

Applicant

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Project Title

Promoting Health for an Aging Population: The role of community services in enhancing benefits and addressing challenges of pet ownership for seniors

Project Summary

This study will explore pet-ownership among senior citizens so as to promote healthy aging, and will seek to understand the socially situated challenges that some seniors face in terms of having, or even caring for, a pet. The first component will use interviews and direct observation to investigate the population health implications of pets by understanding the effects companion animal relationships have on the life experiences of older adults. In particular, I focus on three key areas of aging: physical activity, social engagement, and mental health. Next, I will explore both the benefits and challenges of pet-ownership for socially-isolated and lower income seniors by interviewing staff and volunteers in social support agencies and other organizations that serve this population. Alongside these two components, I will investigate socio-demographic trends in terms of pet-ownership and health outcomes for seniors using data from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. In particular, I will consider whether animal companionship may have different implications for the physical and mental well-being of socially-isolated or low income seniors, compared to those living in more secure financial and social circumstances. Together, these three components will create a detailed and novel understanding of both the health implications of pets for seniors, but also the barriers in community services and supports that could be targeted for redress, thus contributing to health equity for older adults.

Keywords

Companion animals; aging; health equity; social engagement; population health.