

IDEXX, dedicated to pets and their people

IDEXX is devoted to bringing you and your veterinarian pet-health services and resources you can trust, like Pet Health Network.

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Joyce Briggs, president of the [Alliance for Contraception in Cats & Dogs \(ACC&D\)](#), is striving to change how we view and treat fertility in [cats](#) and [dogs](#). Her mission, and the goal of the organization, is to advance non-surgical fertility control to effectively and humanely reduce the number of unwanted cats and dogs. Animal overpopulation is a critical issue, and not every community has the resources for animal sterilization [surgery](#), which requires skilled veterinary surgeons, surgical supplies and recovery space. In addition, not all animals can safely receive [anesthesia](#), due to congenital [conditions](#) or overall poor health.

Briggs became interested in alternative approaches to animal sterilization as a result of her involvement with [PetSmart Charities](#), a nonprofit animal welfare organization dedicated to saving the lives of homeless pets. Her experience with that charity, as well as her work for the [American Humane Association](#), helped her to realize that current funding efforts for spaying and neutering are not enough and inspired her to try and raise money for visionary animal welfare policies in the smartest and most efficient ways possible.

Exploring the frontiers of veterinary medicine

The ACC&D serves as a resource for the public, [veterinarians](#) and [shelters](#) interested in alternatives to traditional sterilization procedures and helps promote research. The organization also helped inspire the [Michelson Prize](#) – which has designated \$50 million in grant funding and a \$25 million prize to the researcher(s) who can develop a low-cost, permanent, non-surgical sterilant for male and female cats and dogs. ACC&D brought the idea of a prize and related research funding for a non-surgical animal sterilant to Dr. Gary Michelson, who started the Found Animals

Foundation.

There are several approaches for controlling animal fertility, including immunological (vaccines), hormonal (implants), steroidal (injections) and chemical. However, [Zeuterin](#), an intratesticular injection, is currently the only non-surgical sterilant approved by the US Food & Drug Administration. It is being used to sterilize male dogs. Other drugs such as Suprelorin – an implant designed to prevent fertility and suppress libido in male dogs – has been approved in Australia, New Zealand and the European Union.

According to Briggs, “Culture also plays a key role in how communities approach sterilization. Spaying and neutering is less accepted in Europe than in the United States and in some countries, the practice is seen as cruel and inhumane.”

The ACC&D is also exploring creative approaches to help indicate whether a cat or dog has received treatment such as a Zeuterin injection or [vaccination](#). The organization collaborated with [Cornell University](#) researchers to create an affordable, sturdy and highly visible ear tag for marking and monitoring treated dogs. The marker helps workers identify – quickly and at a distance – free roaming animals that either have or have not received vaccines and birth control.

The changing view of cats and dogs

Briggs believes that one of the biggest transformations in the lives of cats and dogs is increased interaction with humans. Systematic [flea](#) control has led to more animals living inside homes and therefore being around people for greater periods of time. This shift has helped create movement toward seeing pets as part of the family.

“Despite this increased closeness, work still needs to be done when it comes to treating and understanding medical and [behavioral](#) issues in cats,” said Briggs. “We’ve made better progress with dogs having lowered the number of dogs euthanized in shelters.”

Cats are very successful breeders and it’s been more difficult to address cat fertility. As a result, [kitten](#) mortality remains a critical issue. When a community has a large number of free roaming cats, the kitten mortality rate tends to be significant. Unchecked

reproduction also impacts how these cats are viewed. According to Briggs, the sheer number of cats contributes to the view that cats are less valuable and more replaceable.

However, animal shelters have made tremendous progress raising their visibility and promoting adoptions. Organizations like PetSmart are helping promote adoption as an alternative to buying cats by holding adoption events at their stores. PetSmart also does not sell dogs or cats at any of its locations. These on-site adoptions have transformed the field, dramatically improving the ability to save the lives of shelter animals.

"While there's still much work to be done, there's also been tremendous progress over the past few decades," said Briggs. "I am proud to be part of an organization like ACC&D and look forward to continuing to foster progress by supporting ongoing research."

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.