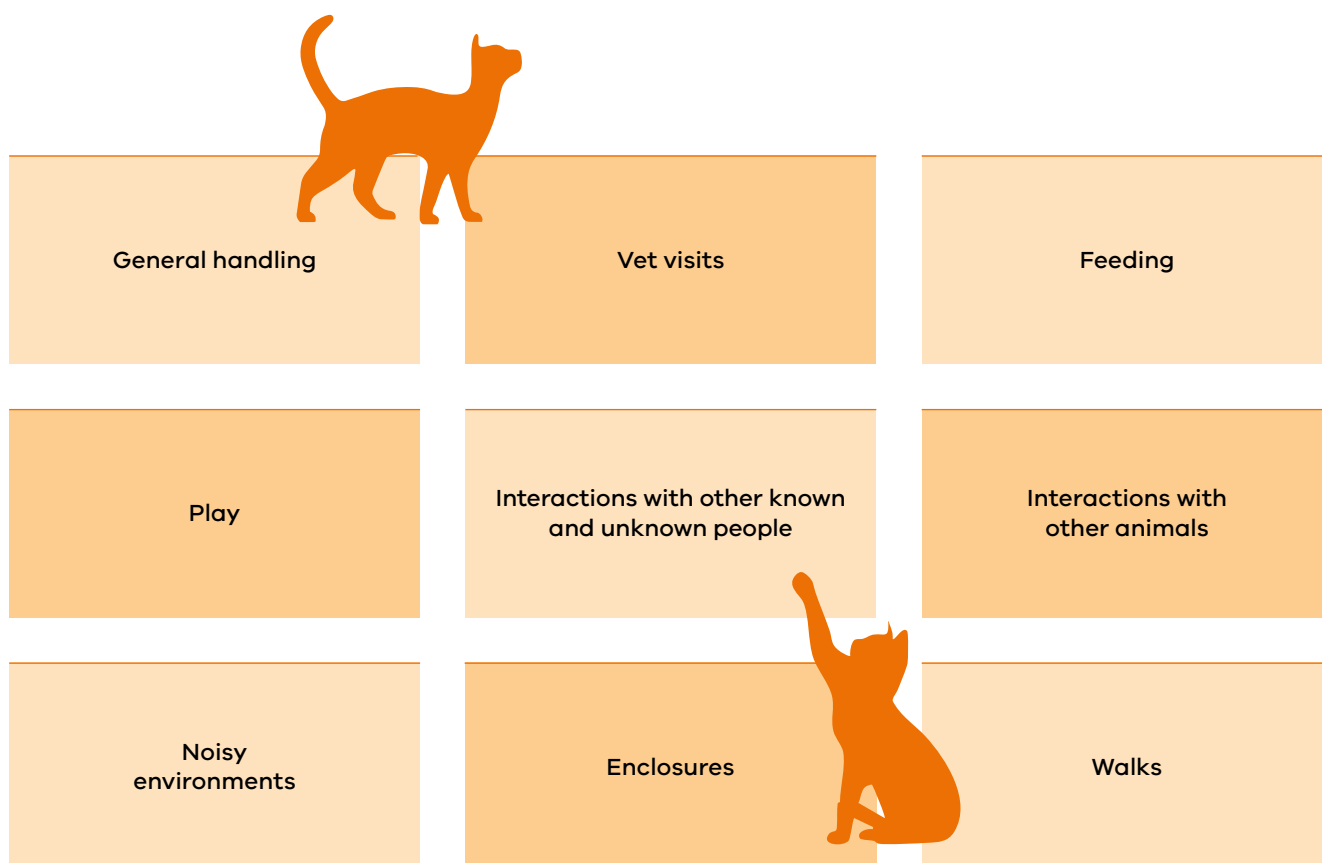
Questions	Yes/No	Further information
1 What are the reasons for surrendering the cat?		
2 If known, where was the cat originally acquired (e.g. breeder, shelter, rescue)? How long was it at this location?		
3 If known, where has the cat previously lived? If possible, include the length of time at each location.		
4 Does the cat have any known injuries, medical conditions or behavioural issues?		
5 Does the cat have a particular daily routine? If yes, what is it?		
6 Does the cat have any favourite activities or toys? If yes, what are they?		
7 What type of food is the cat given? Do they have any favourite foods? Are there any foods that cause an adverse reaction (i.e. diarrhoea)?		
8 Is the cat litter trained? How many litter trays are provided for the cat?		
9 Does the cat regularly urinate or defecate outside of the litter box?		
10 Does the cat have preferences in relation to litter tray, placement or litter type?		
11 Has the cat lived with other cats/dogs/animals before? If yes, what animals? What were their breeds and ages?		
12 If applicable, how does the cat typically behave when interacting or living with other animals?		
13 Has the cat lived with other people before? If yes, roughly what age were the people (children, adults, elderly)? How does the cat typically behave when interacting with these people?		
14 Did the cat interact regularly with unknown people? What was their behaviour around unknown people?		
15 Did the cat have access to the outdoors? Or are they kept inside?		
16 If the cat has access to outdoors, how frequently are they outside (i.e. daytime access, 24/7 access)?		
17 What type of property does the cat live on (for example inner urban, suburban, rural)?		
18 Have there been any behavioural challenges with the cat (e.g. fear, aggression, excessive vocalisation)? If yes, what were the challenging behaviours? When did they occur? And have there been any attempts to address the challenge (either through formal intervention or in the home/institution)?		
19 What training techniques have been utilised to manage the cat's behaviour?		
20 How does the cat behave in a cat carrier and while travelling in the car?		
21 How does the cat behave while at the vet or groomers?		
22 Are there any situations or circumstances in which the cat's behaviour differs from what is described above?		
23 What is the name and phone number of your current vet? Could you please provide consent for us to contact your vet to obtain medical records?		

3.2 Collecting information when an animal is in temporary care

Strengths and weaknesses of collecting information when an animal is in temporary care	
Strengths	Weaknesses
- Allows observation of the animal in a controlled environment. - Or, when the animal is taken out of the enclosure to other surroundings (for example, an enclosed area with other dogs), allows observation of an animal in environments where it may be rehomed.	- An animal's behaviour may be impacted by higher stress/non-home environments such as those experienced while in care. - To observe the animal out of its enclosure, requires access to different environments or resources to transport animals to and from different environments.

There are many opportunities in temporary care to observe and record an animal's behaviour. This includes observing the animal around different people and animals and, where possible, in different environments such as large enclosures with other cats or trips to different locations for specific observation. Individuals observing and recording behaviour can include animal attendants, animal behaviourists and trainers, vets and volunteers.

It is recommended that the animal is observed, with information recorded, during:



Information about the animal should be collected repeatedly, to build a more complete picture of health and behaviour, what interventions have yielded the best outcome and any changes over time (including regression).

A template for collecting information while the animal is in temporary care is provided below. Staff or volunteers that do not have formal training or extensive experience in animal behaviour may find online posters or infographics helpful for understanding an animal's response to various situations. Links to helpful examples of guides for cat body language are provided in the Resources list below.



In enclosure

Questions	Observations (<i>tick those that apply</i>)							
	Calm/ Relaxed No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	Some signs of fear (tail close to body, may be tucked under body, distressed meow)	Some signs of aggression (dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yowling)	Moderate signs of fear (crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	Moderate signs of aggression (growling, hissing spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	High signs of fear (crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yowling, hissing, shut down)	High signs of aggression (repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	Notes (record any relevant contextual details about the observed behaviour, e.g. gender of the animal attendant, time of day, whether the observation occurred during a busy or quiet period etc.)
How does the cat react when you approach the enclosure?								
How does the cat react when you open the enclosure?								
How does the cat react when you enter the enclosure?								
How does the cat react if it can see another animal?								
How does the cat react when it is being fed or is offered food?								
Is the cat displaying any challenging or concerning behaviour (such as significant withdrawal, yowling, repetitive behaviours or health issues)? Are attempts being made to address this?					Notes:			
Has the cat's behaviour in the enclosure changed since the last time observations were taken? If yes, what have been some key changes?					Notes:			

Daily Behavioural Monitoring

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Outside of enclosure

Questions	Observations (<i>tick those that apply</i>)							Notes
	Calm/ Relaxed No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	Some signs of fear (tail close to body, may be tucked under body, distressed meow)	Some signs of aggression (dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yowling)	Moderate signs of fear (crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	Moderate signs of aggression (growling, hissing spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	High signs of fear (crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yowling, hissing, shut down)	High signs of aggression (repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	(record any relevant contextual details about the observed behaviour, e.g., whether the cat was in a familiar room, the behaviour of other cats that were present etc.)
How does the cat react when known or unknown people approach?								
How does the cat react to other animals?								
How does the cat react if you attempt to play?								
How does the cat respond if you attempt training?								
Is the cat displaying any challenging or concerning behaviour (such as significant withdrawal or health issues)? Are attempts being made to address this through behaviour modification and/or veterinary prescribed behavioural medication?	Notes:							
Is the cat responding and learning from attempts to train in basic behaviours (house/litter training)?	Notes:							
Has the cat's behaviour outside of its enclosure changed since the last time observations were taken? If yes, what have been some key changes?	Notes:							

Daily Behavioural Monitoring

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday



3.3 Collecting information when an animal is in a home environment

Strengths and weaknesses of collecting information when an animal is in foster care	
Strengths	Weaknesses
- Detailed information on behaviour, preferences, and interactions with other animals and people can be collected. - Response to training can be assessed.	- Relies on one person's experience and their perception, which may be influenced by previous interactions, training and other biases (positive or negative). - One home environment may not give an accurate reflection on how the animal will typically behave in a different home environment. - Some behaviours may not be evident until the animal has settled in and developed relationships with other animals and people.

Information collected about an animal's behaviour in a home environment is crucial for an organisation to understand how that animal may adjust to a new home. There are opportunities to collect this information when an animal is placed with a foster carer, in structured post-adoption follow-up, or when an animal has been rehomed from a shelter or pound but returned. In the case of foster care, it may be useful to provide the template to the foster carer at the start of the foster period, so that they are aware of what behaviour to observe and record. Depending on the length of the foster period, foster carers could be asked to record behaviour at several times during the animal's stay with them. Monitoring cameras and videos can also be useful in capturing this behaviour.

A template for foster carers, or those surrendering an animal that was adopted but returned, is provided below.

Foster carer observation list								
Questions	Observations (<i>tick those that apply</i>)							Notes
	Calm/Relaxed No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	Some signs of fear (tail close to body, may be tucked under body, distressed meow)	Some signs of aggression (dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yowling)	Moderate signs of fear (crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	Moderate signs of aggression (growling, hissing spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	High signs of fear (crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yowling, hissing, shut down)	High signs of aggression (repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	
How does the animal react when people approach it (e.g. for a pat, when unknown people enter the home/property)?								
How does the animal react around children?								
How does the animal react around elderly people?								

Foster carer observation list

Continued

Questions	Observations (<i>tick those that apply</i>)							Notes
	Calm/ Relaxed No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	Some signs of fear (tail close to body, may be tucked under body, distressed meow)	Some signs of aggression (dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yowling)	Moderate signs of fear (crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	Moderate signs of aggression (growling, hissing spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	High signs of fear (crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yowling, hissing, shut down)	High signs of aggression (repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	
How does the animal react to other animals?								
How does the animal react if you attempt to play with it?								
How does the animal react when left alone at home?								
How does the animal react when left at home with another person or animal?								
How does the animal respond when offered food and when eating?								
How does the animal respond to vet visits?								
Is the animal displaying any challenging or concerning behaviour (such as attempts to escape, withdrawal)?	Notes:							
Has the animal's behaviour changed since the last time these observations were taken? If yes, what have been some key changes?	Notes:							
What do you think would be a suitable home environment for this animal?	Notes:							



3.4 Behaviour in a research facility

Strengths and weaknesses of collecting information when an animal is surrendered

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Ability to provide consistent training to a small number of handlers. • Handlers are very familiar with the animals and can provide information on patterns of behaviour over time. • Provides information on the animal's behavioural tendencies within a familiar context and environment.	• Limited number of familiar handlers, with varying levels of behaviour specific training. • Very different environment to what the animal may be exposed to in other/home environments.

An animal housed at a research facility is likely to have had limited, if any, exposure or socialisation outside of the facility. Recording information about the animal and the environment they have been living in will be crucial in identifying socialisation gaps to possibly prepare the animal for a home environment. Research facilities are encouraged to modify the templates provided above in order to collect information about an animal during its time within the facility.





4. MAKING THE DECISION ON SUITABILITY FOR REHOMING

PHASE 2: DECISION MAKING



Factors to consider when making a rehoming decision

Once a range of information about an animal's behaviour has been collected over time, a decision must be made about its suitability for rehoming.

4.1 What information should be considered when assessing rehoming suitability?

Rehoming organisations should consider various issues when undertaking an assessment of an animal's rehoming suitability. These include:

Community safety	What risk does the animal pose to the community if rehomed? Is the animal likely to display abnormal or intense aggression towards people or other companion animals, either in its new home or in a public environment? If the animal poses a risk to the community, can that risk be managed to an acceptable level by an adopter of typical pet owner skill level? If so, how?
Health	What is the animal's overall health status and what are their ongoing care requirements? Are there health concerns or serious illness that is impacting on the animal's quality of life and ability to be rehomed?
Progress	Has the animal shown positive progress while in the care of a pound, shelter, pet rehoming organisation or research and teaching facility? What is the projected timeline for the animal to be ready for adoption? This can include increased positive responses to interactions and/or decreased signs of fear, stress or anxiety. If progress is slow consult with a veterinarian to discuss whether behavioural medication is appropriate.
Environment	Does the animal react strongly in a particular environment? If so, how could these reactions/behaviours be managed in a new home? Factors like noise and odours can significantly influence an animal's behaviour. Consider how the current environment might affect the behaviour of an animal using various approaches to minimise environmental impacts, such as exposure to more natural environments, playgroups for dogs, setting up home-like spaces for cats, and fostering animals.
Timing	How long is the animal likely to need in order to adapt to a new environment? What adjustments might be needed to support the animal during this time? How long it takes an animal to adapt to a new environment can influence observed behaviour.
Capacity	Does the shelter, pound or rehoming organisation have the resources to house the animal, to provide good welfare and prevent behavioural deterioration if it is not yet ready for rehoming? If not, are there other pet rehoming organisations, shelters or pounds that could assist? An organisation's obligation to admit animals may also affect capacity, but it should not be the sole factor in determining an animal's suitability for rehoming. Collaboration with pet rehoming organisations should be considered if an organisation lacks capacity but the animal is otherwise suitable for rehoming. However, if another organisation cannot accept the animal and its welfare, health or behaviour outcomes decline euthanasia may be the most suitable option.
Animal welfare	If the animal is rehomed, will it have a good quality of life and good animal welfare? That is, will the animal have a positive physical state and a positive mental state? Ensuring good animal welfare goes beyond prevention of pain, suffering and distress but also ensuring animals feel safe, have enriching environments, positive experiences and good quality of life.



Rehoming organisations should also consider species specific information about an animal, taking into account the information gathered over time in relation to that animal. Specific issues to consider include:

Specific issues to consider when assessing cats	
Age	A cat's age plays a significant role. Kittens have different needs compared to adult or senior cats.
Litter training	Is the cat litter trained? Does it have any strong preferences about litter tray style, location and litter type?
Environment	Has the cat been an indoor or outdoor cat? What's its level of socialisation with humans?
Exposure to other animals	How does the cat interact with other domestic pets?
Favourite activities and toys	Does the cat have any favourite toys and/or activities that could help to support a happy environment in its new home?
Health	Does the cat have any known or likely medical issues? Does the cat require regular medication or vet visits?
Habits and quirks	Does the cat have any daily routines, preferences or unique behaviour for the new owners to be aware of?
Past experiences and socialisation	Are there past experiences, socialisations, trauma and/or behavioural issues that will impact the cat's rehoming?
Previous living situation	Does the cat have experience with children, other animals and/or older adults? Consider the type of living situation the cat has previously lived in (for example, suburban home, rural environment, city apartment)
Sex	Whether the cat is male or female can impact behaviour, social dynamics, and health.
Special dietary needs	Does the cat have a specific diet or dietary requirements? Some cats require specific diets due to allergies or health conditions.

Pet rehoming organisations may also have their own additional issues to consider alongside this list.



4.2 Following a rehoming suitability assessment, animals typically fall into one of three categories:

SUITABLE FOR REHOMING

The animal is available for rehoming, and the shelter, pound or rehoming organisation can now find the best fit between that animal and a household (for example, an animal with separation anxiety may be best placed with new owners that are at home for much of the time. Similarly, an animal that is fearful of children or other animals may be best placed in a home with no children or animals).

MORE INFORMATION NEEDED

If a pound, shelter, pet rehoming organisation or research organisation needs more information about an animal's behaviour before categorising it, the animal will:

- Be placed in foster care to enable more information to be collected about its behaviour in a home environment.
- A foster care placement may also enable the circumstances and time for a person to improve any identified issues with an animal's behaviour.
- If the animal requires specialised care or training, a pound or shelter may choose to transfer the animal to a pet rehoming organisation where more information about the animal in a home environment can be collected. If the animal cannot be placed in foster care or transferred to a pet rehoming organisation a decision may need to be made about the animal's suitability for rehoming to avoid staying in care for a prolonged period which may lead to health and behavioural deterioration.

UNSUITABLE FOR REHOMING

Health reasons – A veterinarian should assess the animal's welfare and recommend euthanasia if deemed necessary due to health issues. Veterinary assessment of animals must take place if the animal is being cared for by a pound or shelter.

Behavioural issues – In some circumstances, euthanasia may be the most appropriate, or required, outcome (based on Code requirements) for an animal with significant behavioural issues – in the interests of both the animal's welfare and the community safety. The decision-making process for euthanasia due to behavioural issues varies among organisations. Some hold staff meetings while others form an independent committee. These decision-making models consider staff welfare and safety, community safety, and the animal's welfare. They ensure the decision-making burden does not rest on a single person. In the Victorian rehoming sector, it is rare for a single person to decide on euthanasia. Individuals involved can include staff, volunteers, vets and animal behaviourists.

The decision to euthanise an animal, whether for health or behavioural reasons is a deeply emotional one. However, sometimes euthanasia can be the kindest choice for an animal that is struggling physically or mentally. Staff and volunteers at pounds, shelters and pet rehoming organisation are deeply invested in good welfare outcomes for animals in their care. As such these decisions can be difficult to make and may be best left to experts such as vets or behaviourists.

Animal shelters and pounds must ensure their ongoing compliance with the Code when making final decisions about an animal's suitability for rehoming and euthanasia.



5. POST REHOMING FOLLOW-UP

PHASE 3: POST-REHOMING FOLLOW-UP



Follow-up and learning

It takes time for animals to settle into their new home. Studies show that displaying some problem behaviour post-rehoming is quite common (Gates et al., 2018) and conducting follow-ups to evaluate whether placements are successful is important. This will support the welfare of the rehomed animal and the new owner to ensure the adoption is successful and a strong relationship is built with their new pet. It will also support the organisation to measure the effectiveness of their rehoming criteria and assessment methods.

WHY FOLLOW-UP MATTERS

- **Ensuring a good match**

While behavioural assessments help determine suitability for rehoming, real-life adaptation in the new home is the true test. A pet's behaviour in a shelter or foster home may differ significantly from how they behave in their adoptive home. Without follow-up, rehoming organisations miss critical insights into how well their process matches animals with suitable adopters.

- **Tracking rehoming outcomes**

Some animals that struggle in new homes are returned to the original organisation, while others are surrendered to different shelters or rescues. Without a structured follow-up system, organisations do not have accurate data on the true success rates of their rehoming decisions.

- **Identifying and reducing returns**

Follow-up can help identify common reasons for rehoming failures, allowing organisations to refine their behavioural assessments, training support, and adopter education to reduce the risk of returns or re-surrenders.

- **Supporting adopters and improving animal welfare**

New adopters/foster carers often face challenges in the first few weeks or months. Many minor behaviour issues can be resolved with timely advice, preventing unnecessary returns. A follow-up system allows organisations to offer guidance and support, ensuring better long-term outcomes.

Pet rehoming organisations are encouraged to implement structured follow-up procedures to monitor rehoming success and refine their processes. This can be done by:

Implementing a standardised follow-up system

- Conduct check-ins with adopters/foster carers post rehoming, to assess how well the pet is settling in at:
 - 1 week
 - 1 month
 - 3 months
 - 6 months
- Explore different follow-up methods that best suit the resources of the pet rehoming organisation and the adopter. Follow-up can occur via phone calls, emails, online surveys or home visits (where feasible).
- Standardise follow-up questions include things like:
 - How is the pet adjusting to their new home?
 - Have any behaviour or health issues arisen?
 - Have there been any challenges in training or socialisation with people or other animals?
 - Do you need additional support or resources?



Providing post-adoption support

- Where resources allow, pounds, shelters and pet rehoming organisations could offer behavioural and training advice to help adopters manage challenges before they escalate into reasons for surrender. They may also be able to refer owners to trainers or behaviourists that may be able to provide support.
- The organisation could consider creating an adopter support network such as online groups, where adopters can seek guidance and support.
- Encourage adopters to report difficulties early, rather than waiting until problems become unmanageable.

Collecting and analysing rehoming outcome data

- Track how many animals remain in their adoptive homes vs. how many are returned or re-surrendered elsewhere. Under the Code, pounds and shelters are required to keep and report data on animals returned to their establishment.
- Identify patterns in unsuccessful placements, such as common behaviour challenges, or mismatched adopter expectations.
- Use this data to refine behavioural assessments and pet-adopter matching, improving future rehoming success rates.



6. REVIEWING AND REFINING THE APPROACH TO REHOMING ASSESSMENTS

Pet rehoming organisations are encouraged to review and refine their approach to rehoming suitability assessments regularly. Organisations should consider carrying out a full review of the entire process every five years, or a smaller review of a specific part of the process (for example gathering information while in care) every 2 years.

The review should include follow-up with those who have been involved with the organisation in their efforts to rehome pets (for example, vets, shelters and pounds or other rehoming organisations), so that each can provide their reflections about the process.

WHY REVIEW?

Regular reviews help to ensure that lessons learned through pet rehoming experiences are incorporated into future assessments and that the best available knowledge about rehoming practices can be captured.

7. REVIEW OF THIS GUIDE

This guide will be reviewed as required, with any updates published on the Animal Welfare Victoria webpage.



A black and white cat with yellow eyes is looking up at a cat tree. The cat has a white face with black markings around its eyes and ears. It is sitting on a dark surface. The background is a blurred indoor setting. The top left corner of the page features a geometric design with overlapping triangles in shades of orange, yellow, and teal.

APPENDIX 1: TEMPLATES

Cat pre-admission template

Page 1 of 2

(for use by pounds and shelters when someone has found the cat/does not know their history or the cat has been impounded)

Questions	Answers
1 Where did you find the cat?	
2 Did the cat approach you in response to being called or when it saw you? If not, what did the animal do when you approached?	
3 Did the cat eat when offered food (if applicable)? If so, how did they approach the food?	
4 Were you able to pat and hold the cat? If so, how did they respond?	
5 Who transported the cat to the rehoming organisation and how?	
6 What did the cat do during transportation?	

Cat pre-admission template

Page 2 of 2

(for use by pounds and shelters when someone has found the cat/does not know their history or the cat has been impounded)

Questions	Answers
7 What did the cat do when it saw another animal (if applicable)?	
8 What did the cat do when it saw another person besides you (if applicable)?	
9 What environments did you expose the cat to? (your backyard, closed room in a house etc)	
10 How long was the cat in your care?	
11 Is there any other information about the cat you would like to provide?	

Cat surrender information

Page 1 of 2

(for use by a previous owner/owner agent surrendering the cat)

Questions	Yes/No	Further information
1 What are the reasons for surrendering the cat?		
2 If known, where was the cat originally acquired (e.g. breeder, shelter, rescue)? How long was it at this location?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
3 If known, where has the cat previously lived? If possible, include the length of time at each location.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
4 Does the cat have any known injuries, medical conditions or behavioural issues?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
5 Does the cat have a particular daily routine? If yes, what is it?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
6 Does the cat have any favourite activities or toys? If yes, what are they?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
7 What type of food is the cat given? Do they have any favourite foods? Are there any foods that cause an adverse reaction (i.e. diarrhoea)?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
8 Is the cat litter trained? How many litter trays are provided for the cat?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
9 Does the cat regularly urinate or defecate outside of the litter box?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
10 Does the cat have preferences in relation to litter tray, placement or litter type?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
11 Has the cat lived with other cats/dogs/animals before? If yes, what animals? What were their breeds and ages?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
12 If applicable, how does the cat typically behave when interacting or living with other animals?	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Cat surrender information

Page 2 of 2

(for use by a previous owner/owner agent surrendering the cat)

Questions	Yes/No	Further information
13 Has the cat lived with other people before? If yes, roughly what age were the people (children, adults, elderly)? How does the cat typically behave when interacting with these people?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
14 Did the cat interact regularly with unknown people? What was their behaviour around unknown people?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
15 Did the cat have access to the outdoors? Or are they kept inside?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
16 If the cat has access to outdoors, how frequently are they outside (i.e. daytime access, 24/7 access)?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
17 What type of property does the cat live on (for example inner urban, suburban, rural)?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
18 Have there been any behavioural challenges with the cat (e.g. fear, aggression, excessive vocalisation)? If yes, what were the challenging behaviours? When did they occur? And have there been any attempts to address the challenge (either through formal intervention or in the home/institution)?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
19 What training techniques have been utilised to manage the cat's behaviour?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
20 How does the cat behave in a cat carrier and while travelling in the car?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
21 How does the cat behave while at the vet or groomers?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
22 Are there any situations or circumstances in which the cat's behaviour differs from what is described above?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
23 What is the name and phone number of your current vet? Could you please provide consent for us to contact your vet to obtain medical records?	☐ Yes ☐ No	

In enclosure

Questions								
Observations (tick those that apply)								
	Calm/ Relaxed	Some signs of fear	Some signs of aggression	Moderate signs of fear	Moderate signs of aggression	High signs of fear	High signs of aggression	Notes
	No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	(tail close to body, under body, distressed meow)	(dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yawling)	(crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	(growling, hissing, spitting, swatting, without contact, backing into a corner)	(crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yawling, hissing, shut down)	(repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	(record any relevant contextual details about the observed behaviour, eg. gender of the animal attendant, time of day, whether the observation occurred during a busy or quiet period etc.)
How does the cat react when you approach the enclosure?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat react when you open the enclosure?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat react when you enter the enclosure?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat react if it can see another animal?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat react when it is being fed or is offered food?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Is the cat displaying any challenging or concerning behaviour (such as significant withdrawal, yawling, repetitive behaviours or health issues)? Are attempts being made to address this?								
Has the cat's behaviour in the enclosure changed since the last time observations were taken? If yes, what have been some key changes?								

Daily Behavioural Monitoring

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Outside of enclosure

Questions	Observations (tick those that apply)							Notes
	Calm/ Relaxed	Some signs of fear	Some signs of aggression	Moderate signs of fear	Moderate signs of aggression	High signs of fear	High signs of aggression	
	No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	(tail close to body; may be tucked under body; distressed meow)	(dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yowling)	(crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	(growling, hissing spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	(crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yowling, hissing, shut down)	(repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	(record any relevant contextual details about the observed behaviour, e.g. whether the cat was in a familiar room, the behaviour of other cats that were present etc.)
How does the cat react when known or unknown people approach?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat react to other animals?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat react if you attempt to play?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the cat respond if you attempt training?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Is the cat displaying any challenging or concerning behaviour (such as significant withdrawal or health issues)? Are attempts being made to address this through behaviour modification and/or veterinary prescribed behavioural medication?								
Is the cat responding and learning from attempts to train in basic behaviours (house/litter training)?								
Has the cat's behaviour outside of its enclosure changed since the last time observations were taken? If yes, what have been some key changes?								

Daily Behavioural Monitoring

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Questions	Observations (tick those that apply)							
	Calm/ Relaxed No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	Some signs of fear (tail close to body, may be tucked under body, distressed meow)	Some signs of aggression (dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yawling)	Moderate signs of fear (crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	Moderate signs of aggression (growling, hissing, spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	High signs of fear (crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing, yawling, hissing, shut down)	High signs of aggression (repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	Notes
How does the animal react when people approach it (e.g. for a pat, when unknown people enter the home/property)?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal react around children?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal react around elderly people?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal react to other animals?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal react if you attempt to play with it?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal react when left alone at home?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Questions	Observations (tick those that apply)							
	Calm/ Relaxed No visible signs of fear, stress or aggression (friendly, resting, relaxed body).	Some signs of fear (tail close to body, may be tucked under body, distressed meow)	Some signs of aggression (dilated pupils, ears turned side-ways, tail swishing, tense body, yowling)	Moderate signs of fear (crouching, hiding, hair raised, freezing, distressed meow)	Moderate signs of aggression (growling, hissing, spitting, swatting without contact, backing into a corner)	High signs of fear (crouched with limbs tucked, shaking, piloerection, fully flattened ears, rapid breathing yowling, hissing, shut down)	High signs of aggression (repeated swats with claws extended, intense stare, lunging, attempts to bite)	Notes
How does the animal react when left at home with another person or animal?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal respond when offered food and when eating?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
How does the animal respond to vet visits?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Is the animal displaying any challenging or concerning behaviour (such as attempts to escape, withdrawal)?								
Has the animal's behaviour changed since the last time these observations were taken? If yes, what have been some key changes?								
What do you think would be a suitable home environment for this animal?								



APPENDIX 2: HELPFUL INFORMATION ABOUT REHOMING DOGS AND CATS IN VICTORIA



Helpful tools for understanding cat body language

Body language of feline fear, stress and anxiety

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/rehoming-suitability-guides>

Reading a Cat's Body Language

www.winnipeghumanesociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Reading-a-Cats-Body-Language.pdf

LAWS AND CODES OF PRACTICE THAT APPLY TO THE REHOMING OF DOGS AND CATS IN VICTORIA

Domestic Animals Act 1994 (Vic) – encourages responsible pet ownership, protects pet welfare and ensures they don't become a community nuisance. The Act requires all cats and dogs sold, adopted or given away in Victoria to be registered on the **Pet Exchange Register**. It also sets out the laws relating to dangerous dogs.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (Vic) – sets out cruelty offences and penalties for all animals in Victoria, including cats and dogs.

Code of practice for the private keeping of cats – provides the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care appropriate to the physical and behavioural requirements of cats.

Code of practice for the private keeping of dogs – provides the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care appropriate to the physical and behavioural requirements of dogs.

Code of practice for the management of dogs and cats in shelters – specifies the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care that are appropriate to the physical and behavioural needs of dogs and cats housed in establishments operating as an animal shelter or Council pound.

Title	Typical Qualifications	Can Diagnose Medical Issues?	Can Prescribe Medication?	Specialisation
Dog Trainer	Certificate IV or no formal qualifications	✗ No	✗ No	Basic training, obedience, manners
Animal Behaviourist	Bachelor's or higher	✗ No	✗ No	General behaviour assessment, training, consulting
Applied Animal Behaviourist	Master's or PhD	✗ No	✗ No	Behaviour modification, consulting, research
Certified Applied Animal Behaviourist (CAAB)	PhD (CAAB), Master's (ACAAB)	✗ No	✗ No	Expert behaviour assessment, training, research
Veterinarian	BVSc	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	General practitioner. Diagnosing and treating medical and behavioural issues, prescribing and supplying medication.
Behaviour Veterinarian	BVSc / DVM + post-graduate study	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	A veterinarian with a specific interest and high level of expertise in behaviour. Diagnosing & treating medical and behaviour disorders, prescribing and supplying medication.
Registered Specialist in Veterinary Behavioural Medicine (Veterinary Psychiatry)	BVSc / DVM + Specialisation in Veterinary Psychiatry	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	The highest level of qualification in veterinary behavioural medicine. Diagnosis and treatment of complex mental health disorders in animals, developing individualised treatment plans, prescribing and supplying medication, research.
Veterinary Nurse	Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing Bachelor of Veterinary Nursing and Technology Diploma of Veterinary Nursing	✗ No	✗ No	Assistance in observations, medical procedures, administration of medication, animal care and welfare education.

