



Morris Animal Foundation Helping Shelters Help Cats Projects

Through its Helping Shelters Help Cats program – part of the Happy Healthy Cat Campaign – Morris Animal Foundation (MAF) is funding research projects that address conditions that negatively affect the health of shelter cats. For every dollar MAF raises, an anonymous donor will match it up to \$500,000. [Click here](#) to support this feline health research.

“Effect of Cage Enrichment and Predictability on Healthy Outcomes of Shelter Cats”

Linda K Lord, DVM, PhD, Ohio State University

D09FE-502, Year 1: \$107,533, Year 2: \$157,681, Year 3: \$117, 157, Total Request: \$382,371

Large numbers of domestic cats enter animal shelters each year. Some are strays and many are surrendered by owners who can no longer care for them. Entering a shelter is likely a frightening experience for most cats, resulting in a strong stress response. If the stress response persists, the cat may become sick, making it less likely that the cat will be adopted into a new home and more likely it will be euthanized. The overall goal of this project is to improve outcomes for shelter cats by reducing the number of days to adoption, the number of sick cats and the number of days these cats are sick. The researchers believe that finding the best ways to improve the cage experience and increase the safety and comfort of the cat’s surroundings from the time of arrival at the shelter to its adoption will improve health outcomes. This study tests the ability of improved observations and use of a biomarker to predict health outcomes, determines whether changes in the cage environment reduce stress and creates a training program to help shelter workers become experts in observing and working with cats to reduce the cats’ stress. By focusing on adoption and health as outcomes, the researchers hope to improve the lives of both cats and the shelter personnel who care for them.

“Effectiveness of Behavioural Interventions to Increase Mucosal Immune Response in Shelter Cats”

Clive Phillips, BSc, PhD, University of Queensland

D09FE-504, Year 1: \$76,948, Year 2: \$136,647, Total Request: \$213,595

Conditions in animal shelters are a source of emotional stress for cats. Emotional stress has been associated with onset of viral shedding (resulting in high pathogen load in the environment) and immunosuppression (resulting in resistance to these pathogens.) The mucosal immune system is the first line of defense against upper respiratory infection (URI). URI’s main antigen, Immunoglobulin A (s-IgA) which prevents invasion from pathogens, is highly responsive to emotional states. In other species, s-IgA has been increased with interventions that successfully change the animal’s emotional state from negative to positive. The proposed study has two phases. The first phase currently under way, examined the interrelationship between behavior (indicative of emotional stress), cortisol (indicative of physical stress)

and quantities of s-IgA (indicative of mucosal immune activity.) The proposed second phase will test the effect of various behavioral interventions on the emotional state of cats and examine health outcomes, using a technique developed and validated during the first phase. Effective behavioral interventions will be developed into practical interventions that shelter personnel can use to reduce the spread of disease in shelters. This study will contribute significantly to the management of welfare and URI in animal shelters.

“Comparison of Two Cage Types: Effect on Shelter Cat Stress, Upper Respiratory Disease and Adoption”

Kate F. Hurley, DVM, University of California–Davis
D09FE-507, Year 1: \$153,359, Total Request: \$153,359

Feline upper respiratory infection (URI) is closely linked to stress and represents a leading cause of illness and euthanasia for shelter cats. Housing type and size influences stress and the frequency of disease transmission. Housing characteristics that have been linked to stress include floor space and presence of a hiding place. Virtually all cats are singly housed for the first week after shelter admission to allow evaluation of health and behavior, and most cases of URI occur soon after intake. This study focuses on single housing of newly admitted cats and evaluates the effect of two different cage types on feline stress, URI and likelihood of adoption. Cats will be housed in an animal shelter in one of two otherwise identical wards containing the two different cage types, and researchers will compare the outcome for cats housed in cage A versus cage B. The findings will help guide shelter personnel in creating the optimal environment for cats to maintain their health and become adopted.

AWARD DEDICATION

The donor dedicates this gift in honor of all the veterinarians and veterinary staff; directors, operations and administrative staff; and volunteers who commit their time and skills to humane societies, animal shelters and rescue organizations.