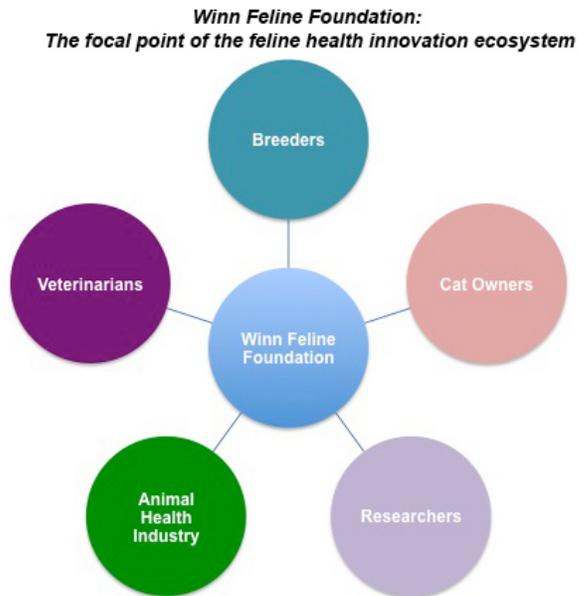


Cures4Cats

Winn Feline Foundation: focal point of feline health innovation



The process of innovation in feline healthcare is complex. It involves a variety of stakeholders: cat owners, breeders, veterinarians, animal health companies, and researchers. This diverse ecosystem of stakeholders each conceptualizes feline health in unique ways.

Winn Feline Foundation (WFF) understands that to truly impact feline health we must seek to understand the unique perspective of our different stakeholders and serve as a crucial focal point within this

innovation ecosystem. Driven by our mission, to “advance cat health through funding research and education,” WFF lives by our vision that “every cat every day benefits from Winn-funded research.” We do this by supporting two distinct research mechanisms: 1) evidence-based medicine that drives clinical decisions, and 2) supporting discovery research and preclinical science that lays the foundation for progress in feline health. Finally, we actively disseminate information to all of our stakeholders through various educational programs.

Evidence-based medicine is crucial for establishing best practices in feline health:

Evidence-based medicine is “the conscientious explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients.” When new drugs and treatments emerge on the market, or existing drugs are repurposed, there is often a grey area where implicit use of a therapy conflicts with the day-to-day reality of patient care. WFF foundation seeks to remove this grey area for practicing veterinarians by funding studies that will provide clinicians with the best available information to answer questions and treat patients in clinical practice. An excellent example of this is the use of the transdermal form of mirtazapine as an appetite stimulant in cats with chronic kidney disease (CKD). As cats age, the likelihood of CKD increases, with up to 60% of senior cats suffering from CKD. As kidney disease progresses cats can become picky eaters and an appetite stimulant is critical to maintain their health and well being. Through WFF funding of evidence-based research, we now know that transdermal mirtazapine gel provides the best and safest appetite stimulant for cats with CKD in comparison to alternate treatments.

Early-stage biomedical research is crucial to future success in feline healthcare: The focus of WFF is on meeting the real health needs and values of the feline community. Most people are familiar with the feline-specific medications, foods and products found at their veterinary office or local pet store. Few ask *how* these innovative products made it to market, and most assume they are the result of individual companies who strive to meet consumer demand. In reality, innovation usually rests on a foundation laid by independent research institutes, such as our Colleges of Veterinary Medicine, and the work done by independent biomedical researchers. Scientific research conducted in academia is a critical part of the feline-specific health care advances that cat owners rely on today. The quality of the research at these institutions is extremely high because their goal isn't to satisfy stockholders by focusing only on top revenue-generating products, but rather, to improve the well-being of all cats. Winn has played an integral role in providing initial funding for feline health researchers on projects that have led to the development of potential new antiviral drug treatments for feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) and the whole genome (DNA) sequencing of the 99 Lives Genome Sequencing Initiative discovering cat genetic variations and improving cat health.

The review of research proposals submitted for funding to WFF by independent research institutions is performed by a diverse group of scientific reviewers, including veterinarians, cat breeders and biomedical researchers who evaluate each study for its potential impact on feline health, as well as its scientific approach, innovation, investigator expertise, and institutional environment. Through careful selection of grants, WFF has been the critical focal point within the feline health innovation ecosystem supporting evidenced-based medicine and early-stage biomedical research discoveries for 50 years.

Studies of substantial impact include:

- Inclusion of taurine in cat food that has prevented the death of thousands of cats from dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)
- Establishment of the best anesthetic and surgical protocols for early-age spay and neuter;
- Discovery of the mutation in the feline PKD1 gene responsible for Polycystic kidney disease (PKD),
- Identification the fundamental mutations in feline Enteric Corona virus associated with the emergence of Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP).

Overall, WFF has provided over \$6 million as of the end of 2017 to fund feline-specific research, contributing to the publication of 110 feline-specific studies in prestigious journals such as the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* and *PLOS Pathogens*. These studies have been cited or “used” by other investigators to make strides in their respective areas of study; collectively, Winn Feline Foundation publications have been cited 929 times, illustrating an enduring and measurable impact in feline health. Importantly, WFF understands progress is often made faster when research transcends traditional academic boundaries and is

inclusive of novel interdisciplinary approaches and public-private partnerships. For example, a recent Winn-funded FIP diagnostic grant partners an academic virologist with a startup company, with the goal being to shorten the bench-to-clinic development of a novel, non-invasive diagnostic test.

Funding the future of feline health innovation

Without expanded support, the economic challenges facing independent biomedical research and feline health pose a serious threat to tomorrow's discoveries. Together with the help of donors, veterinarians, and organizations such as the Cat Fanciers Association and American Association Feline Practitioners, we can not only preserve, but also strengthen the feline health innovation ecosystem. With your support, we will continue to partner with national and international independent biomedical researchers, funding their pioneering approaches to improving feline health. We envision a day when genetic disorders will be defined and prevented; when infectious disease is controlled and treated; when chronic disease is ameliorated and all cats age well without pain and discomfort. We are excited to celebrate our first 50 years, thanks to our generous donors, and we look forward to supporting the health and well-being of every cat, every day.

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