



Overview

Pet ownership is one of the most studied behavioral and public health phenomena in the world. The relationship between humans and companion animals is ancient, but its implications for mental health, physical health, social cohesion, and community resilience are only recently being quantified at scale. One Health extends beyond disease — it encompasses the wellbeing dimension of the human-animal bond.

♥■ **The human-animal bond is measurable:** Petting a dog for 15 minutes reduces cortisol levels and increases oxytocin in both the person and the dog. Pet ownership is associated with lower blood pressure, reduced cardiovascular disease risk, faster recovery from illness, and decreased loneliness. These are not anecdotes — they are documented in peer-reviewed literature.

Mental Health Benefits of Pet Ownership

- **Depression and anxiety:** Companion animals provide non-judgmental social support, routine, and a sense of purpose — all of which are protective against depression and anxiety disorders
- **Loneliness and social isolation:** Pet ownership increases social interaction; dog walking in particular is associated with increased community connection and neighborhood social cohesion
- **PTSD:** Service dogs and emotional support animals are evidence-based adjunctive therapies for PTSD — used widely in veteran populations
- **Childhood development:** Children who grow up with pets develop higher empathy, more robust immune systems (the "hygiene hypothesis" suggests early microbial exposure is protective), and lower rates of certain allergies
- **Elderly and palliative populations:** Animal-assisted therapy reduces agitation in dementia patients and improves quality of life in palliative settings

Physical Health Benefits

Cardiovascular health: Dog owners have lower resting heart rates, lower blood pressure, and lower risk of heart attack death than non-owners. The American Heart Association issued a scientific statement noting the association between dog ownership and reduced cardiovascular risk.

Physical activity: Dog owners walk an average of 22 more minutes per day than non-owners. In NYC's dense urban environment, dog walking is often the primary source of daily physical activity for many owners.

Immune system development: Children raised with dogs have lower rates of asthma and eczema. Early exposure to pet-associated microbiota — particularly from dogs — appears to support healthy immune system development.

Recovery and resilience: Patients recovering from surgery, cancer treatment, or cardiac events with pets at home have measurably better recovery outcomes and lower rates of depression during recovery.



■ Responsible Ownership as Public Health Practice

The public health benefits of pet ownership are maximized when ownership is responsible. Responsible pet ownership is itself a form of community public health practice:

- Vaccinated pets reduce community zoonotic disease risk (especially rabies)
- Parasite-prevented pets reduce local vector burden for neighbors and wildlife
- Sterilized pets reduce shelter populations and associated euthanasia
- Well-socialized, properly managed pets reduce bite injuries and related public health costs
- Pet owners who access regular veterinary care have better-monitored animals — and catch zoonotic illness earlier

■ **One Health and the Human-Animal Bond:** The value of pets to human health is not incidental — it is biological, psychological, and social. One Health recognizes that animal wellbeing and human wellbeing are intertwined. Investing in your pet's health through preventive care, regular veterinary visits, and responsible ownership is an investment in your own health and your community's health simultaneously.

■ **Schedule your pet's annual wellness visit today.** Preventive care is the foundation of responsible ownership — and the most direct way to honor the health bond between you and your animal. XVetCare is here for every step of that journey.

■ Final Summary

Pet ownership is one of the most accessible and impactful public health interventions available — but only when paired with responsible care. The human-animal bond is a One Health asset worth protecting.

■ Related XVC Guides:

- [What Is One Health?](#) · [Annual Wellness Exams](#)
- [Zoonotic Diseases Overview](#) · [One Health Careers](#)



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