

# Coordinated Care: Integrating Veterinary Medicine into the Healthcare System



# One Health Healthcare System

- **Collaborative Nature of One Health**
  - Interconnected health systems
  - Collaboration across disciplines
  - Veterinary care as part of family healthcare
- **Holistic Family Healthcare System**
  - Treating the family as a unit
  - Recognizing the human-animal bond
- **Necessity of an Integrated Approach for Family Health Equity**
  - Bridging gaps in access to care
  - Addressing social and environmental determinants of health
  - Collaboration for preventive care
  - Comprehensive approach to health equity
  - Leveraging community resources



**FIGURE 6.2**

*Organizational assets that contribute to a community care network*

# Veterinary Medicine in the Family Healthcare System

- Holistic Integration of Veterinary Care
  - Veterinary medicine should be seamlessly integrated into the broader family healthcare system, recognizing pets as integral members of the family whose health impacts the overall well-being of the household.
- Collaboration with Human Healthcare Providers
  - Strengthen partnerships with human healthcare providers to address the interconnected health needs of pets and their owners, ensuring coordinated care that benefits the entire family.
- Financial Support Services
  - Collaborate with financial assistance programs and social services to help families manage the costs of veterinary care, making essential services more accessible and reducing the burden on low-income households.
- Emotional and Mental Health Support
  - Work closely with mental health professionals and veterinary social workers to address the emotional and psychological needs of families, especially in situations involving difficult care decisions or pet loss.

# Veterinary Medicine in the Family Healthcare System

- Access to Non-Veterinary Pet Services
  - Facilitate connections with organizations that provide non-veterinary pet services, such as pet food banks, grooming, and behavioral support, to ensure the overall well-being of pets in the context of family health.
- Advocating for Pet-Inclusive Family Policies
  - Engage with policymakers to advocate for family policies that recognize the role of pets in households, ensuring that pet care is considered in broader discussions about family health and welfare.
- Community Resource Integration
  - Integrate veterinary services with community resources, such as public health initiatives, shelters, and local nonprofits, to create a network of support that addresses both human and pet needs.
- Education and Communication Strategies
  - Educate families on the importance of integrated care for their pets and promote communication strategies that help them navigate the various services and resources available to support their pet's health.



**Bonded Families in Need**



**Veterinary Social Workers & Human Support Coordinators**



**Veterinary Service Providers**

**AlignCare**

*Serving Families, Pets and Communities*

**Animal Welfare Organizations**

**Social Service Agencies**

**Community Council**



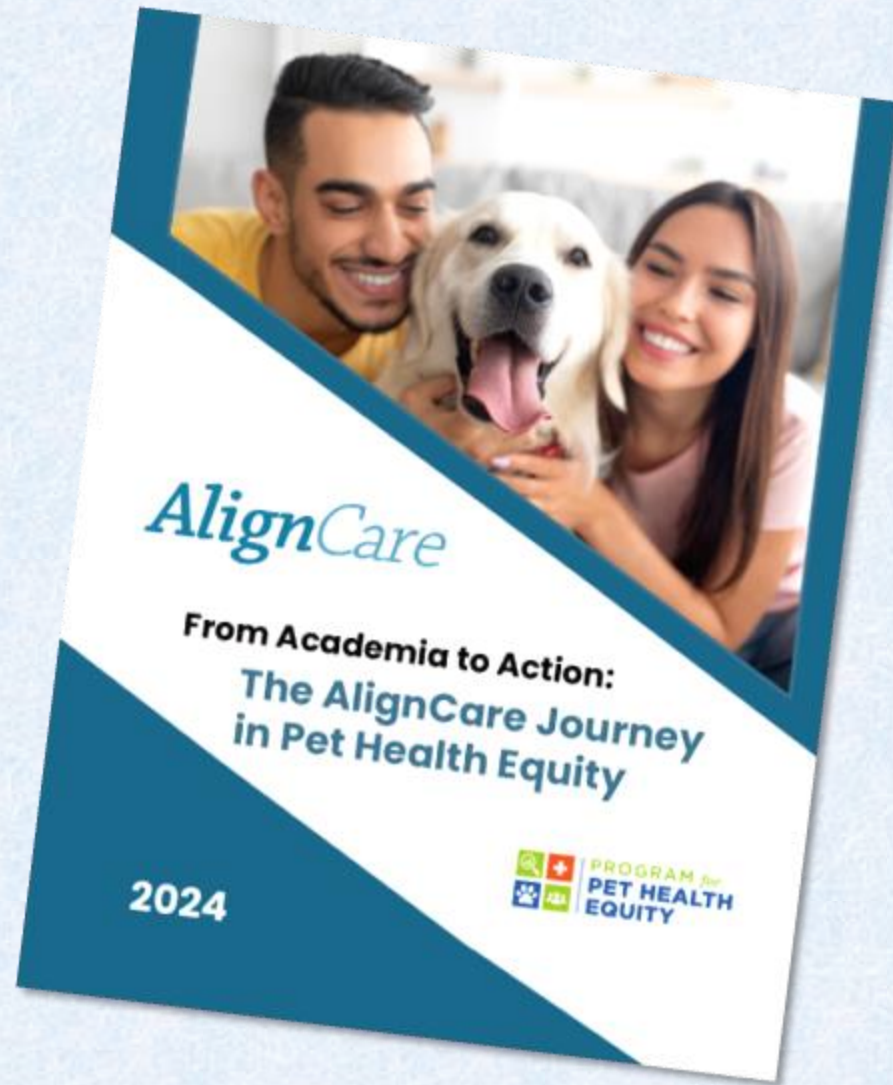
**Private Citizens**

**Government**

**Businesses & Foundations**



**AlignCare Engage**



<https://tiny.utk.edu/TheAlignCareJourney>



# Strategic Action Steps for Integration

- **Actionable Steps to Enhance Communication and Collaboration**

- Establish regular communication channels
- Develop integrated care plans
- Use referral networks
- Cross-train staff
- Collaborative case conferences
- Develop shared resources
- Leverage technology for integration

- **Examples of Successful Integration Efforts**

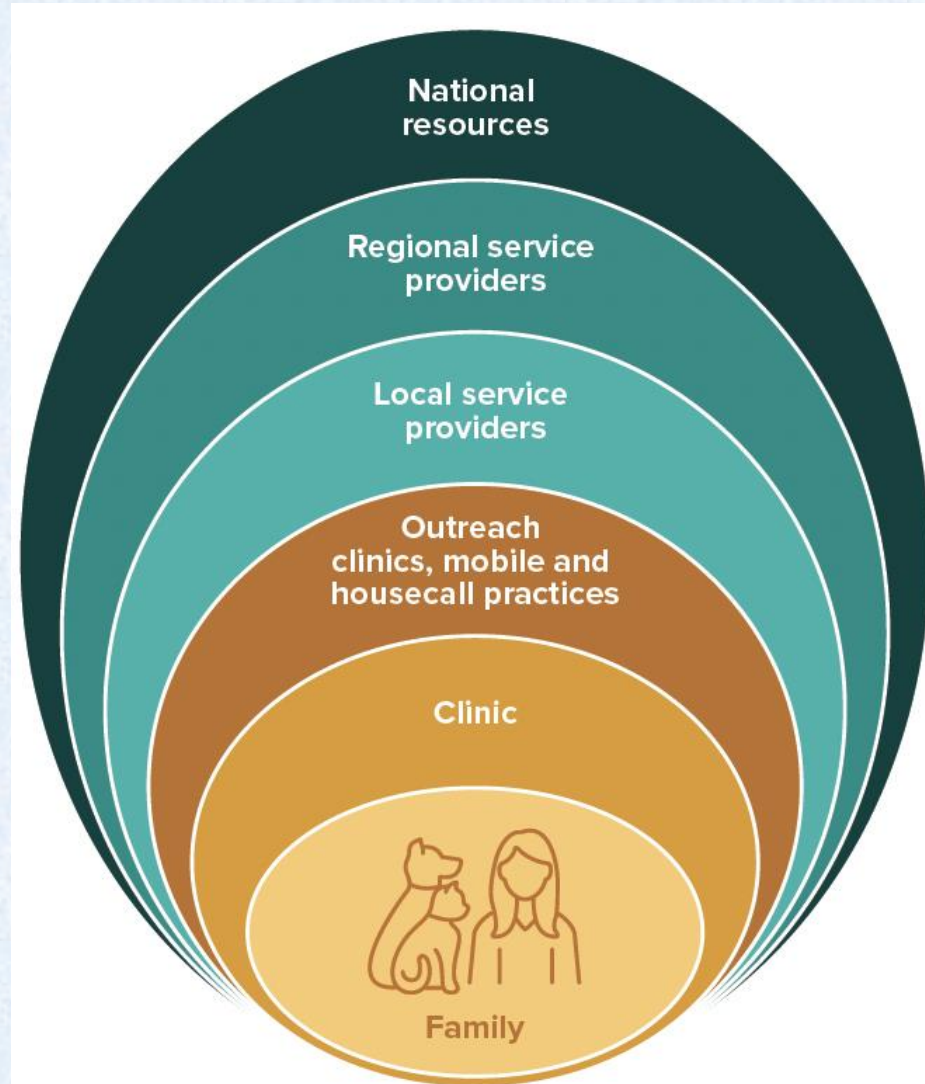
- Partnership with local health clinics
- Collaboration with social services
- Public health initiatives
- Shared facilities and resources
- Joint health education programs





# Community-Level Gold Standard Care

- **Variability of Gold Standard Care**
  - Context-dependent definition
  - Community resources and limitations
  - Impact of socioeconomic realities
- **Adapting Care Standards for Underserved Populations**
  - Tailoring care to the community's needs
  - Incremental care as a viable option
  - Balancing ideal with practical
  - Creative use of community resources
  - Providing culturally competent care
  - Building trust through communication
- **Delivering Quality Care Under Constraints**
  - Quality is not compromised
  - Advocating for equitable access



**FIGURE 6.1**  
*Integrated community care and an asset-based approach*

# Clinical Case 3

Long-term patient due for their **annual heartworm test** needs a refill of **preventive medication**.

The patient's caregiver is **hospitalized** and cannot bring the pet in for the required testing and examination. However, the caregiver is committed to protecting the pet from heartworm disease and has expressed concern about maintaining the pet's health while incapacitated.

The pet was last examined a few months ago and was in good health then. The annual heartworm test is now overdue, but with the caregiver in the hospital, the pet cannot be brought in for the test.

The caregiver is worried about missing the heartworm test window and being unable to refill the preventive medication, which could leave the pet vulnerable to heartworm disease. They have asked if there are alternative ways to ensure the pet remains protected until they can bring the pet to the clinic.

# Clinical Case 3 – Discussion Questions

What strategies could you use to manage the pet's care while the caregiver cannot bring them in? Consider **telemedicine**, **mobile veterinary services**, or **community resources** that could help overcome the transportation barrier.

Heartworm prevention protocols typically require an annual test before medication can be refilled. How would you balance following **best practices** with the practical limitations the caregiver faces? Could an exception be made in this case, or could a **temporary solution** be implemented?

How would you communicate with the caregiver to ensure they understand the risks and available options? Are there **community resources** or **volunteers** that could assist in bringing the pet in for care? How could you facilitate collaboration with **social services** or local **healthcare providers** to help manage the pet's health while supporting the caregiver?