

Title: Advancing Health Equity through the Integration of Social Care in Pet Support Services

Abstract

Background: There is a growing movement in the veterinary healthcare industry to align with the human social care effort by identifying how human social conditions influence poor pet health outcomes. Additionally, there is increasing use of social care service models in pet support services, such as community health workers and partnerships with human health and social service agencies. However, there are no measures that explicitly incorporate social care concepts with equity-focused measures of the human-animal bond and access to pet support services.

Objective: Develop an equity-focused measure to inform the development and evaluation of pet support interventions. Co-create tools with marginalized lived experience experts to ensure ability to advance health equity for people and their pets in Los Angeles, CA.

Methods: A community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was used to co-create data collection tools through an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. Semi-structured focus groups were conducted in English and Spanish with 27 BIPOC pet owners living in Los Angeles, CA. The themes from the focus groups were used to design a quantitative survey instrument that was then piloted in Los Angeles (n = approx. 250, data collection still in progress).

Results: The Human & Animal Well-Being survey instrument assesses community-specific health equity priorities, including: community care and mutual aid, access to pet-friendly green spaces, access to information and preventative care services for pets, affordable and pet-inclusive housing, and support for unhoused people with pets.

Conclusion: As stated by Fleming et al (2023), the CBPR approach takes research and evaluation efforts “beyond simply documenting inequities and instead actively transforms inequitable systems.” In this project, CBPR has been an effective tool for building and maintaining interdisciplinary coalitions across human and pet service providers to advance health equity for marginalized communities and their pets by amplifying community-led solutions in the development of programs and policies.