



Pet Support Services Free and Low-Cost Medical Care Through Field Services

Overview

Access to veterinary care is limited or may be nonexistent for some pet owners due to cost, location, or transportation limitations. Creating a pathway through field services for community members to receive information on available free and low-cost medical care will improve community relationships and can prevent unnecessary separation of people and their pets.

Getting Started

Providing options for free and low-cost medical care through field services may look different for each situation. Consider integrating a mix of the following options into protocols to accommodate different needs.

1. **Provide information on organizations and programs**, including ways to contact them, that provide free or low-cost medical care such as low-cost vaccination clinics, microchipping programs, food banks, and spay/neuter services. You may use pets.findhelp.com or a local [ecosystem map](#) to find options and should include local veterinary services emergency contact numbers.
2. **Provide quick tip sheets about basic medical care for pets** to hand out in the field including topics such as flea prevention, heartworm prevention, rabies and other vaccines, spay/neuter, diarrhea, coughing, and pregnancy. *Tip: Include resource materials in multiple common languages in your community.*
3. **Carry extra microchips, flea and tick prevention, and vaccines** (if able to be stored appropriately) and provide these items directly while in the field. Be sure to check internal policy and local jurisdiction rules before providing services like microchips and vaccines to ensure there aren't legal restrictions for this type of support.
4. **Organize or participate in community events** that provide free and low-cost veterinary services such as a drive-through clinic day.
5. **Partner or collaborate with local veterinary service providers** that can provide free or low-cost services to community members through vouchers, monthly reduced-cost service days, mobile clinics, etc. See more on this concept below.

Partnering and Collaborating with Local Veterinary Services

HASS data shows that two primary reasons animals are relinquished are health and the lack of access to affordable and available veterinary care. [Working with local veterinary practices](#)

can be the most efficient way to address that issue, without the expense of running your own public-facing clinic or managing a crowdsourcing page (consider platforms like [Waggle](#)).

Start by collaborating with veterinarians to bridge the accessibility gap, discuss [incremental care](#), and implement financing options. Use this [letter](#) and this [insert](#) to reach out to veterinarians in your community!

Payment Resources for Private Veterinarians

- [AVMF Veterinary Care Charitable Fund Information](#)
- [Veterinary Care Foundation](#)
- [Increasing Access to Veterinary Care Ideas](#)
- [Open Door Veterinary Collective Expanding Care Project](#)

Tasks for Staff and High-Level Volunteers

- Establish guidelines on what would be considered free and/or low-cost vet care.
- Identify potential veterinarians in your community and reach out to them about contributing to or partnering in crises.
- Please see Pima Animal Care Center's sample email to Veterinarians in your community and their letter to partner clinics explaining the Keeping Families Together Program in [additional resources](#).
- Connect with local Veterinary Schools for student or faculty support. Check out Pima Animal Care Center's pilot Outreach program with the University of Arizona Shelter Medicine Student Club in [additional resources](#).
- Learn more about [incremental veterinary care](#) and consider shifting toward this approach with vet care and vet care partnerships.

Tasks for Any Volunteers

- Advocate! Have volunteers reach out to their pet's veterinarians to join the effort of partnering with local shelters and field services operations.

Host or Co-Host a Drive-Thru or Stationary Clinic to Provide Low-Cost Vet Care, Vaccines, and Microchipping

Tasks for Staff and High-Level Volunteers

- Check out [Kansas City Pet Project's toolkit](#) on how they organized their Community Drive-Thru Clinic.
- Spread the news on all social media platforms, community bulletins, and with local community agencies.

Tasks for Any Volunteers

- Assist staff in organizing and running service events.
- Reshare the news on all social media platforms, community bulletins, and with local community agencies.
- Create an option for crowdsourced funding for emergencies or medical care.

Create “General Care” Guidelines for Pet Owners Who Can’t Access Vet Care

Having guidelines readily available may help pet owners and/or field service officers determine what medical care needs require urgent treatment and can triage accordingly.

- Check out Pima Animal Care Center’s general care guidelines for the following ailments/conditions in your [additional resources](#).
 - Diarrhea
 - Pregnancy (dog)
 - Vomiting
 - Helping Pets Lose or Gain Weight
 - Fleas
- Check out Maddie’s Fund general care guidelines about common medical concerns in your [additional resources](#).
- Check out [ASPCA Pet Care](#) for more information on general pet care.

Supporting Research and Resources

- [Access to Veterinary Care—A National Family Crisis and Case for One Health](#) (Blackwell & O’Reilly, 2023)
 - “Due to the significance of the human–animal bond in our society, the lack of veterinary care negatively influences both human and nonhuman members of communities.”
 - **“More than 1 out of 4 families struggle to access veterinary care in the United States.”**
 - “Barriers to veterinary care are human-related, requiring a One Health solution.”
 - “Access to veterinary care is the social justice call to action of veterinarians”
- [Assessment of canine health and preventative care outcomes of a community medicine program](#) (Mueller et al., 2018)
 - The study hypothesizes that “the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities that exist with regard to access to high quality human health services, especially related to preventative care,” are likely similar in regard to access to preventative vet care for the dogs of underserved communities.
 - “Existing research exploring the impact of affordability in veterinary care has found that pet owners with lower incomes (less than \$35,000 a year) or who are unemployed were less likely to have taken their pet to a veterinarian within the previous year. . . (Volk et al., 2011).”
 - “Capitalizing on **low-cost, community health models** that have been successful in human healthcare settings may be an effective **method of addressing access to veterinary care** (particularly preventative care) in underserved canine populations”

- [Goodbye to a Good Friend: An Exploration of the Re-Homing of Cats and Dogs in the U.S.](#) (Weiss et al., 2015)
 - “**Services that might have helped pet retention** were examined for the lower income category since the services listed were all described as free or low cost. **The service that was selected most commonly as something that might have helped respondents was free or low cost veterinary care (40%).** Other service options were free or low cost training or behavior help (34%, more common for dog owners), access to pet friendly housing (33%), free or low cost spay/neuter services (30%), free or low cost pet food (30%), free or low cost temporary pet care or boarding (30%) and assistance in paying pet deposits (17%).”
- [The Impact of the Social Determinants of Human Health on Companion Animal Welfare](#) (McDowall et al., 2023)
 - “In a study of rehomed companion animals, **40% of the participants identified that free or low-cost veterinary care could have prevented relinquishment [57].**”
 - “The proposed integrated framework considers the interconnection between the social determinants of health, One Health, One Welfare and the five domains of animal welfare, providing a model for a more comprehensive approach to better outcomes for companion animals, their guardians and the community.”
- [More Than a Pet](#) (The Humane Society of the United States, n.d.)
 - “20M+ pets live in poverty and that's three times more than the number who enter animal shelters every year.”
 - “70% of pets living in poverty have never seen a veterinarian.”
 - “28% of pet owners are unable to access veterinary care.”
- [Human Animal Support Services \(HASS\) Releases Community Values Survey Results](#) (Human Animal Support Services, 2023)
 - “In fact, **71% of pet owners could not afford nor had access to the means necessary to meet their pets’ needs with the largest barrier being accessibility to affordable veterinary care of all types.** These results point to communities in distress and in agreement for the prioritization of offering direct assistance when care grows beyond the capabilities of pet owners.”
- [A Pilot Program to Assess and Address the Veterinary Health Care Needs of the Hispanic Community in Knoxville, TN](#) (Weisent et al., 2023)
 - “Key survey results (n=45) showed that 28% of Centro community members obtained pets through an animal shelter or rescue organization, friends or family gifted 28%, and 26% came from breeders or pet stores. The primary reason for pet ownership included a love of animals and the perspective that the pet is part of the family (76%). **Forty-eight percent reported that pets were not spayed or neutered (s/n), and of these, 39% said s/n was too expensive, whereas 22% did not know where to receive s/n services.** Respondents reported that they would access local veterinary services for annual exams (56%), vaccinations (82%), and parasite prevention (58%). Twenty-six percent identified a time over the past two years when they could not get needed treatment for a sick pet, the primary reason being lack of affordable care. Other reasons included not knowing where to find care (22%), language barrier (11%), and a concern that the care provider would think badly of them for not seeking care earlier (22%). Participants said they would be interested in services and resources on vaccines and parasite prevention (64%), training and behavior (36%), information on clinics, and pet care resources (29%).”

- “The survey findings **led to implementation of a vaccine clinic** for Knoxville’s Latino community. The municipal shelter attended, and local resources and AVMA brochures in Spanish were provided on pet ownership, internal parasites, external parasites, vaccines, heartworm disease, and spay-neuter options.”
- [Race and ethnicity are not primary determinants in utilizing veterinary services in underserved communities in the United States](#) (Decker Sparks et al., 2018)
 - “When veterinary and animal welfare organizations deliberately remove structural barriers embedded with racial inequalities, individuals, regardless of race and ethnicity, proceed with companion-animal sterilization. Therefore, service providers must use **unbiased, informed, and culturally competent practices to improve companion-animal welfare** through the optimization of veterinary services, **including spay and neuter.**”