



AB 1399 – (Friedman and Lowenthal) Veterinary Telemedicine

Summary:

Telemedicine – the delivery of medical services via telecommunications technology – has been widely implemented in human medicine. As we have seen in the human healthcare field, telemedicine can help bridge gaps in healthcare access. Doctors in all 50 states establish new doctor-patient relationships using telemedicine, even for infants and other nonverbal people. Telemedicine is a proven, safe means for delivering care.

Currently, California regulations unreasonably prohibit veterinarians from giving simple advice and direction to pet owners through the use of telemedicine unless the owners can bring their animals into the veterinary hospital. Pet owners are forced to wait for a hard-to-get appointment so that veterinarians can perform an in-person physical examination of an animal as a prerequisite to giving almost any recommendations. The law requires veterinarians to conduct a new in-person examination each time that an animal (even a regular patient of the vet) has a new medical condition [CCR, tit. 16, § 2032.1], even minor and extremely common ailments, or for routine prescriptions.

These outdated regulations block licensed veterinarians from using their professional discretion to treat animals, and further hinder access to veterinary care. Amidst a crisis in access to veterinary care, California should join the growing number of states that allow for the creation of a veterinarian-client-patient-relationship via telemedicine by passing AB 1399.

Background:

The veterinary industry is facing a critical shortage of professionals in the workforce, and California families are struggling to access care for their pets. According to the Access to Veterinary Care Project, counties across California have low access to veterinary care. Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Census Bureau, Esri, and the American Veterinary Medical Association, the state of **California has a Veterinary Care Accessibility Score of 47 out of 100.**

Amidst the ongoing veterinary workforce shortage,

research shows that 75 million pets in the U.S. could be without veterinary care by 2030 if we do not update our approach to providing these services. California is currently one of the most restrictive state in the nation with respect to veterinary telemedicine, and this fact is contributing to the crisis.

Research demonstrates that many pets do not regularly see a veterinarian, often because their families confront significant obstacles to obtaining veterinary care – including financial, geographic, and logistical -- obstacles that may result in pet owners forgoing or postponing veterinary care or relinquishing pets. And when animals are relinquished to government shelters, it is taxpayers who are footing the bill. Collectively, California shelters are spending millions to provide for pets who need to be rehomed due to a lack of vet care.

AB 1399:

AB 1399 empowers highly educated, licensed California veterinarians to establish a veterinarian-client-patient-relationship through video technology and assess when an animal needs to have an in-person examination as well as those situations when veterinary telemedicine would be a safe and satisfactory treatment decision.

The bill makes veterinary care more accessible for all California pet-owners.

Support:

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
San Diego Humane Society
Veterinary Virtual Care Association
Humane Society of the United States
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association
San Francisco SPCA
Thirty-Four Licensed California Veterinarians
CAT Town
Former Vet Med Board Member Lee Heller
Michelson Center for Public Policy
CalAnimals
Social Compassion in Legislation
Best Friends

Project Street Vet

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