

## BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION

Identifying Regional Need

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—Dr. Brittany Watson, Director and Clinical Assistant Professor, Shelter Medicine and Community Engagement

Dr. Brittany Watson and Dr. Chelsea Reinhard stand in front of the new shelter medicine mobile clinic.



# SHELTER MEDICINE PROGRAMS EXPANDS IMPACT

BY SACHA ADORNO

Every year, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 6.5 million stray or surrendered animals enter shelters, and 1.5 million of them are euthanized. In Philadelphia, the city’s shelter alone admitted 19,000 animals last year.

Enter Penn Vet’s Shelter Medicine program with its mission that includes keeping animals from ending up in shelters at all. The program helps improve the lives of the city’s most at-risk animals. Its new clinic on wheels will help it cover even more ground.

## SERVING NEED AND SAVING LIVES

“We provide primary care to shelter animals, but also services to the community in collaboration with our partners,” said Dr. Brittany Watson, Director and Clinical

Assistant Professor, Shelter Medicine and Community Engagement. “Community engagement is as important as direct clinical services in preventing shelter overpopulation and increasing animal welfare. Philadelphia has areas of deep poverty and inequity. Many communities don’t have adequate health care resources for pets, and residents can’t easily travel to or afford quality care elsewhere. This can lead to surrenders or affect the human-animal bond. Then shelters and the community are overtaxed and under-resourced in their ability to help animals in need.”

The Shelter Medicine team supports shelters with critical surgical and other medical services. This includes the Penn Vet Richard Lichter Charity for Dogs Program, which provides care for dogs that are beyond the shelter’s ability to treat. The program also partners with Humane Society of the United

States' Pets for Life program to provide at-home care in underserved neighborhoods.

"The Shelter Medicine program has been a great partner for us," said Dr. Hillary Herendeen, Medical Director, ACCT Philly, Philadelphia's municipal shelter and the region's largest intake facility. "They help us on protocol development and review, give advice on disease control, and provide guidance when we adopt a new process or procedure. Having Penn Vet's insight and partnership helps us remain at the cutting edge of sheltering and maximize lifesaving for Philadelphia's at-risk animals."

The program also collaborates with University programs like Netter Center for Community Partnerships. Through Netter Center programming, Shelter Medicine exposes middle and high school students to veterinary medicine, science, and the human-animal bond.

## TAKING CLINICAL CARE ON THE ROAD

Today, Shelter Medicine and its partners are rolling out a new 40-foot-long mobile clinic to heal and help more vulnerable animals.

Outfitted for surgery and diagnostics, the traveling clinic offers services and equipment that shelters can't afford or accommodate. In addition to exam, surgery, and recovery spaces, on board are a microscope, radiograph machine, ultrasound, and other diagnostics. Eventually, the clinic will also accommodate dental care.

"When planning how to expand the Shelter Medicine program's reach in the city, we looked at gaps and how to fill them," Watson said. "One advantage of having a mobile clinic instead of a building is that transportation is a big barrier for many communities. So, we'll be able to go where the need is. Our animal welfare partners are confined by their brick and mortar facilities too, so we can bring services directly to them."

On a weekly basis, the clinic will operate onsite at shelters. At other times, the unit can serve as a public clinic in neighborhoods through community partnerships, as well as an opportunity for Philadelphia middle and high school students to learn about animal health and welfare. In the long term, Watson hopes to use the clinic in disaster and emergency response and animal cruelty cases.

While the concept of mobile medical services isn't a new one, Watson pointed out that Penn Vet's "is unique because most veterinary schools are not located in urban environments and most shelter medicine programs are embedded in a particular facility."

She added, "We want this unit to be a robust educational tool for Penn Vet students, shelter staff, and the people of Philadelphia, one that can help us address the surgical, medical, and educational needs of the communities we serve."

## DRIVING TOMORROW'S VETERINARIAN

For Penn Vet students, the medical facility will be a new teaching and learning resource in a program that has grown in popularity over the past four years. Since 2014, the School's Shelter Medicine program has seen a 55 percent increase in student enrollment, and 50 percent of Penn Vet students are registered in the program's courses.

"Our students are deeply engaged in animal welfare, as well as human-focused issues," said Watson. "Whether they plan to enter research, alternative careers, or private practice, early interaction with shelter medicine is important training. We want our graduates to think globally and see connections between humans, animals, and the environment. Shelter Medicine exposure helps future veterinarians understand and work within difficult and diverse contexts, which can help them serve all animals—and the world—in a more meaningful way."



Penn Vet Dean Andrew Hoffman; Dr. David Haworth, PetSmart Charities; Dr. Brittany Watson; Ms. Katy Champ, Bernice Barbour Foundation; and Dr. Chelsea Reinhard cut the ribbon at the mobile clinic unveiling. At right, surgical tables inside the mobile clinic.