

One Health Delaware:

A Novel Approach to Health Equity Through Cross Professional Collaboration

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Delaware Humane Association's (DHA) One Health Delaware is a free, once monthly clinic that provides both veterinary and human healthcare to an underserved community in Wilmington, Delaware. The CDC states that, "Differences in social determinants of health contribute to the stark and persistent chronic disease disparities in the United States among racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups,¹ systematically limiting opportunities for members of some groups to be healthy."² The goal of One Health Delaware is to utilize the human-animal bond to help bring preventive healthcare to families no matter their income, ethnicity, or immigration status. An additional benefit is to provide clinical experience to health professional students while modeling compassionate care without racial bias and enhancing One Health thinking across professions in a time of great global need.

One Health Delaware is led by DHA, but is run with the volunteer help of veterinarians and technicians who join student volunteers from University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Delaware, and Wilmington University Nurse Practitioner Program. The clinic runs in the community room of the Henrietta Johnson Medical Center, which is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in the Southbridge section of Wilmington, Delaware. The team provides services for both the pets and people, side by side. The pets receive wellness exams, vaccinations, and health screenings. The families attending the clinic can access a variety of health and social services including blood pressure screenings, flu vaccines, or help enrolling for health insurance. All services are provided free of charge. They also have opportunities to schedule future health appointments, enroll in SNAP benefits, or sign up for healthy eating classes. Nurses and nursing students provide wellness information and opportunities to discuss any concerns. Spanish interpretation is provided by University of Delaware undergraduate students.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, the human-animal bond is "a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors essential to the health and wellbeing of both." One Health Delaware supports these relationships by providing an opportunity for clients to present their concerns and ask questions about themselves and their pets. Meanwhile, the medical professionals and student volunteers provide them with support, educational materials, and their time. This open platform encourages further development of the emotional and physical wellbeing of both pet and owner by creating a welcoming environment free of judgement or financial barriers. We aspire to give our clients the power to take an active role in their pet's healthcare with the hope that this translates to empowerment in their own healthcare decisions. With the creation of this pop-up, open-door, One Health clinic in their neighborhood, we offer a unique opportunity to use the human-animal bond for the benefit of the community as a whole.

This inclusive healthcare model shows promise to provide access to services in both rural and urban areas for people and pets and could become an impactful way to reach populations that have been previously underserved. Pilot data collection during the first year of the clinic showed a profound interest in families coming back to Henrietta Johnson Medical Center for both veterinary and human healthcare. Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine are currently measuring the clinic's impact on the clients, veterinary students, and volunteers of the clinic. It is my sincere hope that this small One Health project in the First State of Delaware could serve as a model for One Health clinic opportunities across the country.

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References

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