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Exploring Voluntary Animal Companion Insurance Benefits for Los Angeles

County Employees

Animal guardianship offers a myriad of benefits for both mental and physical well-being, as evidenced by numerous studies. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has shown an animal companion is linked to several health benefits including decreased blood pressure, decreased feelings of loneliness and anxiety, and increased physical activity and social opportunities.¹ Additionally, a study on animal-assisted therapy from the University of California, Los Angeles found that even the simple act of petting animals helps promote the release of serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin, which are all hormones that can play a part in elevating moods.² These findings underscore the positive impact of animal companion policies and their potential to improve employee well-being, suggesting that supporting employees who care for animal companions can be a valuable strategy for fostering a positive work environment.

¹ "Healthy Pets, Healthy People." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2 Feb. 2018, www.cdc.gov/healthypets/health-benefits/index.html.

² *Animal-Assisted Therapy Research*. UCLA Health. (n.d.). <https://www.uclahealth.org/programs/pac/about-us/animal-assisted-therapy-research>

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Los Angeles County offers one of the strongest public-sector benefits packages in the nation. Research has consistently demonstrated that interactions with pets can help mitigate stress and improve overall mental health, which, in turn, can positively influence employee well-being. To continue to attract, develop, and retain a talented, engaged, and diverse workforce, the County should consider providing animal companion insurance as a voluntary benefit to its employees. Animal companion (AKA pet) insurance is crucial for animal guardians because it provides financial protection against unexpected veterinary expenses. Just like human healthcare costs, veterinary bills can quickly add up, especially in the case of emergencies, surgeries, or chronic conditions. Having pet insurance ensures that animal guardians can afford necessary medical treatment without having to make difficult decisions based solely on financial constraints. Additionally, animal companion insurance may encourage more proactive and preventive healthcare measures, as pet guardians are more likely to seek veterinary attention when needed, rather than delaying treatment due to the worry of financial concerns.

Animal companion insurance is one of the fastest growing voluntary employee benefits across the nation. The Cities of Portland, Madison, Newport Beach, and Santa Ana are some municipalities currently offering animal companion insurance as a standalone, voluntary benefit, or providing discounts to animal companion insurance company plans for their employees. This benefit helps demonstrate an employer's commitment to supporting work-life balance and fostering a positive workplace culture that values employees' holistic needs. Additionally, it can serve as a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining top talent, as prospective employees may prioritize

employers that offer comprehensive benefits packages that extend to their beloved pets. Ultimately, investing in animal companion insurance reflects an employer's recognition of the significant role pets play in employees' lives and reinforces the organization's commitment to their overall wellbeing.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to work with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and report back to the Board in writing in 60 days on the feasibility and associated costs to add animal companion insurance as a voluntary benefit for County employees, including options similar to existing governmental programs.

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