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CHEROKEE NATION®
P.O. Box 948 • Tahlequah, OK 74465-0948
918-453-5000 • www.cherokee.org

Office of the Principal Chief

Chuck Hoskin Jr.
Principal Chief
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Bryan Warner
Deputy Principal Chief
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January 26, 2026

TO: Corey Bunch, Chief of Staff
FR: Chuck Hoskin, Jr.
Principal Chief
CC: Bryan Warner, Deputy Chief
Council Leadership
Cabinet / Sub-cabinet
Lisa Pivec, Executive Director of Public Health
Michael Lynn, Executive Director of Transportation and Infrastructure

Administrative Memorandum Directing the Creation of “Cherokee Nation Public Health and Wellness Pet Partners” Program Utilizing up to \$400k of PHWFA Funds

The purpose of this memorandum is to direct the Deputy Secretary of State and the Executive Director of Public Health, via a work group to include the Senior Advisor and the Executive Director of Transportation and Infrastructure, on the creation of the “PHW Pet Partners Program” utilizing funds authorized by the [Public Health and Wellness Fund Act, as amended](#).

I. Background

By [Administration Memorandum of October 21, 2025](#), the FY 2026 spending framework for the Public Health and Wellness Fund Act was established. PHWFA, as amended, does not include express language declaring animal rescue and population control measures as “Public Health and Wellness Activities and Infrastructure,” but contains language which can arguably bring such measures within the meaning of the Act. In that regard, PHWFA includes the following under Section 4, sub-section 1004:

7. Safe access to public places, including sidewalks, driveways, parking areas and lighting and security systems.

12. Any other activity or investment that supports improvements to public health or behavioral health as determined by the Principal Chief.

Animal rescue and population control measures fall within public health and therefore PHFA’s “Public Health and Wellness Activities and Infrastructure” for a number of reasons.

It is self-evident that control of feral domesticated animals such as dogs and cats improves safety in public places. But, data and research supports this conclusion. On review of data found that “approximately 2 to 5 million animal bites occur each year, with dogs being the most common culprits, followed by cats and, less frequently, wild animals.”¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that dog bites account for an average of 43 deaths per year from 2011 to 2021.² Additionally, uncontrolled dog populations “are associated with the transmission of a number of zoonotic pathogens... road traffic accidents... and transmitting over 300 zoonoses to humans,” including rabies.³ Cats pose similar risks.⁴ Even when not feral, excessive pets belonging to a household doubtless creates potential health and economic harms to those households, particularly low income households.

All of the foregoing supports the conclusion that animal rescue and population control measures are “Public Health and Wellness Activities and Infrastructure” within the meaning of PHFWA and therefor an eligible expenditure category using the Public Health and Wellness Fund.

On that basis, the memorandum of October 21, 2025, authorized the following:

- **\$400k PHW Pet Partners**
 - *Rescue / Spay / Neuter / Public Outreach pilot program administered primarily by third parties via grants and MOUs.*

II. Directive

The Executive Director of Public Health and the Deputy Secretary of State assemble a work group to implement “PHW Pet Partners,” as authorized in the memorandum of October 21, 2025. The work group should include, but need not be limited to, Senior Advisor Todd Enlow and Executive Director of Transportation and Infrastructure Michael Lynn. Elements of the program include for FY 2026 include:

¹ National Center for Biotechnical Information, [Animal Bites - StatPearls - NCBI Bookshelf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK430852/), April 10, 2025, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK430852/>, retrieved October 24, 2025.

² CDC, *QuickStats*: Number of Deaths Resulting from Being Bitten or Struck by a Dog, by Sex — National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2011–2021, September 8, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7236a6.htm><https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7236a6.htm>, retrieved October 24, 2025.

³ Smith, et al, “The Effectiveness of Dog Population Management: A Systematic Review,” *Animals* 2019, 9(12), November 22, 2019, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6940938/>, retrieved October 24, 2025.

⁴ Gunther, Idith, et al, “Reduction of free-roaming cat population requires high-intensity neutering in spatial contiguity to mitigate compensatory effects,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, February 20, 2022, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2119000119>, retrieved October 24, 2025.

- Coordinate the existing pet vaccination program managed by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure⁵, to include:
 - Branding the existing program under the new “PHW Pet Partners” branding and a single program, such that in terms of a public face the existing programs and new programs appear singular.
 - Evaluate whether to continue to vaccination program under the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure management beginning in FY 2027, or whether to consolidate PHW Pet Partners under a single management structure.
 - Determine, whether the programs and internally consolidated or simply externally branded as a single program, the expenditure of IHS funds is the best and highest use of those funds in view of the availability of new PHWFA general revenue funds.
- MOU based grants and/or contracts with up to two established third-party non-profit organizations⁶ operating animal rescue and pet ownership resources, such as spay and neuter programs and pet owner education, with following objectives:
 - Target underserved / high need / low-income geographic areas for service.
 - Support regional spay / neuter / resource clinics on at least an annual basis.
 - Develop trap / neuter / release programs.
 - Support no-kill shelter and rehome activities.
 - Provide spay / neuter vouchers co-branding with the participating “Pet Partner” organization and Cherokee Nation.
- Develop public relations and public education materials on responsible pet ownership.
- Expand the program to up to four non-profits “Pet Partners” in FY 2027, with attendant budget increase for FY 2027.
- Identify whether direct FTE or direct service contract support under Public Health is needed for program management.
- Identify grant opportunities to supplant PHWFA funding in future fiscal years.

The program launch target date is on or before February 23, 2026⁷.



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⁵ The pet vaccine program managed by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure dates back to the predecessor Community Services Department and utilizes Indian Health Service Funding, one staff member and partnerships with third parties.

⁶ Cherokee Nation presently works with two such non-profits, Kenwood Animal Rescue, Inc., and Waymaker Pet Rescue, Inc (Stillwell), each with an annual operating budget of approximately \$100,000, each receiving sporadic support from Cherokee Nation. Those organizations provide coverage across all or portions of Delaware, Adair and Cherokee Counties.

⁷ The last Tuesday in February is “National Spay and Neuter Day” and “World Spay Day,” per the Human Society of the United States.