

Economy

The price of pet parenting has gone off leash

18 May 2026

Key takeaways

- Pet ownership is still widespread, yet adoption momentum has cooled over the past year, especially for dogs, according to BofA Global Research. As household budgets face increasing pressure, the pullback suggests affordability is playing a larger role in decisions to take on the responsibility of pet ownership.
- Bank of America credit and debit card data shows that pet store spending varies meaningfully by income and generation, with younger lower-income households trimming spending the most.
- The cost of pet services such as veterinary care continues to rise. This leaves overall pet care far more expensive than it was pre-pandemic, and vet visits have fallen as a result of these higher prices. Plus, increasing clinic consolidation by private equity has contributed to driving prices higher, making it increasingly harder for many pet owners, according to BofA Global Research.

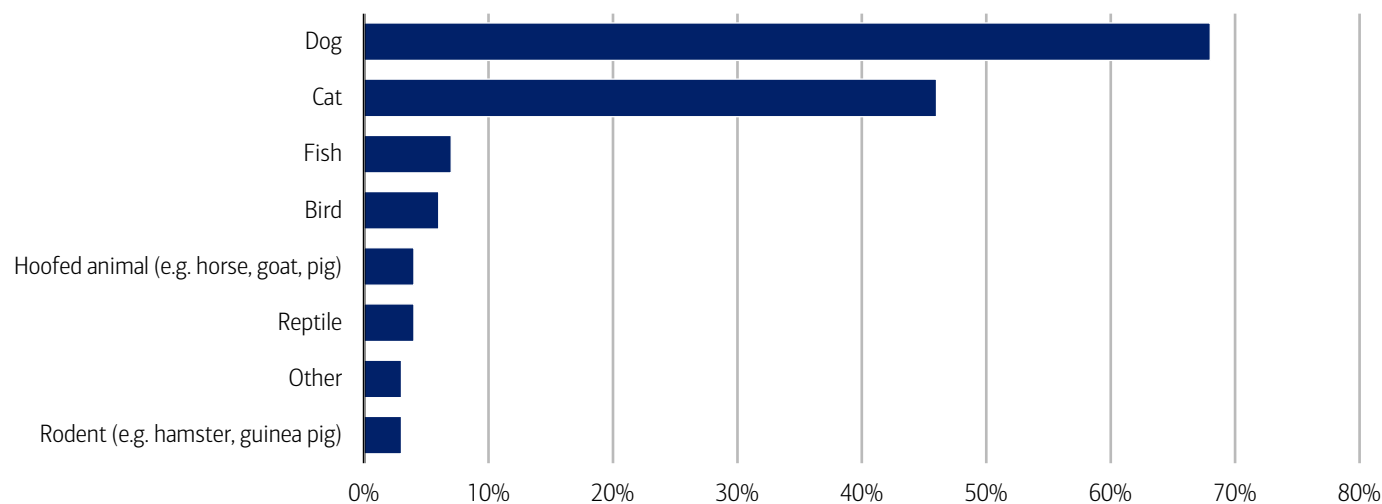
Owning a pet is the cat's meow

The US pet market remains on a steady growth path: 95 million households own a pet (or around 71% of Americans), and spending hit \$158 billion in 2025, according to the 2025 National Pet Owners Survey by the American Pet Products Association. Dog ownership dominates (68%) and is well ahead of other pets over the last few years, according to a survey from CivicScience (Exhibit 1). Cats followed as the second-most prevalent pet (46%), while ownership of fish, birds, and small mammals was far less common.

Yet pet owners are increasingly facing affordability issues when it comes to their furry friends. Spending is distributed across categories including pet food and treats, veterinary care, supplies and over-the-counter medications, and services such as grooming, boarding, insurance and pet sitting.¹

Exhibit 1: Dogs and cats are the most popular pets in terms of ownership

What type of pet(s) do you currently have? (% of respondents with pets)



Source: CivicScience

Note: 78,445 responses from June 1, 2023 to May 8, 2026. See Methodology.

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¹ American Pet Products Association. (2026). *Industry Trends and Stats*. American Pet Products Association.

Consumer pressures trickle down to new pet adoptions, particularly for dogs

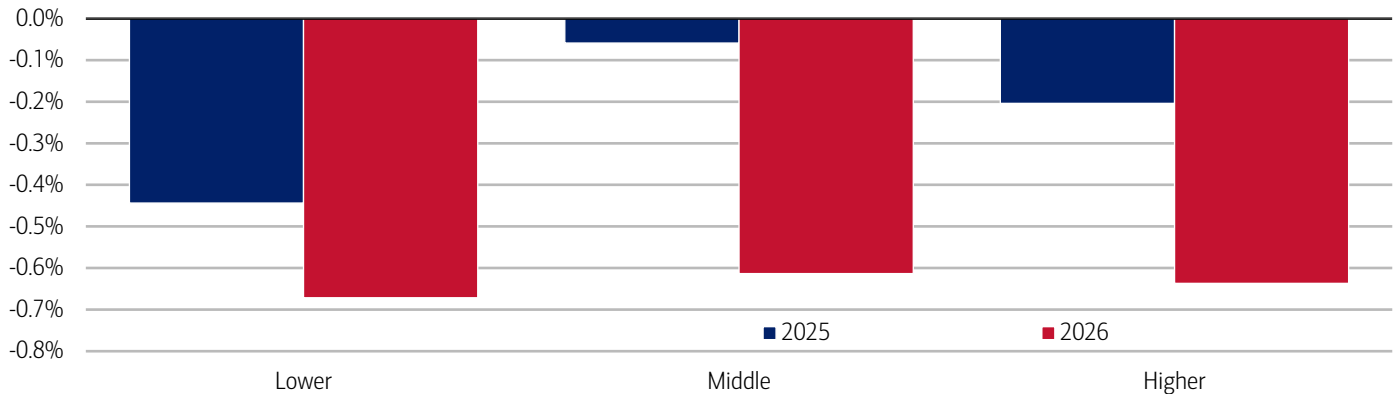
However, tighter household budgets (read more on this in [May's Consumer Checkpoint](#)) appear to be weighing on pet adoptions, according to BofA Global Research. They found adoptions slowed in the first half of 2025, with dog adoptions declining modestly year-over-year (YoY) and those for cats broadly stable. Even though adoption levels remain above pre-pandemic norms, momentum has softened from last year.

Bank of America data corroborates this. Across income groups, the share of households with a pet (see Exhibit 2 Note for definition) has declined over the past two years (Exhibit 2). The sharpest drop was seen among lower-income households.

One caveat to the decline in the share of households with a pet could be that people are no longer shopping at pet specialty stores and may be trading down to general merchandise stores.

Exhibit 2: For the past two years, the share of households with a pet has declined, especially among lower-income households

Households with a pet by income (% change in share, annual)



Source: Bank of America internal data

Note: Households with a pet were identified as those with pet-related spending transactions at either pet retailers or services.

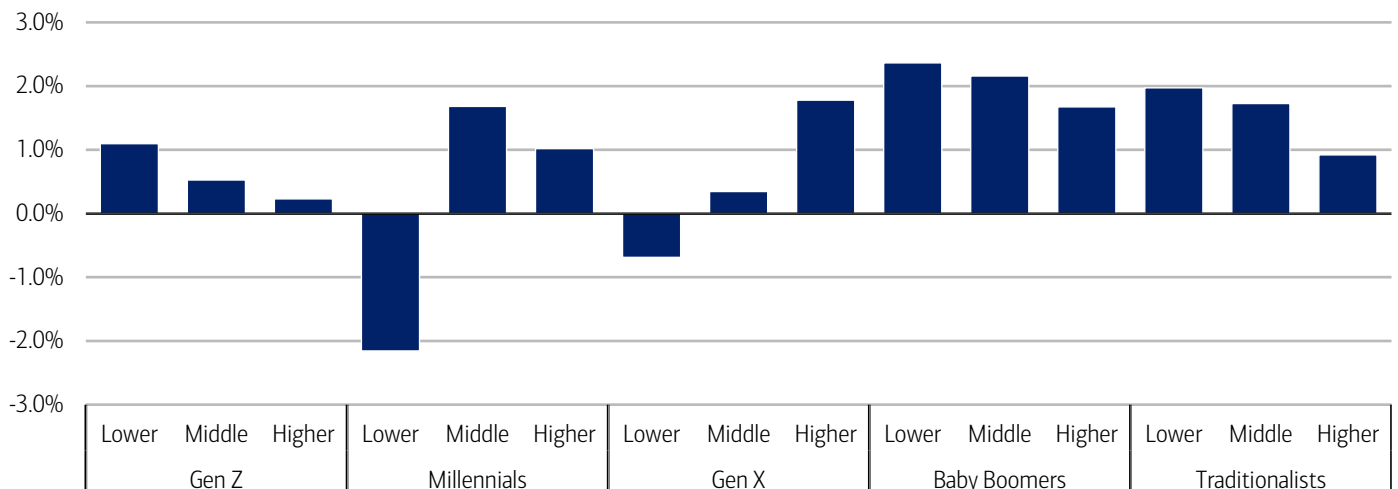
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Younger generations are clawing back on pet purchases

In fact, in April, spending growth by younger generations declined, especially among lower-income households (Exhibit 3). The variation reflects “selective spending” with households adjusting their outlays on discretionary categories (like toys, accessories and supplies) depending on the differences in their budgets. And according to a CivicScience survey, consumers are buying pet food from local grocery stores more frequently than specialty pet stores, likely to save money or avoid a second trip to the pet supply shop.

Exhibit 3: Younger generations and lower-income households have generally reduced pet store spending

Credit and debit card pet store spending per household by income and generation in April (YoY%, 3-month moving average)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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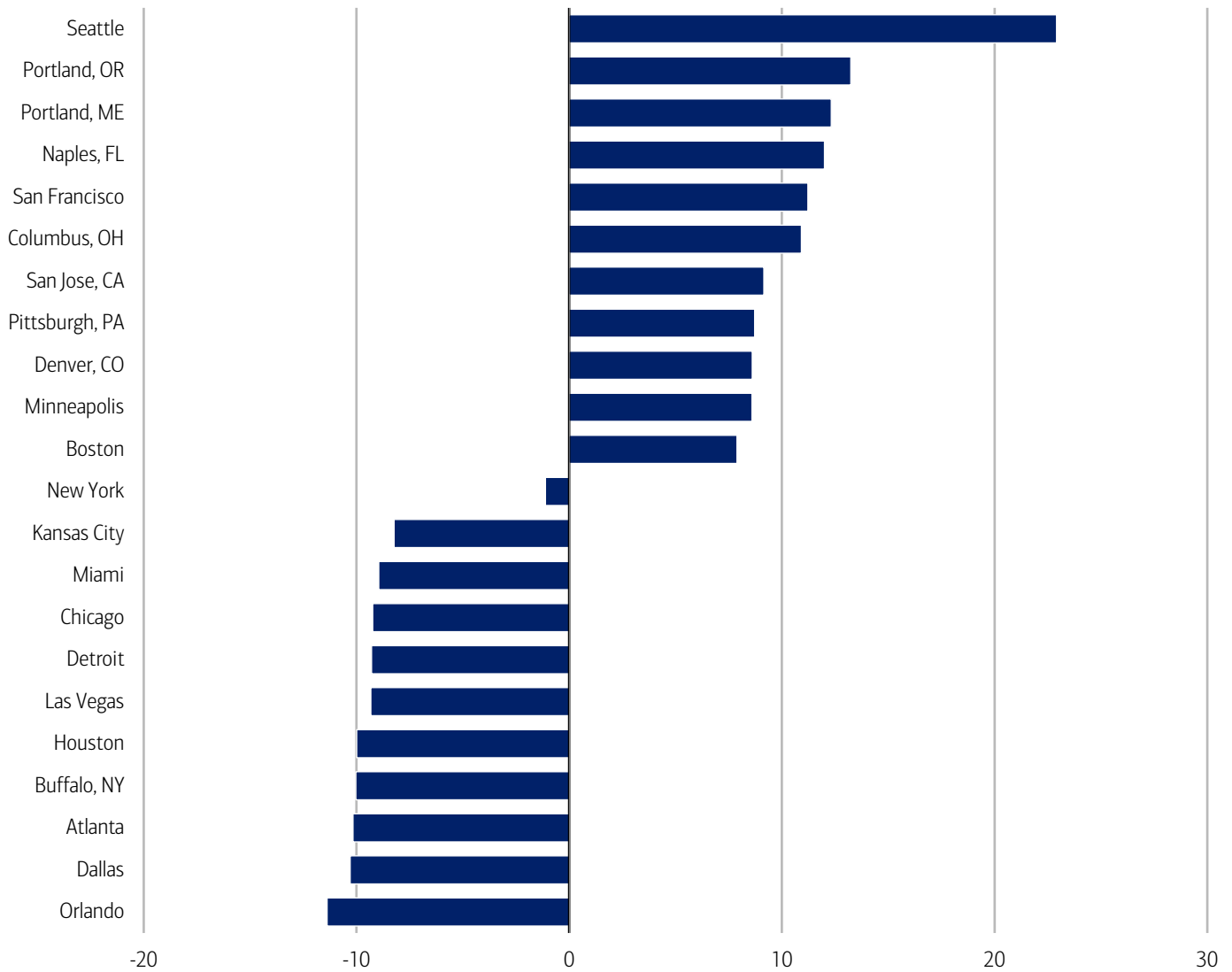
It's raining cats and dogs out west

Yet looking at spending trends by geography shows a more nuanced story. Bank of America card data on pet store, pet insurance and veterinary spending across 20 large core-based statistical areas (CBSAs) relative to the US average shows that Seattle tops the list. Average monthly spending there in the first four months of 2026 was nearly 23% above the US monthly average (Exhibit 4). The two Portlands – in Oregon and Maine – came in second and third.

By contrast, pet spending so far this year is running below the national average in Atlanta, Dallas and Orlando. One explanation may be the South's lower cost-of-living, which likely keeps the overall expense of owning and caring for pets comparatively lower than elsewhere.

Exhibit 4: The West accounts for about half of the top 10 markets where spending is above the US average

Average pet store and pet care (including veterinary and insurance) spending per month relative to US average by CBSA (average January-April 2026, %)



Source: Bank of America internal data

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Vet visits are biting into budgets

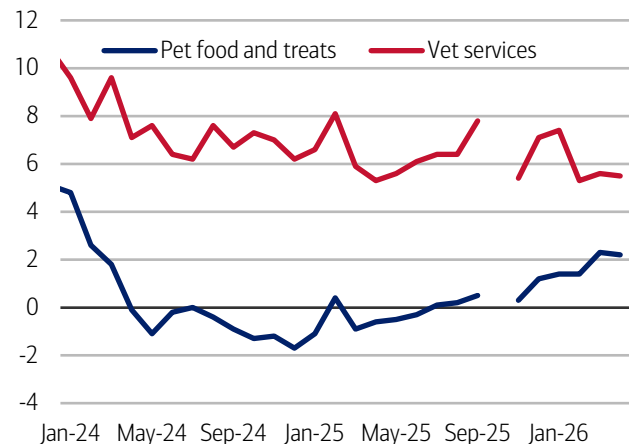
Another major cost of pet ownership that's straining budgets is veterinary care. As shown in Exhibit 5, prices for vet services rose nearly 6% YoY in April, and, according to Bank of America card data, spending at the vet increased more than 4x than that of pet food and treats (Exhibit 6). The latter was up just 1% YoY.

One way in which consumers could be cushioning these costs is with pet insurance, which can help owners spread the costs of pet healthcare. However, the share of pet insurance uptake remains fairly low (read more on this in last year's publication: [Best in show: US pet ownership](#)).

Increasing vet costs contribute to existing consumer price pressures (read more on this in May's [Do consumers have wiggle room to absorb higher gas prices?](#)). With veterinary prices rising faster than wages for some households, many are delaying non-essential pet care like wellness visits, preventative dentistry and elective diagnostics, according to BofA Global Research. In fact, vet visits have declined over the past several years, according to VetSource.

Exhibit 5: Vet services inflation was up 5.5% YoY in April

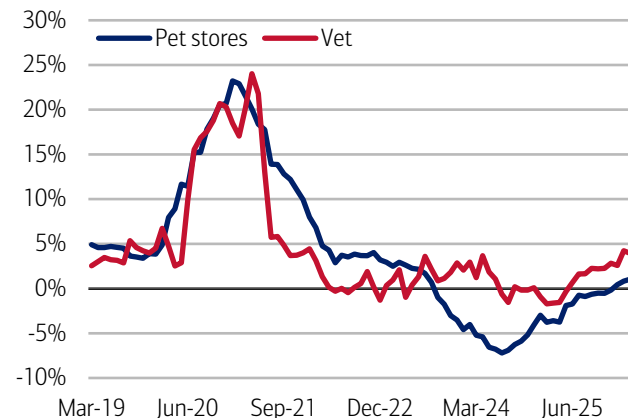
Consumer price indices for pet food and treats and vet services (monthly, % YoY)



Source: Haver Analytics
 Note: BLS did not produce data in October 2025 due to government shutdown
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Exhibit 6: Spending at pet stores was up around 1% YoY in April 2026; vet spending was up almost 4x as much

Bank of America credit and debit card spending per household on vet payments and pet stores (monthly, three-month moving average, % YoY)



Source: Bank of America internal data
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Private equity puts prices in the doghouse

Another primary driver in decelerating vet visits is increasing clinic consolidation, according to BofA Global Research. According to a 2024 American Veterinary Medical Association report, approximately 25-30% of US veterinary practices (representing roughly 75% of specialty clinics) are now owned by large corporations or private equity firms.

Such consolidation can erode competition, elevate prices and weaken service quality, ultimately reducing consumer choice, according to BofA Global Research. And if current macro headwinds persist, veterinary pricing will become increasingly harder for everyday pet owners to absorb, accelerating pressure on visit volumes through deferred care.

Methodology

Selected Bank of America transaction data is used to inform the macroeconomic views expressed in this report and should be considered in the context of other economic indicators and publicly available information. In certain instances, the data may provide directional and/or predictive value. The data used is not comprehensive; it is based on **aggregated and anonymized** selections of Bank of America data and may reflect a degree of selection bias and limitations on the data available.

Any payments data represents aggregated spend from US Retail, Preferred, Small Business and Wealth Management clients with a deposit account or credit card. Aggregated spend include total credit card, debit card, ACH, wires, bill pay, business/peer-to-peer, cash, and checks.

Any **Small Business** payments data represents aggregate spend from Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card. Payroll payments data include channels such as ACH (automated clearing house), bill pay, checks and wire. Bank of America per Small Business client data represents activity spending from active Small Business clients with a deposit account or a Small Business credit card and at least one transaction in each month. Small businesses in this report include business clients within Bank of America and generally defined as under \$5mm in annual sales revenue.

Unless otherwise stated, data is not adjusted for seasonality, processing days or portfolio changes, and may be subject to periodic revisions.

The differences between the total and per household card spending growth rate (if discussed) can be explained by the following reasons:

1. Overall total card spending growth is partially boosted by the growth in the number of active cardholders in our sample. This could be due to an increasing customer base or inactive customers using their cards more frequently.
2. Per household card spending growth only looks at households that complete at least five transactions with Bank of America cards in the month. Per household spending growth isolates impacts from a changing sample size, which could be unrelated to underlying economic momentum, and potential spending volatility from less active users.
3. Overall total card spending includes small business card spending while per household card spending does not.
4. Differences due to using processing dates (total card spending) versus transaction date (per household card spending).
5. Other differences including household formations due to young adults moving in and out of their parent's houses during COVID.

Any household consumer deposit data based on Bank of America internal data is derived by anonymizing and aggregating data from Bank of America consumer deposit accounts in the US and analyzing that data at a highly aggregated level. Whenever median household savings and checking balances are quoted, the data is based on a fixed cohort of households that had a consumer deposit account (checking and/or savings account) for all months from January 2019 through the most current month of data shown.

Bank of America aggregated credit/debit card spending per household includes spending from active US households only. Only consumer card holders making a minimum of five transactions a month are included in the dataset. Spending from corporate cards are excluded. Data regarding merchants who receive payments are identified and classified by the Merchant Categorization Code (MCC) defined by financial services companies. The data are mapped using proprietary methods from the MCCs to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), which is also used by the Census Bureau, in order to classify spending data by subsector. Spending data may also be classified by other proprietary methods not using MCCs.

Lower, middle and higher household income cuts in Bank of America credit and debit card spending per household, and consumer deposit account data are based on quantitative estimates of each households' income. These quantitative estimates are bucketed according to terciles, with a third of households placed in each tercile periodically. The lowest tercile represents 'lower income', the middle tercile represents 'middle income' and the highest tercile 'higher income'. The income thresholds between these terciles will move over time, reflecting any number of factors that impact income, including general wage inflation, changes in social security payments and individual households' income. The income and tercile in which a household is categorised are periodically re-assessed.

Generations, if discussed, are defined as follows:

1. Gen Z, born after 1995
2. Younger Millennials: born between 1989-1995

3. Older Millennials: born between 1978-1988
4. Gen Xers: born between 1965-1977
5. Baby Boomer: 1946-1964
6. Traditionalists: pre-1946

Any reference to card spending per household on gasoline includes all purchases at gasoline stations and might include purchases of non-gas items.

CivicScience survey includes 78,445 responses from June 1, 2023 to May 8, 2026. This is an ongoing survey.

Additional information about the methodology used to aggregate the data is available upon request.

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