

Pets for Life

Quick Reference



About Pets for Life

A core program of the Humane Society of the United States, Pets for Life is guided by the philosophy that a deep connection with pets transcends the boundaries of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and geography, and that no one should be denied the opportunity to experience the benefits, joy and comfort that come from the human-animal bond.

Systemic inequity and institutional barriers create immense challenges for millions of people. Since 2011, PFL has been increasing access to pet resources through a comprehensive, community-based approach that provides veterinary care, pet supplies, services and information at no cost to pet owners.

PFL focuses on four distinct but intersecting areas:

DIRECT CARE

Providing pet services and information at no cost to pet owners in Los Angeles and Philadelphia. These established core markets serve as training grounds for organizations from around the country to learn how to implement the PFL approach in their own communities and also where PFL refines best practices.

TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP

Delivering in-depth guidance and support to local organizations and veterinary professionals throughout the U.S. and Canada, ensuring the necessary tools and knowledge to implement and sustain community outreach programs. PFL emphasizes understanding the impact of systemic poverty on pet-keeping, effective outreach strategies and long-term program sustainability.

POLICY AND ENFORCEMENT REFORM

Encouraging agencies tasked with enforcement of animal welfare ordinances and statutes to implement a less punitive and more support-based approach and providing best practices for animal welfare organizations to enact policies that are equitable for all pet owners.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND INDUSTRY EVOLUTION

Acting as a catalyst for systemic solutions and working to make companion animal welfare more just, inclusive and fair. PFL engages in comprehensive data collection, analysis and mapping, utilizes innovative research partnerships and offers industry tools and guidelines.

The PFL program has significantly contributed to a paradigm shift in companion animal welfare, where access to care is a core principle and standard practice. Access to care is the opportunity and ability for all pet-keeping audiences to obtain necessary resources to preserve or improve animal health and welfare, and to keep people and pets together. For resources to be accessible, they must be available, attainable, affordable, appropriate, and accepted.

Available: Providers and resources exist to provide timely care when and where it is needed.

Attainable: Individuals can reach the available resources with minimal barriers.

Affordable: Resources are within the financial means of the population being served.

Appropriate: Resources are relevant and suitable to the needs and capacities of the animal, caregiver and community.

Accepted: Individuals have knowledge of when and how to access resources and feel comfortable engaging with the system of care. Providers practice with cultural humility, attention to the needs and resources of each pet family and respect for the pet caregiver expertise and decisions.



Addressing Structural Inequity

Systemic poverty and structural inequity create obstacles to affordable veterinary and pet wellness services similar to the challenges and barriers people experience in accessing healthy food, education, jobs, health care and housing. At its core, PFL challenges the institutions that create and perpetuate divisiveness, unjust policies and an overt imbalance in resource accessibility.

Getting Proximate & Strategic

While the direct care work of PFL is extremely important and will always be central to the program, just as important is sharing all that has been learned from the community, what people living in poverty and in underserved areas have to teach the animal welfare field and veterinary profession. One of the biggest lessons is that there is a difference between just offering services and creating equity in access.

A philosophical shift must happen. Service providers and policymakers have to get up close and personal. Big problems cannot be tackled from a distance. While it may feel uncomfortable and takes time and real investment, being proximate to the people being served is essential to developing an approach that truly mirrors the voice of the community.



Rethinking Community Engagement

In addressing systemic, deep-rooted inequity, community engagement and support are more effective and economical than approaches that are reactive and punitive. There are many ways companion animal work can be fair and inclusive and where focusing on pet owner support programming yields results beneficial to people, animals and the entire community.

Changing the Narrative

The narratives created by animal welfare experts can set the tone for what others believe and do. In our messaging, we must tell accurate and nuanced stories. It is all too easy for our messaging to fall into the trap of creating extremely narrow definitions of who is capable of compassion or what compassion must look like.

Exercising cultural humility - the practice of looking inward and examining implicit bias - is an essential ingredient to valuing other viewpoints and creating an honest narrative. A fundamental part of being equitable is for all types of service agencies to listen to community members, learn from their knowledge, provide opportunities for sharing and then integrate this feedback into the way we conduct our work and the stories we tell.



Visit humanepro.org/petsforlife to download the complete PFL Community Outreach Toolkit and Sustainability Guide.

