

Are pet owners abusing animals to get opioids?

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Veterinarians in Colorado are concerned that some of their clients may have intentionally hurt their pets in the hopes of receiving prescription painkillers, according to a recent survey conducted by the Center for Health, Work & Environment at the Colorado School of Public Health at CU Anschutz and a local veterinary association.

Although veterinarians can prescribe powerful drugs, their role in curbing the [opioid epidemic](#) has been largely overlooked. Researchers are calling for improved surveillance, more research, and better training in an editorial published in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

"The role veterinarians play in helping reduce [opioid abuse](#) hasn't been thoroughly examined," said Lili Tenney, one of the lead investigators of the survey and the deputy director of the Center for Health, Work & Environment. "Our results indicate that we should be paying more attention to how opioid abusers are seeking their drugs—including through veterinary clinics. We want to see health people and healthy pets."

Opioid diversion and misuse is a problem affecting everyone in the veterinary clinic—from staff to pet owners to pets themselves. Of the 189 veterinarians surveyed, 13% reported that they had seen a client who they believed had purposefully injured a pet, made them ill, or made them appear to be unwell. Close to 45% of those surveyed knew of a pet owner or member of their team who was abusing opioids; 12% acknowledged that were aware of a staff member diverting opioids or

abusing them.

The Center for Health, Work & Environment team and the Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention are working to address [opioid misuse](#) and animal abuse by educating veterinarians and their staff. Together, they designed an online training that focuses on opioid prescription guidelines and best practices for veterinarians.

More information: Derek S. Mason et al, Prescription Opioid Epidemic: Do Veterinarians Have a Dog in the Fight?, *American Journal of Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2018.304603](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304603)

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