

## **Finding Help for a Pet with a Behavioral Problem**

It is extremely important for pet owners to report any change in an animal's behavior to a veterinarian before starting a behavior modification program. Behavioral signs may be the first or only indication that an animal has an underlying health problem. Because neurological diseases (including cognitive dysfunction/senility), endocrine disorders, skin disorders, infections, pain, and diseases of internal organs can affect a pet's behavior, y veterinarian will need to evaluate the pet for medical conditions that might be causing or contributing to the problem. Early diagnosis will allow for early intervention, which provides the best opportunity for successful treatment. If any of the signs are due to pain or discomfort, then reporting, diagnosing and treating them are also in the best interest of the pet's welfare.

If the problem has behavioral components or proves to be primarily behavioral, veterinarians and their technical staff have varying degrees of training in animal behavior. Depending on the problem and his/her level of expertise, the veterinarian can either advise the owner on an appropriate treatment regimen or suggest a referral to a board certified veterinary behaviorist ([www.dacvb.org](http://www.dacvb.org)) or a veterinarian with a professional interest in behavior. For assistance, consider contacting the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior's Web Site at [www.avsonline.org](http://www.avsonline.org). This site enables pet owners to search for individuals in their area willing to manage behavior issues. For a more thorough description of the various professionals who work in the field of animal behavior, see the accompanying position statement on "Types of Behavior Professionals"