

# Better Together

**KEEPING PETS AND  
PEOPLE TOGETHER**



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# ABOUT Paws for Hope

Paws for Hope Animal Foundation (Paws for Hope) is an animal welfare charity based in British Columbia that envisions communities that embrace all pets as family, ensuring they are loved, free from harm, and where no pet is left behind. To that end, Paws for Hope strives to keep pets and people together, ensures BC pets survive and thrive and supports positive change in animal welfare.

Paws for Hope operates a range of programs that support companion animal welfare in British Columbia, such as direct service programs such as Better Together, Community Cats and No Pet Left Behind. Paws for Hope also leads the provincial initiative, the Paws for Hope Network Membership, and is the author of the Animal Rescue Standards of Practice, which is accompanied by a volunteer accreditation program. Paws for Hope aims to work under a social justice lens.

We acknowledge that inequities and systemic racism in our society create barriers to both opportunities and services to people because of their race, gender, disability, sexuality, mental health, or history of abuse or neglect. We commit to consistently re-evaluating our programs and policies to ensure that we are supporting people and their pets in an equitable and just manner. We would like to acknowledge that we are living and working with gratitude and respect on the traditional territories of the First Nation peoples of British Columbia.



A black and white photograph of a person with glasses and a backpack hugging a dog. The person is smiling and looking down at the dog. The dog is looking towards the camera. In the background, another person is visible, sitting and looking down.

## ABOUT Better Together

Paws for Hope recognizes the positive effect that pets have on marginalized individuals, including those that are homeless/unsheltered. The relationship with their pet is often their only constant source of companionship, and at times can be the one thing that keeps them going. No matter where you live or who you are, we believe that healthy communities include healthy animals.

Better Together provides emotional and financial support to people caring for their pets in the community and aims to keep loved pets at home and out of the shelter and rescue system. Support provided by Better Together includes:

- Veterinary care support
- Pet care needs, such as pet food and supplies
- Municipal pet licensing support
- Connecting people with social service support
- Supporting people through pet end-of-life decisions and grief

The program outlined in this policy document is modelled after AlignCare at the [Program for Pet Health Equity, Center for Behavioral Health Research at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.](#)



# TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE

Trauma Informed Practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.<sup>1</sup> Interactions with pet guardians enrolled in the Better Together program will be done through a trauma informed lens.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

### COMMUNITIES

1. Homeless and low-income pet guardians have access to veterinary care, pet supplies and other resources to support the well-being of their pet.
2. Improved health of both people and their pets.
3. A reduction in economic euthanasia and surrendering to shelters and rescues due to a treatable medical condition.
4. Prevention and control of zoonotic disease.
5. Standardization of decisions and costs when using incremental veterinary care.

### SOCIAL SERVICE AND PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

1. Benefits of interprofessional collaborations
2. Benefits of the inclusion of pets in the social safety net
3. Predictable and consistent options when addressing the need for veterinary care

### VETERINARY SERVICE PROVIDERS (VSP)

1. Provides options to help underserved pet guardians, resulting in an increase in workplace satisfaction and wellbeing
2. An expansion of clients served
3. Standardization of decisions about patient care when there are limited resources
4. Opportunity to intervene early in the disease process

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1. BC Government [Trauma-Informed Practice \(TIP\) Resources webpage](#). (Accessed December 9, 2020).

# ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Paws for Hope pays 80% of the veterinary charges for initial examinations and ongoing treatment, including prescription medications. Pet guardians are expected to pay 33% of the charges, including vaccinations and parasite control. In the event that pet guardians are unable to cover the co-pay, they are expected to speak with the Human Support Coordinator prior to booking an appointment. Families can enroll up to four pets.<sup>2</sup> Additional pets cannot be added after enrollment has been completed.

Eligibility requirements include:

- **Bonded family:** The pet guardian views the pet as a family member.
- **Need for assistance:** The pet guardian is income eligible as evidenced by enrollment in public assistance, or has paid employment income defined as low income through the most current Statistic's Canada Low income Cut Off (LICO rates<sup>3</sup>), plus 10%.
- **Technology competent:** The pet guardian should have a computer or smart phone, be able to interface with online applications and email or have social services agency support.
- **Willingness to partner:** The pet guardian must be willing to work with the Human Support Coordinator and the Veterinary Service Provider.
- **Comply with VSP recommendations:** Pet guardians must be willing to follow the recommendations of the Veterinary Service Provider.

**Failure to comply with requirements may result in termination of Paws for Hope coverage.**

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2. Can be any pet that a VSP is able to provide treatment for.

3. Statistics Canada [Low income cut-offs \(LICOs\) before and after tax by community size and family size](#) (Accessed Dec 9, 2020)



# HUMAN SUPPORT COORDINATOR

The Better Together program is run by a Human Support Coordinator (HSC). The HSC is accountable to Paws for Hope's Executive Director and Director of Veterinary Services. The HSC's role is to:

- Enroll pet guardians into the Better Together program.
- Act as a liaison between Paws for Hope clients and the Veterinary Service Providers.
- Assist the family with making pet-related treatment decisions.
- Offer assistance in coping with the life adjustment associated with illness or death of a pet.
- Link pet guardians with existing community resources to meet their pet-related needs.
- Provide consultation, with informed consent, with the pet guardian's mental health and/or other support professional(s).
- Maintain records and communication methods.
- Provide service reports.
- Assist in the annual evaluation of the program.
- Link pet guardians to services and supports in the community to assist with other life circumstances or crises, including, but not limited to, domestic violence, addiction/mental health treatment and food insecurity.
- Report suspected animal cruelty, abuse or neglect to the BC SPCA and other authorities as required by section 22.1 of the *BC Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*.
- Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Ministry of Children and Family Development as required by section 13 of *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.

## KEY PARTNERS

1. **Social Service and Public Health Agencies** who will have access to trained professionals who can help by supporting pet guardians in other areas of their lives that may benefit from additional support and referrals.
2. **Animal Welfare Agencies** who will act as a referral source for pet guardians reaching out for assistance.
3. **Veterinary Service Providers** who will be able to care for pets previously out of reach.

## SOCIAL SERVICE AND PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

Community social services and public health agencies play an important role in supporting people and their pets. They can refer their existing clients to Paws for Hope for enrollment and can receive referrals from Paws for Hope for clients in need of support, but not connected to an agency.



## ANIMAL WELFARE AGENCIES

Municipal and SPCA/ Humane Society shelters and community-based animal welfare agencies are integral partners. In situations where they are not able to assist an individual reaching out for support, they can refer the individual to the Better Together program for enrollment. Paws for Hope can also refer requests to Animal Welfare Agencies if the request is not within Paws for Hope's mandate.

## VETERINARY SERVICE PROVIDERS

Veterinary Service Providers (VSP) are critical to the program as the primary service provider for pets enrolled into the program. VSPs agree to sign a Collaboration Agreement agreeing to:

1. Provide incremental veterinary care, which is a case management strategy to achieve the best possible patient outcome within the context of limited resources.
2. Accept payment for services at a 33% discount for wellness/preventative care and spay/neuter, and a 20% discount for sick care per schedule below.
3. Work with Paws for Hope's Human Support Coordinator to:
  - Facilitate communication with the client.
  - Support the veterinary care team regarding Paws for Hope patients.
4. Report suspected animal cruelty, abuse or neglect to the HSC and other authorities as required by section 22.1 of the *BC Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*.

## PAYMENTS AND PRICING

### COPAYMENT

The Veterinary Service Provider is responsible for collecting a copayment from the Paws for Hope client, to be applied to the charge of services rendered. The Paws for Hope's client's copayment is 20% of the total invoice, 33% for preventative care and spay and neuter. Under certain circumstances, the copayment may be less, in which the VSP will be notified. The VSP is responsible for providing the Paws for Hope client with treatment options and an estimate of costs before services are rendered. Client approval of services and projected charges must be obtained before proceeding with the services.

### PAYMENT FOR SERVICES RENDERED

The amount paid for services rendered is a maximum of 80% of the VSP's usual charges, or as negotiated. Pricing varies amongst communities and any negotiation will be done on an individual basis. The source of payment is a combination of the copayment by the Paws for Hope client and the subsidy from the Better Together fund.

VSPs must submit invoices to Paws for Hope for payment of services, which will be via cheque.

## SCOPE OF COVERED VETERINARY SERVICES AND PRICING

### WELLNESS/PREVENTATIVE CARE

Paws for Hope works with partnering VSPs to develop the basic wellness and preventative services needed in their community. These services are to be discounted by the VSP by one-third, with the client contributing 33% co-payment to the total amount, and Paws for Hope covering the remainder. For any wellness and preventative services not in the basic category, such as flea and parasite control, the VSP is paid at the rate of 80% of their usual charge with the client expected to cover 33% as a co-payment.

WELLNESS/PREVENTATIVE CARE BASIC COVERAGE	
Canine Services	Recommendation
Exam	Annually
DA2PP Vaccine	Booster as recommended*
Bordetella Vaccine	If recommended*
Leptospirosis Vaccine	If recommended*
Rabies Vaccine	Booster as recommended*
Feline Services	Recommendation
Exam	Annually
FVRCP Vaccine	Booster as recommended*
FeLV Vaccine	If recommended*
Rabies Vaccine	If recommended*

\* [AAHA Vaccination Guidelines](#) (accessed January 11, 2021)

\* [AAFP Vaccination Guide](#) (accessed February 9, 2022)

### SPAY/NEUTER

Paws for Hope's SpayAid BC initiative has supported hundreds of low-income clients with preventative spay and neuter surgeries since its inception. The SpayAid BC program was developed to limit unwanted pregnancies in an effort to reduce the overpopulation of cats and dogs within the province.

Spay and neuter services through Better Together are to be discounted by partnering VSPs by one-third. The client is expected to contribute a 33% co-payment, with Paws for Hope covering the remainder of the balance.

Dogs should be spayed prior to their first heat ideally, and neutered by 1 year of age, depending on their breed and size. Cats should be spayed or neutered by 5 months of age.

Coverage includes procedures considered necessary at time of spay/neuter for FeLV/FIV testing if status not currently known, umbilical hernia repair and deciduous tooth extraction. Important to note,

many cats have deciduous teeth still present at 5 months of age but rarely do they require extraction.

Coverage does not include procedures, such as but not limited to, OFA hip and elbow screening, non-therapeutic dewclaw removal, devocalization, and baseline blood work beyond pre-anaesthetic screening or as required due to illness. Any client requesting additional services would be expected to cover 100% of all associated fees and should be directed to contact Paws for Hope's Human Support Coordinator.

Surgery for diagnosed pyometra is considered urgent and will be classified under Paws For Hope's sick care or emergency service coverage as per schedule below.

## SICK CARE COVERAGE

Sick care coverage includes acute and chronic illness, injury, dental treatment for periodontal disease, tooth resorption, fractured or abscessed teeth, prescriptions, emergency care, palliative care, and euthanasia including communal cremations and in-house memorial paw prints (where available).

In the instance of a poor or grave prognosis coupled with projected high costs, Paws for Hope coverage is limited to palliative care to maintain quality of life and/or euthanasia.

## EMERGENCY SERVICES

In the case of an emergency, VSPs are to address the emergent situation, stabilize the patient and transfer the patient back to the client's primary VSP as soon as appropriate for continuation of care.

Treatment of afterhours emergency care must be done in coordination with the Human Support





Coordinator.

# INCREMENTAL VETERINARY CARE GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guideline is to assist the veterinary care team in utilizing incremental veterinary care as a case management strategy. Incremental veterinary care controls the cost of care while achieving positive health outcomes for the patient. It facilitates the veterinarian-client-patient relationship and evidence-based veterinary medicine. Paws for Hope's program identifies broad parameters for incremental veterinary care.

## DEFINITION OF INCREMENTAL VETERINARY CARE

Incremental veterinary care<sup>4</sup> is patient-centered, experience-based medicine, focused on a problem-solving approach to achieve the best possible outcomes for the family, safeguarding the human-animal bond in the context of limited resources. Experience-based medicine manages patient needs based on the practitioner's experience and judgment relative to various clinical presentations. The veterinarian informs the client about the most pressing issues and guides them in allocating their money towards what is most helpful for the pet.

Incremental veterinary care is a patient management strategy that utilizes the intuitive judgment of the veterinarian to develop a tiered therapeutic and dynamic diagnostic approach. Non-critical procedures are avoided to help control costs. It is a combination of the clinical judgment of the veterinarian, active follow up of case progression, and, when appropriate, in-home care that can be provided by the client.

Incremental veterinary care is weighted towards prevention and early diagnosis and intervention. Incremental veterinary care is a viable alternative to being unable to help the patient. In those situations where gold standard care is not possible because of financial constraints, it provides an option, consequently safeguarding the integrity of the human-animal bond. In the past, terms commonly used to describe this medical approach have been "empirical medicine" and "intuitive medicine."

## CASE MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Although it is difficult to address every type of case seen, the majority of clinical case presentations can benefit from an incremental veterinary care case management approach. Since the veterinary practitioner's clinical judgment is primary to the success of this type of care, clinical experience, and

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4. [Extracted from AlignCare Community Manual](#) (accessed December 29, 2020)

exposure to a broad-ranging caseload is helpful.

Incremental veterinary care maximizes the veterinarian's judgment based on experience. Emphasis is placed on the pet's primary caregiver and veterinary team to closely monitor the clinical response of the patient, requiring a commitment of timely and accurate ongoing communication between the two.

The pet's primary caregiver is the person who actively participates in the medical care of the pet and is committed to collaborating and coordinating with the veterinary team. The capability of the primary caregiver to communicate with the veterinary team, as well as carrying out recommendations, needs to be considered when developing a treatment plan. These two factors are prognostic indicators.

Key features of incremental veterinary care include:

- Practical-minded approach by the attending veterinarian;
- Medical team involvement with clear communications;
- Appropriate facilities and available equipment;
- Trained and motivated support staff;
- Client communication;
- Client acceptance and compliance; and
- Use of technology options (e.g., telemedicine) when appropriate to help control costs.

Although veterinarians may choose different parameters when helping a client with significant financial limitations, the following questions are suggested to be used for objective patient evaluation:

1. Do I have the skills/resources/equipment to adequately and humanely treat and manage the case?



2. Is there a good prognosis? Is the problem treatable? Is it manageable? Are there multiple problems?
3. If the problem is not treatable or manageable, is there a simple palliative option that can extend and provide good quality of life?
4. Is the problem an ongoing or chronic condition?
5. Can the owners afford follow-up care or management?
6. Can the owners provide for overnight monitoring at an emergency VSP, if it is necessary?
7. Is the patient in critical condition?
8. Would significant amounts of money make a difference in a positive outcome?

## POTENTIAL LIABILITIES

There are potential liabilities when practicing incremental veterinary care as a case management strategy. However, when there are financial constraints, a veterinarian is expected to take reasonable steps to help the patient, given the financial limitations of the client. In addition, as with any case management strategy, there is always the possibility of client dissatisfaction with outcomes. Mitigating client dissatisfaction can occur by creating and guiding reasonable client expectations, including the use of signed informed consent forms and thorough record keeping to document the communication, and by including the Human Support Coordinator to help resolve conflicts.

## INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent<sup>5</sup> helps to protect the public and Veterinary Service Provider by ensuring that sufficient information is communicated, enabling families to reach appropriate decisions regarding the care of their animals. The College of Veterinarians of BC (CVBC) requires veterinarians to inform their client or authorized agent in a manner that would be understood by a reasonable person, of the diagnostic and treatment options, risk assessment, and prognosis. The client or authorized agent should receive an estimate of the charges before providing veterinary services, and the client or authorized agent should indicate that the information is understood and consent to the recommended treatment or procedure. In addition, in order to meet CVBC requirements, there must be documentation of verbal or preferably written informed consent that acknowledges the client's understanding of such.

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5. [College of Veterinarians of British Columbia Ethics and Standards](#) (accessed February 4, 2021)