

# Digital hub for Australia's pets

September 5 2016, by Thomas Smith

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Researchers at Murdoch University have helped to build Australia's first ever online health database for pets.

[VetCompass Australia](#), Veterinary Companion Animal Surveillance System, will be officially launched across the country today.

With access to more information, the digital hub will make it easier for [veterinary](#) surgeons to diagnose and treat sick animals.

Harnessing big data in an accessible, central database will also offer greater support to researchers across a range of fields, including public health.

Professor Peter Irwin, Principal at Murdoch University's College of Veterinary Medicine and a Chief Investigator on the [VetCompass project](#), said: "This project will support research which will significantly, and almost immediately, advance our understanding of disease in veterinary clinical sciences."

VetCompass is based on a database of the same name which was first developed in the UK in 2007.

Collaboration between the Royal Veterinary College in the UK and the University of Sydney, the project investigated the range and frequency of companion animal health problems and identified risk factors with the most common disorders.

Vet clinics involved in the project shared stored information held in their practice management systems with clinics throughout the UK in a single, merged database.

The UK project has been hugely successful. More than 450 vet clinics signed up, with researchers able to study more than 11 million episodes of care, representing four million unique animals.

Research projects targeted numerous disorders that affect pets, including kidney disease, epilepsy, pyoderma (skin infection) and cancer.

Professor Paul McGreevy, from the University of Sydney, was involved in the launch of VetCompass UK and he's brought the project to Australia.

He said: "Initially looking only at the most popular pets – cats and dogs – as well as horses, for which little data exists, we envisage VetCompass eventually expanding to all companion animals in Australia."

VetCompass has been launched in collaboration with all seven Australian veterinary schools, including Murdoch University.

The consortium of veterinary schools secured Australian Research Council funding for the project, which will share information with the UK database.

"The Australian data may reveal different patterns of diseases and different breed predispositions because, to some extent, we have a separate gene pool to dogs and cats in the UK," said Professor McGreevy.

"Vets collect this information anyway and once VetCompass has its first 100 Australian practice signatories, data from the system will provide

researchers with access to a wealth of information.

"It's great news for pets – but we're also excited about learning more about how our relationship with companion animals can affect and inform human health."

Professor David Morrison, Deputy Vice Chancellor Research & Innovation at Murdoch University, said: "Murdoch's research focus is translational in nature. We aim to provide solutions to the challenges facing the world we live in.

"VetCompass has been very successful in the UK and Murdoch University has played a role in bringing the project to Australia."

Pet owners are asked to support the project by asking their vet clinics to join VetCompass.

Provided by Murdoch University

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