

Responses for Questions on HR 8473

Question 1: In your testimony you state that children in tribal communities have disproportionately higher hospitalization rates for dog bites, especially in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta. What are the key contributing factors to these statistics?

- Animal overpopulation is the main cause of this issue. Other contributing factors would be that most dogs in rural Alaska generally live outside and that the footprint of communities is physically small, which means there is a lot of opportunity for interface between dogs and children. Across the country, children are at a higher risk of dog bite injury than adults ([CDC, 2026](#)).

Question 1A: How can Congress work to address this phenomenon?

- Passing this bill would help the Alaska Tribal Health System address the root cause of this issue, overpopulation of dogs. Fertility control, through surgical or chemical sterilization, has been found to be the most effective method on overpopulation control ([Frank, 2024](#)). With federal authority to provide these services, the Alaska Tribal Health System would be empowered to create unique programs and services to fill this critical gap, as we have done with access to healthcare, behavioral health and dental services.

Question 2: From a cultural and mental health standpoint, what are the long-term impacts of dog bites and zoonotic disease transmission?

- This isn't my field of expertise nor is there much research on this topic in Alaska, but there is commonly accepted mental health impacts associated with this problem.
 - At the personal level, just like anybody else, people in rural Alaska experience stress and guilt when they are unable to access the care needed for their animals. This becomes especially acute when animals are sick, nearing the end of life or when there have unwanted litters of puppies.
 - There is also fear and distress caused by dog bites or rabies outbreaks. Post-traumatic stress disorder, dog phobia, nightmares and symptoms of anxiety and avoidance behaviors have all been associated with dog bites ([Westgarth, 2024](#)).
 - Animals control through the culling of animals is generally conducted by Village Police Officers, Tribal/municipal employees and individuals and is the most common means of population control in rural Alaska ([Meythaler-Meyers et al, 2025](#)). While there haven't been published research on this topic in Alaska, research from northern Canada and other countries has

linked culling with depression, PTSD and community tension ([Park, 2020](#); [Baker et al., 2020](#)).

- A 2019-2024 survey of 390 YK Delta residents from 25 communities found that 41% had been bitten by dogs, 69% fear stray dogs, 75% report dogs spreading waste and garbage around their communities and 71.2% believed that stray dogs were a problem in their community ([Meythaler-Meyers et al., 2025](#)). 50% reported mental stress from the need to cull dogs. At the community level, this issue presents an ongoing community wellness problem associated with safety, sanitation and security of subsistence resources. As such, in 2022, the Alaska Federation of Natives recognized the lack of veterinary care as a public health crisis ([AFN, 2022](#)).
- Alaska Native culture has a strong focus on animals from a spiritual, emotional and cultural standpoint. For at least the last 12,000 years, dogs have played an integral role in Alaska Native culture for transportation, protection, hunting and companionship. Although their role in Alaska Native culture has changed, 95% of survey respondents mentioned earlier responded that they like dogs and dog mushing is still an important part of communities across our state.

Question 3: The Pre and Post Exposure Prophylaxis schedule of dosages for rabies are hard to resource in rural areas. Please describe the impact of the lack of readily available medication places on rural health systems, and how HR 8473, if enacted, would work to address this strain.

- In the incident I mentioned during my testimony, there were not enough PEP available in Alaska or with CDC to treat all 40 people. In this case, YKHC had to make an emergency request through the manufacture secure PEP. This was a public health emergency in the truest sense. A midrange and likely very conservative estimate of PEP administration cost per person in rural Alaska is \$7,755 ([Meythaler-Mullins et al., 2025](#)). It is likely higher than this as patients or providers need to travel for treatment, adding additional costs such as airfare, lodging and lost wages. It is estimated that YKHC spent \$279,180 on PEP in 2024 alone.
- The need to respond to dog bites and rabies outbreaks creates a large burden on Tribal Health Organization Environmental Health offices and medical staff in terms of responding to incidents and conducting contact tracing. Rabies symptoms are similar to distemper so there are also times when public health emergency responses are triggered although a rabies outbreak is not occurring.

- By focusing on prevention instead of follow-up treatment, HR 8473 would reduce the incidence of these events, saving time and resources that are currently spread across individuals, communities, insurance companies and healthcare organizations.