

Transportation and Mobility: Final Report

Access to animal health is multifactorial and complex. Social determinants are practical factors that can directly affect animal welfare through individual or systemic means. One social determinant is termed transportation and mobility. It refers to the ability of an animal to be safely and reliably moved in order to access veterinary services, preventative care and emergence services¹. It includes both the physical means of transport, such as trailers, vehicles, carriers, and the broader infrastructure that enables mobility². Transportation and mobility differ significantly between small and large animals, and we must recognize their distinct challenges. Additionally, individual animals differ in their ability to withstand transport². Specifically, physical infrastructure such as roads, vehicles, and public transport greatly impact the reliability of animal transportation in urban and rural environments³. Furthermore, societal considerations such as social and financial status, transit regulations/policies, and geographic location are equally impactful to this determinant³.

The ability for animals to have timely access to veterinary services is highly relevant to whether an animal will receive preventative care, treatment or suffer from an untreated illness or injury. For example, in companion animal care, owners with reliable cars and who live in favourable geographic locations can usually access veterinary clinics without any difficulty. However, those without private transport can face significant barriers. In urban settings there are many restrictions placed on the transportation of animals, other than service animals, on public transport which likely highly impacts individuals ability to access care for their pets. A Canadian survey found that practical barriers, such as transportation and geographic distance were significant constraints, apart from financial ones⁴. It's important to consider that lower income individuals often mobilize public transportation. Therefore, despite the availability of other private transport resources, it is not realistically accessible for many caregivers who rely on public transit due to financial constraints. Furthermore, caregivers in rural or northern regions are missing the opportunity for any other transportation alternative. Especially, when the nearest clinic may be hundreds of kilometers away. Unfortunately, in these instances animal health likely becomes neglected due to inaccessible resources, rather than the fault of the owner. Preventive and routine care can easily be foregone.

Additionally, in emergency situations companion animals may be left behind if owners lack access to transportation during sudden evacuations⁵. For large animals, evacuation becomes even more complex due to the need of specialized trailers, equipment, and trained personnel. Furthermore, in large animals expense is often noted as a barrier for not getting veterinary aid¹⁰. Due to these constraints vets are often not seeing the animal until the situations are more dire¹⁰. The growing frequency and intensity of natural disasters emphasizes the need to integrate animal welfare into disaster planning and response, guided strongly by ethical concerns⁶. The 2025 Canadian wildfire season, one of the most severe on record, is a great example of this⁷. Organized animal evacuation planning remained limited; evident in the formal petitions made by Human Canada and others, such as Vancouver Human Society, to include the evacuation of companion animals into emergency preparedness⁸. Vancouver Humane Society petition stated that "more than 60% of Canadian households include a dog or a cat, yet

there is a lack of pet-inclusive support and accommodations for people evacuating during emergencies such as wildfires”⁹. It is important to recognize the severity of loss when the welfare of small and large animals remain neglected in emergency situations such as natural disaster evacuations.

Transportation and mobility are important determinants of animal health in Canada. They determine access to essential veterinary care and drastically impact the result of animal welfare in emergency evacuations. Emphasizing the differences between companion and large animals in terms of the resources and responsibilities required to access care, is essential in order to understand the limitations that affect this determinant. Recognizing these limitations encourages and highlights the need to bring these concerns into conversations with government, veterinary professionals and the public to hopefully move towards a solution that will allow easier transport access to veterinary care.

Legislation on transportation and mobility in Canada presents a complex picture of both support and challenges when viewed through the lens of human and animal health. For example, in Nunavut, the Medical Travel Policy and Legislation only covers transportation for human medical needs, posing a significant challenge for those seeking veterinary care as it is not included. However, a separate Community Transportation Initiatives Program Policy is a notable supportive measure that helps communities develop and maintain local transportation infrastructure, which can indirectly support both human and animal well-being by improving overall access and connectivity. Another example is that in Saskatchewan, while the Vehicle for hire act improves transportation options, drivers are not required to accommodate pets beyond service animals, which can create barriers for owners seeking timely veterinary intervention. Policies that fail to include veterinary care in medical travel assistance create a significant disadvantage for individuals in remote or rural areas, turning a simple health need into an obstacle. In all the assessed provinces and territories, there are legislative initiatives underway to improve access to service industries, including veterinary medicine, for those with physical disabilities. However, ensuring private businesses are more inclusive of patrons with physical disabilities is in its infancy. On the veterinary association side of professional legislation, the College of Veterinarians of British Columbia has updated bylaws to make telemedicine a more readily available tool for veterinarians to offer clients that may experience transportation and mobility barriers when accessing veterinary health.

The goal of our infographic was to grab the attention of the reader and to highlight transportation as a social determinant of veterinary health in a way that was clear and accessible to all. Inaccessible transportation, impeding access to veterinary care, is a problem many pet owners face. The reality is that 11% of Canadian households do not have a vehicle and therefore experience difficulty accessing care¹¹. Furthermore, in a 2022 Canadian Survey, 8% of pet owners attributed failing to access veterinary care to difficulty getting to the clinic¹². We chose to include a brief explanation of the importance of transportation and mobility, as well as options for how a client experiencing these difficulties can manage. Many of the options, such as ride services, public transport, and telemedicine, come with setbacks of their own. There is also often an additional cost associated with the transportation of animals. For

example, Uber Pet Friendly Rides are more expensive and have additional cleaning costs for any pet hair, waste, or damages left behind¹³. Public transportation can also have big limitations, as animals must be vaccinated and free from communicable diseases. These complications were included because it is important for the public to understand that this is not a problem that comes with black and white solutions.

In conclusion, when we analyze transportation and mobility through an animal health lens there are still obvious barriers that must be improved in order to allow the best outcomes with respect to animal care and welfare. Differences between small and large animals exist which also must be taken into consideration. In small animal medicine we think that society needs to adapt to the changing urban environments by making pet care more accessible for individuals that do not have access to personal cars. This need for legislation changes falls more heavily on the responsibility of society as its current position remains very limited. However, in large animal clients we believe the responsibility falls currently more on the individual due to research showing financial limitations is a primary concern in individuals' decision to transport their animal to the vet. Furthermore, the changing climate also demands that we start to prioritize animal health in our planning with evacuations when an emergency occurs. The need for some change is evident and I believe it starts with bringing awareness to the current situation in hope that we can move towards a better solution.

References:

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4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392635030_Access_to_veterinary_care_in_Canada_a_cross-sectional_survey_of_animal_healthcare_organizations_and_interventions
5. <https://rcmp.ca/en/gazette/wildfire-confirms-need-animal-response-plan.com>
6. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/9781394208180.ch42>
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12. <https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/72/100>

13. <https://help.uber.com/en/riders/article/uber-pet-pet-friendly-rides?nodeId=e4468070-c193-41cf-b792-fa66ecfb1163>

Transportation and Mobility: Responsibility analysis

Determinant: Transport and Mobility

Primary Responsibility: Shared between individual caregivers and society/government.

Justification:

Transportation and mobility in companion and large animals is a shared responsibility between society/government and the individual, but the primary responsibility differs between them. Companion animal caregivers, specifically of lower income, are often dependent on systemic infrastructure, making society/government bear the responsibility in enabling or restricting access to care. In contrast, for large animal transport, individuals must maintain the practical means, equipment, and financial resources necessary to move livestock safely. By comparing these responsibilities, it becomes clear that transport and mobility barriers have a direct effect on animal welfare.

For companion animal care, systemic factors place a significant burden on society and government. Ethically, guardianship means caregivers should anticipate transportation needs such as having pet carriers, leashes, or vehicles available in case of illness or emergency. However, several factors play a role in the availability of these resources that results in many pet owners relying on other alternatives to ensure their animals receive care. In urban environments, many pet owners depend on public infrastructure as a primary method of transportation. This includes Uber, taxi's or specialized pet transport services that are costly to utilize, or unavailable depending on geographical location. Therefore many pet owners, who have the physical capability, rely on public transit services when seeking transportation with their pets. However, the absence of pet-friendly transit is a major systemic barrier. For instance, Edmonton transit services in Alberta have a pet policy that states, passengers can travel with a pet on board provided that the pet is properly confined to an appropriate carrier¹. Likewise, policies for public transit in Victoria, B.C, only allow small pets in a hard or soft carrier that is small enough to fit on the owner's lap². Two have been effectively outlined, however there are many similar pet policies regarding public transportation across Canada³. These limitations effectively exclude owners of medium- and large-breed dogs from using affordable public transport for routine veterinary visits or emergencies. Furthermore, caregivers with limited physical mobility (e.g. seniors and disabled individuals) may find it difficult to lift carriers or manage their animals safely in transit; resorting to other costly methods of transportation or forgoing care altogether.

In comparison, despite the role the government plays in regulating large animal transportation⁴, the ability and practical means to transport them relies heavily on the individual caretaker. A study surveyed producers working with organic dairy farms and found that the primary reason for not accessing more veterinary care was due to financial limitations⁵. Additionally, veterinarians reported that when they were called it was when the animals had significantly worsened⁵. Other factors that can impair individuals' ability to access veterinary care include their socioeconomic status, where they live, and if they are able to access

transportation equipment such as trailers⁶. These barriers can have important ethical considerations. If individuals are not able to access vet care then this will likely lead to decreased animal welfare. One study found that farmers will often treat sheep and cattle themselves without consultation; citing expense as the reason⁷. This often leads to animals being misdiagnosed and/or being provided the incorrect treatment⁷.

Transportation and mobility barriers present significant challenges to animal health with responsibility divided across caregivers, society and government. The limitations of companion animal access highlight a need for policy reevaluation and expanded public infrastructure support. In contrast, large-animal transportation remains largely dependent on individual caregivers that determines feasibility of veterinary access. Ethical implications remain clear that when transport is inaccessible, animal welfare is compromised. Addressing these challenges requires shared accountability between individuals and government in order to improve health outcomes for companion and large animals.

References:

1. <https://www.edmonton.ca/ets/riding-ets#items>
2. <https://www.bctransit.com/victoria/riderinfo/parcels-pets-strollers/>
3. <https://www.gopetfriendly.com/blog/pet-friendly-public-transportation-us-canada/>
4. https://inspection.canada.ca/en/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/humane-transport/healt_h-animals-regulations-part-xii
5. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022030222004532>
6. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10830634/#:~:text=3.4.&text=Identifying%20and%20addressing%20the%20barriers.identified%20in%20this%20scoping%20review.>
7. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani3030629>

Transportation and Mobility: Legislation review

<u>Region</u>	<u>Relevant Legislation/Policy (with citations)</u>	<u>Supports or Challenges Determinant?</u>	<u>Notes</u>
British Columbia	<p>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (<i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, RSBC 1996, c 372</i>)</p> <p>“Relieving distress in animals-11- If an authorized agent is of the opinion that an animal is in distress and the person responsible for the animal</p> <p>(a)does not promptly take steps that will relieve its distress, or</p> <p>(b)cannot be found immediately and informed of the animal's distress,</p> <p>the authorized agent may, in accordance with sections 13 and 14, take any action that the authorized agent considers necessary to relieve the animal's distress, including, without limitation, taking custody of the animal and arranging for food, water, shelter, care and veterinary treatment for it.”</p>	Supports	An authorized agent can be appointed to provide veterinary care for animal in distress if the person responsible encounters transportation and/or mobility barriers
	<p>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (<i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, RSBC 1996, c 372</i>)</p> <p>“Transportation of animals/9.3-</p> <p>(1)A person responsible for an animal must not transport the animal by vehicle unless the animal is</p> <p>(a)inside the passenger compartment, or</p>	Both	<p>This policy could limit owner's ability to transport their animals to obtain veterinary care.</p> <p>However, subsection 3 does allow exceptions for vehicles designated for use as mobility aids for persons with disabilities.</p>

<p>(b) confined or secured in a manner that will prevent the animal from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) falling from the vehicle, (ii) being injured during transport, or (iii) causing a hazard to the safe operation of other vehicles. <p>(2) A person responsible for an animal must not attach the animal to a vehicle that is in operation unless the animal is confined or secured as described in subsection (1) (b).</p> <p>(3) Subsections (1) and (2) do not apply to a person operating a vehicle that is designed for use as a mobility aid for persons with a disability and that is being used for that purpose.”</p>		
<p>Bill M 214-2012 Standards of Care for Breeders of Companion Animals Act/Transportation/11-(1)</p> <p>An operator must ensure that an animal originating from and/or in the care of a breeding premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) is provided with adequate ventilation during transport; (b) is not transported loose in a stock crate with livestock; (c) is not carried on the open rear of a moving vehicle unless it is secured or enclosed in a crate; (d) is not left in a vehicle in conditions where the animal is likely to suffer from heat stress or extreme cold; (e) has access to water in accordance with subsection 2 (2) of this Act if in transport for two or more hours; 	Both	<p>Requirements for vehicles and carriers during transportation may limit an owner's ability to transport their animal to obtain veterinary care.</p> <p>Subsections 3 and 4 do allow for exceptions of transporting animals displaying signs of shock, exhaustion, illness etc. and pregnant and post-partum females for obtaining veterinary care.</p>

<p>(f) is not in transport for longer than 12 hours without a break for exercise, food, water, and the opportunity to urinate and defecate; and,</p> <p>(g) passes a fitness for air transport assessment, administered by a registered veterinarian, before travelling by air.</p> <p>(2) If animals are transported in a purpose built transport box fixed to a vehicle, an operator must ensure that it is well ventilated and free from exhaust fumes and road dust.</p> <p>(3) Subject to subsection (4), an operator must not permit an animal to be transported if the animal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) is displaying any sign of shock, exhaustion, fever, dehydration or an injury or illness that is more than trivial in nature; (b) is a female that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) is within one week of her anticipated whelping date; or (ii) has whelped within 2 weeks before the date of transport. <p>(4) Subsection (3) does not apply in respect of an animal being transported for the purposes of receiving the assistance of a registered veterinarian.”</p>		
<p>Accessible British Columbia Act <i>(Accessible British Columbia Act, SBC 2021, c 19)</i></p> <p>“Part 4 - Division 1 — Accessibility Standards/13 - (1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations respecting the</p>	<p>Supports</p>	<p>Accessibility standards are being drafted by the BC Provincial Accessibility Committee to develop accessibility standards in service provider businesses (includes veterinary clinics/hospitals). These efforts aim at helping people with physical and mental disabilities obtain</p>

<p>identification, removal or prevention of barriers.</p> <p>(2) Without limiting subsection (1), the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations under that subsection in relation to any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) employment; (b) delivery of services; (c) the built environment; (d) information and communications; (e) transportation; (f) health; (g) education; (h) procurement. <p>(3) For certainty, the authority to make regulations under this section is not limited by Division 2 [Standards Development].”</p>		<p>access to service providers such as veterinarians</p>
<p>Transportation Act (<i>Transportation Act, SBC 2004, c 44</i>)</p> <p>“Purpose of Authority-26 - The purpose of the authority is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) to, throughout British Columbia, acquire, construct, hold, improve or operate, or cause to be constructed, improved or operated, (i) transportation infrastructure, other than infrastructure related to municipal highways, (ii) provincial public undertakings, and 	<p>Supports</p>	<p>This legislation defines responsibility of the authority to improving infrastructure to improve access to transportation</p>

<p>(iii) transit-oriented developments, and</p> <p>(b) to do such other things as the Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize.”</p>		
<p>College of Veterinarians of British Columbia Bylaws (<i>College of Veterinarians of British Columbia. (2017). Bylaws. College of Veterinarians of BC)</i></p> <p>“Division 4.3- After hours care -</p> <p>215(1) If a facility does not regularly or cannot temporarily provide emergency care beyond regular hours, the facility must provide information to clients whose animals may be in need of emergency veterinary services after hours which, regardless as to how that information is conveyed, clearly</p> <p>(a) states that the facility is closed and when it will reopen, and</p> <p>(b) directs clients whose animals are in need of emergency care after hours”</p>	<p>Challenges</p>	<p>Alternate after-hour care in another geographical location may not be accessible</p>
<p>College of Veterinarians of British Columbia/Guidelines for the Use of Telemedicine in Veterinary Practice (<i>College of Veterinarians of British Columbia. Guideline for the Use of Telemedicine in Veterinary Practice (July 2021). College of Veterinarians of BC)</i></p> <p>“Telemedicine is a veterinary medical practice tool and involves the evaluation and communication of medical information regarding a</p>	<p>Supports</p>	<p>The CVBC has guidance for using telemedicine as tool to accommodate people with transportation and/or mobility barriers. An exception to establishing a VCPR is in place when in-person examinations are not possible.</p>

	<p>patient's clinical health status via electronic methods. It comes with requirements, just like more traditional practice does:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A VCPR should be already in place to deliver veterinary medicine through telemedicine, however an exception can be made to establish a VCPR through telemedicine when an in-person examination is not possible.” 		
Saskatchewan	<p>Vehicle for hire act https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/92603</p>	Both	<p>Many animal owners rely on personal transport to access veterinary clinics, especially in more rural and remote areas where clinics are not as accessible. The Vehicle for hire act and Traffic safety act make transportation options more accessible, diverse, and safe. However, drivers are not required to accommodate pets beyond service animals, which can create barriers for owners seeking timely veterinary intervention. The Animal Protection Act establishes care duties and transportation prohibitions, as well as inspection powers that impose a duty of care, including humane handling, diminishing the possibility of animals being transported in distress.</p>
	<p>Traffic safety act https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/12208</p>	Supports	
	<p>Animal Protection Act, 2018 https://www.saskatchewan.ca/business/agriculture-natural-resources-and-industry/agribusiness-farmers-and-ranchers/livestock/livestock-emergencies/animal-welfare</p>	Supports	

Manitoba	Accessible Transportation Standard Regulation https://accessibilitymb.ca/accessibility/act-standards/the-accessibility-standard-for-transportation.html#:~:text=The%20Accessible%20Transportation%20Standard%20Regulation%20helps%20conventional%20and%20paratransit%20service,more%20inclusive%20for%20all%20Manitobans.	Supports	These two policies primarily focus on improving accessibility for people with disabilities and managing the province's overall transportation structure. It establishes requirements for paratransit providers, municipalities, and vehicle for hire services. It ensures standard fares, and mandates that vehicles meet accessible design requirements. This kind of policy provides individuals with more autonomy and flexibility, as well as increases their independence, making animal ownership a more accessible and feasible option.
	Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) https://accessibilitymb.ca/accessibility/the-accessibility-for-manitobans-act.html	Supports	
Nunavut	Medical Travel Policy and Legislation <i>(Medical Travel Policy, June 2013, Nunavut Department of Health)</i>	Challenges	This exists to support access to transportation for medical health needs. However, accessing veterinary medical support is not encompassed in this legislation
	Community Transportation Initiatives Program Policy <i>(Community Transportation Initiative Program Policy, Transportation and Infrastructure Nunavut, February 2023)</i>	Supports	This policy exists to support communities in developing and maintaining local transportation infrastructure to connect communities to economic development opportunities and traditional livelihood activities.
	Nunavut Human Rights Act (<i>Human Rights Act, CSNu, c H-70</i>)	Supports	This legislation declares there is a duty to accommodate individuals with disabilities - mental or physical
NWT	Human Rights Act, SNWT 2002, c 18, < https://canlii.ca/t/55fwx > retrieved on 2025-09-02	Supports	This legislation states there is a “duty to accommodate” in goods, services, accommodation and facilities.
Yukon	Yukon Human Rights Act (<i>Human Rights Act, SY 1987</i>)	Supports	This legislation mandates a “duty to accommodate” in services and contexts

TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

Setbacks to accessing care for your animals

Means of transportation can hinder how accessible veterinary care is to the public. Effective transportation is essential for the best success in preventative care and emergencies.

Did you know?

11% of Canadian households do not own a vehicle! That is over 4 million people who do not have access to a car!

Statistics Canada

8%

of pet owners reported failing to access veterinary care because they could not get to the clinic

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What to consider when you do not have access to a vehicle?



Check Public Transit! Many allow pets, but they must be contained in a handheld carrier. Animals must be free from communicable diseases and must be vaccinated.

Resources:
Toronto Transit Commission



Specific taxi services offer pet friendly rides. Beware, they often include an additional cost!



What about telemedicine? Call your clinic today to find out if you can access care through your mobile device!

1. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240813/dq240813a-eng.htm>
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