

## **THE ETHICS OF USING DOGS AND CATS AS RESEARCH SUBJECTS: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR OWNED AND COMMUNITY ANIMALS**

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Dogs and cats, whether living with owners or free roaming community animals, merit special ethical consideration as research subjects. Although nominally covered under research protections in the US by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), many issues inherent in doing research on dogs and cats outside of a laboratory setting are not addressed by the AWA. Additionally, there is very little information and minimal guidelines governing such research outside of federal regulations. Because dogs and cats occupy a unique cultural position within both urban and rural human communities, the ethics of using them as research subjects must include protections for the animals as individual and respect for the importance of the human-animal bond, while incorporating the realities of legal relationships between owners and animals. When designing research utilizing dogs and cats, we can take some cues from human subject research on children, but must also include considerations for the species specific emotional and physical needs of the dogs and cats. Examples of issues to take into account is how to we determine who “owns” community animals or who will advocate for them, who pays for and provides medical care for animals that may experience adverse effects from trials, and whether financial incentives for enrollment in trials represent a conflict of interest or even coercion. These issues can be systematically assessed and addressed as part of a well-designed protocol. Doing so as part of the design process will improve the likelihood of completing a trial with usable data and less disruptive and distressing ethical conflict.