

Companion dogs provide a unique translational model for human health studies

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Credit: Royal Veterinary College

Dogs are commonly referred to as man's best friend. This is because of their undeniable physical and emotional connection to their owners. Now, new research suggests that this connection is actually closer than had previously been expected. It reveals that companion dogs can be a powerful translational model to study complex questions about human health and pave the way for a new undiscovered area of research, in which old dogs can now teach us new tricks about our health.

The research, conducted by a team at the Royal Veterinary College and the University of Washington has yielded ground-breaking new data to support the value of using clinical records from [dogs](#) to learn about [human health](#).

Companion dogs and their owners live closely entwined lives, and the research showed that both

suffer from age-related [health issues](#) such as obesity, arthritis and diabetes, with very similar occurrence patterns (for example, at what point in their lives that conditions develop). With the ever-growing life expectancy for humans, it is becoming more common for us to spend several years suffering from multiple chronic diseases in later life. But the long delay in humans from exposure to risk factors in youth such as geographical location, diet or exercise to eventual disease in older age means that research studies in humans can take decades to complete, and this limits our ability to develop ways to prevent and effectively treat these conditions.

However, because dogs naturally have a much shorter life span, and experience similar [health](#) issues, canine lifetime studies can be completed in roughly one-seventh of the time in dogs compared with humans. These studies can help researchers to understand complex diseases and provide valuable information that can be used to enhance the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of these health issues in both humans and dogs.

Dr. Dan O'Neill of the Royal Veterinary College said: "These findings are hugely exciting. By sharing clinical records on their pets with VetCompass, UK owners and vets have already helped the UK to lead the world in population-based animal research. But now potentially millions of older humans may also see the benefits from the exploration of canine health records."

The research was published in the [human](#) aging journal *Aging Cell*, and the research was conducted through the VetCompass project at the Royal Veterinary College which analyses anonymised veterinary clinical records from over 1000 UK vet clinics enhance understanding, and improve the health and welfare, of companion animals, and

beyond.

Provided by Royal Veterinary College

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