

Animal Management as Public Health Infrastructure

*A Reader on Leadership, Policy Design, and Community
Animal Management in Indigenous Communities*

Increased ACCESS
Version 4.0 | 2026

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Introduction

This Reader brings together a body of public writing, policy analysis, and applied systems work published by Increased ACCESS between 2025 and early 2026.

Across these pieces, a consistent finding emerges: Canada has never built a coherent, nationwide animal health or animal safety system. Animal-related risk has been treated as a charitable concern rather than as an ongoing public health and safety function. As a result, responsibility has been diffuse, continuity has been absent, and prevention has been chronically underfunded.

The consequences of this design failure fall most heavily on rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, where the absence of infrastructure, services, and sustained authority produces predictable cycles of crisis and response.

This Reader does not catalogue individual programs or interventions. Instead, it presents an integrated narrative intended for policymakers, public health professionals, Indigenous governance leaders, philanthropic and financial partners, veterinarians, and others working at the intersection of health, safety, land use, and systems change.

The aim is not to assign blame, but to make visible the structural conditions that continue to produce preventable harm, and to identify pathways toward durable solutions.

Why This Reader Exists

Community animal management in Canada is routinely framed as an animal welfare issue. In practice, it functions as a determinant of human health and safety.

Where communities lack sustained access to veterinary care, animal control authority, kenneling and holding capacity, and prevention programs, the consequences are not abstract. They include elevated risk of dog bites, trauma exposure for children, populations of free-roaming dogs in contexts where under-socialization and low sterilization coverage increase risk, recurring crisis responses including culls, and escalating human-wildlife conflict.

For many children, walking to school or playing outdoors carries a level of risk that would be considered unacceptable in most Canadian municipalities.

In urban centres, these risks were largely addressed over a century ago through taxation, infrastructure, and professionalized public services. In Indigenous communities, they were not.

This is not a cultural failure. It is a policy outcome.

The Historical Design Problem

The roots of present-day inequities trace directly to nineteenth-century federal policy design.

As settler municipalities developed animal control systems funded through local taxation, First Nations were governed under the Indian Act, which constrained economic autonomy, limited access to revenue tools, and centralized financial control under federal authority.

Although the Act referenced animal management roles such as pound keepers, it provided no accompanying funding, infrastructure, or enforcement support. Over time, Canada built systems for itself and withheld the conditions required to build them elsewhere.

This asymmetry hardened across generations. Today, animal control and veterinary access are often assumed to be universal features of modern governance, while entire regions were structurally excluded from those systems by design.

The SPCA model itself emerged from a specific understanding of “society” shaped by nineteenth-century English and settler governance. That society assumed municipal authority, enforceable law, taxation, and proximity to services. As the model travelled, those assumptions came with it, even when the conditions required to support them were absent.



EXTENDED ANALYSIS:
The War Against Dogs Continues
(Healthy Debate Article)

Animal Management as a Social Determinant of Health

In Indigenous communities, poorly supported animal populations are not abstract animal welfare concerns. They are child injury risks. They are sources of chronic fear. They are trauma exposures. They are contributors to human-wildlife conflict. They are preventable.

Evidence consistently shows that children aged five to nine in Indigenous communities experience disproportionately high dog bite risk. Many incidents go unreported. Health systems frequently do not record bites by species, and community-level data are sparse.

The absence of comprehensive data should not be mistaken for the absence of harm.

Animal management also intersects with land use, mobility, and daily life. Where people do not feel safe moving through community spaces, the impacts extend beyond injury risk to education, social participation, and overall wellbeing.



EXTENDED ANALYSIS:

[Cultural Literacy Impacts Philanthropy: Why Public Health and Animal Welfare Can't Be Separated in Indigenous Communities](#)

Why Charity and Volunteerism Were Never Enough

Canada delegated most animal welfare functions to charities and volunteer organizations. In urban centres with dense donor bases and existing infrastructure, this model functioned tolerably well.

It does not function as a substitute for public systems.

Large SPCAs and humane societies were not designed as public health agencies. They hold no legislative mandate to provide equitable, province-wide access to animal health services. Their funding follows visibility, population density, and donor interest, not need.

Small non-profits, Indigenous-led initiatives, and community groups are left to manage the highest-risk environments with the fewest resources.

Volunteer labour fills gaps, but it cannot build or sustain systems. When governments rely on volunteerism to deliver essential services, responsibility is shifted without authority, and risk is downloaded onto communities least equipped to absorb it.

This is not a failure of goodwill. It is a mismatch between responsibility and structure.



READ THE FULL ESSAY:
The Next Era of Animal Welfare Leadership. And the Lottery We Keep Losing

INVOICE

Invoice Number: 1876-2025
Date Issued: December 31, 2025
Amount Due: \$149,000,000 CAD

Billed To: Government of Canada
Ottawa, Canada

Payment Terms: Due upon receipt

PAST DUE

Description	Years	Unit Price	Total
Services & Infrastructure	149	\$1,000,000	\$149,000,000

Description of Charges

Animal management services and infrastructure not provided to First Nations communities following the delegation of responsibility for dog management ("poundkeeper" role) under the 1876 Indian Act.

Calculated at \$1,000,000 per year for 149 years, representing the absence of sustained funding, infrastructure, and services required to ensure community safety.

Explanation

This invoice is PAST DUE BY 149 YEARS.

In the 1876 Indian Act, Canada deferred responsibility for the management of dogs to First Nations.

Since that time, Canada has not provided First Nations with the animal-related resources required to keep communities safe, including funding, infrastructure, or access to services such as veterinary care and animal-holding facilities.

Canada has not honoured its fiduciary duty to ensure First Nations community health and safety to date.

Total Amount Due: **\$149,000,000**

Figure 2: This invoice represents 149 years of animal management services and infrastructure not provided following the delegation of responsibility under the 1876 Indian Act.

Placeholders and Misdiagnoses

When systems are absent, placeholders often take their place.

Education campaigns are substituted for services. Awareness is expected to compensate for the lack of tools. Communities are asked to change behaviour without being given the conditions required to do so safely.

This pattern is visible in the persistent call for “more humane education” in contexts where basic access to veterinary care, containment, and population management does not exist.

Learning matters. But education cannot substitute for infrastructure.

Without cultural and historical literacy, institutions misinterpret policy outcomes as community failures and mistake structural absence for individual irresponsibility. Language reinforces these misreadings, quietly shaping where blame is placed and where investment is withheld.



EXTENDED ANALYSIS:
Racism Disguised as Rescue

Leadership Is a Systems Issue

Despite these constraints, Indigenous communities are leading.

Nations are drafting animal management bylaws, investing in infrastructure, hosting mobile veterinary clinics, engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and developing prevention strategies grounded in local law and teachings.

At the national level, the Assembly of First Nations has called for a coordinated strategy on animal care and control in First Nations communities.

What is missing is not leadership at the community level. What is missing is alignment at the systems level.

Leadership cannot be sustained where authority, financing, and continuity are absent. Transitions cannot be made durable when institutions have not been designed to support them.

Canada has no mechanism to coordinate animal health across ministries, jurisdictions, and sectors. Responsibilities remain fragmented. Accountability is diffuse. Equity is optional.

This is not a system. It is a patchwork.

What Structural Change Looks Like

A structural response does not require reinvention. It requires alignment.

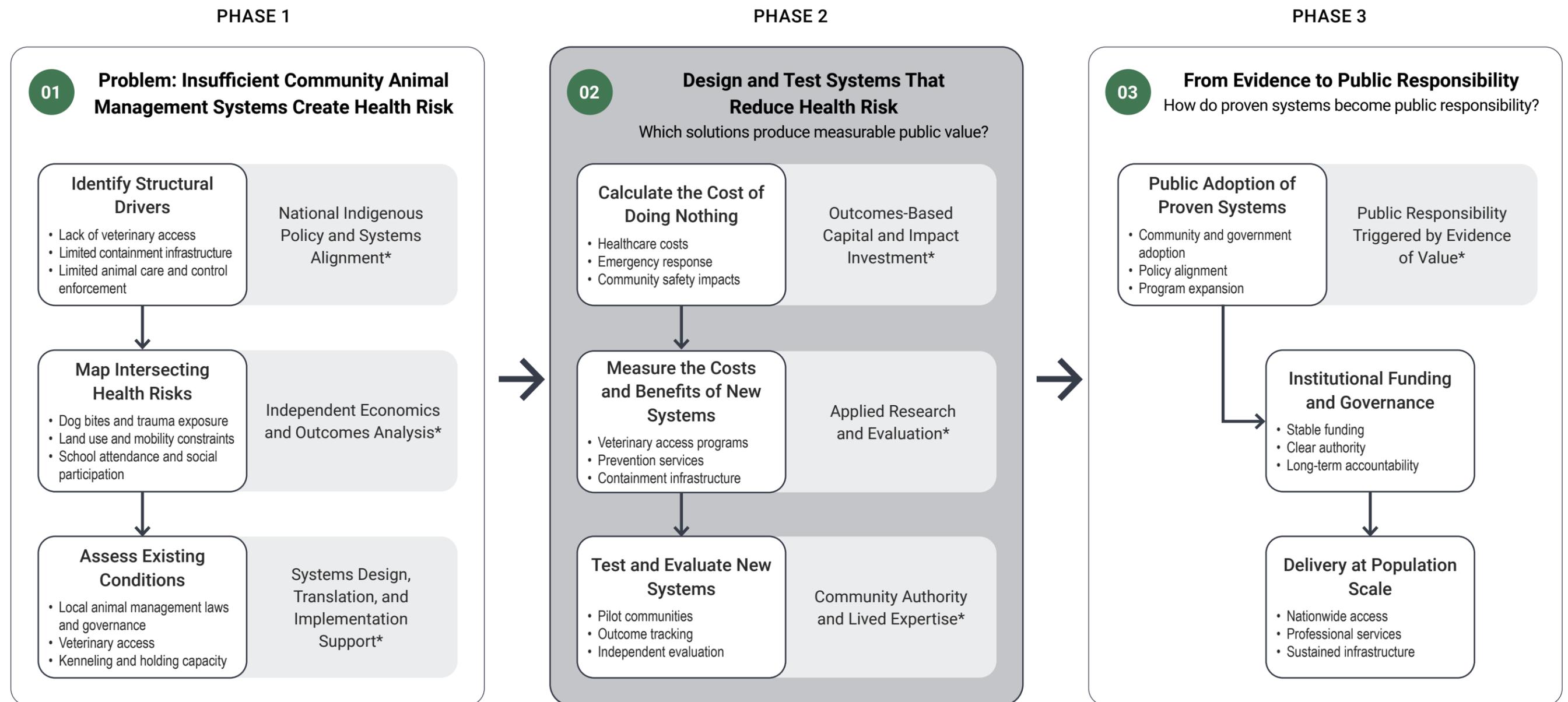
A public health approach to community animal management includes:

- Recognition of animal management as a determinant of human health and safety
- Minimum standards for access to veterinary care and animal control infrastructure
- Indigenous-led governance and decision-making
- Sustainable, predictable funding rather than episodic philanthropy
- Expansion of a non-profit veterinary sector, much of it mobile
- Policy tools that support professionals serving underserved regions
- Financing models that allow governments to pay for prevention rather than crisis

When communities gain sustained access to tools, authority, and infrastructure, outcomes shift. Risk decreases. Confidence increases. Crises become less frequent. Success becomes visible primarily as the absence of harm.

Animal Management as Public Health Infrastructure

A Governance Pathway from Community-Defined Problems to National Public Responsibility in Underserved Communities



*Supporting Systems

Figure 2: Governance and Implementation Pathway for Community Animal Management as Public Health Infrastructure

Financing Prevention: Why Outcomes Matter

For decades, community animal management in rural and remote Canada has been funded as if it were episodic. A grant here. A pilot there. A visiting service when conditions become acute. When funding ends, systems revert to crisis response.

This pattern persists not because the problem is poorly understood, but because financing models do not match the nature of the challenge.

Community animal management is an ongoing public health function. Its outcomes accrue over time, across systems, and across generations.

Outcomes-based financing offers a way to align investment with that reality.

An Outcomes Fund does not create new services. It creates a mechanism for paying for results rather than activities. Capital supports interventions expected to produce measurable outcomes. When outcomes are achieved and independently verified, repayment is triggered by systems that benefit from avoided costs.

The logic is straightforward. If failure is expensive and prevention is cheaper, prevention can be financed against future savings.

In this context, the beneficiaries are already visible: health care, emergency services, education systems, child and family services, and community governance structures that absorb the downstream costs of under-managed risk.

Philanthropy plays a transitional role, absorbing early risk and supporting implementation, governance development, and measurement. As outcomes are demonstrated, responsibility shifts toward public systems that already hold fiduciary obligations for health and safety.

An Outcomes Fund does not replace public responsibility. It accelerates its arrival.



EXTENDED ANALYSIS:
Financing Prevention: Why Outcomes Matter

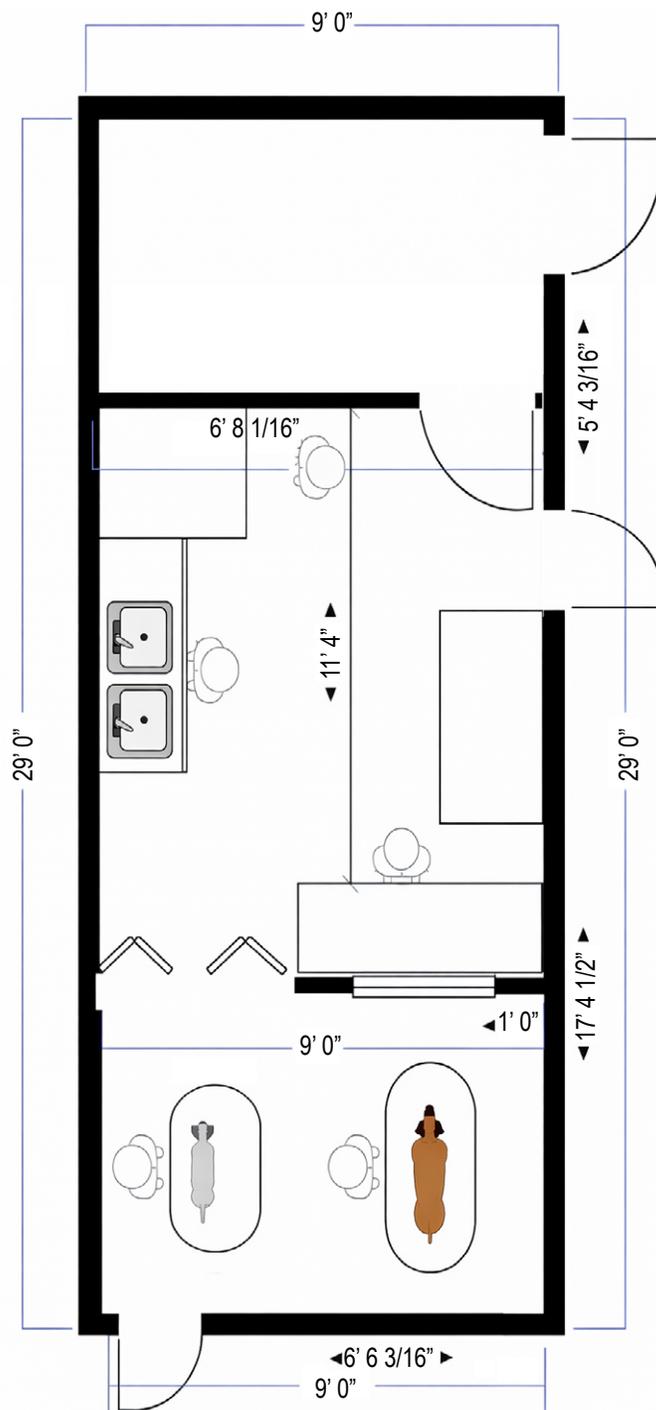


Figure 3: Example of modular veterinary infrastructure designed to enable consistent service delivery in remote contexts. Shown here to illustrate how access, continuity, and safety depend on physical systems, not volunteer availability.

The Role of Increased ACCESS and Indigenous SPCA

Increased ACCESS is an Indigenous-led nonprofit working with Nations to address community animal management as a public health and safety issue.

Indigenous SPCA is a project of Increased ACCESS focused on supporting community-led animal management systems grounded in self-determination, local governance, and sustained access to tools.

The organization supports planning, infrastructure development, mobile veterinary access, policy engagement, and the development of an Indigenous-led Community Animal Management Outcomes Fund in partnership with economists at the University of Winnipeg.

The aim is not to build parallel charity systems, but to help essential services move out of the charitable realm and into durable public responsibility.

Recent public writing by Increased ACCESS further examines the historical assumptions embedded in the SPCA model itself, including how ideas of “society,” authority, and responsibility were shaped by settler governance and later applied in contexts where those conditions never existed.



READ THE FULL ESSAY:
The Indigenous SPCA

Looking Forward

If 2025 marked a shift in how these issues were discussed, 2026 must be the year systems begin to change.

Communities are already leading. Evidence is accumulating. Public health frameworks support action.

The remaining question is whether Canada is prepared to build structures capable of following that leadership.

Animal welfare, when understood properly, is not about animals alone.

It is about health. Safety. Equity. And the systems we choose to build.

Notes on What Comes Next

Alongside financing and infrastructure development, Increased ACCESS is developing a pattern language for community animal management. This work is intended to help communities, funders, and policymakers name recurring system conditions, understand how they interact, and avoid repeatedly misdiagnosing structural gaps as local failure.

This Reader is a living document. Updates will continue to reflect new evidence, partnerships, and system design work as it emerges.

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