

7 Things You Need to Do Now to Protect Your Beloved Pets

Pets sometimes outlive their owners. If you suffer an accident or illness, it could leave your cat, dog, horse, iguana, or any other pet without a caregiver, which, without proper planning, could result in your beloved pet being sent to an animal rescue or shelter that is not of your choosing. Take a few steps to protect your beloved pet's future and ensure they are always cared for, no matter what happens.

1. Carefully Choose a Pet Caregiver

Talk to more than one trusted person until you find someone willing to physically care for your pet if something happens to you. If you have more than one candidate, select one as your backup in case circumstances change—a caregiver can move, change their mind, or pass away. Caregivers must have the right environment to receive your pet and accommodate their daily needs.

2. Create a List of Emergency Contacts

Just like people, pets likely have professionals that should be called in an emergency. This can include their primary veterinarian and any specialist they may be seeing. You may also want to include the contact information for any boarding facilities you have used in the past or petsitters that come to your home when you cannot take your pet with you.

3. Create a List of Your Pet's Medications

Like people, some animals need medications to cure a temporary illness or supplements to manage a chronic condition. It is important that you have a list of these medications and times when they are administered to make sure that whoever is caring for your pet is prepared to administer them.

4. Create a Budget for Your Pet's Needs

Your checklist should include monthly or annual expenses for your pet, including the following:

- Regular pet food purchases
- Treats
- Recommended supplements or vitamins
- Routine veterinary checkups and vaccinations
- Preventive medications (flea, tick, heartworm)
- Dental cleanings and care
- Prescription medications for chronic conditions or illnesses
- Haircuts or professional grooming services
- Litter, litter boxes, waste bags
- Toys and enrichment items
- Pet insurance premiums
- Boarding
- Training or obedience classes

- Travel expenses
- Licensing

Developing this budget will help you estimate costs that a caregiver may have to shoulder or allow you to set aside an appropriate amount of money in your estate plan (either outright to the caretaker or in a pet trust) to cover expenses for your pet's expected lifetime based on age, health, and breed.

5. Research Local Shelters

Although you do not want your pet to end up in a shelter if something happens to you, it is important that you plan for all contingencies. By researching local shelters and pet rescues, you can take control of your pet's future by knowing which one would be acceptable in the event your family or friends cannot take your pet. This is a decision that we can document in your estate plan so that your trusted decision-makers know your wishes.

6. Contact an Estate Planning Attorney

Armed with a detailed list of expenses and critical information, you will be prepared to share it with potential pet caregivers if you experience a medical emergency and can no longer care for your pet. The best way to do this is with legal documentation. Take this information to an estate planning attorney to create a will or pet trust with a letter of instruction for your pet caregiver. Let your pet caregiver know you have a will naming them the beneficiary of your pet or as the trustee of a funded pet trust to help them with caretaking expenses. Give them the name and contact information of your executor, trustee, and estate planning attorney so they can access a copy of your documents when necessary.

If your pet outlives you, a trusted caretaker will have what they need to ensure a loving environment. By taking the right steps, you will be helping your family members, friends, or local pet welfare agencies provide the best possible care for your pet. If you need to update your existing estate plan or create a new one to provide for your beloved pet, give us a call to schedule an appointment.