

# California Animal Welfare Association

Promoting Excellence in Animal Care, Sheltering, and Law Enforcement since 1909™



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **California's Animal Welfare Leaders Meet in Berkeley for 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Animal Welfare CEO Forum**

SACRAMENTO, Calif., October 18, 2018 – The top dogs of 41 of California's animal care and control agencies, SPCAs, and humane societies met in Berkeley earlier this month for the California Animal Welfare Association's fifth-annual Animal Welfare CEO Forum. Thanks to the generous support of Wallis Annenberg and the Annenberg Foundation, California's animal-welfare leaders came together to discuss the key issues facing animal shelters, animals, and communities across the state.

"This year's CEO Forum was particularly exciting because it was the first gathering of California's animal-welfare leaders since the California Animal Control Directors Association and the State Humane Association of California merged into one organization," explained Erica Hughes, Executive Director of the California Animal Welfare Association. "The two organizations had a rich history of working side by side on issues, sponsoring training events, and working on legislation. However, sometimes it was rather challenging to get everyone on the same page at the same time. So, given that we all agreed that public and private animal-welfare organizations have far more in common than not, it was really a no-brainer to join forces to enable us to craft a shared agenda and speak with a unified voice on behalf of all the animal-welfare organizations that care for the stray, homeless, and abused animals in our state and serve the animal-related needs of their communities."

Among the hot topics of discussion were California's shortage of shelter veterinarians, lack of public access to affordable veterinary care, the need to ramp up disaster planning, the importance of gathering accurate industry-wide statistics on the numbers of animals entering the state's shelters on an annual basis, and the ins and outs of effective and ethical animal-transfer programs.

"The CEO Forum is the best thing that I have seen to bring California's animal welfare, service and enforcement brain trust together constructively, productively, and respectfully to further the interests of our animals and those who love them," remarked Madeline Bernstein, President of the Board of the California Animal Welfare Association and President of spcaLA. "I predict great things from this new merger."

Kirstin Gross, Director of Madera County Animal Services, voiced her passion about the need to increase access to affordable veterinary care, particularly spay and neuter services. "Veterinarians are our most important partners providing essential services for shelter animals" Ms. Gross explained. "The veterinarians who provide spay and neuter services are the big guns in our arsenal in the war on pet overpopulation. However, there is a scarcity of them and this creates incredible challenges for disadvantaged populations in the Central Valley and elsewhere."

And, Ms. Gross believes addressing this problem is critical. "As a member of the California Animal Welfare Association, it is a priority for us to encourage veterinary participation, share our resources and come up with creative solutions to this challenge. Without adequate access to affordable veterinary services, we are unable to address adequately the problem of pet overpopulation in our state."

Kerri Burns, Executive Director of the Santa Barbara Humane Society, emphasized the importance of working on disaster planning. "What a great conference with so many animal welfare professionals pitching in ideas that collaboratively help all the animals in our communities," said Ms. Burns. "California always has some type of disaster affecting people and their pets. Working together, we talked about developing and gathering resources that can be used before, during and after a disaster happens. We can all be better prepared by having open communication and sharing resources. What a great group to be involved with."

Jill Tucker, member of the Board of the California Animal Welfare Association and Executive Director of Woods Humane Society in San Luis Obispo, is taking the lead on gathering statistics from every shelter in California. "We are pleased to report that a statewide effort to encourage all organizations to participate in Shelter Animals Count is well underway," said Ms. Tucker. "Animal shelter CEOs recognize that collaboration is essential to achieving our goals and that establishing a baseline of data from which we can identify areas of need and trends will be essential to supporting these efforts."

Shelter-to-shelter animal transfers were also discussed. "One of our greatest opportunities in California is to more effectively move pets from areas where the shelters are overcrowded to communities where there is a demand for more adoptable animals," stated Jeffrey Zerwekh, Executive Director of the Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society. "Solving this problem requires strong partnerships between public and private shelter executives and we made significant strides at the CEO meeting."

The generous support of PetHealth, Inc., an international leader in the provisions of animal management software, RFID microchip identification, database-related services for companion animals, and pet insurance, and VCA Pet Hospitals, with over 800 animal hospitals and 50,000 veterinarians nationwide, also made the event possible.

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