

FOR RELEASE
July 15, 2016

New programs to support Yukon communities through dog care

WHITEHORSE—The Government of Yukon is launching the Community Dog Care Initiative and the Community Dog Spay Project to help address challenges with dogs in communities.

"Ensuring public and animal safety is a Government of Yukon priority," Minister of Environment Wade Istchenko said. "These new programs will help give communities the tools and support to meet their needs and address issues with dogs."

The Community Dog Care Initiative and the Community Dog Spay Project were developed to support communities in addressing problems with unwanted or unowned dogs.

Through the Community Dog Care Initiative, the Animal Health Unit will support community leaders in creating a plan to address their issues with dogs. This could include assistance in establishing community task teams, creating dog registries, facilitating voluntary surrenders, support in shaping bylaws, joint education campaigns and other efforts to effectively address the community's specific needs.

"There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution for dogs in different communities," Istchenko added. "By working together with communities, the Animal Health Unit can provide advice, tools and support to help local leaders address their communities' needs."

The Community Dog Spay Project will help offset the cost of a spay surgery for one female dog per owner for Yukoners living in rural communities. This project will focus resources on spaying female dogs to help maintain healthy dog populations, decrease the number of unwanted puppies and reduce aggressive fighting and packing behavior among male dogs initiated by female dogs in heat. This project provides \$250 per spay surgery directly to the veterinarian of choice once the surgery is complete for a total of 115 dogs per year.

The Community Dog Spay Project will launch on August 1, 2016, and will be delivered on a first-come, first-served basis. Community leaders can contact the Animal Health Unit for support through the Community Dog Care Initiative at any time.

Learn more: [Community Dog Care Program](#)

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Backgrounder-Community Dog Care Initiative and Community Dog Spay Project

Why are dog neuters not supported anymore?

Spaying female dogs is the most effective tool to manage healthy dog populations, reduce aggressive dog behaviour and promote dog health.

Spaying a female dog guarantees that she will not have puppies. If females are not spayed and there is even one non-neutered male in a community, puppies can still occur. The spay surgery also has a strong benefit to the health of female dogs. In addition to preventing the stress from continual pregnancy, which contributes to a shorter life span, spay surgery prevents mammary tumors, ovarian tumors and infections of the uterus.

While neutering male dogs has been linked to reducing testosterone-related behaviour like leg-lifting and aggression toward other male dogs, it does not reduce territorial aggression toward people. By spaying females, we reduce the number of dogs going into heat, which is a common cause of dog fights and packing.

Health benefits from neutering male dogs are less established. Testicular tumors, which are rare and usually non-life-threatening, are prevented but research shows an increased risk of some diseases such as bone and blood tumors in male dogs that are neutered at a young age. Dog owners should make the decision to neuter a male dog after consultation with their veterinarian and should take these factors into consideration.

Why isn't cat sterilization covered by the spay project?

The main issues identified in the review of the past project were the threat to people in communities from packs of uncontrolled dogs, and the number of unwanted or abandoned dogs in rural communities. Cat over-population was not

identified as a concern. While there are some diseases that cats can spread to people, they are not a significant threat to public safety.

Why can't Whitehorse residents access the spay project?

The evaluation of the spay/neuter voucher project showed that it is more difficult for residents of rural Yukon communities to access veterinarian services. It is not convenient and can be very expensive for owners to transport a dog to Whitehorse. Many individuals do not get their dogs spayed because they cannot afford the time off work or the travel, accommodation and meal costs. Even residents of Dawson City and Haines Junction, where there are local veterinarians, are at a disadvantage because they do not have options for choosing a veterinarian.

It is also clear that larger communities like Whitehorse have the tax base to support bylaw officers who can respond to uncontrolled dogs and enforce responsible dog ownership. As a result, smaller and unincorporated communities face greater public safety risks from packs of dogs.

I live in rural Yukon, but have a Y1A postal code. Is my dog eligible?

Your dog is not eligible under the Community Dog Spay Project at this time. The primary focus of this project is to address concerns about overpopulation and unwanted dogs in communities where they are more likely to form packs. Packs of dogs are a threat to children in school yards and to elders out in the community. Rural properties outside Whitehorse do not have these concerns. Dogs in rural settings may be eligible in the future but we are focusing on community dog issues at this time.

A first-come-first-served approach doesn't seem fair. What about people who are away for the summer or have a puppy that is too young? What happens when the money runs out?

There is a limited budget for this project and there is not enough to spay the dogs of every owner in all Yukon communities. We are advertising this opportunity and advise people who are interested to act quickly so they don't miss out. We expect to be able to continue this project, if it is well-used, so those who miss out this year should have an opportunity next year.

Is this program a result of the coroner's investigation into the death in Ross River?

No. A revised spay program has been in development since the evaluation of the previous spay and neuter program. While elements of the program reflect issues facing Yukon communities, including Ross River, this program is not a direct result of the coroner's investigation – which has not been finalized as of yet.

How was the \$250 amount decided?

The previous voucher project relied on an agreement among veterinarians that set a maximum fee for spay or neuter surgeries on dogs or cats. The voucher covered half of that amount (\$185). The owner was responsible for the remainder and in some cases it was paid by their municipal or First Nation government. The new project only covers dog spays and these are the most expensive types of sterilization surgeries. The amount government pays was increased to offset at least half the cost of the average dog spay.

How do I get the \$250 credit? Do I have to pay for the full cost of the spay surgery and then get reimbursed?

The \$250 will be deducted from the total amount that you owe the veterinarian for the spay surgery. You will not have to pay the full amount and then wait to be reimbursed. The veterinarian is paid directly from the fund that is administered by the Animal Health Unit. You will be responsible to pay for all remaining costs, after the \$250 has been deducted.

Can I take my dog to any veterinarian for this surgery?

You can take your dog to any veterinarian who is practicing in Yukon. The project has been discussed with all of them and they have supported it. Veterinarians have to enter into an agreement with the Government of Yukon so the payment can be processed. Confirm with your veterinarian that this is completed when you make your appointment.

Can I have other veterinary services performed at the same time as the spay surgery – such as vaccinations – or do I have to make a separate appointment?

You should discuss all these options with your veterinarian. Some veterinarians prefer that vaccinations be completed before the surgery is done, and that other procedures like dental work be done at a separate appointment. Some may make special considerations for owners who need to travel long distances to get veterinary care, so we recommend that you contact the veterinarian of your choice and make the arrangements according to their recommendations.

The \$250 can only be applied to the spay surgery. All other costs, including medications, must be paid by the owner.

We have more than one female dog in our home, can we have them all spayed at the same time?

The project is limited to one dog per owner in order to make it available to as many Yukoners as possible and allow fair access to the fund for all who are eligible. If the program is well-used we expect to renew it each year, so an opportunity could be available for owners to get their other dogs spayed in future years.

Why do you need the owner's contact information on the spay fund form?

The government is funding this project to help reduce public safety risks caused by dogs in rural communities. We must evaluate the project to determine how effective it is in accomplishing that goal. We require contact information so we can follow-up on the results of the project in the future. The form owners complete with their veterinarian to access the funds clearly outlines that the information is being collected under the Animal Protection Act and the Animal Health Act and is protected under the ATIPP Act. This information will be used for program purposes and evaluation only.

Why aren't you giving out actual vouchers anymore?

The vouchers were a promise that money would be held for the owner until the surgery was done. Many of these vouchers were never used and therefore the money could not be used for anyone else. The new system pays veterinarians directly, once the surgery is completed. This means that the available money goes to those people who take action quickly to make appointments and get the spay surgery done.

Why doesn't this new project prioritize low-income Yukoners, like it did in the past?

When the project was administered by Humane Society Yukon, they had an interest in supporting people with limited income who might not be able to afford pet care. To do this, income level was one of the criteria they used to determine who was eligible for vouchers. The current project is intended to offset the economic disadvantage experienced by all individuals who live in rural communities who want to have their dog spayed.

Why is the government no longer supporting the Humane Society Yukon to manage the spay/neuter program?

The Humane Society Yukon strongly believes in the importance of responsible pet ownership, however the time required for their staff to administer the project meant it was very costly to them. It is also important for the Government of Yukon to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, and we have the authority to collect and manage personal data that allows us to do that evaluation.

News Release #16-266



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