

## Mars Donates \$2 Million for Human-Pet Research

**Federal studies will document how interaction affects children, animals.**

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The Waltham Center for Pet Nutrition, a division of Mars Inc. of McLean, Va., recently committed more than \$2 million to the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) for studies about various aspects of pet ownership. This field is called Human-Animal Interaction research (HAI).

The NICHD, a division of the National Institutes of Health, will combine the donation with funding from the National Institute of Nursing Research to form what it says is the first formal program in human-animal interaction.

The donation will span four years and help fund NICHD studies in three areas: the effect of human-pet interaction on typical development and health; clinical trials that will focus on the role pets play in both physical and psychological therapeutic treatments; and the impact of animals on public health, including the cost-effectiveness of animals in reducing and preventing disease.

“NICHD is pleased to be able to support an expansion in HAI research,” said Peggy McCardle, Ph.D., chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch at NICHD. “Over the next four years, through our joint research initiative, we hope the scientific community will make great strides in understanding the significance of the relationships between animals and people—especially children. This information will inform how future generations decide how best to incorporate animals into their lives.”

HAI research has been around for several decades, but previous studies have been small scale, observational or anecdotal, according to Mars.

The new research aims to provide concrete evidence on how children perceive, relate to and think about animals and how pets in the home affect children’s social and emotional development.

The company also said that research is needed on how pets in the home affect children’s health (e.g. allergies, the immune system, asthma and obesity), as well as on issues such as when and how parents select pets for their families or children and how best to prevent injury from pets.