

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

What is the Cat Desexing Program?

This two-year free cat desexing program is a joint initiative between RSPCA South Australia and the City of Onkaparinga.

With the aim to desex 2,000 cats and kittens over the course of two years, this program is the largest targeted free cat desexing program ever conducted in Australia. To be the first to know when the program goes live, please visit www.rspcasa.org.au/desexing-program

Why is a community Cat Desexing Program needed?

South Australia is facing a major cat overpopulation challenge; an estimated 137,000 cats – and probably far more – live in urban areas as unowned or semi-owned strays across our state. This puts cats at risk of injury and illness – as well as uncontrolled breeding.

These free-roaming unowned or semi-owned stray cats also threaten native wildlife and cause nuisance for humans.

The best way to address all these issues is to decrease cat breeding through supported community desexing programs. These programs will also reduce the numbers of unwanted animals being abandoned or ending up in RSPCA's care.

This Program aligns with recommendations made and goals listed in RSPCA South Australia and AWL's Cat Management Plan for South Australia, released in November 2019, including:

1. Improved health and wellbeing of cats
2. Reduced predation of cats on native wildlife
3. Reduced cat-related nuisance complaints in the community

What does RSPCA South Australia aim to achieve through this program?

We aim to reduce the number of homeless and unwanted felines in South Australia, while demonstrating to local and state government that community desexing programs are a highly effective method for reducing the long-term costs associated with cat management.

How is the program being funded?

The program is being funded by a generous \$200,000 donation from one of RSPCA South Australia's major supporters, who wishes to remain anonymous, along with a \$50,000 contribution from Onkaparinga Council.

Why is the program only available to residents of Onkaparinga District?

This desexing program is part of RSPCA's new partnership with Onkaparinga Council for the management of stray dogs and cats, and Onkaparinga is contributing \$50,000 towards the cost of the program. This is the first time RSPCA has entered into a formal agreement to partner with a metropolitan council for the impounding and rehoming of dogs and cats.

Additionally, RSPCA's Lonsdale Shelter is not only located in the Onkaparinga Council area, but the vast majority of the shelter's intake of stray cats and kittens come from the Onkaparinga area. Over the past year, around 40% of our intake of stray felines came from Onkaparinga. This indicates that cat overpopulation may be a larger problem in Onkaparinga suburbs than in other areas of South Australia.

What is Onkaparinga Council's involvement in this program?

Onkaparinga Council is contributing \$50,000 towards the program and will assist RSPCA in promoting the program to its community, as well as reinforcing the key components of responsible cat ownership, being to desex, microchip and keep indoors at night.

Will this program ever be available to residents outside the Onkaparinga District?

At the conclusion of this two-year program, RSPCA South Australia will collate all data to demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. We are hopeful that the results will attract funding from different quarters to enable similar programs in other regions of SA, where problems are occurring as a result of cat overpopulation.

I donate to RSPCA but don't live in Onkaparinga – why should my donations be used to fund this program?

No general community donations are being used to fund this program. RSPCA's \$200,000 funding has been provided by a single donor who wished to assist with our aim of demonstrating the effectiveness of large-scale desexing in a restricted area.

Why isn't the desexing available to all areas in South Australia?

This project is designed to demonstrate that large-scale desexing within confined boundaries has a significant impact on the number of stray animals in that area. If this desexing budget were spread across all of South Australia, or even all of Adelaide, we would not see significant enough results to prove the effectiveness of the strategy.

Is the program really free?

Yes, although we will seek a commitment for those participating, to keep their cats inside at night. Educational information on cat containment will be provided to assist.

What happens if people who get their cat desexed don't keep them indoors?

Keeping cats indoors at night is a commitment we are asking those involved in the desexing program to honour. However, we find most responsible citizens do the right thing if asked.

Will cats desexed in the program also be microchipped?

Yes. The cats will all be microchipped when they are desexed. Owners will be given the microchip number, but will be responsible for adding their cat and its microchip to the Dogs and Cats Online (DACO) database. We strongly recommend this is done so that you can be found if ever your cat gets lost.

Are the microchips safe for my cat?

Yes, they are completely safe.

I have more than two cats. If they get microchipped will the council find out and fine me?

Onkaparinga does not have a limit on the number of cats permitted per residence. Many councils do have a limit of two cats, but do allow more with permission. RSPCA's Cat Management Plan proposes four cats per household, which is quite reasonable if they are responsibly owned, but we also believe that more than four cats per household is acceptable if they are responsibly owned and not causing any nuisance to neighbours.

Will the desexing surgery be done properly?

Yes. Desexing will be performed by RSPCA vets who undertake 5,000+ operations each year. If, however, you prefer to take your cat to a vet, we may be able to subsidise that cost.

When and where will the desexing program take place?

The key element of the program, free desexing, will take place at RSPCA's Lonsdale animal shelter.

The second element of the program, the offer of subsidised desexing vouchers, will be available to use at participating local vet clinics, likely to be located within the Onkaparinga district. With these vouchers, Onkaparinga residents will pay a reduced fee for cat desexing, and RSPCA will subsidise the remaining cost.

To be the first to know when the program goes live, please visit www.rspcasa.org.au/desexing-program

How will desexing cats save wildlife?

Desexing itself helps to settle cats, especially males who no longer roam so much. Importantly however, the program will be strongly promoting the third arm of responsible cat management – keeping your cat indoors at night. This containment is proven to significantly help in protecting wildlife. Not only that, but decreased breeding in cats, as a result of desexing, results in fewer cats roaming around and harming wildlife.

This is not hard enough. People should be made to keep their cats indoors by law.

We are seeing councils have a lot of difficulty with introducing effective By-Laws and most are now waiting for changes to the state's *Dog and Cat Management Act*, which is due for review in 2022 and will almost certainly include improved requirements on cat owners. Rather than doing nothing until then however, Onkaparinga Council is being very progressive in assisting their residents to prepare for these future requirements before punitive measure come into effect.

Won't this take business away from local vets?

We are very sensitive to this issue and will be communicating and working with local vets to get them involved in the program by providing subsidies to people to have their cats desexed through a local vet. There are a number of factors to be considered:

- This program is really targeted at people who were not going to pay to get their cats desexed anyway so should not result in lost income.
- We are trying to develop the desexing of cats as just the normal practice of responsible cat owners, so longer term this will lead to increased business for vets.
- We will be referring owners to local vets for checkups and other medical issues identified with their cats.
- A lot of the cats coming in for desexing will never have been to a vet. We will be providing owners with a list of the local veterinary practices, providing information about cat health and encouraging owners to vaccinate their cats and have regular checkups with their vet.
- We will be meeting individually with all local vets to explain and discuss the program, seeking their input and involvement.

Responsible cat ownership includes proper veterinary care. Unfortunately at RSPCA we see too many cats who are not provided with proper veterinary care. Increased numbers of responsible cat owners is a good outcome for cats and for vet practices.

PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM

Do I have to be a ratepayer in Onkaparinga to access the program?

No, you just need to provide proof of residency within the Onkaparinga district. Everyone who lives in Onkaparinga, including those who rent but don't pay Council rates, can participate.

I'm a resident in Onkaparinga. Do I need a Government card to be involved in the desexing program?

No. There is no income qualification process and no Government cards are needed for eligibility. All residents of Onkaparinga council can participate in the cat desexing program, ***although to maximise the number of cats desexed, we would hope that those who can afford to have their cats desexed at a vet will do so themselves.***

What proof of residency in the Onkaparinga district is required?

A driver's license or photo identification where your address is identified.

Do I need to be over 18 to access this program?

Yes.

I'm not in the Onkaparinga District. Are there other programs like this that I have access to?

Yes, there are programs in SA that assist owners with desexing costs. For more information, search 'National Desexing Network' or 'Cats Assistance to Steralise'.

Exactly who is eligible for this program?

All residents of Onkaparinga above the age of 18, with proof of residency, can bring their cat/s in for free desexing, as long as their cat is eligible for desexing.

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What cats are eligible for the program?

The following male and female cats and kittens are eligible to be desexed in this Program:

- Above the age of three months
- Above the weight of 1kg
- Below the age of 12 years
- Determined as healthy enough to undergo desexing surgery by our vets
- Determined as not being a health risk to humans or other cats by our vets

I live in the Onkaparinga district - can I bring in cats that I've been feeding in my neighbourhood but don't own?

Provided the cats meet the eligibility criteria and do not have a microchip identifying someone else as their owner, you can bring the cats in. However, we ask that you take responsibility for the cats and this includes ensuring they are indoors at night.

Is there a limit on the number of cats I can bring in?

Generally no, but depending on the number of cats you wish to bring in, our vets will discuss options for desexing with you.

How do I book my spot in the program?

The first desexing sessions won't take place until September. More details about how to book your spot will be announced in late August via both RSPCA South Australia and Onkaparinga council social media and websites.

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