

## **Board of Animal Health FAQ**

The most frequent question we get at our MVMA exhibit booth every year during the annual meeting is, “Can you help me with my CE credit questions?” No, we cannot, that’s the Board of Veterinary Medicine. We get it, state government can be confusing with multiple agencies and Boards sharing similar names and different responsibilities. For example, you might not realize the Board of Animal Health has a lot of staff and resources devoted to companion animals.

Our priority for companion animals is disease prevention. While the diseases are our focus, we still see the whole picture and work to address other concerns of companion animals. We began in 1903 as the livestock sanitary board with no authority for companion animals. Since then we’ve evolved with Minnesota’s growing population of companion animals and the important role they hold in family life. We meet new challenges to protect their health and well-being all the time. One example of this was the Commercial Dog and Cat Breeder law enacted in 2014 giving us the authority to license and inspect certain breeders and enforce health and welfare measures.

This July we took the program one step further and launched the Breeder Excellence program to grant recognition to licensed breeders putting in the extra effort to care for their animals. We can’t take all the credit for this program though, we did it with an advisory board of members of the public, animal welfare experts, veterinarians and breeders. We have a strong belief in collaborating with all parties in the interest of the animals. The rules and statutes governing our work do not define our relationships with our stakeholders. When we need to address a unique issue, we call upon others to guide us to a solution within our purview that’s supported by our stakeholders. This is how we work; together.

The Minnesota Board of Animal Health recognizes the important role companion animals play in the daily lives of Minnesotans. In addition to the growth in our companion animal programs we hired a companion animal veterinarian in 2015 to help build the commercial dog and cat breeder program. We also established training protocols for our staff who inspect kennels and commercial dog and cat breeders. None of this is done alone because handling and care of companion animals falls to both owners and veterinarians, two groups we rely upon with strong relationships.

### **What is a companion animal?**

- Sounds like a trick question, doesn’t it? The answer is cats and dogs, right? It goes a bit further though, and the Board of Animal Health works with all kinds of companion animals; horses, cattle, birds, pigs, deer and wombats only scratch the surface.
- Let’s get technical for a second. By law, “companion animal” refers to any animal controlled by a person for the present or future enjoyment of that person. Therefore, the proposed Companion Animal Board would attempt to govern all species, including livestock, exotic animals and captive wildlife with only canine and feline expertise. This is something the Board of Animal Health already handles and forming a new arm of government to address it is repetitive overkill.

### **Why is someone proposing a Companion Animal Board?**

- Government agencies may seem rigid and inflexible, incapable of responding to change and addressing issues outside our purview. We’re not and we can meet new and diverse challenges.
- The mission of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health is to protect the health of the state’s domestic animals through education and cooperation with veterinarians, producers, owners and

communities. We have relationships with companion animal owners, veterinarians, and all of the regulatory officials who work to keep animals healthy.

- The proposed Companion Animal Board presents a narrow focus on dog and cat welfare. A noble cause, yet not an efficient and appropriate response to addressing these issues within state government. The Board of Animal Health recognizes the value of seeking expertise from individuals outside of government entities and believes the goals of companion animal issues would be best accomplished through the Board of Animal Health and advisory task forces.

### **Doesn't the Board of Animal Health already accomplish the core duties of the proposed Companion Animal Board?**

- Yes, the Board of Animal Health educates and communicates with veterinarians, animal owners and the general public regularly to advance its pursuit of healthy animals for healthy people and communities. The Board of Animal Health has an enforcement division and an established relationship with the Minnesota Attorney General's office, it is a well-respected and known resource for other state agencies, non-profits and the public, and it collaborates with many individuals and groups. The Board of Animal Health relies on local law enforcement officials existing humane and animal welfare organizations to enforce laws pertaining to companion animal welfare and humane investigations.
- Resources deployed at the local level can have the most direct impact on companion animals in communities. The Board of Animal Health supports additional state funding in local public sectors to address companion animal health and welfare throughout Minnesota.

### **How many operations does the Board of Animal Health oversee and do they keep up with current issues?**

- The Board of Animal Health currently licenses and inspects 122 Commercial Dog and Cat Breeders and 83 kennels as defined in Minnesota law.
- The Board of Animal Health is continuously evaluating and improving its licensing and enforcement programs by communicating with all interested parties involved, to ensure licensees meet program requirements as outlined by the Minnesota legislature. There continue to be good discussions on the current programs, and Board of Animal Health staff are always open to new and different ideas to enhance these important programs.

### **What about animal cruelty and enforcement of criminal laws?**

- We have connections here too, including you. The Pet and Companion Animal Welfare Act requires all veterinarians to report known or suspected cases of abuse, cruelty, or neglect to peace officers and humane agents (Minn. Stat. §346.37, Subd. 6). The Board of Animal Health has worked with peace officers and humane agents for many decades. Established relationships are an important component of this work.
- If animal cruelty or neglect is witnessed or suspected, Board of Animal Health staff report it to law enforcement officials for investigation.
- The Minnesota Board of Animal Health has companion animal health and welfare through the programs it currently oversees, including: Commercial Dog and Cat Breeders Program, Rabies Program, Kennel Program, Animal Import and Traceability Program, and specific disease outreach aimed to educate veterinarians and members of the public.

**Why is the companion animal board proposing separating powers for some and not all programs currently within the Board of Animal Health?**

- This is a confusing and destructive proposition. The mission of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health is to protect the health of the state’s domestic animals through education and cooperation with veterinarians, producers, owners and communities. A Companion Animal Board given “primary authority” for regulating companion animals in the State would create dual regulatory boards.
- The proposal also includes language requiring the Board of Animal Health provide copies of data to the proposed CAB. This is duplicative, inefficient and poor use of state time and very limited resources.

**Why not just create a new division under the Board of Animal Health?**

- Now we’re talking! Many Board of Animal Health veterinarians and staff have experience and interest working with companion animals. In fact, a former Board member is a companion animal veterinarian.
- Also, as we previously mentioned, we have the authority to create an advisory task force of up to 15 members to advise us on specific programs or topics within the jurisdiction of our agency.
- The Board of Animal Health would also be supportive of creating a non-governmental board or group to develop guidance for shelters, rescues and breeders in Minnesota. This approach would not impede disease management and regulatory medicine practices already in place, or divert resources from existing state agencies, while still fostering “a centralized and collaborative approach for delivery of animal welfare services and resources in communities throughout Minnesota.”

*Developed by the Board of Animal Health*