



AlignCare

Unleashing Community Power: A Blueprint for Strengthening Families

Michael J. Blackwell, DVM, MPH
Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS (Ret.)
Director, Program for Pet Health Equity
University of Tennessee



PROGRAM for
**PET HEALTH
EQUITY**

ppheweb@utk.edu

Service, Education, and Research



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

Inequity in veterinary care access is tearing families apart, hitting BIPOC families the hardest.



The Problem - Inequities

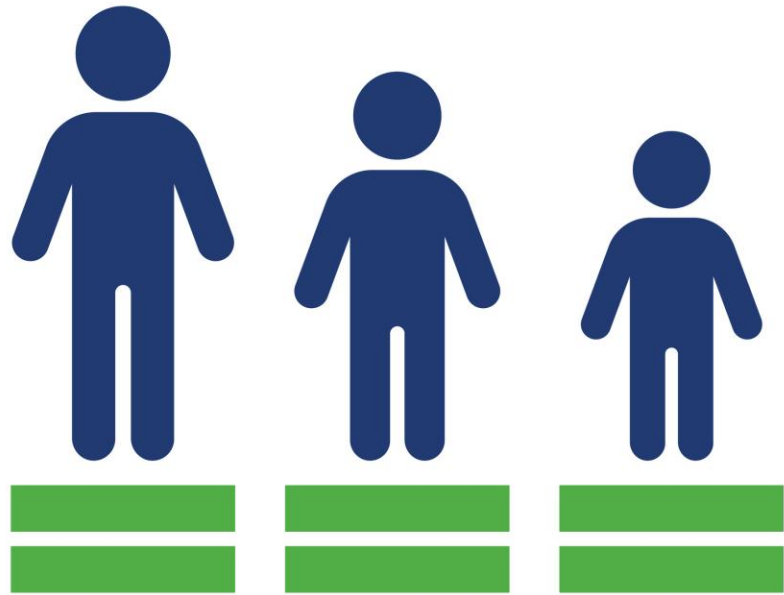
Current systems not aligned with today's families

- 70% of U.S. and 60% of Canadian families have pets.
- 95% of U.S. view pets as family (Harris Poll 2015).

The Healthcare Gap

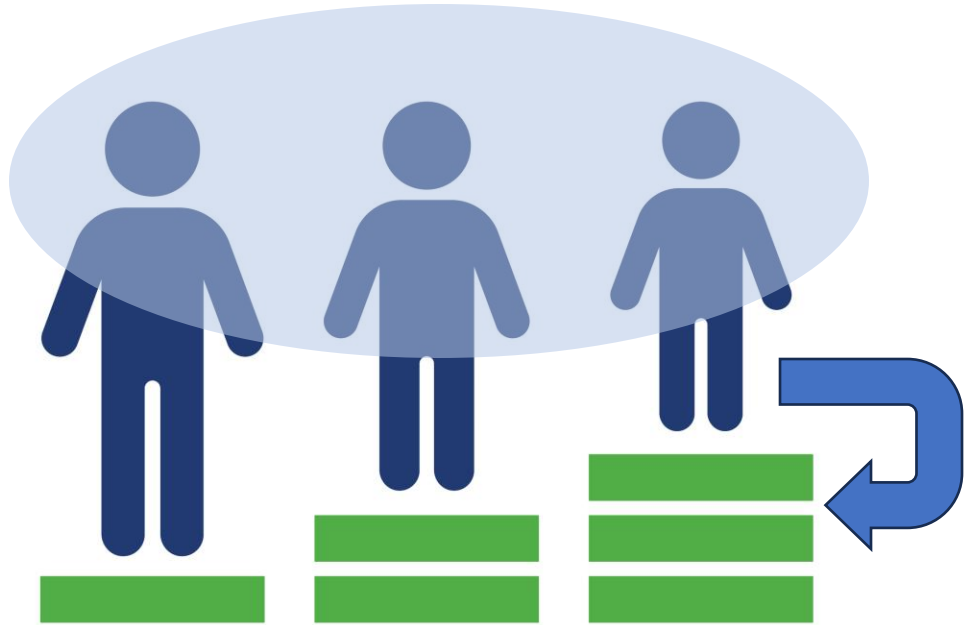
- 2018 study showed over 25% of U.S. families lacked veterinary care in the past 2 years (AVCC).
- Main reason: unaffordability.
- Inequities in pet healthcare affect the health of families, veterinary care teams, animal welfare workers, and the broader community.





EQUALITY

VS



EQUITY

Impacts on Families



- Poor health outcomes
- Emotional distress
- Prolonged recovery
- Premature death, relinquishments
- Increased risks of zoonoses in communities

Impacts on Veterinary Care Teams

Compassion fatigue

- Increased physical health symptoms, i.e., heart issues, weight loss/gain, headaches, nausea, chronic pain
- Anxiety, depression, mood swings, decreased self-esteem
- Memory loss, poor decision-making, difficulty concentrating
- Decreased empathy and compassion



Impacts on Communities – Zoonoses

Bacterial

- Plague
- Brucellosis
- Tularemia
- Anthrax
- Salmonellosis
- E. coli

Viral

- Rabies
- West Nile virus
- Encephalitis
- Influenza
- Hantavirus
- Prion diseases

Outbreaks

- Ebola
- Avian influenza viruses A(H5N6), A(H7N9)
- Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus
- Cholera

- ~60% of all globally emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic
- 72% originate in wildlife (Philip J. Nyhus, 2016)

Benefits of Pet Ownership



Pet Ownership Saves \$22.7 Billion in Health Care Costs

Annual Health Care Cost Savings Associated with Pet Ownership

ANNUAL HEALTH CARE COST SAVINGS OF PET OWNERSHIP	SAVINGS
Physician Office Visits	\$14,986,493,000
Obesity	\$4,536,476,000
Treatment of C. difficile Infections	\$90,470,000
Mental Health Costs for Anxiety in Children 8-10 Years Old	\$671,711,000
Mental Health Care Costs of Socially Isolated Seniors	\$1,776,146,000
Veteran PTSD Treatments (Emotional Support & Service Animals)	\$688,017,000
Total Identifiable Cost Savings	\$22,749,313,000



The full report, *The Health Care Cost Savings of Pet Ownership*, was made possible by a grant from Banfield Pet Hospital and is available for download at

habri.org/health-care-cost-savings

Four Essential Elements of a Healthcare System

Coverage

Community
Resources

Services

Bonded Family

Timeliness

Organization

Workforce

Collaborations



AlignCare, an innovative, disruptive solution that addresses the primary barrier to veterinary care: financial constraints.

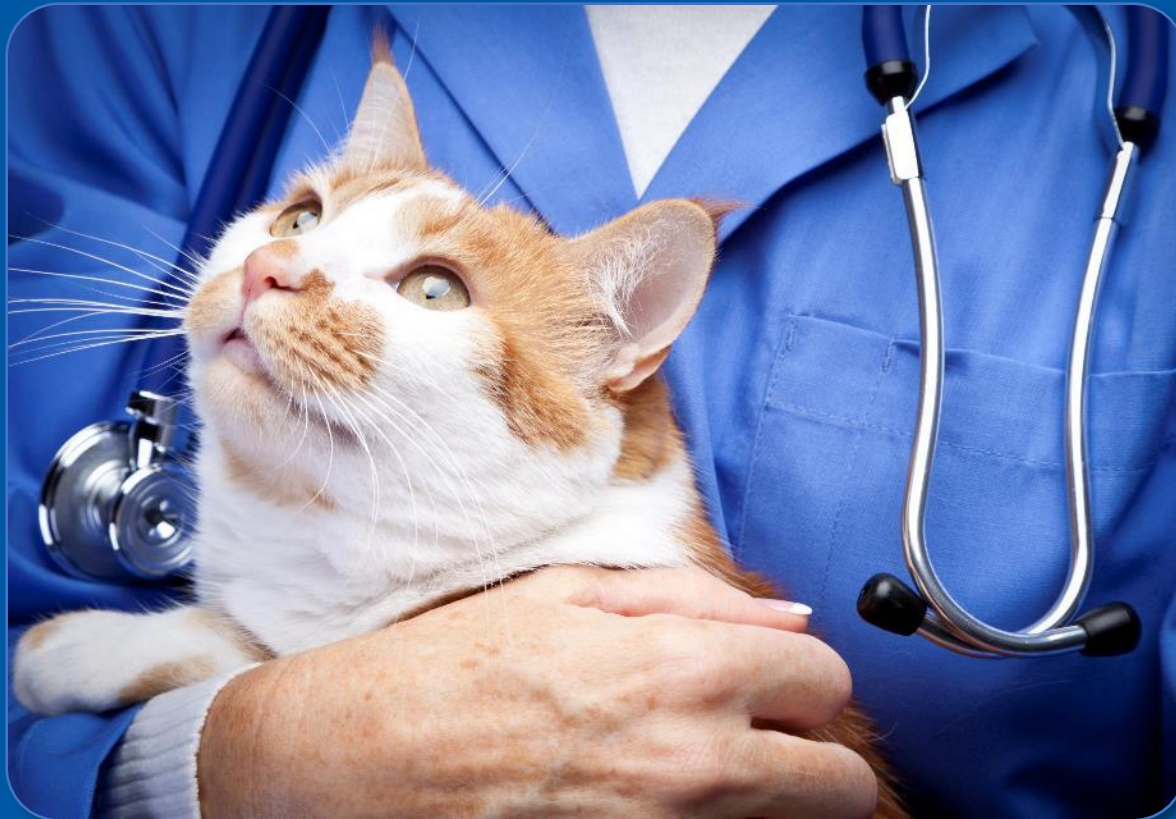


Collaborations Empower Communities



- Intentionality
- Shared vision
- Leveraging resources
- Organized system

Incentivizing Veterinary Service Providers



- FORMAL AGREEMENTS ARE A MUST
 - Discounts provided
 - Specific items not discounted
 - Services that are covered
 - Limitations on coverage

Incentivizing Veterinary Service Providers

- VSPs are in control of their practice
- VSPs are in control of patient treatment
- Set expectations for families
 - Not covered unless recommended by the veterinarian
 - Must follow the recommendations of the veterinarian
 - List of services covered
 - Be on time and respectful



Mobilizing Community Partners

Key Partners

- Animal Health
- Human Health
- Community

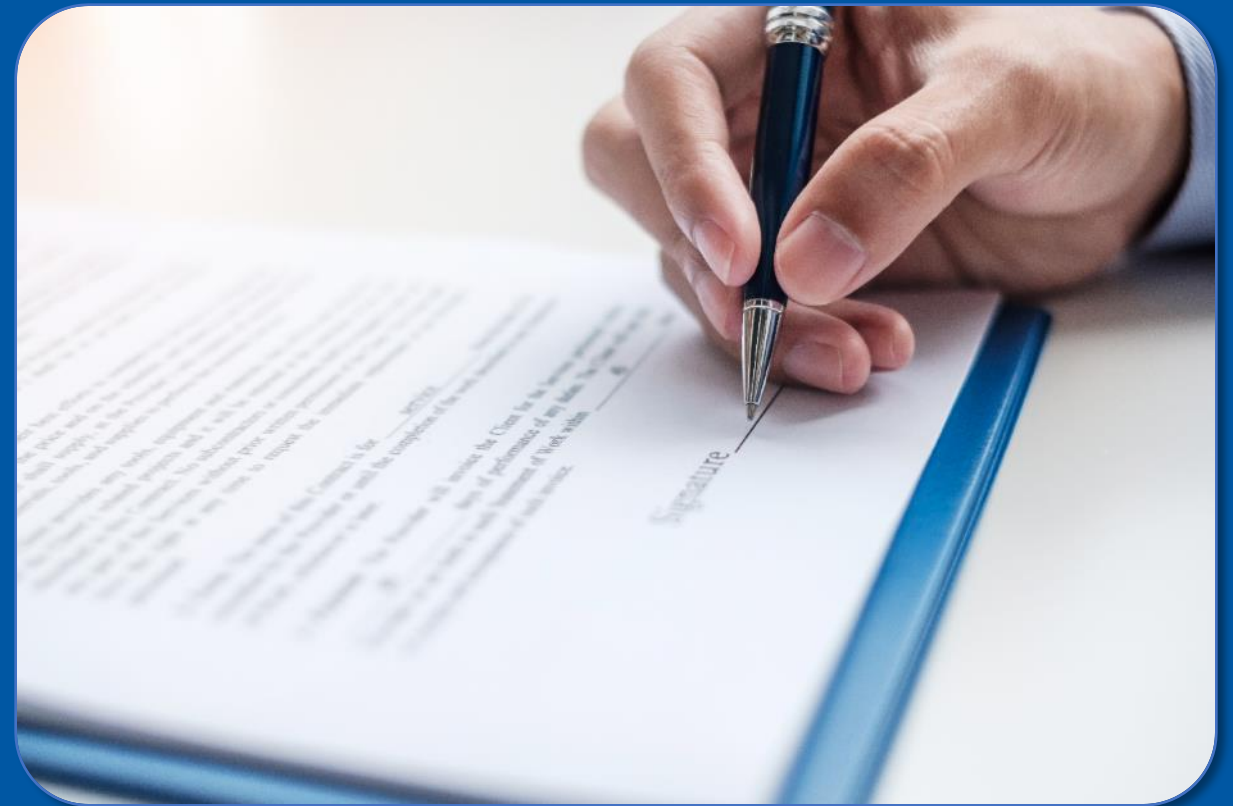
Identifying Partners

- Current relationships
- Geographic location
- Family Characteristics



Mobilizing Community Partners

- Partnerships are mutually beneficial
- Written Documents
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Collaboration Agreements
 - Goals, Outcomes, and Impact



Mobilizing Community Partners

- Communication is key
 - Keep partners updated
 - Monthly reports/meetings
 - No news is bad news
- Monitor
 - Program evaluation
 - Partner input
 - Refinement



Incorporating Veterinary Social Work


An area of social work practice at the intersection of humans and animals to improve support and strengthen interdisciplinary partnerships.



Support Role of VSWs



- Coordinating referrals
- Speaking on behalf of the family
- Mediation
- Grief and loss support

A close-up photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow sweater, smiling warmly. Next to her is a large dog with black, white, and brown fur, also wearing a yellow sweater, with its tongue hanging out. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting.

Together, we can build a world where every family, regardless of their background, can enjoy the love, joy, and companionship of their pets without fear of separation.



Questions?
ppheweb@utk.edu

Service, Education, and Research