International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Protocols

INPLASY

Promoting Companion Animal End-of-Life Care: Exploring Companion Animal Guardians' Perspectives and Experiences

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - SSHRC Insight Development Grant (Canada).

Review Stage at time of this submission - The review has not yet started.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 19 June 2025 and was last updated on 19 June 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective The systematic review is the first step in a longer research project which aims to :
Objective 1 – To comprehensively investigate companion animal guardians' (CAGs) attitudes and desires to pursue companion animal end-of-life-care (CAEoLC);
Objective 2 – To systematically examine CAGs' challenges associated with accessing CAEoLC and their understanding of potential benefits of using CAEoLC; and
Objective 3 – To effectively address CAGs' challenges, improve CAEoLC services, and promote CAEoLC public education through CAEoLC practitioner discussions.

Condition being studied Stemming from human end-of-life care, companion animal end-of-life care (CAEoLC) aims to improve the quality of life for companion animals who have entered the final life stage. In addition to enhancing animal welfare, CAEoLC enables companion animal guardians (CAGs) with elder or unwell companion animals to take time to make the treatment decisions and build their coping capacity associated with the impending loss of their companion animals. Successful CAEoLC relies on timely and effective collaboration between CAGs and CAEoLC practitioners, including veterinary care professionals, veterinary social workers, animal protection organization employees, and other service providers. Although CAEoLC services are widely available in veterinary care and animal protection sectors across Canada, there is no comprehensive understanding of CAEoLC-specific experiences from the perspectives of CAGs, especially their desires to pursue CAEoLC, their challenges to accessing CAEoLC, and the potential benefits associated with using CAEoLC. The lack of CAG-driven knowledge prevents CAEoLC practitioners and organizations from improving their services, as well as promoting public education regarding CAEoLC. These knowledge deficits have triggered short-term negative impacts on the well-being among the companion animals, CAGs, and CAEoLC

practitioners in particular, and long-term influences on human-animal welfare in general.

METHODS

Search strategy

Search terms:
"companion animal" OR "pet" OR “house pet” OR “dog” OR “cat” OR “bird” OR “small animal” OR “fish” OR “reptile” OR “rodent”
AND
“end-of-life” OR “end of life” OR “pallia*” OR “palliative care” OR “hospice” OR “euthanasia” OR “assisted death” OR “assisted dying” OR “near death” OR “dying” OR “put down” OR “terminal illness”
AND
“care” OR “treatment” OR “veterinar*” OR “vet” OR “hospital”

Databases:
ProQuest
PubMed
Scopus
Ebscohost
Embase

Participant or population The study population includes companion animal guardians, or, more simply, pet owners. As stated above, the goal of the project is to understand the experience of companion animal guardians who have needed or are seeking end-of-life care for their pet.
Companion animals for this study include animals owned for the primary purpose of companionship. This excludes service animals and working animals, such as agricultural animals.

Intervention N/A.

Comparator N/A.

Study designs to be included Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method studies will be included.

Eligibility criteria Additional criteria: English. Peer-reviewed, Scholarly Journals 2015-2025.

Information sources Databases: ProQuest; PubMed; Scopus; Ebscohost Embase.

Main outcome(s)

Search date: 16.06.2025
ProQuest 3,379 (10 years, journal articles, English) (anywhere, abstract, abstract)
PubMed 2,668 (10 years, journal articles, English)
Scopus 3,956 (10 years, journal articles, English)
EbscoHost 4,583 (10 years, journal articles, English)
Embase 1,495 (10 years, journal articles, English)
Together: 9,812
Duplicates: 6,005
Screening has not yet begun for this project.

Data management All formal screening process will be done with the use of COVIDENCE. Covidence is a web-based systematic review management tool designed to streamline the process of conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses. While Covidence primarily focuses on systematic reviews, its principles of data management can be broadly applicable to various research contexts. Here are the particulars of data management using Covidence:

1. Importing Studies: Covidence allows researchers to efficiently import search results from bibliographic databases such as PubMed, Embase, and Cochrane Library. After conducting a systematic search, researchers can upload search results directly into Covidence, where they can screen and manage studies throughout the review process.

2. Screening and Selection: Covidence facilitates the screening and selection process by providing a user-friendly interface for reviewers to assess the eligibility of studies based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data management in this phase involves tracking the status of each study (e.g., included, excluded, or pending) and documenting reasons for exclusion.

3. Data Extraction: Once studies are selected for inclusion, Covidence supports data extraction by providing customizable forms for capturing relevant study characteristics, outcomes, and findings. Data management involves organizing extracted data systematically, making it easier to analyze and synthesize findings later.

4. Synthesis and Analysis: After completing data extraction and risk of bias assessment, Covidence supports the synthesis and analysis of findings through features such as descriptive summaries, forest plots, and subgroup analyses. Data management involves organizing synthesized findings and ensuring transparency in reporting methods and results.

5. Reporting and Exporting: Covidence allows researchers to generate reports and export data in various formats, including Microsoft Word, Excel, and RevMan.

Additional outcome(s) N/A.

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Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis Quality assessment: there are two stages of the formal screening process. In the first stage, two student researcher reviewers will use COVIDENCE to screen the title and abstract independently. In the second stage, two reviewers screen full text of the articles selected based on stage 1.

Risk of bias analysis: Covidence includes tools for assessing the risk of bias in individual studies, particularly in systematic reviews. Researchers can use predefined risk of bias domains or customize assessment criteria based on the review's specific objectives. Data management in this phase involves documenting judgments about the risk of bias for each included study, which informs the interpretation of review findings. However, we will not apply a risk of bias assessment scale due to the fact that it is a social science based review that uses primarily qualitative methodology to report results.

Strategy of data synthesis After completing the screening and data extraction phases in Covidence, we will export the extracted data, including relevant study characteristics, outcomes, and findings, into a format compatible with qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo) or spreadsheets (e.g., Microsoft Excel).

A research team member will then engage with student research assistants to collaboratively study the extracted data, through a thematic analysis by reading through the extracted data to gain an understanding of the breadth and depth of the information collected. An initial list of themes will be developed, which will include similarities, gaps, and imperatives found in the existing literature.

We will iteratively review and refine the identified themes through a second-pass comparison and triangulation of data across included studies. This will result in the development of richer sub-themes that will target practical issues relating to research, practice, and policy, in the experience of pet end-of-life care. The goal will be to identify key issues and imperatives for improvement that will inform future qualitative research on pet end-of-life care.

We will then report the results of the thematic analysis in the systematic review, integrating the identified themes into the narrative synthesis or discussion section.

Subgroup analysis N/A.

Sensitivity analysis N/A.

Language restriction English.

Country(ies) involved Canada.

Keywords companion animals; pets; pet guardians; end-of-life care; euthanasia; palliative care; pet hospice; veterinary approaches.

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