

The Pets for Life as One Health Study: Results from the first year of data collection

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The Humane Society of the United States' Pets for Life (PFL) program uses a person-centered approach to break down barriers to accessing veterinary care and other pet services in underserved communities. The program operates in 40 communities in the US, serving over 175,000 pets and providing over 475,000 medications, supplies and services since its launch in 2011.¹ The University of Denver's Institute for Human-Animal Connection is conducting research to understand the community-wide impacts of the PFL model. An initial retrospective analysis of the data collected by PFL found that race and ethnicity are not predictive of individuals' interest in utilizing veterinary services.² In 2018, the research team launched a four-year study to measure the community-wide effects of PFL within the One Health framework. Four demographically-matched communities, two urban and rural pairs, have been enrolled in the Pets for Life as One Health Study. In the first phase of the study, one community from each pair is receiving PFL programming while the other initially serves as a comparison. A variety of data gathered at both the individual resident and zip code levels will be compared across the four sites to measure the One Health impacts of the PFL program. A second phase of the study in which all four communities will receive the PFL program will identify if the changes seen in the first phase are repeatable in the other two communities. This phase will also assess the sustainability of any changes identified in the initial intervention communities. The One Health Community Assessment instrument, developed for the study using an exploratory sequential methodology, serves as the primary measure of change at the individual level, while a variety of secondary data are being collected at the zip code level to assess whether the changes are also observed on a community-wide scale. Findings from the Pets for Life as One Health Study are anticipated to help veterinary and animal welfare organizations optimize programs focused on creating access to basic veterinary care and pet services in communities where substantial barriers exist.

During the first year of the study, a detailed assessment of pet ownership in the four study communities was conducted using a door-to-door survey. Almost 40% of households in the two rural communities and approximately 3% of households contacted in the urban communities participated. An average of approximately 20% (SD 2.4) of households in all four communities own cats. However, the dog ownership rates in the rural and urban sites differed substantially, with approximately 52% (SD 1.3) and 33% (SD 6.3) of households including dogs, respectively. The results of the cat assessment are slightly less than the 25.4% household ownership rate predicted by the American Veterinary Medical Association calculator, while the estimated 38.4% dog ownership rate is under that measured in the rural communities but predictive of the rate measured in the urban communities.³ Also during the first year of the study, approximately 750

One Health Community Assessment surveys were completed in the four study communities. The One Health Community Assessment includes basic demographic information on people and their pets, and measures resident perceptions across the One Health domains using 115 questions with Likert scale responses. A validation study of the instrument using the 750 year-1 responses measured an overall Cronbach's α of 0.94, with scores above 0.80 for each of the five domains included in the instrument (Human Health, Animal Health, Environmental Health, Community Health and Perceived Links). This instrument provides a new and unique tool for assessing the community-wide impacts of interventions focused on any of the components of the One Health triad. Overall, the combined data sets represent one of the most detailed assessments of pet ownership and perceptions of community health within the One Health framework to date. `

1. The Humane Society of the United States (2019). Pets for Life. Available at: <http://www.pflequity.org>
2. Decker Sparks, J., Camacho, B., Tedeschi, P. & Morris, K. N. (2017). Race and ethnicity are not primary determinants in utilizing veterinary services in underserved communities in the United States: a retrospective database analysis. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 21, 120-129.
3. American Veterinary Medical Association. (2017). Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook.