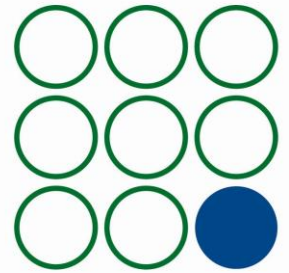




THE KENNEL CLUB
GENETICS CENTRE

AT THE ANIMAL HEALTH TRUST



media *release*

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GIVE A DOG A GENOME – NEW PROJECT WILL REVOLUTIONISE DOG HEALTH THROUGH PIONEERING CANINE GENETIC RESEARCH

**Animal Health Trust, Kennel Club and dog breeders unite to create
the UK's largest canine genome bank by sequencing genomes of 50
different breeds of dog**

Give a Dog a Genome is a brand new initiative from leading UK veterinary charity, the Animal Health Trust (AHT), to improve dog health by using the latest technology available in genetic research.

The Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the AHT, under Dr Cathryn Mellersh, is world-renowned for its pioneering genetic research to better understand, and eradicate, inherited diseases in purebred dogs.

By analysing DNA from healthy dogs alongside those of the same breed affected with a specific disease, a team of experts, based at the AHT in Suffolk, identify the genetic mutation(s) responsible and develop DNA tests that dog breeders can use to breed healthier dogs. DNA test results normally indicate if a dog is Clear, Affected or a Carrier of the faulty gene(s) and this knowledge allows breeders to select the best mate to ensure they breed puppies free from that disease.

Give a Dog a Genome seeks to take this expertise to the next level by using the latest technology to sequence the entire genomes (all 2.4 billion letters of DNA) of 50 dogs, from 50 different breeds, by the end of 2016 to radically enhance understanding of the canine genome.

In doing so, the AHT will create the UK's largest canine genome bank, gaining a much better understanding of which DNA changes are neutral and those which are likely to have a negative effect on dog health. By sequencing DNA from 50 different breeds of dog the genome bank will be as diverse as possible and will vastly increase the pace of canine genetics research and the speed with which new DNA tests are developed.

The AHT is appealing to dog breed communities to help fund this project to maximise the number of genomes that can be sequenced and subsequently the health benefits for purebred dogs.

The Kennel Club Charitable Trust has made a significant donation of £50,000, enough to sequence 25 genomes. In order to double the number of genomes that can be sequenced, the AHT is asking stakeholders for each breed (owners, breeders, Breed Clubs etc.) to raise £1,000, with each donation being matched by £1000 from the Kennel Club Charitable Trust to meet the £2,000 required to sequence each genome. In return, the AHT will sequence the entire genome of a dog from that breed until 50 breeds have been sequenced, creating a canine genome bank with maximum impact.

Breeds will be selected on a first come first served basis until the 50 places have all been allocated. All enquiries can be made through Breed Health Coordinators who will liaise directly with the AHT. For more information please visit www.aht.org.uk/gdg

Dr Cathryn Mellersh, Head of the Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the AHT, said: "Give a Dog a Genome represents an unprecedented initiative to utilise the latest DNA sequencing technology available to the Animal Health Trust to improve the health of all purebred dogs and countless future generations of dogs.

“The DNA tests we develop from our research are incredibly powerful in helping breeders to better control, and in time, eradicate, inherited diseases from their lines, reducing the number of dogs suffering from painful and debilitating conditions such as inherited forms of blindness or ataxia, without necessarily restricting the gene pool of that breed. It’s about making smarter breeding decisions.

“The AHT has been making significant improvements to dog health through genetics for over 20 years, but the knowledge we have the potential to gain from this project could very quickly accelerate us forward another 20 years.

“I hope dog breed communities will embrace our crowdfunding approach to funding this project and appreciate that this is an initiative to help all breeds of dog, not just those 50 breeds we can sequence now. Every genome we sequence represents a permanent resource which will contribute towards our research for years to come.

“Give a Dog a Genome is the start of something really new and exciting in terms of understanding the canine genome and optimising how this knowledge can be used to improve dog health.”

Aimee Llewellyn, Head of Health and Research at the Kennel Club, said: “The Give a Dog a Genome project will have a substantial positive impact on the future health of purebred dogs, and is another example of the pioneering work being carried out by the Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the Animal Health Trust.

“Advances in science such as this one enable dog breeders to make even more informed breeding decisions to ensure they are doing all they can to help eliminate inherited conditions in dogs and we look forward to watching the project develop and yield positive results.”

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For further information, please contact:

Katherine Lawson, AHT press office, 01638 751000 ext 1511 or 07341 737 746

Photographs & Videos:

Images can be requested from the AHT press office.

Additional notes:

- The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk