

The University of Tennessee's Program for Pet Health Equity AlignCare Project

\$350,000 in Grants from PetSmart Charities will support Community-based Network that Connects Pet Owners with Essential Resources, such as Access to Veterinary Care

Knoxville, TN – May 14, 2021 – The University of Tennessee's Program for Pet Health Equity (PPHE) recently received two grants totaling \$350,000 from PetSmart Charities to support the AlignCare project. AlignCare is a community-based network that aligns resources provided by Veterinary Service Providers, Human Support Coordinators, Social Service Agencies, Animal Welfare Organizations, as well as other agencies and stakeholders, to improve access to veterinary care. The funds awarded will also enable expansion into Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities. Data currently being collected will help better explain how lack of access to veterinary care may affect family health and well-being. The project also allows researchers to further explore how sociocultural barriers impact pet owners' ability to access veterinary care.

According to a national study performed by the University of Tennessee, lack of access to veterinary care is a national family crisis, with more than one out of four families reporting they experienced a barrier to veterinary care, most often due to limited finances. The impacts on pets can be substantial, including prolonged recovery from an illness or injury, premature death, or relinquishment. This results in distress for the family and negatively impacts the emotional wellbeing of veterinary professionals, further tasks animal shelters, and may present threats to public health. The COVID pandemic has made the need for AlignCare even greater.

As the national One Health healthcare system, AlignCare helps to ensure pets receive urgent veterinary care when their families are unable to afford it. Data gathered will show how this system can sustainably improve access to veterinary care. Ongoing social science, economic, and incremental veterinary care research will inform new service delivery models that enhance overall family health and wellbeing, and therefore, overall community health.

"We're proud to partner with the University of Tennessee to support the AlignCare project and increase access to veterinary care", said Aimee Gilbreath, president of PetSmart Charities. "As we continue to see the impacts of the pandemic, we know that pets provide a sense of security and companionship to the entire family. Grants like these play a vital role in ensuring that pets stay healthy and happy with the families that love them, especially when they need them most."

About AlignCare

AlignCare is the One Health healthcare system that *aligns* the resources of social service agencies, animal welfare organizations, and veterinary service providers, while utilizing community funding. The alignment of these resources improves access to veterinary care for families currently underserved, as well as enables social service and animal care professionals to meet their goals in serving families and their communities. Families who receive services from a means tested public assistance program and have a pet currently in need of urgent or sick veterinary care should visit www.aligncarehealth.org to complete their application and upload their proof of public assistance.

About PetSmart Charities®

PetSmart Charities, Inc. is committed to finding lifelong, loving homes for all pets by supporting programs and thought leadership that bring people and pets together. Through its in-store

adoption program in all PetSmart® stores across the U.S. and Puerto Rico, PetSmart Charities helps to find forever homes and families for more than 600,000 shelter pets each year. Each year, millions of generous PetSmart shoppers help pets in need by donating to PetSmart Charities using the PIN pads at checkout registers inside PetSmart stores. In turn, PetSmart Charities efficiently uses more than 90 cents of every dollar donated to fulfill its role as the leading funder of animal welfare in North America, granting more than \$450 million since its inception in 1994. Independent from PetSmart Inc., PetSmart Charities is a 501(c)(3) organization that has received the Four-Star Rating from Charity Navigator, a third-party organization that reports on the effectiveness, accountability and transparency of nonprofits, for the past 17 years in a row – placing it among the top one percent of charities rated by this organization. To learn more visit www.petsmartcharities.org.

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