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## Support the Creation of Veterinary Professional Associates (VPAs)

### The Problem

A critical labor shortage in the veterinary field is impacting the ability of pet owners and agricultural producers to access veterinary care for their animals. By creating a mid-level veterinary provider, a veterinary professional associate (VPA), we can ensure more animals receive the care they need and increase workforce capacity. Top veterinary schools like Colorado State University are already developing master's degree program for VPAs, however, the state needs to create a licensed pathway for these providers to be able to practice and provide veterinary care.

- Colorado has 25 counties that are USDA-designated veterinary shortage areas, and an estimated 1/3 of pet owners face significant barriers to obtaining veterinary care.
- Creating a mid-level provider will add to the veterinary workforce, decreasing costs and making it easier for pet owners to access veterinary care.
- According to a 2023 survey of Colorado pet owners, 80% said they would be comfortable with a VPA seeing their pet.

### *What is a veterinary professional associate (VPA)?*

Like a physician assistant in human medicine, a VPA is a master's degree-level professional who works under the supervision of a veterinarian to provide care such as examining pets, diagnosing minor conditions, performing routine surgeries, and leading healthcare teams.

### The Solution

Ballot initiative 145 will improve access to veterinary care by increasing workforce capacity with the creation of a career pathway for VPAs, veterinary mid-level providers. By signing the petition on Initiative 145, Coloradans can use their voice to help ensure that all animals get the care they need and deserve.

### Supporters

Initiative #145 is supported by the Veterinary Care Coalition, an expanding alliance of animal welfare organizations, veterinarians and technicians, pet owners, ranchers, and other experts with a common goal to find innovative solutions to the state's veterinary workforce shortage.

The list of coalition members can be found here: <https://www.vetcarecoalition.com/endorsement>



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## Support the Expansion of Veterinary Telehealth

### The Problem

A critical labor shortage in the veterinary field is preventing many pet owners from accessing veterinary care for their animals. In fact, experts predict that over 75 million pets in the U.S. could be without care by 2030. Telehealth – virtual medical services – is a proven safe and effective tool for veterinarians to provide needed care to pets who otherwise might suffer without it.

- **Colorado Lacks Access:** Colorado has a “veterinary care accessibility score” of 58 out of 100, with most of our rural and farmland ranking as “difficult to access” or “nearly inaccessible” for veterinary care. Additionally, an estimated 1/3 of pet owners face significant barriers to obtaining veterinary care.
- **Telehealth Bridges the Gap:** Using virtual technology allows veterinarians to reach those who face geographic and logistical obstacles, such as individuals with health or mobility challenges, those lacking transportation, and those who live in underserved urban or remote areas.
- **Reducing Pet and Owner Stress:** In-person veterinary exams can be stressful for pets. Allowing veterinarians the option of offering telehealth keeps pets in their comfortable home environment to reduce stress and enhances access to care for anxious, large, senior, or terminally ill animals.

Despite a growing number of states empowering veterinarians and pet owners to utilize telehealth as a tool to deliver services and expand access to veterinary care, Colorado law currently prohibits veterinarians from providing the benefits of telehealth services by requiring pet owners to travel to a veterinarian to receive any care.

### The Solution

Ballot Initiative 144 will remove barriers to the use of telehealth and create more equitable access to veterinary care in Colorado by allowing pet owners to access virtual veterinary care. Coloradans can use their vote to ensure that all animals have access to medical care, regardless of their owner’s socioeconomic status, physical limitations, or geographic location. By signing the petition in support of Initiative 144, voters can make accessible veterinary care for all animals a reality.

### Supporters

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## Brief Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

This document was designed to help you learn how to respond briefly to questions. If someone wants more information about the campaign, please give them a half-page flyer, so they can contact our headquarters.

### #145 – Veterinary Professional Associates (VPAs)

What is a Veterinary Professional Associate?

- A Veterinary Professional Associate, or VPA, is a masters-degree level professional who practices veterinary medicine under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian, similar to a Physician Assistant in human medicine.

What tasks can a Veterinary Professional Associate perform?

- A VPA will be trained to perform many of the same routine tasks as a veterinarian, including preventative care, assessing patients, initiating treatment, leading health care teams and performing surgical procedures such as tooth extractions. The specific tasks they perform will be delegated by their supervising veterinarian based on their level of education and experience.

How will a Veterinary Professional Associate increase access to veterinary care?

- *Adding professionals to a shrinking workforce:* A VPA serves as a career option for highly qualified candidates for veterinary school who could not place in one of the very few seats available and even foreign-trained veterinarians while working through the long US licensure process.
- *Adding capacity to veterinary practices:* A VPA can take on several different roles in a veterinary practice which frees up additional time for a veterinarian, thereby increasing appointment availability.
- *Lowering costs for veterinary care:* The cost to visit a VPA will be lower than the cost to see a veterinarian. These savings, along with the savings veterinary practices will gain through increased efficiency, can then be passed down to consumers of veterinary services.
- *Offering professional growth for veterinary technicians:* Pursuing a veterinary masters degree to become a VPA is a new opportunity for career advancement for veterinary technicians, allowing them the ability to gain advanced skills and increased salaries. This will help keep these talented individuals in the veterinary field.

What are the educational requirements to become a Veterinary Professional Associate?

- A Master's in Veterinary Clinical Care (or the equivalent) is required to become a VPA. Colorado State University is currently developing a master's degree program.

Who will benefit from the creation of Veterinary Professional Associates?

- Everyone! Increased efficiency and capacity for veterinary care will help pets, their people, and veterinary practices.



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### #144 – Veterinary Telehealth

What is veterinary telehealth?

- Veterinary telehealth refers to the practice of veterinary medicine (diagnosis, treatment) which occurs at a distance using telecommunication, such as by online video conferencing (e.g. Zoom, FaceTime), between a veterinarian and a pet owner.

How will initiative #144 change veterinary telehealth?

- Ballot initiative #144 will allow for a veterinarian to begin a relationship with a client virtually via video conferencing, such as Zoom, but will NOT mandate that any visit with your veterinarian be performed virtually. Your veterinarian will determine when telehealth is appropriate or when a clinic visit is necessary.

How will expanding veterinary telehealth benefit pets and their people?

- *Accessibility:* Telehealth visits make veterinary care more accessible, especially for people in remote areas or those who face obstacles getting pets to a hospital due to health or transportation challenges.
- *Convenience and Cost:* Telehealth visits can be more efficient, convenient, and economical.
- *Less Stress for Pets:* Telehealth improves animal welfare, not only by increasing access to the veterinary healthcare system, but also by reducing unnecessary fear, anxiety, and stress that can accompany trips to the vet clinic—for both pets and pet owners.

Can veterinarians safely diagnose and treat animals without an in-person physical exam?

- Veterinarians can be trusted to decide when they can safely and effectively diagnose and treat a pet using telehealth and when to ask the client to bring the pet into a clinic for an exam. In all 50 states, physicians use telemedicine visits with new patients, including babies and other nonverbal people.

Will expanded veterinary telehealth end the need for exams at veterinary clinics?

- Telehealth is an effective tool in treating animals, but it will not replace clinic visits. There are still many situations where an in-person visit will be necessary, such as vaccinations and surgeries.

What are some types of conditions that can be examined and/or diagnosed through telehealth?

- Several conditions can be examined and/or diagnosed, including behavioral issues, many upper respiratory diseases, vomiting, diarrhea, skin issues, and eye infections to name a few.