

# Proposition 129 Media Backgrounder

## Proposition 129 summary:

Proposition 129 will create a career pathway for a Veterinary Professional Associate or a “VPA” to help address the access to veterinary care crisis in Colorado. Similar to human-medicine PAs, VPAs will be highly-trained professionals who work under the supervision of a licensed Colorado veterinarian.

To become a VPA, one must have a master’s degree in veterinary clinical care. Over the past five years, Colorado State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine and Biological Science has been evaluating industry needs and has developed a robust and comprehensive master’s program to train VPAs in Colorado.<sup>i</sup>

CSU has been mindful of making the new program accessible and inclusive. Part of the curriculum will be online to support working and rural students, and the debt-to-salary ratio will be less than 1:1, making this an affordable option for those who want to enter the veterinary field.

As the profession develops, VPAs will be credentialed and required to pass a national certification exam. Proposition 129 directs the Colorado Board of Veterinary Medicine to establish rules and regulations about VPAs, just as they do with veterinarians and veterinary technicians.

VPAs will expand the capacity of Colorado veterinary practices, allowing veterinarians to focus on the most complicated cases and increase access to vital veterinary care to our state’s pets.

A survey from the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) found that 53% of members agreed that a VPA would help expand access to care for pets and livestock.<sup>ii</sup>

## The Access to Veterinary Care Crisis:

**The United States is facing an access to veterinary care crisis, and Colorado is the first state to address it systemically.**

1. A recent CSU survey found that 1 in 3 people have experienced barriers to accessing veterinary care in the past two years<sup>iii</sup>.
2. More than 20% of Colorado counties have little to no access to veterinary care – this is equal to more than 114,000 rural Colorado families.<sup>iv</sup>
3. In a Colorado Cattleman’s Association survey, 56.5% said a shortage of vets is affecting the health of their livestock and the economics of their operations.<sup>v</sup>
4. Current estimates show that 75 million companion animals could be without veterinary care by 2030 if the current economic trends continue.<sup>vi</sup>
5. Up to 55,000 new veterinarians are needed to meet projected demand in 2030.<sup>vii</sup>
6. It would take more than 30 years of graduates to meet the 10-year need for credentialed veterinary technicians based on current U.S. education capacity.<sup>viii</sup>
7. 71% of veterinary practices divert clients at least weekly because they are at capacity.<sup>ix</sup>
8. Economic euthanasia - 72% of DVMs and technicians reported that their veterinary team has had to euthanize an animal in the past year because the owner couldn’t afford the treatment they recommended, and a different decision would have been made if the client had sufficient financial resources.<sup>x</sup>
9. It takes 10.8 months on average to fill a veterinarian position in Colorado.<sup>xi</sup>
10. Lack of inclusive opportunities - 90% of veterinarians and veterinary technicians identify as white.<sup>xii</sup>

## FAQ's:

### 1. Who is funding the ballot measure in Colorado?

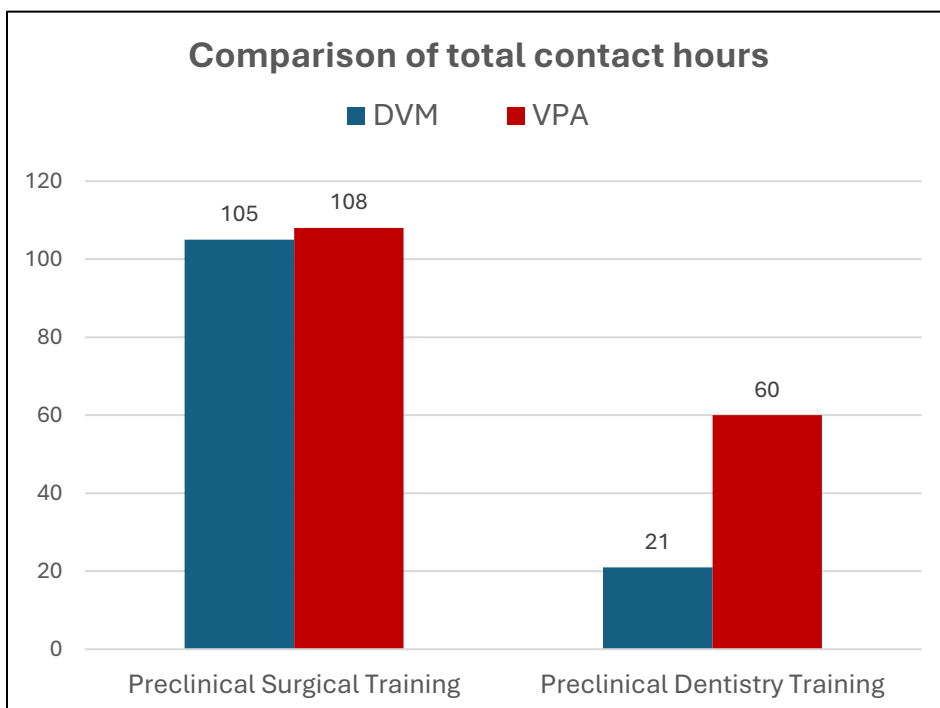
To date, the investment in obtaining enough signatures to get on the ballot in Colorado has been \$1.3 million. This has been funded primarily by animal welfare organizations, including the Dumb Friends League, the ASPCA, and NOCO Humane. Many invested citizens of Colorado have also contributed. No corporate funding has been accepted by these non-profit organizations and subsequently invested in this initiative. One gift of \$10K was donated to the Vet Care Coalition directly from a corporation. The claim that corporate veterinary medicine is funding this work is false unless you look at the opposition where 100% of funding has come from special interest groups, mostly out-of-state.

### 2. Will VPAs be well-trained to care for pets?

The Master's in Veterinary Clinical Care degree program under review at Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biological Science is a 65-credit hour program focused only on cats and dogs. Future graduates of this program would be able to serve in shelter medicine regardless of the success of this legislation, but if this proposition is passed they could make a bigger impact and truly move the needle on helping animals across our state.

Because DVMs must learn about many more species, the actual training for a VPA on the species they will be treating is very similar between the programs. Approximately 38% of the DVM curriculum for a student who is focusing on small animals is specific to cats and dogs, and an additional 27% of training is relevant to all species. Sixty-five percent of a four-year education vs 100% of a two-year education represents a slight difference, but not one that would result in an untrained VPA.

Considering the VPA will work under the supervision of a DVM and would not be expected to handle complex medical cases, it is clear the VPA will be equipped to provide excellent care to patients.



VPAs will also receive comprehensive training in dentistry and surgery. When you compare the proposed VPA curriculum, including surgical labs, with DVM preclinical surgical training in small animals, the required pre-clinical surgical training for a VPA is 108 hours as compared to 105 hours for the DVM program. To assert that a VPA would be unprepared for surgical procedures is to say that DVMs are similarly unprepared. The difference when it comes to preclinical training in dentistry is even more striking—the VPA program will have three times as much preclinical training in small animal dentistry as the current DVM curriculum.

These are only a couple of examples of how robust the MVCC program at CSU will be. The prerequisites for the program are very similar to those to qualify for the DVM program. The number two veterinary school in the country (CSU) is stepping up to provide a comprehensive program to prepare this new profession for success.

### 3. Who opposes this measure?

The creation of a VPA is a bipartisan solution supported by the majority of Coloradans. Some veterinary trade associations, whose mission is to advocate for their members, oppose this measure (and many others that expand access to veterinary care), but many Colorado veterinarians are in support of Proposition 129. The veterinarians who oppose have every right to protect the current veterinary model but shouldn't be allowed to dictate how all veterinarians choose to best serve their clients, especially when 46% of veterinary professionals reported that a VPA would positively benefit the profession.<sup>xiii</sup>

Additionally, the veterinary trade association is only one stakeholder in this discussion. Local humane societies, animal welfare agencies, ranchers, farmers and pet owners are also stakeholders, and they are all seeking real solutions – like Proposition 129 - now.

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<sup>i</sup> Colorado State University Veterinary Professional Associate - A Master's Degree in Clinical Care:

<https://vetmedbiosci.colostate.edu/vpa/>

<sup>ii</sup> CVMA member survey: <https://www.colovma.org/advocacy-news/cvma-releases-results-from-member-survey-on-veterinary-professional-associates/>

<sup>iii</sup> CSU Animal-Human Policy Center Colorado Pet Owners Survey Summary of Results:

[https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/animalhumanpolicy/wpcontent/uploads/sites/171/2024/01/PetOwners\\_SummaryofResults.pdf](https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/animalhumanpolicy/wpcontent/uploads/sites/171/2024/01/PetOwners_SummaryofResults.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> The Veterinary Care Accessibility Project: <https://www.accesstovetcare.org/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.denverpost.com/2024/06/20/colorado-tackles-veterinary-shortage-pets-dogs-cats/>

<sup>vi</sup> Lloyd, James W. DVM, PhD, *Pet Healthcare in the US: Are There Enough Veterinarians?*, April 14, 2021, at

[https://www.marsveterinary.com/media/uploads/2022/03/Characterizing%20the%20Need%20-%20DVM%20-%20FINAL\\_2.24.pdf](https://www.marsveterinary.com/media/uploads/2022/03/Characterizing%20the%20Need%20-%20DVM%20-%20FINAL_2.24.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> *A Brighter Future for People and Pets: Tackling the Veterinary Shortage*: <https://www.marsveterinary.com/media/uploads/2023/08/MVH-Veterinary-Shortage-Infographic.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> *A Brighter Future for People and Pets: Tackling the Veterinary Shortage*: <https://www.marsveterinary.com/media/uploads/2023/08/MVH-Veterinary-Shortage-Infographic.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> CSU Animal-Human Policy Center Veterinary Professional Survey Results: <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/animalhumanpolicy/wp-content/uploads/sites/171/2023/10/AHPC-Veterinary-Professional-Survey-Results.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> CSU Animal-Human Policy Center Veterinary Professional Survey Results: <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/animalhumanpolicy/wp-content/uploads/sites/171/2023/10/AHPC-Veterinary-Professional-Survey-Results.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> CSU Animal-Human Policy Center Veterinary Professional Survey Results: <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/animalhumanpolicy/wp-content/uploads/sites/171/2023/10/AHPC-Veterinary-Professional-Survey-Results.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>

<sup>xiii</sup> CSU Animal-Human Policy Center Veterinary Professional Survey Results: <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/animalhumanpolicy/wp-content/uploads/sites/171/2023/10/AHPC-Veterinary-Professional-Survey-Results.pdf>