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## TruCuddle: Standing Together, Standing Stronger

*A collaborative veterinary campaign aims to bring well-deserved joy and support to the veterinary community.*

By Amanda Carrozza

A new worldwide movement—TruCuddle—launched on Veterinary Appreciation Day, June 18. The movement is designed with the future of the veterinary profession at the forefront and aims to address critical challenges that pervade the veterinary industry, with a specific emphasis on educational gaps, mental well-being, diversity, and inclusion within the profession.

Trupanion recognizes the 24/7/365 dedication and support the veterinary community provides for the

common good of pets, families, and the veterinary professionals entrusted with their care.

Trupanion is leveling up their commitment to support veterinary professionals with this special fundraising campaign by offering additional opportunities to raise much-needed funds that will go directly to support grants, scholarships, and educational programs.

"We know that the veterinary profession is physically and emotionally demanding," says Margi Tooth,

Co-President of Trupanion. "With TruCuddle we aim to help overcome important challenges the veterinary community faces together for pets, their families, and the veterinary profession. It's a genuine 'cuddle' where we hope that we can put our arms around a profession in need of some TLC."

TruCuddle will run through National Veterinary Technician Appreciation Week (October 17-23, 2021) and is a partnership between Trupanion, MightyVet, the Multicultural

Veterinary Medical Association (MCVMA), Not One More Vet (NOMV), and WeRateDogs, with the shared goal to empower, support, and educate the veterinary community.

"We realize we can do more to support a healthier veterinary ecosystem by working with organizations like NOMV, MCVMA, WeRateDogs, and MightyVet, who are aligned with our core values, and the TruCuddle movement is a start," says Travis Worra, Trupanion General Manager.

## Statistics tell part of the story

Although the conversation around mental health in the veterinary profession has been amplified in recent years, the statistics surrounding the reality of the crisis are still harrowing.

Suicide ideation remains significantly higher among veterinarians when compared to the general population. This is according to the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing 2020 Study.<sup>1</sup> The number of veterinarians who contemplated suicide in 2019 was more than double that of the national average (7,455 per 100,000, compared to 3,600 per 100,000). Overall, the rate of suicidal ideation and attempted suicide among veterinarians as a whole remained mostly unchanged from the group's previous study. But that unaffected statistic is not viewed as good news.

In 2017, 24.9% of respondents indicated they had contemplated suicide. That figure decreased slightly to 21.9% in 2019. In segmenting the responses by age and gender, the survey found that women are more likely to experience higher levels of serious psychological distress than men. Younger veterinarians are also much more likely to suffer from serious psychological distress.

On a positive note, the study found significant improvement in perceived attitude towards those with mental illness, from 24% in 2017 to 57% in 2019. The study's investigators believe this is an indication that there is now less stigma around mental illness. This notable increase can be viewed as a testament to the work accomplished by groups like NOMV and MightyVet and their benefit to the industry.

Mental health is a significant crisis for the veterinary profession but is not the only concern TruCuddle addresses. The lack of diversity in the industry is palpable, and is the focus of groups like the MCVMA. There is no arguing that minorities comprise only a small percentage

of veterinarians. According to a 2019 census provided by the AVMA, approximately 2% of veterinarians are Black, 6.1% are Asian, and 3 to 4% are Hispanic.<sup>2</sup> What's more, 2018-2019 data from the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), highlights that only 2.1% of veterinary school applicants are Black.<sup>3</sup>

"Beyond the indisputable fact that our profession is one of the least racially and ethnically diverse in the nation, it can no longer be ignored that the future relevance of our field hinges upon the growth and development of a workforce that more closely resembles the American population at large," the MCVMA website reads.

The work done by leaders in the industry, and collaborative efforts like TruCuddle, will continue to pave the way for future veterinary professionals.

## Get to know the TruCuddle partners



**Trupanion:** Trupanion is a leader in medical insurance for pets, providing peace of mind for hundreds of thousands of pet parents. For veterinarians, Trupanion offers a free payment solution that helps eliminate barriers to care, while increasing access to care. It seamlessly integrates with a hospital's practice management system and can provide point of care payment in seconds.



**MightyVet:** Launched in 2018, MightyVet offers access to information not otherwise taught in veterinary school, intending to ensure veterinary professionals are aware of and prepared for the realities of practice. Through education, mentorship, and free resources, veterinary professionals can learn tools to overcome burnout, compassion fatigue, ethics exhaustion, and decreased career satisfaction.



**Multicultural Veterinary Medical Association:** The MCVMA exists to lead veterinary medicine towards the racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and inclusivity necessary to serve a multicultural society. The association works to create a space in which veterinary professionals of diverse backgrounds can network and educate each other while transforming the veterinary profession into one that is inclusive and equitable.



**Not One More Vet:** NOMV addresses well-being in veterinary medicine through innovative pathways, including a peer-to-peer support group, an educational program providing leadership focused on wellness, a support grant program providing immediate financial support, an online crisis support system, and research to further the advancement of wellness, mental health, and the reduction of suicide in veterinary professionals.



**WeRateDogs:** A social media account turned fundraising powerhouse, WeRateDogs celebrates man's best friend through humor, touching stories, and adorable photos. Through partnering with Trupanion, WeRateDogs continues to help dogs in need.



### REFERENCES

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3. Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. Annual data report 2018-2019. Accessed June 5, 2021. [www.aavmc.org/assets/Site\\_18/files/Data/2019%20AAVMC%20Annual%20Data%20Report%20\(ID%20100175\).pdf](http://www.aavmc.org/assets/Site_18/files/Data/2019%20AAVMC%20Annual%20Data%20Report%20(ID%20100175).pdf)



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