
Pet Obesity: Brainstorming Highlights

Obesity has become a staggering health and welfare problem affecting nearly half of pet dogs and cats, as this year's CAN Summit speakers have reported. In many instances, pet obesity mirrors human obesity. Owners who lack motivation to reduce their own overweight or obese state also lack the discipline needed to help their pets. An effective approach to battling pet obesity will likely require changes that impact lifestyle, physical activity, diet, and behavior. The hope is that helping pets lose weight and live healthy lives will reduce the serious comorbidities that often accompany obesity and the costs related to treating these diseases. Best of all, pets will have less risk of a reduced life span due to obesity.

Introduction

To address the global problem of pet obesity, a brainstorming session was held at the CAN Summit that allowed attendees to discuss and explore ideas about the problem and its prevention. The purpose was to learn new information and viewpoints about pet obesity management, to exchange ideas, and to consider what different stakeholder groups can do to prevent and challenge obesity.

Small-group discussions sparked a mix of perspectives and viewpoints. The participants reviewed obesity through the "eyes" of stakeholders that included pet owners, pet food companies, communities, governments, nongovernmental organizations, clinical veterinarians, researchers, board-certified veterinary specialists, and veterinary organizations. The goal was to understand how key stakeholders and Nestlé Purina can work together to address pet obesity.

Insights on Pet Obesity

The collaborative small-group sessions yielded rich information and ideas that were shaped by the stakeholders' views. Here are key highlights:

- **Food represents love philosophy triggers pet obesity:** Pet owners and the pet community share this view. The cycle involves pets begging for food coupled with owners' feelings of guilt and breakdowns in a consistent feeding schedule adhered to by all family members. The perception by some stakeholders that pet obesity is not a problem presents a barrier to progress.
- **Pet obesity education:** This is needed to address obesity and help resolve key issues related to the problem.
- **Portion size and controls:** Various concepts were considered including breed-specific bowls, different pouring options and individual meal pouches.
- **Packaging information:** Considerations included removing feeding guidelines, providing transparent ingredient listings and adding caloric information.
- **Social events:** Pet friendly gyms and organized events that encourage dogs to be active and play were suggested.
- **Technology:** Using apps to track a pet's activity and access information from experts on ways to make behavioral changes were considered.
- **Academia:** The array of thoughtful messages provided by this participant group precluded overanalysis.