NACA Position Statement on Elective Declawing of Domestic Cats

Introduction

The National Animal Care & Control Association (NACA) is committed to advancing humane, evidence-based practices that promote animal welfare, protect public safety, and strengthen the human–animal bond. As part of this mission, NACA offers the following position statement on the surgical procedure known as declawing (onychectomy or partial digital amputation) of domestic cats.

Stand-Alone Statement of Position

NACA unequivocally opposes the elective declawing of cats for non-therapeutic reasons. (AAHA; AVMA; ASPCA; CVMA; ISFM)

Definition of “Non-Therapeutic”

For this position statement, non-therapeutic declawing refers to any surgical removal of the distal phalanx (P3) that is not medically required to address disease, trauma, infection, malignant growth, or other clinically documented pathology.

Declawing performed for owner convenience, property protection, cosmetic purposes, or the management of normal feline scratching behavior is considered non-therapeutic.

Rationale

1. Scratching is Normal, Necessary Feline Behavior

- Scratching supports multiple essential biological functions, including claw maintenance, full-body stretching, marking territory, and behavioral well-being (AAHA; ISFM). Eliminating this natural behavior creates a mismatch between feline needs and the domestic environment.

2. Declawing is an Amputation with Documented Welfare Risks

- Acute pain, infection, and hemorrhage (AAHA; AVMA)
- Altered gait, compensatory limb strain, and chronic pain (AAHA; CVMA)
- Increased aggression and biting (ASPCA; PPG)
- Increased incidence of inappropriate elimination (PPG; ISFM)
- Long-term musculoskeletal changes (CVMA)

3. Declawing Does Not Resolve Behavioral Concerns

- Research and veterinary consensus show that declawing does not reliably prevent undesirable behaviors nor reduce relinquishment risk (AAHA; ASPCA; ISFM).
- Declawed cats may be more prone to behavioral issues that contribute to surrender, including aggression and litter box avoidance (PPG; CVMA).

4. Humane, Effective Alternatives Exist

- Routine nail trimming
- Positive reinforcement training
- Multiple scratch surfaces and posts
- Environmental enrichment
- Soft nail caps
- Owner education on normal behavior

5. Medical Exceptions Recognized

- Therapeutic partial digital amputation may be appropriate for select medical conditions such as malignant tumors, severe trauma, or chronic infection of the digit. Such cases require:
  - Clear medical justification
  - Adequate analgesia
  - Appropriate surgical standards
  - Informed owner consent (CVMA; AVMA)

Shelter & Animal Control Considerations

Cats Arriving Already Declawed

- Document declawed status at intake
- Monitor for pain, arthritis, or mobility changes
- Provide soft bedding and low-impact housing areas
- Note any behavioral changes associated with declawing (PPG; ISFM)
- Educate adopters about additional considerations for declawed cats

Agency Practices

- Prohibit elective declawing in organizational policy
- Provide adopter counseling on normal scratching behavior
- Promote alternatives to declawing when supporting pet retention
- Coordinate with veterinary partners to discourage elective declawing (AAHA; ASPCA; ISFM)

Legislative & Regulatory Context

NACA supports legislative and regulatory efforts that restrict non-therapeutic declawing, consistent with positions held by veterinary professional organizations in the U.S. and internationally (CVMA; AVMA; AAHA).

Talking Points for Animal Control Officers

- “Scratching is normal behavior in cats and essential to their physical and emotional health.”
- “Declawing is an amputation that may cause long-term behavioral and medical problems.”
- “Many humane, safe alternatives exist to protect both cats and household property.”
- “Declawed cats are at increased risk for biting and litter box issues.”
- “NACA strongly opposes elective declawing and supports evidence-based alternatives.”

Conclusion

Elective declawing of cats for non-therapeutic purposes is inconsistent with modern feline welfare science, poses significant medical and behavioral risks, and undermines the human–animal bond. NACA supports humane alternatives, public education, and policy efforts that prioritize the welfare of cats while empowering guardians and animal care professionals with effective tools for behavior management.

References

- American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). Declawing: Position Statement. Revised 2021.
- American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Declawing of Domestic Cats: Backgrounder. July 23, 2019.
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Position Statement on Declawing Cats.
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA). Partial Digital Amputation (Onychectomy or Declawing) in Domestic Felids. 2022.
- International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM) & International Cat Care. Position Statement on the Declawing of Cats.
- Pet Professional Guild (PPG). Position Statement on Cat Declawing. October 21, 2019.

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV).

ASSOCIATION OF SHELTER VETERINARIANS