

Colorado Animal Sheltering in 2025: Where Denver Stands, and Where the State Is Heading

About the data

This analysis draws on Colorado's annual animal shelter and rescue statistics, which every licensed facility in the state files each year. The 2025 file covers **369 organizations** and 154 reported fields, breaking each species into adults and juveniles and tracking how animals arrive (stray, owner relinquished, transferred in from a Colorado organization, transferred in from out of state, or other) and how they leave (adoption, return to owner, transfer out, other live outcomes, death, euthanasia, or missing/stolen). We also pulled the equivalent files for 2021 through 2024 to look at five-year trends. Two threads run through the work: a detailed look at Denver Animal Protection, and a statewide look at how animals move into and around Colorado.

The short version

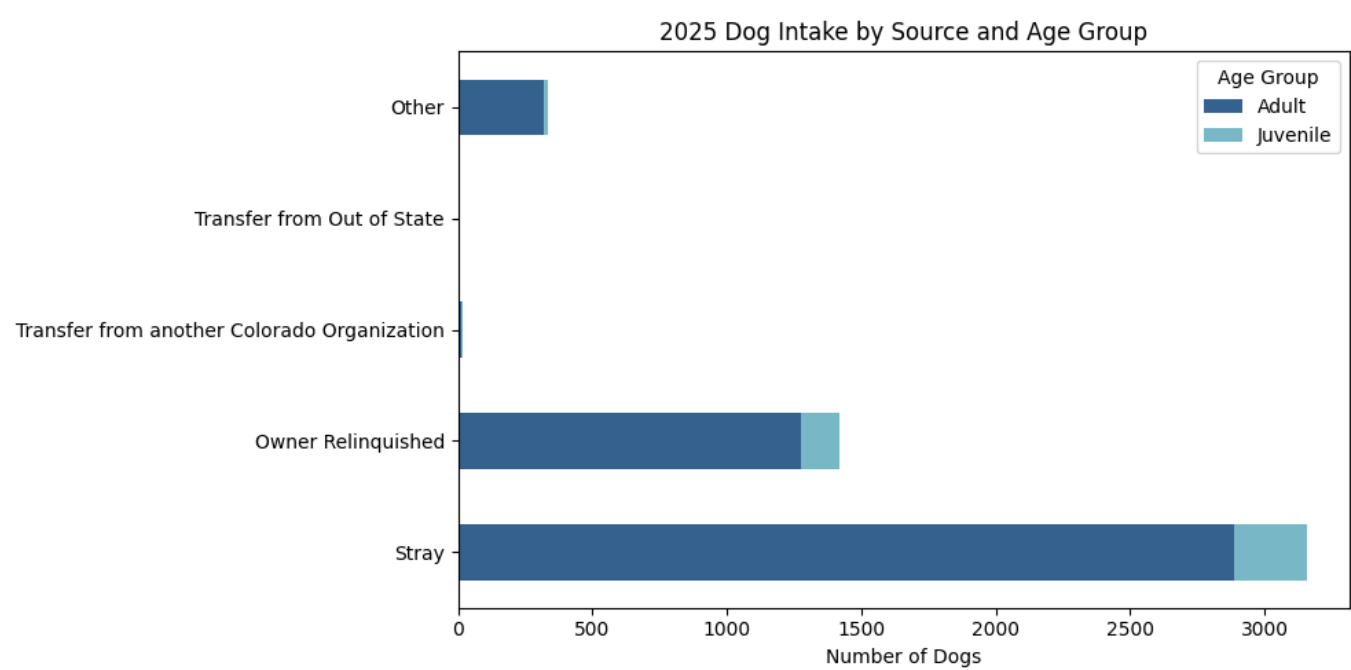
Denver Animal Protection is one of the largest animal intake operations in Colorado, but in 2025 it finished **last among the state's ten highest-intake organizations** for the share of dogs and cats that left its care alive. The shortfall is not spread evenly: it is overwhelmingly concentrated in **adult animals, and adult dogs in particular**. Meanwhile, statewide, the number of dogs and cats imported into Colorado from other states has fallen by more than 40 percent in five years, and that flow is driven far more by rescues than by shelters.

Denver's 2025 dog intake

Denver took in **4,932 dogs**, almost all of them from its own community. Strays alone accounted for nearly two-thirds of intake, and the shelter reported **zero** dogs brought in from outside Colorado.

Intake source	Adult	Juvenile	Combined
Stray	2,886	273	3,159
Owner relinquished	1,276	145	1,421

Transfer from another Colorado organization	14	1	15
Transfer from out of state	0	0	0
Other intake	321	16	337
Total intake	4,497	435	4,932

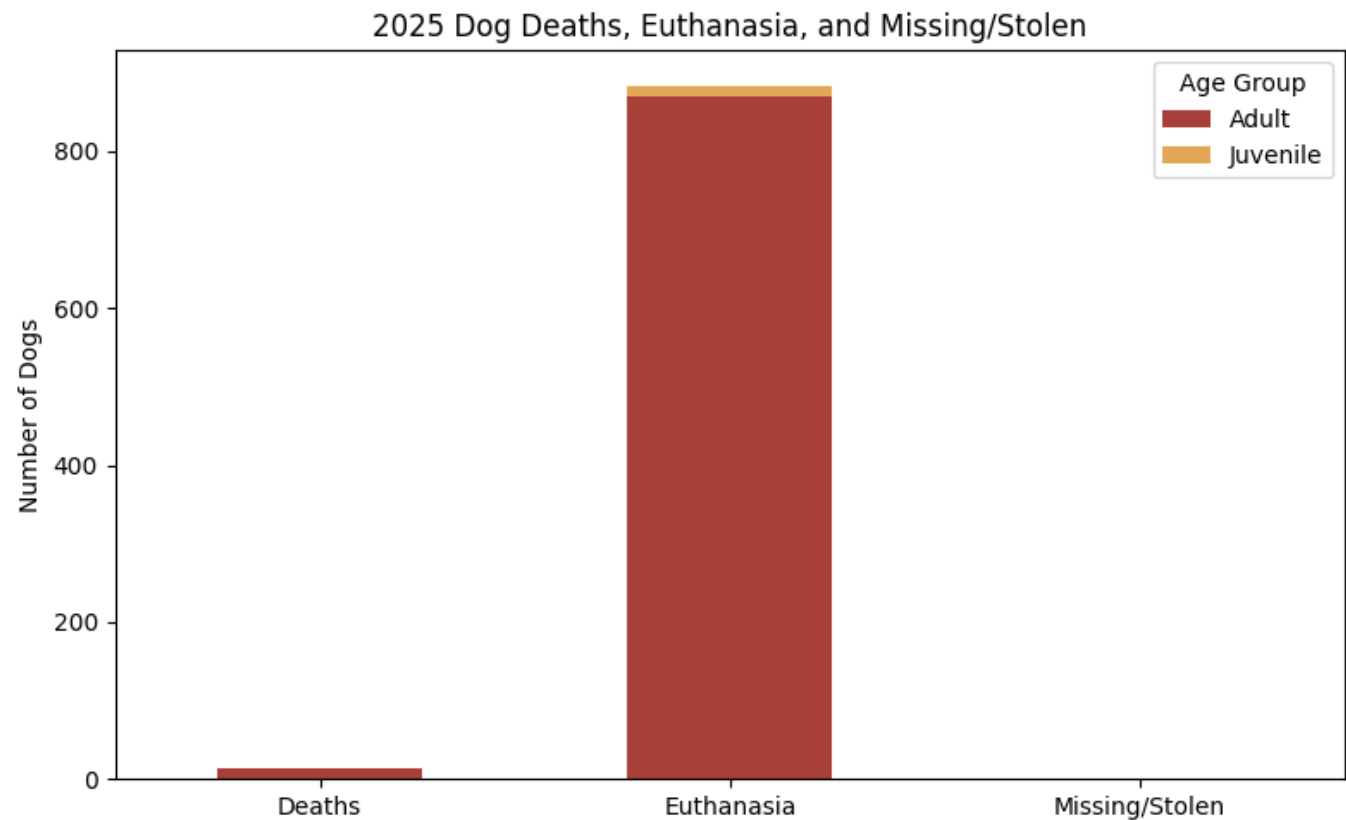


Adults made up **4,497** of the **4,932** dogs — roughly nine of every ten. That matters, because adults are also where nearly all the losses occurred.

Deaths, euthanasia, and missing animals

Outcome	Adult	Juvenile	Combined
Deaths	14	0	14
Euthanasia	870	14	884
Missing/stolen	1	0	1

Total	885	14	899
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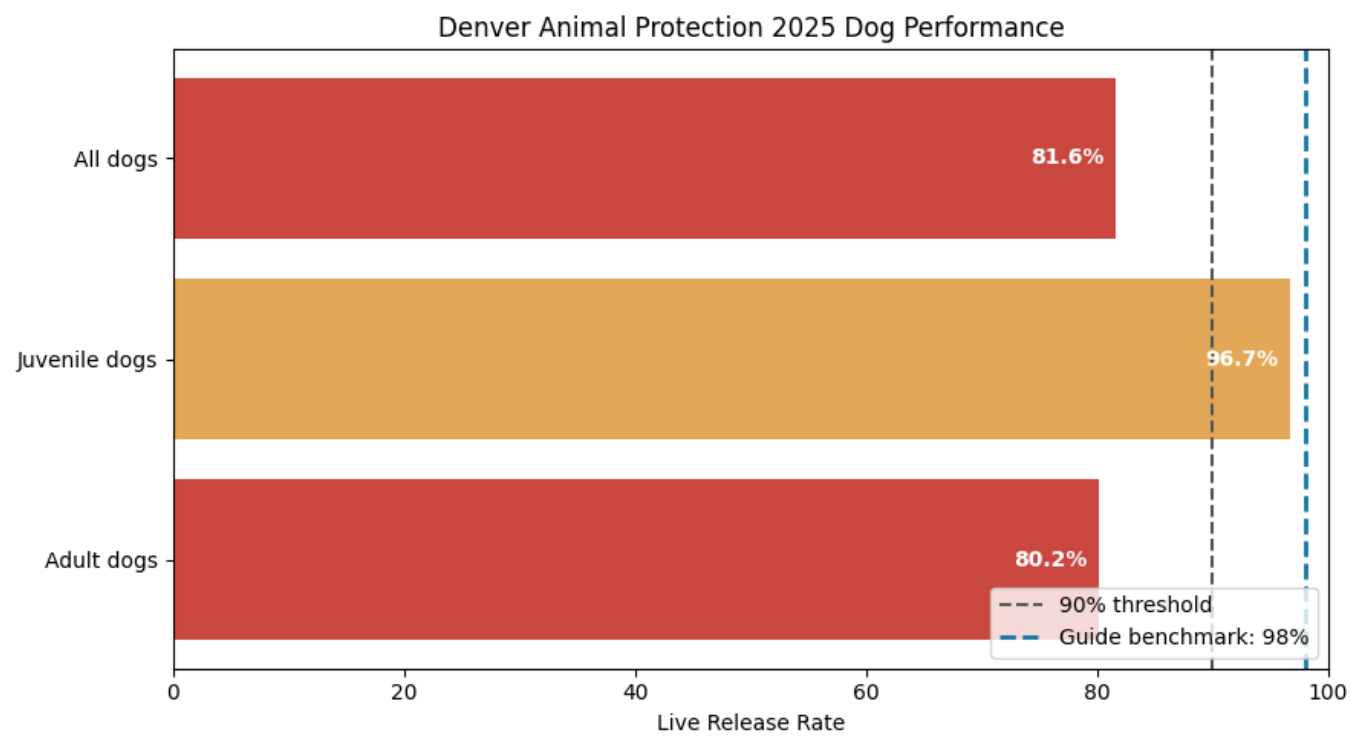
Of the 899 dogs that died, were euthanized, or went missing, **885 were adults — 98.4 percent**. Euthanasia accounted for **884 of the 899**, or 98.3 percent, so this is not a story about animals dying naturally in custody.

Denver's own numbers tell two different stories

Counting only animals with a final outcome, Denver's dog live-release rate was **81.6 percent**, with a corresponding death rate of 18.4 percent — roughly one in every 5.4 dogs.

Measure	Adult dogs	Juvenile dogs	All dogs
Live outcomes	3,575	409	3,984
Deaths, euthanasia, missing	885	14	899
Final outcomes	4,460	423	4,883

Live-release rate	80.2%	96.7%	81.6%
Death rate	19.8%	3.3%	18.4%



The same organization, in the same year, saved **96.7 percent** of juvenile dogs and **80.2 percent** of adults. An adult dog was roughly **six times as likely** as a juvenile to die, be euthanized, or go missing. To reach a 90 percent live-release rate, Denver would have needed about **411 more live outcomes**; to reach the 98 percent benchmark used in the reference report, about **802 more**.

Adoption volume was not the obvious culprit — Denver reported **2,265 dog adoptions**, about 46 percent of final outcomes. Reunification was weaker: **1,491 dogs went home**, an estimated **47.2 percent** of stray intake, against a 65 percent high-performing benchmark. Closing that gap would have meant roughly **563 more dogs returned to their families**.

How Denver compares with Colorado's biggest dog operations

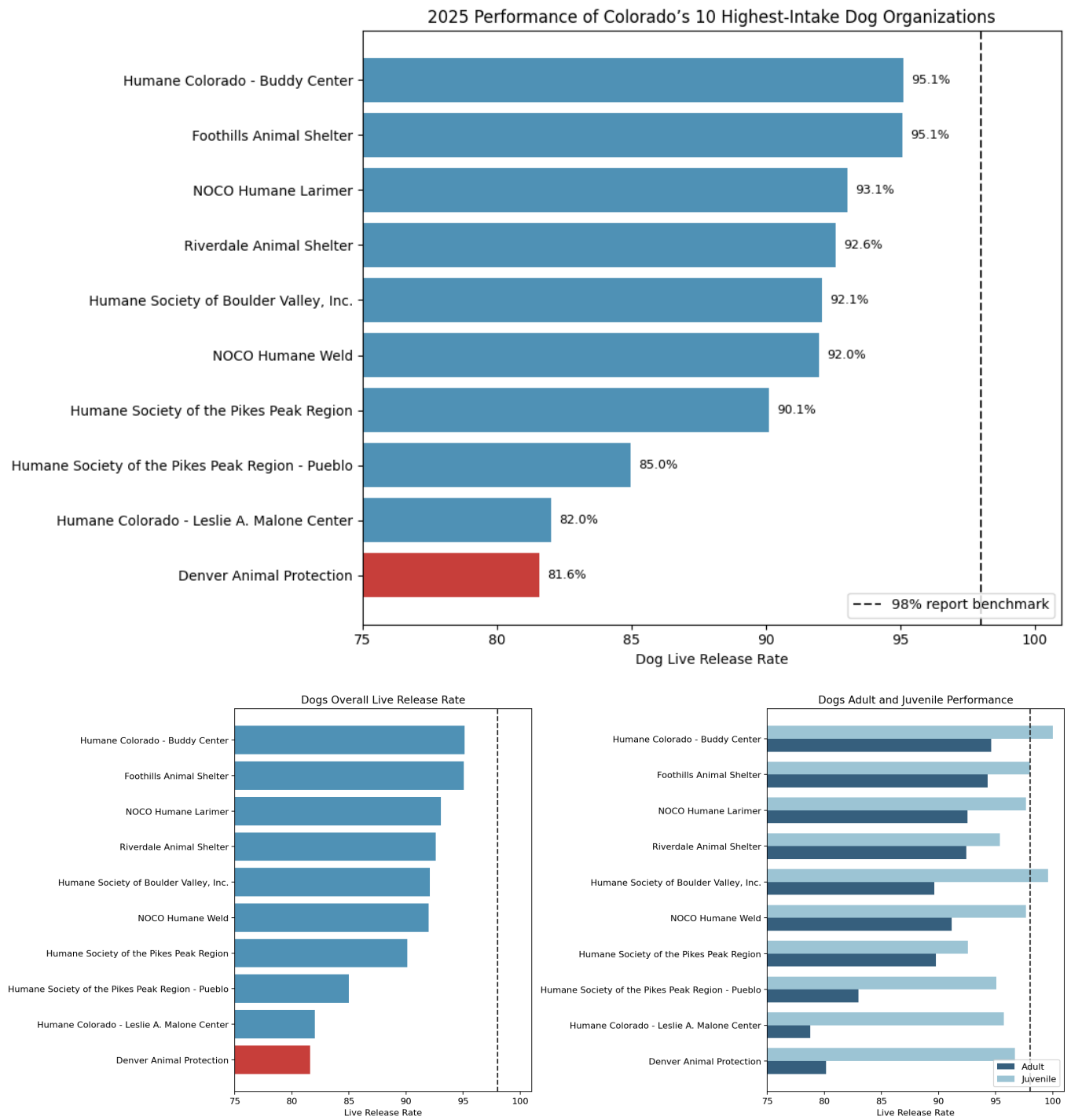
Denver was the state's **third-largest dog intake organization**, but ranked **tenth of ten** on live release.

Intake rank	Organization	Adult	Juvenile	Total dogs
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1	Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region	6,802	932	7,734
2	Humane Colorado – Leslie A. Malone Center	5,184	1,227	6,411
3	Denver Animal Protection	4,497	435	4,932
4	Foothills Animal Shelter	3,641	928	4,569
5	Pikes Peak Region – Pueblo	3,417	680	4,097
6	Riverdale Animal Shelter	3,679	269	3,948
7	NOCO Humane Weld	2,594	382	2,976
8	NOCO Humane Larimer	2,286	260	2,546
9	Humane Colorado – Buddy Center	2,208	230	2,438
10	Humane Society of Boulder Valley	1,488	492	1,980

Performance rank	Organization	Live-release rate	Death rate
1	Humane Colorado – Buddy Center	95.1%	4.9%
2	Foothills Animal Shelter	95.1%	4.9%
3	NOCO Humane Larimer	93.1%	6.9%
4	Riverdale Animal Shelter	92.6%	7.4%
5	Humane Society of Boulder Valley	92.1%	7.9%
6	NOCO Humane Weld	92.0%	8.0%

7	Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region	90.1%	9.9%
8	Pikes Peak Region – Pueblo	85.0%	15.0%
9	Leslie A. Malone Center	82.0%	18.0%
10	Denver Animal Protection	81.6%	18.4%



Seven of the ten cleared 90 percent. Denver sat **10.5 points below the peer median of 92.1 percent**, had the group's **highest death rate**, and reported the **second-highest euthanasia count** despite ranking third in intake.

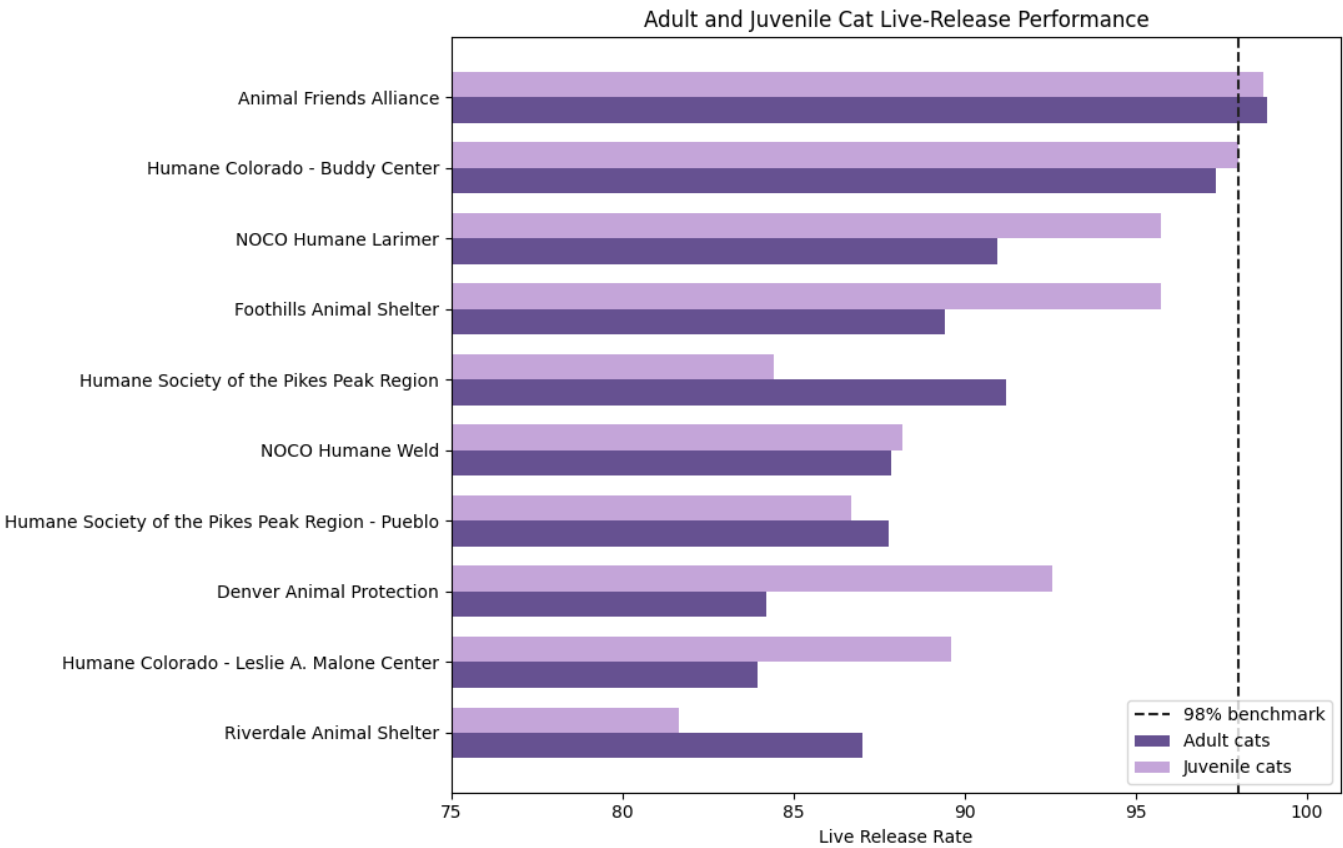
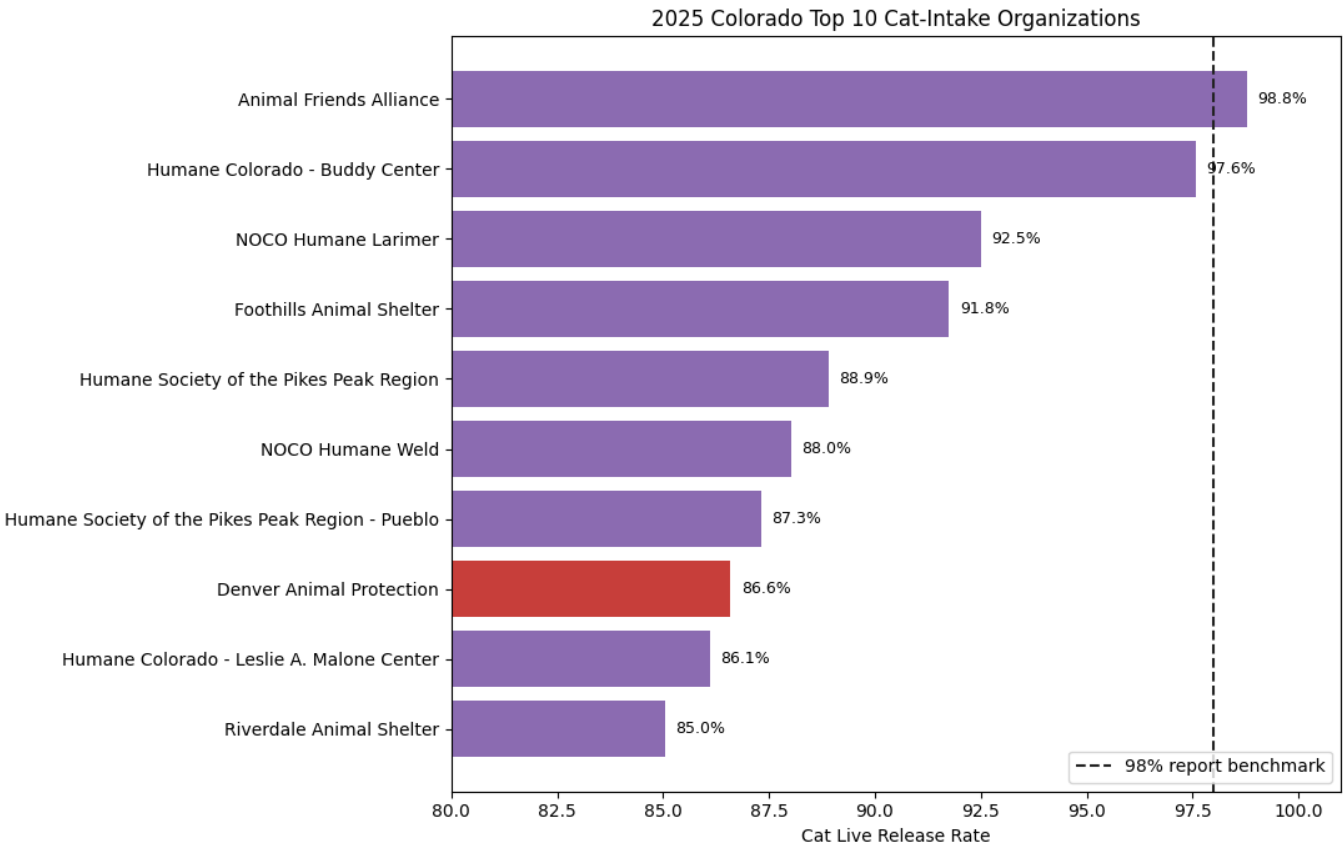
The sharpest comparison is Foothills Animal Shelter, which handled only 363 fewer dogs but reported **657 fewer euthanasias** and a live-release rate **13.5 points higher**. Volume, on its own, does not explain the gap. Applying Foothills' adult rate to Denver's adult caseload would have meant roughly **631 more adult dogs leaving alive**; matching just the peer median would have meant about **461 more**.

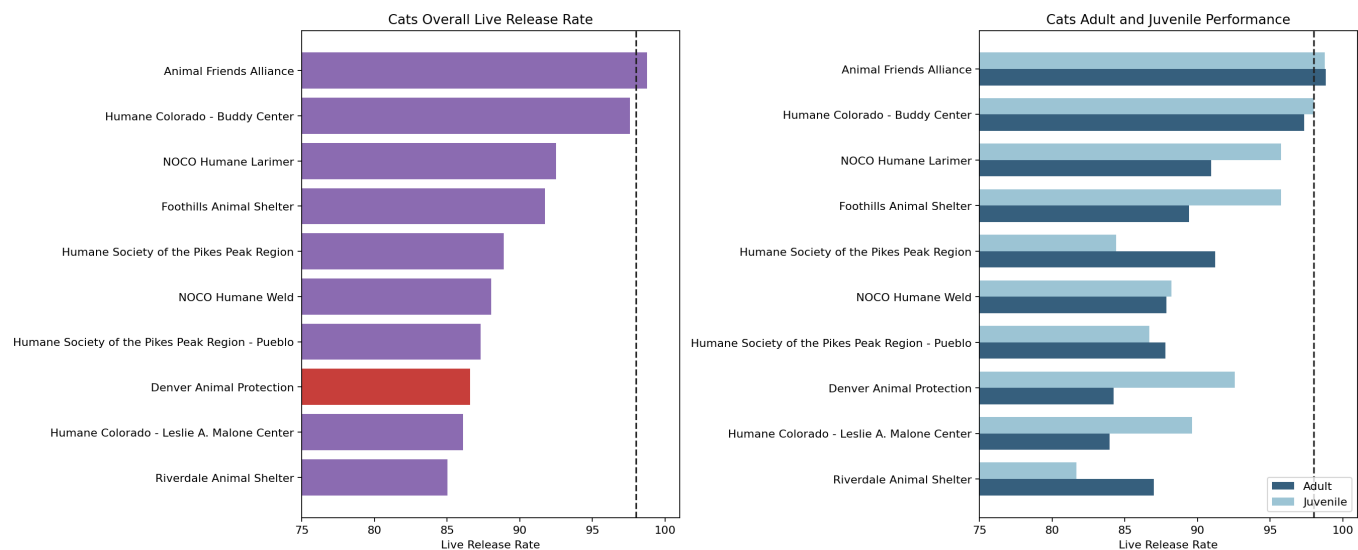
Cats: a narrower gap, but the same adult pattern

Denver was the **seventh-largest cat intake organization** at 2,785 cats, and ranked **eighth of ten** on live release.

Intake rank	Organization	Adult cats	Juvenile cats	Total
1	Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region	5,220	2,707	7,927
2	Leslie A. Malone Center	4,904	2,962	7,866
3	Pikes Peak Region – Pueblo	2,714	2,096	4,810
4	Foothills Animal Shelter	2,002	1,179	3,181
5	Riverdale Animal Shelter	1,981	1,147	3,128
6	Animal Friends Alliance	1,038	1,881	2,919
7	Denver Animal Protection	2,009	776	2,785
8	NOCO Humane Weld	1,189	1,110	2,299
9	NOCO Humane Larimer	1,459	713	2,172
10	Humane Colorado – Buddy Center	1,169	563	1,732

Performance rank	Organization	Overall	Death rate	Ad
1	Animal Friends Alliance	98.8%	1.2%	98.8%
2	Humane Colorado – Buddy Center	97.6%	2.4%	97.6%
3	NOCO Humane Larimer	92.5%	7.5%	90.0%
4	Foothills Animal Shelter	91.8%	8.2%	89.4%
5	Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region	88.9%	11.1%	91.1%
6	NOCO Humane Weld	88.0%	12.0%	87.0%
7	Pikes Peak Region – Pueblo	87.3%	12.7%	87.0%
8	Denver Animal Protection	86.6%	13.4%	84.0%
9	Leslie A. Malone Center	86.1%	13.9%	84.0%
10	Riverdale Animal Shelter	85.0%	15.0%	87.0%





Denver's cat rate sat **2.3 points below the 88.9 percent peer median**, with the third-highest death rate in the group. Of its **375 non-live cat outcomes**, **330 were euthanasia**. Adults again fared worse (84.2 percent) than juveniles (92.6 percent).

One structural difference stands out: Denver reported only **16 "other live outcomes"** for cats, while Pikes Peak reported 1,899 and Pueblo 1,203 — a category that typically captures community-cat work such as return-to-field. That suggests very different program models rather than a simple performance gap.

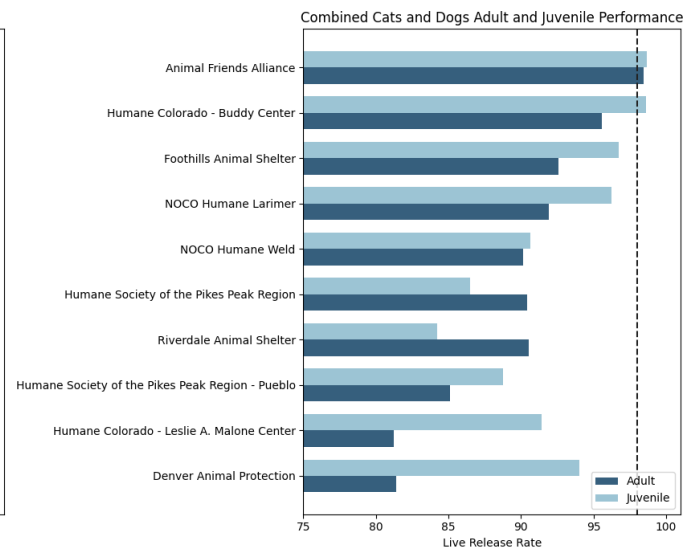
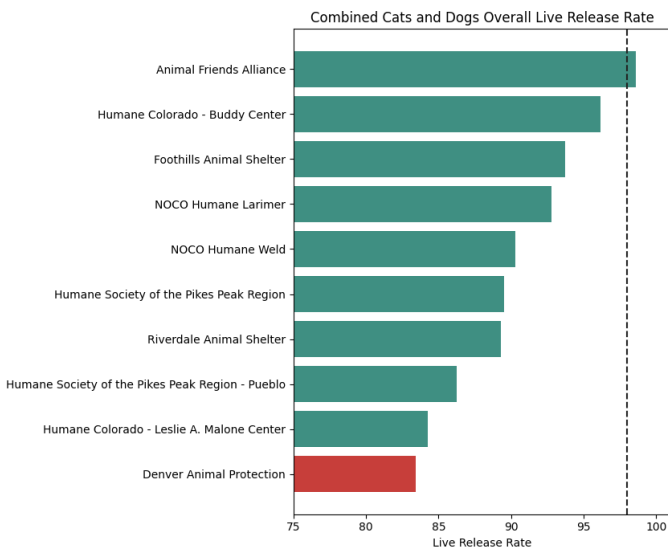
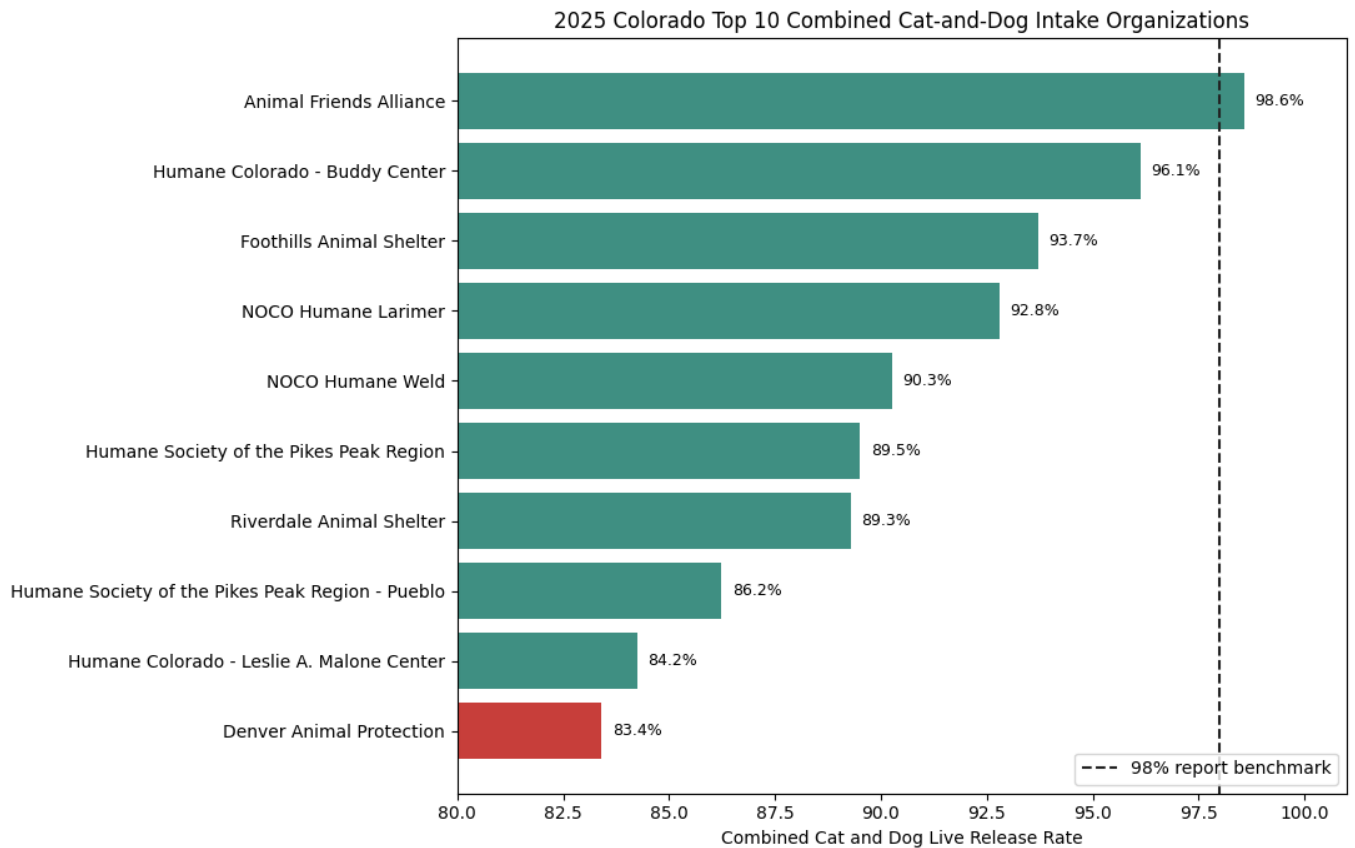
Everything combined: cats and dogs together

Across both species, Denver was the **fifth-largest intake organization** and finished **last of ten** on live release.

Intake rank	Organization	Adult	Juvenile	Total
1	Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region	12,022	3,639	15,661
2	Leslie A. Malone Center	10,088	4,189	14,277
3	Pikes Peak Region – Pueblo	6,131	2,776	8,907
4	Foothills Animal Shelter	5,643	2,107	7,750
5	Denver Animal Protection	6,506	1,211	7,717

6	Riverdale Animal Shelter	5,660	1,416	7,076
7	NOCO Humane Weld	3,783	1,492	5,275
8	NOCO Humane Larimer	3,745	973	4,718
9	Humane Colorado – Buddy Center	3,377	793	4,170
10	Animal Friends Alliance	1,915	2,198	4,113

Performance rank	Organization	Overall	Death rate	Ad
1	Animal Friends Alliance	98.6%	1.4%	98.4
2	Humane Colorado – Buddy Center	96.1%	3.9%	95.0
3	Foothills Animal Shelter	93.7%	6.3%	92.0
4	NOCO Humane Larimer	92.8%	7.2%	91.9
5	NOCO Humane Weld	90.3%	9.7%	90.0
6	Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region	89.5%	10.5%	90.4
7	Riverdale Animal Shelter	89.3%	10.7%	90.0
8	Pikes Peak Region – Pueblo	86.2%	13.8%	85.0
9	Leslie A. Malone Center	84.2%	15.8%	81.0
10	Denver Animal Protection	83.4%	16.6%	81.4

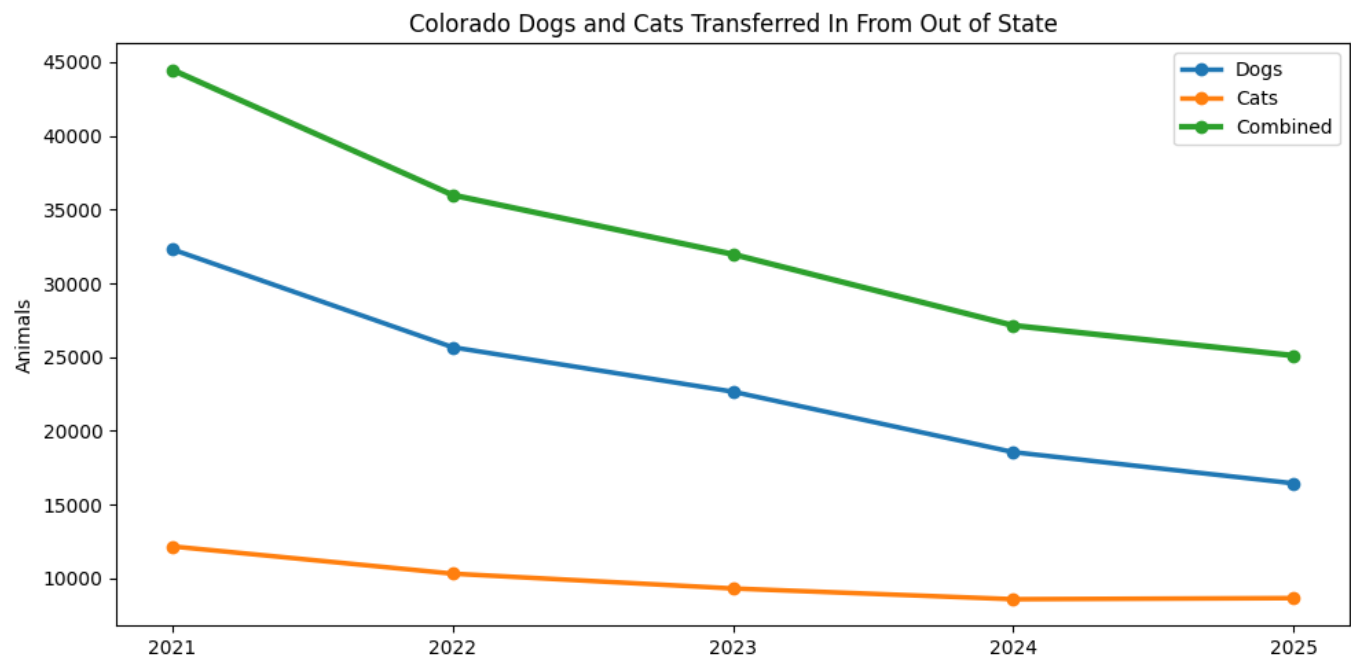


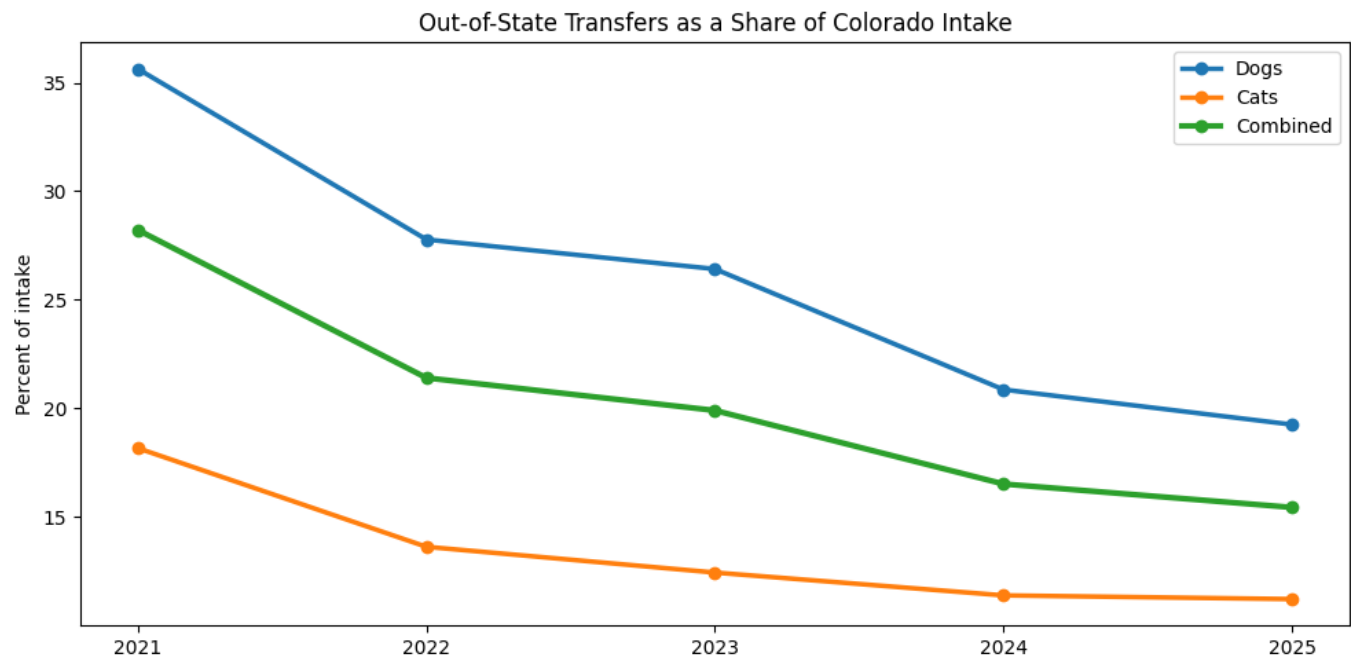
Denver recorded 7,679 final outcomes, of which 1,274 were non-live — and 1,214 of those (95.3 percent) were euthanasia. Its combined rate sat 6.9 points below the peer median of 90.3 percent. Foothills handled almost exactly the same number of animals (7,750 versus 7,717) but reported 782 fewer non-live outcomes, roughly 2.6 times fewer than Denver.

Animals coming into Colorado from other states

Zooming out to the whole state and back five years, one of the clearest trends in the data is a steady decline in animals imported from outside Colorado.

Year	Dogs	Cats	Combined	Share of all intake
2021	32,304	12,167	44,471	28.2%
2022	25,668	10,319	35,987	21.4%
2023	22,655	9,315	31,970	19.9%
2024	18,557	8,587	27,144	16.5%
2025	16,442	8,661	25,103	15.4%

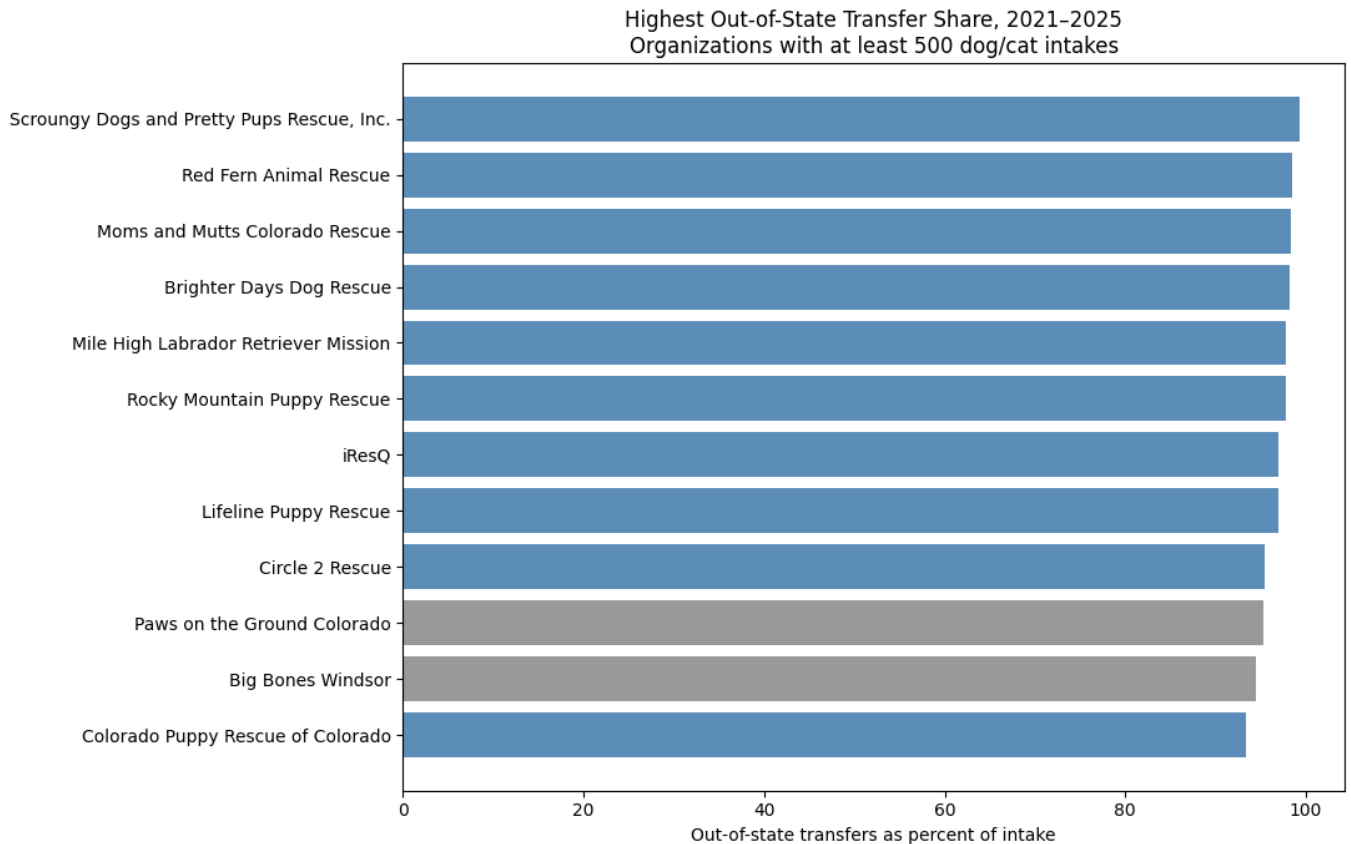
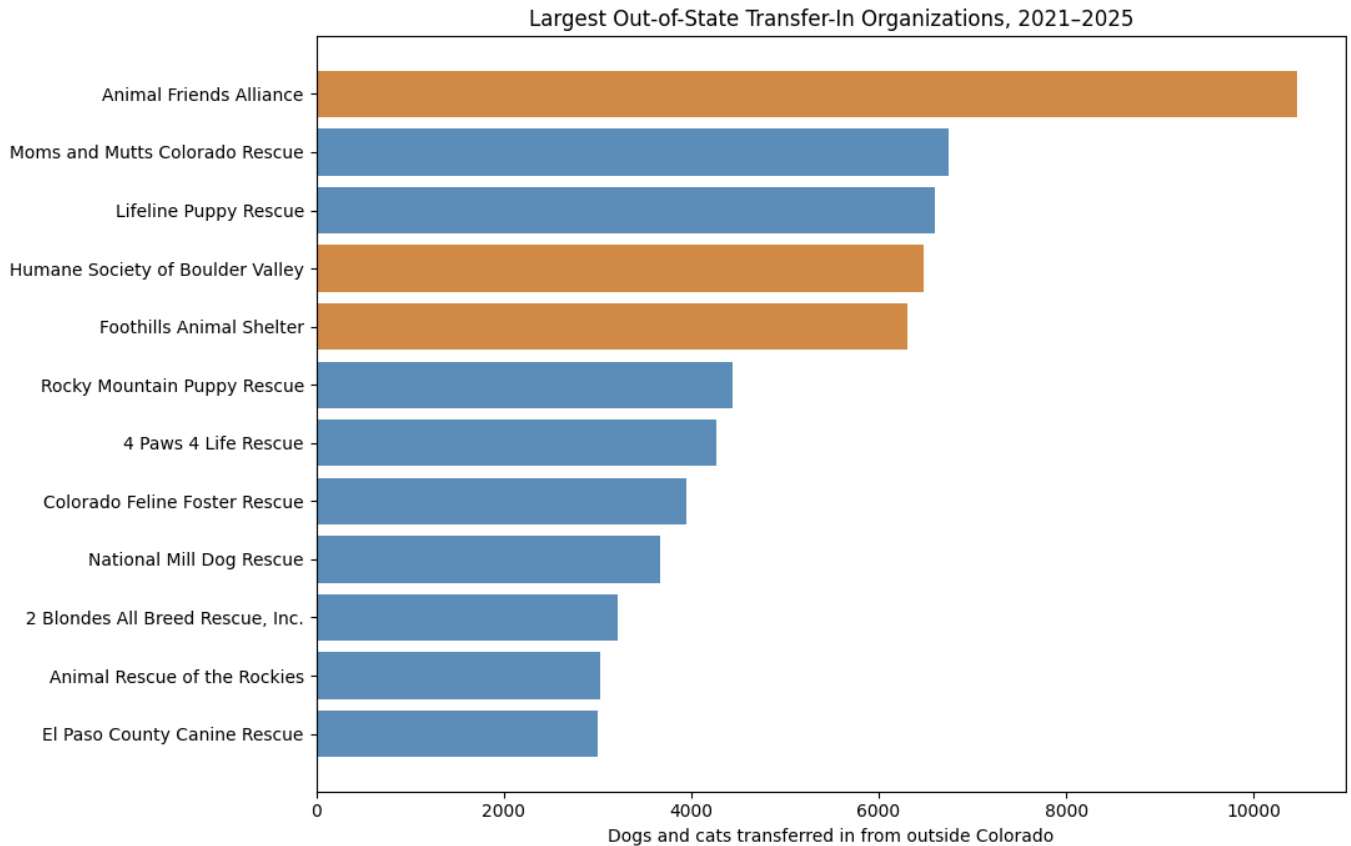




Combined imports fell **43.6 percent**, dogs **49.1 percent**, and cats **28.8 percent**. This is not simply a reflection of shrinking intake: total dog and cat intake was **157,619** in 2021 and **162,496** in 2025. Over the five years, Colorado organizations reported **164,675 imported animals** — 115,626 dogs and 49,049 cats.

Using a provisional, name-based split between rescues and shelters, the flow is heavily concentrated in the rescue sector.

Provisional type	Five-year imports	Share of imports	Imports as share of
Likely rescue or sanctuary	104,836	63.7%	
Likely shelter or humane agency	35,435	21.5%	
Other or unclear	24,404	14.8%	



Volume and dependence tell different stories. Animal Friends Alliance had the largest total (10,459 imports, 54.8 percent of its intake), and Foothills imported 6,308 — but only 16.1 percent of its intake. At the other extreme, organizations such as Scroungy Dogs and Pretty Pups (99.3 percent),

Red Fern Animal Rescue (98.4 percent), Moms and Mutts (98.3 percent), and Lifeline Puppy Rescue (96.9 percent) draw nearly all of their animals from beyond Colorado. The ten largest importers accounted for about **34 percent** of all five-year imports, meaning roughly two-thirds happened elsewhere in the sector.

A counting caution worth knowing

Because these figures are added up organization by organization, transfers can make the same animal appear more than once. A transfer out is recorded as a live outcome by the sending organization; the receiving organization then records its own outcome later. An animal transferred and later adopted can generate **two live outcomes** for one animal in one home. An animal transferred and later euthanized generates **one live and one non-live outcome**. Multiple hops multiply the effect further.

That means a statewide live-release figure built from facility reports is better understood as a rate of **reported outcome events**, not a count of unique animals that survived. It also means organizations that transfer heavily can look stronger than those that keep difficult medical or behavioral cases and report the final result themselves. Separating adoptions and returns to owner (known final outcomes) from transfers out (intermediate steps) gives a cleaner read.

The 2025 statewide bottom line

In 2025, 25,103 dogs and cats were transferred into Colorado from out of state. Across the state that same year, 12,393 dogs and cats had negative outcomes: 10,788 euthanasias, 1,537 deaths, and 68 missing or stolen animals.

Key takeaways

- Denver Animal Protection is a high-volume operation — third in dogs, fifth in dogs and cats combined — but finished **last of ten** on combined live release at **83.4 percent**, with the group's **highest death rate at 16.6 percent**.
- The shortfall is almost entirely an adult-animal issue. **885 of Denver's 899 negative dog outcomes were adults**, and an adult dog was about **six times** as likely as a juvenile to die, be euthanized, or go missing.
- Euthanasia, not natural death, drives the result: **884 of 899** negative dog outcomes and **1,214 of 1,274** combined cat-and-dog negative outcomes.

- Scale is not the explanation. Foothills Animal Shelter handled **7,750 animals** to Denver's **7,717** yet reported **782 fewer non-live outcomes** and a live-release rate **10.3 points higher**.
- Denver's reunification performance also lags, with an estimated **47.2 percent** stray dog reclaim rate against a 65 percent high-performing benchmark — roughly **563 dogs** short of that mark.
- Statewide, imports from other states have fallen **43.6 percent since 2021**, from 44,471 to 25,103 animals, while total intake held roughly steady — and that flow is overwhelmingly a **rescue-sector activity** (63.1 percent of rescue intake versus 7.3 percent of shelter intake).
- Because transfers create duplicate outcome records, aggregate live-release rates describe reported events rather than unique animals saved, and should be read alongside adoption and return-to-owner figures.