

# Pet Insurance: What you need to know



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When Andrea Castinetti adopted Brody, she not only jammed her house with new toys and treats, but looked into buying pet insurance. This 12-year-old Golden Retriever pup would become a light in her life and she knew she wanted to protect him in all sorts of ways, including medically.



"I never had pet insurance before," said Castinetti, who is a real estate agent in Shrewsbury, MA, "but the rescuer said that he was going to have eye issues supposedly, later in life, and that it would be smart to get pet insurance right away."

Any pet lover will remind you: "they're a member of the family." Just as people spend hundreds on their dog for the holidays or throw their cat a birthday party, we want to protect and maintain these family members' health, too.

Pet health care has advanced, marching in step with the value we place on the lives of our beloved furry friends. And that health care cost escalates, especially with emergency situations or diseases. Ask anyone who's been thrust into a medical "situation" with a pet.

The cost of the lab work and X-rays alone could send many pet guardians into financial distress. Even the cost of "wellness," such as veterinarian visits that include immunization shots, can be expensive. The final bill can hit thousands of dollars.

Pet health insurance has grown exponentially over the past decade -- and the options are plentiful.

The North American Pet Health Insurance Association (NAPHIA) marketplace alone has more than 12 companies under its umbrella. Many of whom also market or underwrite multiple white label or co-branded products. NAPHIA members collectively represent more than 20 different pet insurance brands marketed across the US and Canada.

Naphia said there were close to 2.43 million pets insured at year-end 2018 in North America. That was an increase of 17.1% from 2017. The average age of insured dogs in 2018 was 4.58 years and the average age of insured cats was 5.51 years.

## What is pet insurance?

Because pets are legally considered property, pet insurance, technically, is similar to car or homeowners insurance, according to the Insurance Information Institute (III). Insurance for pets falls under the "property and casualty" insurance classification and functions as indemnity insurance.

"In North America, the scope of coverage is slightly different than in other parts of the world," said Janet Ruiz, spokesperson with III. "Here, it is commonly referred to as pet health insurance (PHI). Pet health insurance is a unique, specialized coverage designed to reimburse pet owners for unforeseen veterinary fees and related expenses."

## What does pet insurance cover?

Pet insurance plans vary greatly, and the options are expanding. Policies can also limit coverage for pre-existing conditions or alternative treatments.

There are three main types of pet health insurance coverage:

- Accident: Coverage for veterinary treatment for unexpected injuries.
- Illness: Coverage to treat sickness, disease and any changes to your pet's normal healthy state.
- Wellness: May include vaccinations, tests and dental work. This is sometimes called "routine" or "preventative" care.

In 2018, accident and illness plans were main drivers in the pet health insurance market, according to the "state of the industry" report from Naphia.

In the U.S., 98% of insured pets were covered either through an accident and illness plan or a policy with an embedded wellness plan. The remaining 2% of insured pets were covered through an accident-only plan, said the report.

Some pet insurance plans may include special coverage, such as:

- The cost of emergency veterinary treatment when traveling out country.
- Third-party liability coverage if your dog injures someone or damages someone else's property.
- The cost of advertising a reward for the return of a lost or stolen pet, and the cost of the reward itself, if the pet is found and recovered (up to a pre-set amount).
- The cost of looking after a pet if the policy-holder is hospitalized or requires emergency medical treatment.
- The cost of a vacation if it's cancelled because the policy-holder's pet needs emergency surgery.

# What doesn't pet insurance cover?

Similar to most insurance policies, pet insurance doesn't cover everything. Here's what pet insurance usually doesn't cover:

- Elective and cosmetic surgery
- Pregnancy-related veterinarian costs
- Orthodontic procedures
- Pet foods
- Shampoos
- Supplements
- Preventative or planned treatments, such as flea, worm or tick treatments, vaccinations, grooming, claw clipping, dental maintenance, spaying and castration
- The purchase price of your pet if your pet dies after a certain age, typically nine years, is likely to be excluded.
- Pre-existing conditions

Pre-existing conditions may include issues with the specific animal or even breed-specific problems. So, if you have a dog whose breed is known for a particular health problem, your policy may not cover it. Check with the insurer about any coverage restrictions before getting coverage.

# Survey finds most pet owners happy with pet insurance

In a recent survey of 800 people, Insurance.com asked pet owners about pet insurance. We found that 46% said they have pet insurance, while 55% do not have coverage for their pets.

Why don't people have pet insurance? Almost half (47%) of those without coverage said they never looked into it. Nearly one-quarter (23%) noted that they didn't think it was worth the money. Less than one-fifth (15%) said pet insurance doesn't offer enough coverage and the same percentage remarked that they would rather handle pet health care payments on their own.

However, most people with pet insurance sang its praises in our survey:

- 48% said pet insurance saved them money
- 32% said it has been a huge help in keeping their pet healthy
- 15% say it hasn't saved them money
- 4% said it doesn't offer enough coverage for their pet

How much do they pay for annually for pet insurance? The top response was between \$201 and \$300. Here are the results:

- Less than \$200 (about \$16 a month) -- 29%
- \$201-\$300 (about \$17 to \$25 a month) -- 36%
- \$301-\$400 (about \$26 to \$33 monthly) -- 24%
- \$401-\$500 (about \$34 to \$41 monthly) -- 6%
- More than \$500 (\$42 or more a month) -- 5%

# Pet insurance companies

The list of pet insurance companies continues to rise. Here are some of the companies offering pet insurance policies.

## Trupanion

Founded in 2000, Trupanion is one of the more well-known pet insurance options. Michael Nank, spokesperson for Trupanion, said the company's medical insurance product covers more than a half a million cats and dogs. Nank added that a policy covers 90% of actual veterinary costs for eligible claims once a deductible is met.

Trupanion pays veterinarians directly at the time of check-out, often in seconds, which "eliminates the cumbersome reimbursement model," according to the company.

Trupanion policies cover:

- Hereditary conditions
- Unidentified issues, such as cough or diarrhea
- Congenital conditions
- Diagnostic testing
- Surgery
- Hospital stays
- Medications
- Veterinary supplements
- Herbal therapy
- Prosthetic devices
- Carts

Nank said premium costs vary, but the average cost for dogs is \$60 per month and the average cost for cats is \$40 a month.

Castinetti compared several options for her dog Brody and went with Trupanion, getting a full coverage package with a \$1,000 yearly deductible.

"I have used it a few times because Brody had pneumonia and needed some stomach medication and it was very easy to get reimbursed," Castinetti explained. "Make sure people do their research, because I was noticing signs of separation anxiety and I thought that I would be covered. However, that is a separate rider that you need to put on. All in all I am happy with them."

## **Figo**

Unlike other popular plans, Figo doesn't offer a "wellness" plan. According to the company: "It's been our experience that pet owners are better off financially if they invest in an inclusive accident and illness policy while managing their pet's proactive healthcare out of pocket."

Figo offers three tiers of coverage:

- Essential covers up to \$5,000 annually in benefits.
- Preferred covers up to \$10,000.
- Ultimate, which has unlimited benefits.

All are accident and illness coverage.

## **Healthy Paws**

With a solid offering of benefits and no lifetime cap, Healthy Paws has become a popular option for pet insurance.

Reviews often point to Healthy Paws having a good value based on the annual deductible (as opposed to deductible per incident), range of coverage and out of pocket requirements. It additionally boasts that the company processes 99% of claims within two days. Claims for Healthy Paws customers, too, can be submitted through an easy-to-use app. Healthy Paws coverage includes treatment for cancer, ultrasounds, alternative treatments, X-rays and accidents.

Healthy Paws also covers your pet should you travel to Canada.

## **Nationwide**

We all know Nationwide as a car insurance company. But did you know it offers pet insurance, too?

Nationwide, in fact, is the first and largest provider of pet health insurance in the U.S. with more than 800,000 insured pets, according to spokesperson Jarrett Dunbar.

Nationwide, as Veterinary Pet Insurance, issued the very first pet health insurance policy in the United States in 1982 to TV's "Lassie." Nationwide had been VPI's underwriter since it was founded that same year, acquiring the company outright in December 2008. In 2015, the branding officially changed over from VPI to Nationwide, too.

Nationwide is unique in that the company also offers coverage for avian and exotic pets, as well as cats and dogs.

Nationwide's most robust plan, Whole Pet with Wellness, covers 90% of eligible veterinary expenses. It's the only pet health insurance plan in the U.S. to offer coverage for injuries, illness and wellness care under a single plan.

Nationwide plans provide reimbursement on eligible veterinary expenses, including:

- Veterinary exam fees
- Wellness care
- Specialty and emergency visits
- Hospitalization
- Surgeries
- Injuries/illnesses, including cancer and hereditary/congenital disorders
- Diagnostic testing, including X-rays, MRIs, CT scans and ultrasounds
- Prescribed medications
- Nutritional supplements
- Therapeutic diets

The plans offer unlimited lifetime benefits.

As with all pet insurance, premiums vary greatly by location and other factors. Dunbar offered some premium samples:

Nationwide pet insurance premium for a 1-year-old Labrador Retriever dog in:

- Manhattan, NY - from \$43/month
- Manhattan, KS - from \$28/month

Nationwide pet insurance premium for a 1-year-old Himalayan cat in:

- Manhattan, NY - from \$21/month
- Manhattan, KS - from \$13/month

## **24PetWatch**

24PetWatch offers plans for cats and dogs with an enrollment age between eight weeks and 10 years old for a dog and eight weeks and 12 years old for a cat.

The company offers four plan levels. These policies cover accidents and illnesses up to \$20,000 for the policy term, with wellness and other benefits that can be added. The deductible options range between \$100 and \$1,000 and coverage is 80%.

## **ASPCA Pet Health**

Many know the ASPCA as a national nonprofit organization with the mission to prevent animal cruelty. But, the ASPCA offers pet insurance, as well, and was founded in 1997, making it the second oldest pet insurance provider in the United States.

ASPCA Pet Health offers two plans with the option of routine care coverage with the Preventative Care add-on. Complete Coverage lets you use your insurance for services provided by any licensed veterinarian, specialist or emergency clinic to diagnose and treat illnesses, injuries or other health

issues caused by an accident. Exam fees associated with these conditions are also covered. Both plans are customizable.

If you enroll your dog in Accident-Only Coverage, you can still use your insurance for services provided by any licensed veterinarian, specialist or emergency clinic you want, but only to diagnose and treat injuries and health problems caused by accidents. The exam for these conditions would be covered.

### **Embrace/Geico**

Embrace pet insurance by Geico boasts a "one, simple comprehensive plan." It does have just that, but this plan is customizable, offering reimbursement levels of \$5,000 to \$30,000. It has deductibles that range from \$200 to \$1,000 annually, and 70, 80 and 90% reimbursement levels.

The company's dog and cat pet insurance packages also feature a "diminishing deductible." That feature reduces the deductible annually if you don't make a claim. While no pet insurance covers preexisting conditions, "Embrace distinguishes between curable and incurable pre-existing conditions, covering curable conditions after 12 months symptom and treatment free."

Plans also offer wellness awards that can be applied toward routine visits.

### **Pet Assure**

If you're searching for a pet insurance alternative, Pet Assure might be a good option.

While not technically a pet insurance company, Pet Assure is a discount program. You pay a low, monthly fee and present your card for discounts on everything from wellness visits to lab work to surgery and treatment of illnesses. It's also only available through your employer (there is a search to find if your employer participates).

Pet Assure is accepted for all kinds of animals. That includes birds, monkeys, bunnies and fish. There are no age restrictions, no claim forms and no deductibles.

However, your veterinarian must accept Pet Assure. Plus, it also doesn't apply to prescription foods and medications.

## **Petplan**

The original Petplan was founded in the UK in 1976. Its US affiliate, [Petplan Pet Insurance](#) - North America, was launched in 2003 and is based in Philadelphia.

Of the many reviews that insurance.com pored over for pet insurance plans offered in the U.S., Petplan came up as one of the higher-ranked. Reviewers credited the company with offering comprehensive illness and injury insurance for both cats and dogs. However, several user reviews have indicated discontent with the deductible-per-treatment policy.

Petplan touts proudly that it's the "preferred pet insurance provider of the American Animal Hospital Association and the exclusive pet insurance provider for AARP members."

Annual limits for the plan can be set between \$2,500 to unlimited. Petplan doesn't terminate any policy based on claims or the health of your pet.

## **Progressive**

We don't hear Flo talking about pet insurance often, or ever, in Progressive commercials, but the company does offer a plan.

[Progressive Pet Insurance by Pets Best](#) has pet insurance for dogs and cats once they are seven weeks old. Plans include the option of 70, 80 and 90% reimbursement of your vet bills for all covered illnesses and injuries after you meet your annual deductible.

Progressive offers the BestBenefit Accident and Illness Plan, Accident-Only Plan and the Wellness Routine Care Plan (which can be an add-on for the

other plans, as well). Deductibles range from \$50-\$1,000 and annual limits of \$5,000 or unlimited.

### **PetFirst**

Founded in 2004, PetFirst Healthcare LLC is based in Jefferson, IN, and offers accident and illness coverage for dogs and cats in all 50 states.

With an easier-than-most enrollment period, PetFirst doesn't require a vet exam before approval and the coverage starts in 24 hours. The insurance plans also don't have age restrictions and have a healthy pet discount option for those who don't make claims.

### **Prudent Pet**

Founded in 2018, Prudent Pet has more than 1,000 customers and is growing daily. The Chicago-based company said that it was "created by pet parents for pet parents."

"Our people believe all pets should enjoy good health while receiving the best veterinary care," Nicky Sykora, digital marketing manager at Prudent Pet, told insurance.com. "At Prudent Pet, we offer flexible options, such as preventive care that covers annual exams, dental cleanings, heartworm and flea prevention. Our flat 14-day waiting period, budget-friendly plans and quick claims process were crafted to make life easier. With no in-network requirements, you can even keep your local veterinarian."

Prudent Pet offers two main plans: accident and illness; and accident only, as well as an optional add-on for preventative care coverage.

"The cost per policy will vary based on the pet and the plan chosen," explained Sykora.

### **Pets Best**

Pets Best pet insurance has been around since 2005. It covers more than 130,000 nationwide at this point.

"Pets Best offers pet insurance and wellness plans for dogs and cats in every state and has paid more than \$200 million in claims to customers," said spokesperson Jill Akers. "Built upon a legacy of innovation, Pets Best focuses on putting customers first by offering flexible coverage, fast claims and excellent customer service."

Pets Best offers three types of plans:

- Accident and illness
- Accident only
- Routine care

Depending on the plan, it covers a wide range of conditions and situations, including chronic conditions, diagnostics, cancer treatments, accidents, dental care, medications and chiropractic treatments.

## **Wagmo**

Wagmo is not pet insurance, but rather coverage for preventative and maintenance care. Founded out of the Harvard Business School in 2017, it has customers nationwide and is growing at a rate of 30% monthly, according to spokesperson Sarah Vandersluis.

The majority of its customers are concentrated in New York, Massachusetts and California.

"Wagmo helps pet parents get the best care for their dogs and cats by offering plans that cover the day-to-day essentials, including routine and preventative expenses such as annual exams, vaccines and grooming," said Vandersluis.

Three-tiered membership plans are offered to customers: Basic, Legit and Extra - starting at \$15 per month to \$50 per month.

## **Pet Partners/AKC**

AKC Pet Insurance, administered by PetPartners, Inc., provides a comprehensive accident and illness package for cats and dogs in all 50

states, and has served as the exclusive pet insurance provider for the American Kennel Club since 2003.

Coverage includes: accidents, injuries, illnesses, including cancer, allergies, cherry eye, laboratory tests, X-rays, ultrasound, MRI and CAT Scans, surgery, hospitalization, medications, chemotherapy, radiation and extractions of permanent teeth.

### **Pumpkin Pet**

A fairly new pet insurance company to enter the foray, Pumpkin Pet is underwritten by United States Fire Insurance Company.

The company offers a standard accident and illness coverage plan with the option to add a preventative package that includes a 12-month supply of Simparica and a tick and flea preventative, along with three vaccines per year received at a local vet.

## **Pet insurance at a glance: Types of plans, what they cover and how much they cost**

To see details on what pet insurance companies offer in terms of plans, coverage and cost review the table below. Enter one of the following companies in the search field:

- Figo
- Healthy Paws
- Trupanion
- Nationwide
- 24PetWatch
- ASPCA Pet Health
- Embrace by Geico

- Pet Assure
- Pet Plan
- Progressive Pet Insurance by Pets Best
- Pet First
- Prudent Pet
- Pets Best
- Wagmo
- Pet Partners-AKC
- Pumpkin Pet

Company	Types of Plans Offered	What it Covers (Depending on plan)	Monthly Cost*
Figio	Accident and Illness, 3 Levels	Emergency services, hospitalization, lab and diagnostic testing, heredity and congenital conditions, chronic conditions, cancer treatment	\$27.55-\$46.66 dog, \$16.05-\$27.21 cat
Healthy Paws	Accident and Illness	Illnesses, accidents, hereditary conditions, congenital conditions, chronic conditions, cancer, diagnostic treatment, X-rays, blood tests, ultrasounds, surgery, hospitalization, prescription medications, emergency care, specialty care, alternative treatment	\$35.35 dog (\$250 deductible, 80% reimbursement), \$13.94 (\$250 deductible, 80% reimbursement)
Trupanion	Injuries and illness	Plan includes hereditary conditions, unidentified issues such as cough or diarrhea, congenital conditions, diagnostic testing, surgery, hospital stays, medications, veterinary supplements, herbal therapy, prosthetic devices and carts.	\$60 dog, \$40 cat

Nationwide	Accidents, illnesses, wellness coverage	exam fees, wellness care, specialty and emergency visits, hospitalization, surgeries, injuries/illnesses including cancer and hereditary/congenital disorders, diagnostic testing, including X-rays, MRIs, CT scans and ultrasounds, prescribed medications, nutritional supplements and therapeutic diets	\$28-\$43 dog, \$13-\$21 cat
24PetWatch	Extra, Classic, Super, Champion package options	All plans cover hereditary and congenital conditions, exam fees, lab tests, x-rays, ultrasounds, hospitalization and surgery, ambulatory care, physical therapy and rehab, medications and alternative treatments.	\$63 for \$5,000 policy for dog, \$30 for \$5,000 plan with \$100 deductible for cat
ASPCA Pet Health	Complete Coverage, Accident-Only Coverage, wellness and other benefits available for add-on	Accidents, illness, hereditary, congenital, cancer, chronic, dental illness, diagnostic testing, surgery, hospitalization, prescription medications, emergency care, specialty care, alternative care, behavioral therapy	\$40.47 dog, \$22.22 cat
Embrace by Geico	One, simple comprehensive pet insurance policy	Accidents, illnesses, dental illnesses, breed specific and genetic conditions, cancer, chronic conditions, exam fees, alternative therapies, X-rays, behavioral therapy, emergency veterinary care, specialist care, diagnostic testing, hospitalization, surgery, prescription drugs, prosthetics and mobility devices	\$36.66 dog, \$34.50 cat, both with \$15,000 reimbursement limit, \$500 annual deductible, 80 percent reimbursement

Pet Assure	Discount plans (this is not insurance)	Dental cleanings, dental exams and X-rays, spays & neuters, routine care and vaccines, diabetes management, cancer care, hospitalization, wellness visits, surgical procedures, allergy treatments, sick visits, emergency care, tumor removal, ultrasound, parasite screening	\$10.15 dog, \$8.45 cat
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Petplan	3 customizable plans, all 80% reimbursement	Veterinary fees due to accident, injury or illness, including chronic and hereditary conditions. This includes (but is not limited to) laboratory and diagnostic testing, chemistry and hematology, alternative therapy, surgery, oncology, cardiology, ophthalmology, dermatology, dentistry and neurology	\$27.60-\$71.17 dog, \$20.16-\$33.09
Progressive Pet Insurance by Pets Best	BestBenefit Accident and Illness Plan, Accident-Only Plan and the Wellness Routine Care Plan (which can be an add-on for the other plans, as well)	Accidents, illnesses, cancer, hereditary conditions, emergency care, surgeries & Rx med, accident & illness exam fees, rehabilitative, acupuncture and chiropractic coverage	\$29.54-\$3606 dog, \$17.49-\$21.35
PetFirst	Medical, wellness	Accidents, illnesses (incl. hereditary, congenital and chronic conditions), hospitalizations, surgeries, diagnostic tests, exam fees, X-rays, ultrasounds, medications, holistic care and alternative therapies, emergency care, intervertebral disc disease (IVDD), anterior cruciate ligaments, medical cruciate, posterior cruciate ligaments, cranial cruciate ligaments	\$16.95 dog, \$8.85 cat starting premiums

Prudent Pet	Accident and illness, accident only	Accidents and emergencies, illnesses (not including pre-existing conditions, unless the condition had previously been considered "approved" prior to insurance policy). Coverage of these issues includes behaviorists, X-rays, MRIs, cancer, arthritis	Varies on type of pet and plan chosen
Pets Best	Accident and illness, accident only, routine care	Accidents, illnesses, cancer treatments, hereditary and congenital conditions, emergency care, hospitalization, surgery, prescription medications, ongoing and chronic conditions, diagnostics, older pets, full coverage even when not spayed/neutered, behavioral conditions, dental coverage, prosthetic devices and wheelchairs, euthanasia, coverage while traveling, exam fees, acupuncture and chiropractic treatments, physical rehabilitation, prescription medications	\$29.54-\$36.06 dog, \$250 annual deductible, 90% reimbursement; \$17.49-\$21.35; wellness plans can be added for \$16-\$26 per month
Wagmo	3 plans offered for wellness and preventative care	Office visits, vaccines, bloodwork, flea, tick and heartworm treatment, grooming, dental care	\$15, \$30 and \$50 month plans for cats and dogs.
Pet Partners-AKC	CompanionPlus or CompanionSelect with add-ons ExamCare, InheritedPlus and Defender	Accidents, injuries, illnesses including cancer, allergies, cherry eye, laboratory tests, X-rays, ultrasound, MRI and CAT Scans, surgery, hospitalization, medications, chemotherapy, radiation, extractions of permanent teeth	\$35.83 dog, \$25.75 cat with \$250 deductible, \$2,500 incident limit and \$8,000 annual limit
Pumpkin Pet	Accident and illness, preventative plan	Hip dysplasia, cancer and growths, stomach issues, ear, eye and skin conditions, flea and tick prevention, annual vaccines, ACL tears, swallowed objects, bite wounds, dental and gum diseases, radiology and lab tests, prescription meds, emergency and hospitalization, alternative therapies, orthopedic surgeries, stomach surgery, hereditary conditions, behavioral issues, exam fees, microchip implantation, prescription food	\$50.92 dog, \$250 annual deductible, 90% reimbursement, \$10,000 annual coverage limit. \$12.95 additional for preventatives package. \$25.75 cat, \$250 annual deductible, \$7,000 annual coverage limit, 90% coverage, \$7.95 for preventative package

\* When possible, quotes based search of accident and illness option on 3-year-old healthy male pet/medium sized dog/mixed breed cat.

## Cost factors for pet insurance

Much like other types of insurance, pet insurance doesn't cost the same for all people. There are multiple factors that go into how much pet insurance costs, including:

- Whether it's a cat or dog
- Number of animals
- Coverage package
- Age, sex and breed of animal
- Where you live

"Veterinary charges influence the premiums you are charged. Generally in urban centers, the cost of veterinary treatment and overhead is higher than in rural areas, so premiums will reflect this," Ruiz said.

## How much does pet insurance cost?

Premiums vary, so it's tough to determine a median cost for pet insurance.

The monthly premium could be as low as \$10 and be as high as \$120.

**PET INSURANCE COST FACTORS**

- Whether it's a cat or dog
- Number of animals
- Coverage package
- Age, sex and breed of animal
- Where you live

insurance.com

Most pet guardians can expect to pay in the vicinity of \$30 to \$50 monthly.

According to figures from the NAPHIA:

- The average monthly cost for accident and illness coverage for a dog is \$47.20.
- The average monthly cost for accident and illness coverage for a cat is \$29.54.
- The average monthly cost for accident-only coverage for a dog is \$15.84.
- The average monthly cost for accident-only coverage for a cat is \$11.74.

If you consider that pet insurance is basically health insurance for your pet, you can apply the same functions to how these costs, procedures and deductibles work.

"You can liken it to dental, vision or health insurance you carry for yourself," said Ruiz. "Insurance coverage varies widely depending on what you purchase. Deductibles and out-of-pocket limits work the same as they do on your health insurance. It is the amount you pay before your benefits apply."

Experts say that when your pet is relatively healthy, you may consider a larger deductible to keep the overall cost down. The deductible should be an amount that you can easily afford in case you need to visit the veterinarian.

Coverage limits and deductibles vary between plans and companies, too. For instance, Petplan's annual coverage limits range between \$2,500 and \$25,000, with the deductibles ranging from \$100 to \$1,000. After you reach the deductible, you're usually reimbursed between 70 and 90% by most insurance plans.

It's important to remember how costly it can be when a pet gets sick or injured, and even the costs involved for basic care. In March 2019,

Nationwide released its list of the most common medical conditions that prompt veterinary visits, noting that "while common issues such as ear infections and skin allergies are rarely life-threatening, they can be unexpected and expensive."

In 2018, Nationwide members spent more than \$119 million to treat the 10 most common medical conditions affecting dogs and cats, according to an analysis of more than 725,000 insured pets.

Skin allergies were the most common health issue among Nationwide-insured dogs with more than 180,000 individual claims at an average cost of \$279 per dog. Bladder/urinary tract disease accounted for the most common medical condition among Nationwide-insured cats with 8,700 claims received at an average cost of \$515 per cat.

Here are the top 10 most treated conditions for dogs and cats:

Number	Dogs	Cats
1.	Skin allergies	Bladder/urinary tract disease
2.	Ear infection	Dental disease
3.	Non-cancerous skin mass	Chronic kidney disease
4.	Diarrhea/intestinal upset	Vomiting/upset stomach
5.	Skin infection	Diarrhea/intestinal upset
6.	Vomiting/upset stomach	Excessive thyroid hormone
7.	Arthritis	Upper respiratory infection
8.	Dental disease	Skin allergies

Number	Dogs	Cats
9.	Anal gland inflammation	Diabetes
10.	Bladder/urinary tract disease	Heart valve malfunction

Dental disease accounted for the costliest canine medical condition on the list with an average treatment expense of nearly \$450 per dog. The most expensive feline medical condition on the list was diabetes, which carries a significantly higher cost of \$871 per cat.

## Eligibility for Pet Insurance

Whether your pet is eligible for pet insurance depends on your pet's age. According to Ill, most policies won't cover pets less than eight weeks of age. On the flip side, pet insurance may be harder to secure when a pet gets older as some companies will not offer new insurance to them above a certain age.

It's typical for your pet insurance company to require a check-up of your animal by a veterinarian to determine any pre-existing conditions. This exam is to prevent owners from buying insurance when their pet is already sick.

The good news, though, is that once you get coverage, you can usually remain covered as your pet ages.

"If you take out a policy when your pet is younger, it can usually be continued with the same provider for the lifetime of your pet," said Ruiz.

# How do you file a pet insurance claim?

As with other aspects of pet insurance, how pet insurance works varies greatly depending on your carrier, your plan and your veterinarian.

For almost all companies, the pet insurer reimburses you after you pay the bill and file a claim. However, some companies, such as Trupanion and PetsBest, have options to pay the vet directly. The pet insurance company reviews the claim quickly and approves or rejects that claim. The approved amount is usually sent to you either by direct deposit or by check.

Before an insurer reimburses you, the deductible is subtracted from the payment. The deductible is usually between zero and \$1,000. Usually, reimbursement ranges between 50 and 100%, but based on our sampling of several companies, most offer in the range of 70-90%.

Let's take a look at how pet insurance can work. Let's say Freckles is hit by a car and breaks his legs and suffers internal injuries. You've got 100% reimbursement, a \$500 deductible, a \$10,000 annual maximum and the bill at the emergency veterinary clinic is \$15,000.

Here's how it would shake out:

- You shell out the \$500 deductible.
- Your pet insurance reimburses the \$10,000, leaving a remainder of \$4,500.
- That's \$5,000 paid by you, but of course this is much more palpable than having to foot the whole bill.

# How to find the best pet insurance plan for you

Your pet is undoubtedly a cherished member of your family. When looking for a pet insurance policy, make sure you understand what the policy covers. Get multiple quotes so you can compare which plan is best for your situation.

"When choosing a policy, it is important to check the type of product and the level of veterinary fees covered to ensure it will continue to meet your financial needs, now and in the future," said Ruiz.

Remember:

- Shop around for the policy that best meets your needs.
- Get a free, no-obligation quote from a few reputable providers and compare types and levels of coverage.
- Always read your policy and insurance documents for details of the benefits and significant exclusions of the policy. Today, most companies offer their policy document in plain English, rather than "legalese." You can even review them in advance of enrollment.
- Always answer the insurer's questions honestly. Failing to do so is considered fraud and the insurer may refuse to pay your claim.
- Your veterinarian is an ethical professional who may be able to help you understand the benefits of pet insurance coverage -- and the costs of veterinary medical care today.

"Like with human health insurance," continued Ruiz, "if you decide you want to change your insurance after a medical condition has occurred, that condition will likely be excluded under any new insurance whether or not a claim was ever made. Remember, your pet's medical history may be

requested and your vet will be obliged to disclose your pet's full medical records."

<b>Car insurance carriers</b>	<b>Types of car insurance</b>	<b>State auto insurance</b>	<b>High risk auto insurance</b>	<b>Other insurance</b>
Progressive	Home and auto bundle	California car insurance	Car insurance for teens	Term Life Insurance
Esurance	Multi-vehicle	Florida car insurance	Bad credit	Homeowners insurance
21st Century	Non-owner car insurance	Texas car insurance	DUI insurance	Renters insurance
The Hartford	Gap insurance	Georgia car insurance	Ticket calculator	Motorcycle insurance
Liberty Mutual	Liability insurance	Ohio car insurance		Insurance articles
Safeco	Comprehensive insurance	Washington car insurance		