

California Considers Adoption of Controversial Veterinary Telehealth Bill

The California legislature is currently considering a controversial new telehealth bill that would dramatically expand the access to veterinary care for animal patients located in California. **AB 1399** would change California's existing law to permit a veterinarian-client-patient-relationship to be established solely via telemedicine.

Existing California law limits the practice of veterinary telemedicine to existing veterinarian-client-patient-relationships only, where the animal has previously been examined by the veterinarian, except in cases where the advice is given in an emergency. See the attached link to view the bill in its entirety: [Bill Text – AB-1399 Veterinary medicine: veterinarian-client-patient relationship: telehealth. \(ca.gov\)](#)

Proponents of AB 1399 argue that passage of this bill is necessary to make permanent the COVID-era relaxation of California's existing regulations, which permitted care virtually when local veterinary practices were inundated with new patients and human caretakers were dealing with challenging personal circumstances. They argue that California continues to deal with a shortage of veterinarians and telemedicine improves access to care for California animals, many of whom would not otherwise receive care at all. Attached are links to arguments and statements in support of the bill by Dr. Christie Long and the SFSPCA.

However, critics of AB 1399 warn of the unintended consequences of relaxing the existing regulations to California animals. In particular, the American Veterinary Medical Association has opposed the bill on this ground (**see the attached link**). While the California Veterinary Medical

Association had also opposed AB 1399 (**see the attached link**), it just recently amended its position after several new amendments were made to the bill. Attached is a copy of the letter published by the CVMA explaining the change of position: AB-1399-Friedman-NEUTRAL-position.pdf (cvma.net).

For the digital health community, the adoption of AB 1399 and permanent relaxation of existing veterinary care restrictions in California would be a clear win for digital health providers seeking to expand access to veterinary care to more of the state's animal residents. The adoption of AB 1399 in this state could also have the effect of influencing other states with similar restrictions in place to also consider relaxing their regulations.

The Veterinary Virtual Care Association, a global nonprofit association dedicated to developing standards for veterinary virtual care, is actively tracking the current status of veterinary telehealth laws around the country at the following website: The VVCA Telemedicine Regulatory Map – Veterinary Virtual Care Association. According to the VVCA's **regulatory reporting map**, Michigan, Connecticut and the District of Columbia are currently the only states not requiring that telemedicine be tied to a veterinarian-client-patient-relationship. If accurate, this means that California's adoption of AB 1399 would set an important national precedent for veterinary telemedicine law.