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Policy Forum Highlights Data on the Vital Role of Pets for Better Mental Health

Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) Works with Partners to Increase Access to Pets for Mental Health

(Washington, D.C.) May 23, 2024 – The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) hosted its first-ever [Spring Policy Forum](#) focused on Mental Health and Companion Animals, convening leaders in the pet care community and partners in the mental health space to move society toward more widespread awareness of the important role of companion animals for improved mental health.

The Policy Forum program featured presentations addressing research, practice, and policies associated with this important topic and delivered by expert speakers from a wide array of disciplines. Speakers included Susan Trachman, MD, a Board-Certified Psychiatrist who talked about the role of pet ownership in supporting mental health and Mental Health America (MHA) and HABRI unveiled results of a survey of 4,000 MHA constituents on the care and resource-related needs of those impacted by mental health related to companion animals.

The MHA-HABRI survey found that pet owners overwhelmingly report positive health benefits resulting from their pet, that there is great interest and need for resources related to pets and mental health, and that this is particularly true among those living with a mental or physical disability:

- 98% of pet owners report at least one health benefit resulting from their pet, including reduced feelings of loneliness (73%), providing comfort (73%) and a source of happiness (79%)
- 71% of respondents (76% of those with a disability) are interested in working with a mental health professional who incorporates pets or animal-assisted interventions (AAI) into their practice
- Those with a disability are more likely to say they are interested in pets to support their mental health (79%) compared to those without a disability (50%)
- 93% of respondents agree there should be more support for pet ownership and AAIs in society

“Mental Health America is proud to partner with HABRI to bring forward new data from our constituency on the experiences, benefits and challenges related to pets and mental health,”

said America Paredes, PhD. “We found that not only is pet ownership incredibly important for so many people, but also that more than three quarters of those living with a disability want to work with a mental health professional who incorporates pets in their practice. Our survey showed that it is hard to find reliable information about pets and mental health, revealing a great need for resources and information related to pets and animal-assisted interventions.”

“HABRI is proud to bring together a diverse group of leaders in mental health, veterinary medicine, research, animal-assisted interventions, pet care, and public policy to elevate the conversation about pets and mental health,” said Steven Feldman, President of HABRI. “Armed with research, new insights, model practices and policy considerations, HABRI’s goal is to drive the conversation on how best to support pet ownership and the human-animal bond for a healthier society.”

HABRI’s Spring Policy Forum is sponsored by leading pet care and animal health companies and organizations; American Pet Products Association (APPA), Petco Love, Mars Petcare, American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and whiskerDocs.

“Policy Forum sponsors and all of HABRI’s partners are committed to supporting better mental health for pet owners, veterinarians and everyone who can benefit from the research-backed benefits of the human-animal bond,” Feldman added.

For more information, please visit www.habri.org/policy-forum. Images available upon request.

About HABRI

HABRI is a not-for-profit organization that funds innovative scientific research to document the health benefits of companion animals; educates the public about human-animal bond research; and advocates for the beneficial role of companion animals in society. For more information, please visit <http://www.habri.org>.

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