

AlignCare™ Veterinary Service Providers

Policies & Procedures

Background

The relationship between humans and animals has existed for thousands of years. Pets are often reported to be members of the family, and this appears to be the case regardless of racial or ethnic groupings. This indicates a strong human-animal bond and we are using the term “bonded families” to reflect this.

As reported in [*Access to Veterinary Care: Barriers, Current Practices, and Public Policy*](#), we estimate that more than 29 million dogs and cats live in families participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and millions more are in financially struggling middle-class households. Due to the economic circumstances of these families, their pets may have limited access to veterinary care. Our national population study found more than one out of four (28%) families with pets experienced a barrier to veterinary care in the past two years, and the primary barrier was financial. The impacts on family wellbeing can be substantial because:

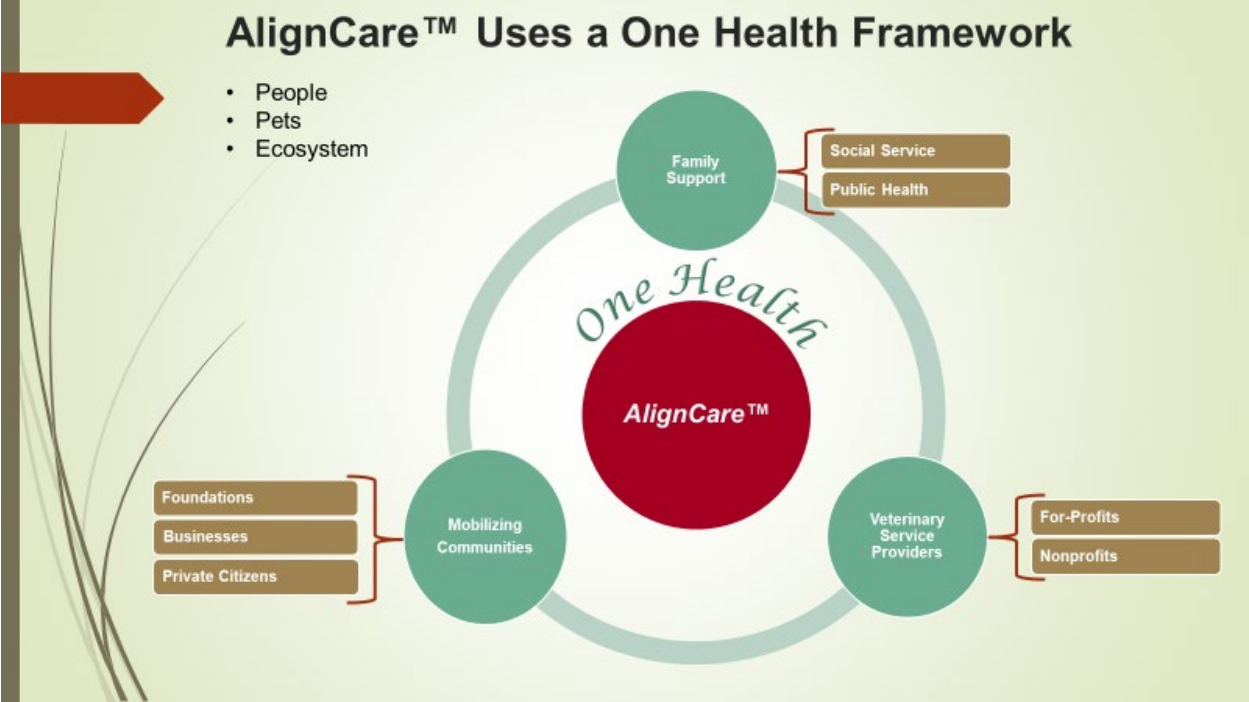
- 88% of families regard their pets as family members.
- An illness or injury may result in prolonged recovery, premature death, including economic euthanasia, or relinquishment, breaking up the family.
- Lack of veterinary care presents health risks to the family and the public health.

National economic trends suggest that this is a long-term problem and AlignCare™ is a viable solution. Two-thirds of pets live with Millennials and Baby Boomers. Millennials are projected to earn less income than their parents’ generation and Baby Boomers are retiring on to fixed incomes, while the costs of veterinary care continue to rise.

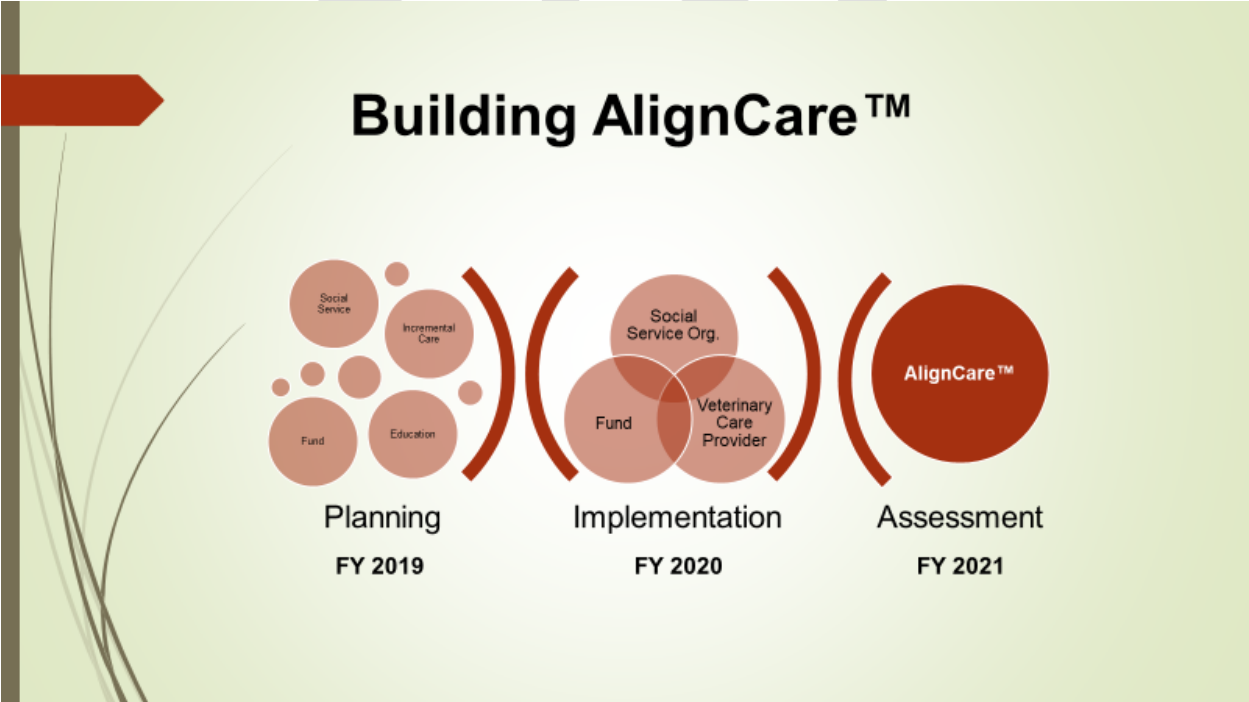
Lack of access to veterinary care is a national family crisis that can be resolved with interprofessional collaboration among veterinary and social service professionals and communities.

Overview

AlignCare™ is a community-based initiative that organizes family support resources and activities to improve access to veterinary care. It is a One Health healthcare system that connects family support services and veterinary service providers, utilizing private sector financing. The objective is to “align” existing resources and activities in ways that improve access to veterinary care.



AlignCare™ is a three-year proof of concept project involving the collaboration of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Maddie's Fund, social service and veterinary service providers, and communities.



Starting in July 2019, implementation of AlignCare™ will begin in 8-10 communities. In July 2020, project assessment will commence with the intent of expanding the AlignCare™ template to additional communities upon completion.

AlignCare™ does not help with the cost of veterinary care for families who do not qualify for public assistance.

Expected Outcomes

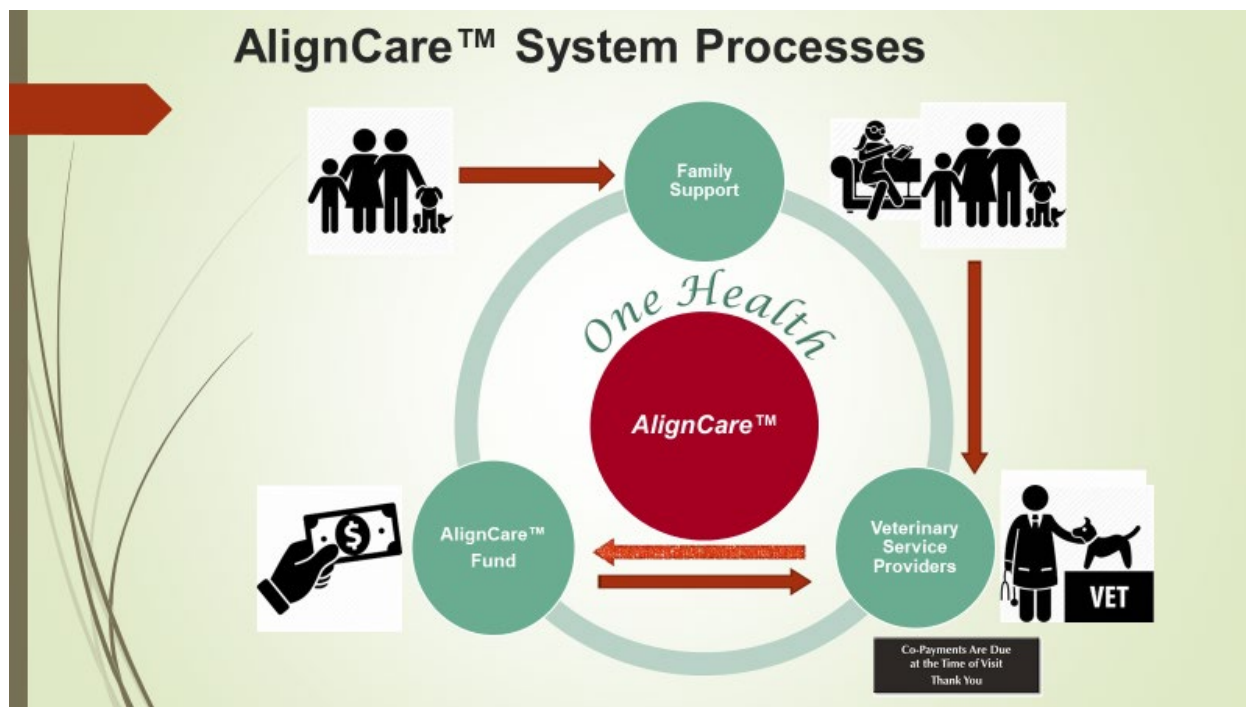
The expected outcomes of this project are:

1. Effective ways to work with social service agencies and professionals.
2. An intake questionnaire to be used by social service agencies to enroll qualified families into AlignCare™.
3. Sustainable approaches to financing AlignCare™ by addressing:
 - a. Client copay structures and appropriate fee levels.
 - b. Provider payment structures and incentives for incremental care.
 - c. Discounted products and services by vendors and veterinary service providers.
4. Forecast of the demand for AlignCare™ services, as well as program participation among veterinary service providers to ensure that revenues are sufficient to cover outlays.
5. General parameters for a tiered diagnostic and dynamic therapeutic approach to patient management through incremental veterinary care.
6. Population research to evaluate outcomes.
7. Longitudinal public health study to gain a better understanding of the relationship between pet ownership and health outcomes for the whole family.
8. The scope of services that AlignCare™ Veterinary Social Workers offer to AlignCare™ clients, social service agencies, and participating veterinary clinics.
9. A comprehensive scoping document for an AlignCare™ Educational Program.

AlignCare™ System Processes

Utilizing a One Health framework, the steps of the AlignCare™ process are:

1. The bonded family talks to their social service agency about the need for veterinary care for their pet.
2. The social service agency enrolls the bonded family into AlignCare system.
 - a. An intake questionnaire is filled out at this time.
 - b. In addition, another questionnaire will be completed that is part of a longitudinal public health study as a way of measuring to what extent there are better health outcomes for the whole family when the non-human members are receiving better health care.
3. The bonded family goes to an enrolled veterinary service provider, who operates within a structured health care system.
 - a. The family pays a co-pay based on a sliding scale.
4. The veterinary service provider provides services at a rate below market and submits an invoice for direct payment of the subsidy.
5. The AlignCare Fund pays the veterinary service provider based on a calculated rate.



AlignCare™ Clients

At this time, AlignCare™ targets families receiving public assistance, where lack of access to veterinary care is most acute. The public assistance received can be on a federal, state, or local level, with no preference given to any particular program. The bonded family is enrolled as an AlignCare™ client by the social service agency that supports them. This is a method of means testing in which underserved families can receive veterinary care without determination by the veterinary service provider.

AlignCare™ clients agree to adhere to the policies of AlignCare™, including:

1. Providing the required information.
2. Paying a co-pay at the time services are provided by an enrolled veterinary service provider.
3. Signed informed consent documents regarding limitations on subsidized services, including caps on the number of pets who can be enrolled and the subsidy for an individual pet per episode and annually.
4. Working with a Veterinary Social Worker (VSW).
5. Participation in the veterinary care of their pet as directed by the veterinary service provider.

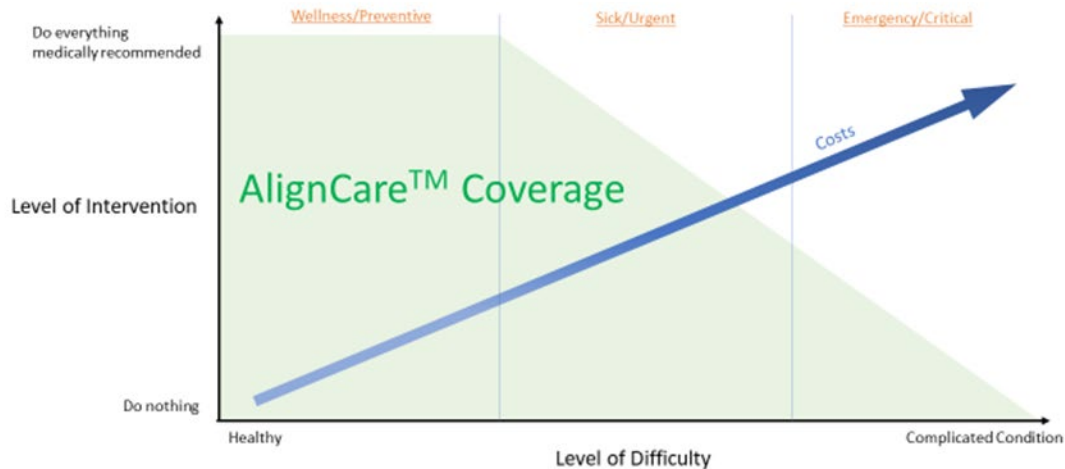
AlignCare™ Veterinary Service Providers

Veterinary service providers who desire to be a part of AlignCare™ can enroll in the program. To do so, they agree to:

1. Serve families enrolled in the AlignCare™ program.
 - a. The number of AlignCare™ clients seen per year is at the discretion of the veterinary service provider.
2. Adhere to the policies of AlignCare™, including:
 - a. Providing the required information.
 - b. Receiving a co-pay from the AlignCare™ client at the time services are provided.
 - c. Receiving a subsidy through Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) per payment policy.

- i. The subsidy will be based on one of two models:
 - 1) Capitation - Veterinarians are paid a pre-determined fee per AlignCare™ client (patient) per month. This is the simplest option, based loosely on Medicaid, with the pre-determined fee based on average costs for veterinary care.
 - 2) Prospective Payment - Veterinarians are paid a pre-determined amount for each major diagnosis as determined upon entry to care. This is a simpler option, based loosely on Medicare and managed care, with amounts based on a market percentage of average costs within each major diagnosis group.
 - ii. Subsidy rates are based on analysis of program data and input from veterinarians, providing an established percentage of market rate for incremental care services (percentage to be determined, but in the range of 65-75% of market rate).
 - iii. Total subsidy compensation will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.
 - d. Working with a veterinary social worker to facilitate:
 - i. Communication with the client.
 - ii. Support of the veterinary care team.
3. Provide veterinary services as specified in the AlignCare™ policy, including:
- a. Use of incremental veterinary care as a case management strategy.
 - i. For more information on incremental veterinary care, refer to the *AlignCare™ Incremental Veterinary Care Guide*.
 - b. Veterinary services covered.
 - i. Although all types of medical, surgical, and behavioral conditions are covered by AlignCare™ subsidies up to the maximum dollar amount that an AlignCare™ client receives per year, it is unlikely that the subsidies would be enough to cover expenses related to high cost care or conditions with a poor prognosis. Considering this, the decision to treat a condition should take into account the following:
 - Provisional diagnosis
 - Cost of treatment
 - Prognosis/Outcome
 - ii. AlignCare™ Coverage Graphic:

Incremental Veterinary Care AlignCare™ Coverage



The above graphic is an illustration of AlignCare™ coverage. It reflects total coverage of wellness/preventive procedures (e.g., vaccines, spay/neuter, etc.) and less coverage as the case becomes more complex and the costs increase.

- c. Accept payment of a total fee not to exceed AlignCare™ rates, which are set at some percentage below market for a given service.
 - i. The specific rate has yet to be determined but it is expected to be in the range of 65-75% of market rate.
- d. Communicating expectations with the AlignCare™ client and, when appropriate, the assigned veterinary social worker.
 - i. This would include working with AlignCare™ clients regarding the best use of the allocated veterinary care subsidy.
4. Help characterize incremental veterinary care, including:
 - a. Granting access to select patient and client information via the AlignCare™ information system.
 - i. The AlignCare™ information system connects electronically to the practice management information system (PMIS) to:
 - 1) Track supported services and financials.
 - 2) Capture, maintain, monitor and analyze information in the AlignCare™ database to continually improve operations.
 - ii. Until the information system is operational, email and other forms of communicating may be utilized.

Social Service Involvement

Local social service agencies play an integral role in the AlignCare™ system by identifying eligible families needing veterinary care. They are responsible for enrolling the family in AlignCare™, referring

the family to an enrolled veterinary service provider, while continuing to support the family according to their non-pet related mission.

[Veterinary Social Work](#) is growing area of social work practice that attends to the human needs that arise in the intersection of veterinary medicine and social work practice. The four areas of veterinary social work are:

- [Grief & Pet Loss](#)
- [Animal-Assisted Interactions](#)
- [The Link Between Human & Animal Violence](#)
- [Compassion Fatigue and Conflict Management](#)

In addition to local social service agencies, veterinary social work is part of the AlignCare™ system. They serve as a gateway into AlignCare™ by providing allied help to the social service agency by supporting clients with their pet issues, supporting the family with their pet’s veterinary care-related issues, and setting client expectations. In addition, they support the veterinary care as they care for the pets of AlignCare™ clients.



AlignCare™ Information System

Information about AlignCare™ clients, pets, case assessment and management (e.g., diagnostics, treatments, prices, etc.), and outcomes will be collected electronically by the AlignCare™ Information System through integration with the practice management information system of enrolled veterinary service providers. Until the information system is operational, email and other forms of communicating may be utilized.

The collection of information will provide a comprehensive source of information needed to:

- Study incremental veterinary care as an evidence-based case management strategy.

- Assess the health of AlignCare™ patients and patterns of illness and injury.
- Identify unmet regional veterinary care needs.
- Document patterns of veterinary care expenditures.
- Improve the quality of care in veterinary care settings.
- Identify areas needing additional research.

Information generated from the AlignCare™ Information System will only be shared in aggregate form to protect the privacy of veterinary service providers and clients. No identifier information (e.g., names of the veterinary service provider, AlignCare™ clients, veterinarians, etc.) will be shared. Access to the data will be limited to specific individuals of the AlignCare™ team and will not be shared outside of this small group. Cyber protection will be prioritized to avoid data being stolen or lost during transit or storage.

Questions and Answers

1. What happens after the subsidy is used in its entirety?
Answer: No more services are covered by AlignCare™. There is a per pet and annual cap.
2. What happens when treatment is more than the subsidy?
Answer: Veterinary care must be provided within the AlignCare™ fee policy. When costs are projected to exceed the policy, the following are the options:
 - The family may find additional financial resources.
 - Non-treatment of the problem.
 - Euthanasia, if appropriate.
3. What if the co-pay is not paid at the time of service?
Answer: The co-pay is *required* at the time that services are rendered.
4. Is the co-pay per visit or per treatment?
Answer: The co-pay is per visit.
5. Is the co-pay applied to the total amount of services rendered?
Answer: Yes.
6. Do AlignCare™ subsidies cover expenses beyond specifically veterinary care (e.g., cremation, food, toys, etc.).
Answer: No, AlignCare™ subsidies are for veterinary care only. However, prescription food would be covered if directed by the veterinary service provider.
7. If an enrolled AlignCare™ family has an allocated amount, would it be their choice in how it is used?
Answer: There is not an allocated amount. However, there are caps. The client chooses whether to pursue treatment within the AlignCare™ policy and may opt to not treat.
8. Can the veterinary service provider limit the number of AlignCare™ clients seen per year?
Answer: Yes, by agreeing to a set number of clients per month.

9. Will the veterinary practice be responsible for submitting bills to the AlignCare™ Fund?
Answer: Yes, through the AlignCare™ Information System.
10. Once a practice agrees to see AlignCare™ clients, is there a limit to the amount or number of involvements for a practice?
Answer: Yes (see response to question 8).
11. There are some veterinary practices that are in a location to serve a population perhaps more than others. How will transport be arranged?
Answer: Transportation to the AlignCare™ veterinary service provider is the responsibility of the AlignCare™ client. However, the social service agency may assist clients with transportation to the veterinary service provider.
12. Who is responsible when a pet needs follow-up care?
Answer: Ultimately, the AlignCare™ client is responsible. If there is AlignCare™ subsidy money still available, it can be used for this follow-up care. Otherwise, the family would need to find other financial resources, or consider other options, including euthanasia, if appropriate.
13. Where is the education about veterinary care to come from?
Answer: The AlignCare™ Education Program will provide educational resources for clients, including maintaining wellness, preventing illnesses and injuries, owner provided first aid, and deciding when a veterinarian is needed.
14. What should be done if a veterinary service provider sees an owner who needs social services? Is the veterinary service provider responsible for reporting this?
Answer: It is expected that the veterinary service provider will be communicating appropriate concerns to the veterinary social worker.