

## **Pets**

When you ask Americans about their relationships, 40% of pet owners will tell you with the exception of their spouse/partner and child, hands down their pet is the most important relationship in their day-to-day life. Yes! The pet counts more than friends, parents, siblings and a co-workers. If you have a pet or had a pet, you know what we are talking about. Pets are, in many instances, the glue that keeps the household together, and for some people, they are the only thing in their households (37% of those who are widows). In all 50 states, a majority of people own a pet. In Vermont it goes up to 70% of all households. In our sample, 57% say they have a pet. What may shock many is that 24% of Americans tell us that a pet is among the two or three relationships that are most central to their daily lives. Yes, spouse/partner and child are most important, add the parent, and then the pet is as important as a friend and more important to a larger number than a sibling or co-worker. The next time you watch a pet food product being advertised, think about these statistics.

But once you get by those central two elements, most of the other data suggest there is little or no difference about their lives than what one might expect; there are more people with pets who live in small towns and rural areas, more in the Midwest, more with those who are married, and African Americans are less likely than whites and Hispanics to have a pet. Unlike volunteering, the differences in connection to longevity between those with pets and those without are mostly within the statistical margin of error. Owning a pet may not give one a longer life, but it should be noted that a higher percentage of those with pets are happier with their relationships with family and friends than those without a family pet. The corollary to this point is the household with pets are less like to be happy with their financial situation. This can be verified by our own observation of life—most pet dog owners know the name of their neighbor's dog, but not the name of their neighbor. And two, for those with pets, take a look at the veterinarian bills and that will explain why pet owners are less secure financially than non-pet owners.