Educational Sponsor

Nurturing the Next Generation of Veterinary Leaders

How Chewy Health is Building a Brighter Tomorrow for Future Veterinarians

"To diversify a field, you must actively provide the resources and support necessary for those you wish to lead to believe they can do so. It's the opportunities we create for underrepresented individuals that will make the difference."

— Hannah Huff, 2025 University of Georgia DVM Candidate and 2024 Chewy Veterinary Leader



Chewy Veterinary Leaders Program

At Chewy Health, we envision an inclusive community of veterinary professionals, equipped with the resources to thrive in their careers, find balance in their lives, and support each other along the way. The Chewy Veterinary Leaders Program, created in partnership with the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), provides financial support, professional development resources, and peer mentorship to help students navigate the challenging transition from veterinary school to professional practice. Each year, this program selects 15 veterinary students from underrepresented groups to receive a wealth of resources with the goal of easing their journeys into veterinary medicine, fostering their leadership potential, and ultimately encouraging a more diverse generation of veterinarians.

We believe supporting the success of people from all backgrounds is the path to building stronger practice teams, normalizing a healthier culture, and providing better care. By investing in a new type of program, we can help address some of the most pressing challenges facing the profession today—from lack of representation to the burden of student debt to the impact of burnout on mental and physical health -- uniquely tackling multiple challenges at once. Focusing on veterinary students allows us to help future veterinary leaders build a strong foundation for their careers while still in school.

For Alexandra Yambilis, 2025 Cornell University DVM Candidate and a 2024 Chewy Veterinary Leader, "Early intervention and career planning can make a huge difference. It's fantastic to get leadership experience and build those connections early on." We officially launched the Chewy

Veterinary Leaders Program at the start of 2024 with an inaugural class of smart, passionate, and committed veterinary students. Over the course of our first year, we have observed three key takeaways that have the potential to yield even bigger results if adopted industry wide.

1 Student scholarships are immensely valuable but go further when they're part of a holistic support system.

We know that financial stress weighs heavily on many veterinary students and that students from underrepresented groups may face even greater financial burdens. To help lighten the load, each participant in the program receives a $20,000 scholarship, which is paid directly to their institution. But at this stage of students' veterinary careers, there are a variety of day-to-day needs that require more than just financial support.

For Casey Lavender, 2025 Mississippi State University DVM Candidate and 2024 Chewy Veterinary Leader, "This program is so much more than just a scholarship... It's support. Not just financially but also mentally and socially. The authenticity, genuineness, and intentionality that went into this program meant I was able to invest in more reliable transportation for externships, immerse myself in the veterinary community, and even resume studying for my MBA. But more than that, it brought me together with some incredible leaders in the profession and peers I will grow alongside for years to come."

2 Building community through mentorship and networking lays a powerful foundation for a stable career.

Mentorship is the cornerstone of the Chewy Veterinary Leaders Program. Every class meets regularly in groups facilitated by a trained, peer support leader via our partner, MentorVet. Through these regular peer support sessions, students can authentically connect with each other by discussing challenges they're facing, seeking advice, and exploring self-chosen topics, which range from imposter syndrome to navigating conflict in the workplace to managing finances.

As James Desir, DVM, the 2024 cohort's peer support leader explains, "This new generation of veterinarians is very different from those that have come before them. From navigating the pandemic and with advancements in social media, they are more connected and also more isolated than ever before. They are desperately seeking community. This program offers them that community while accepting and applauding their individuality."

In addition to regular virtual meetings, the students gathered for an in-person event, at Chewy's headquarters in Florida where students participated in leadership sessions, team building activities, and networking opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, it gave the students the chance to form lasting relationships with their peers.

3 Resources that grow and evolve are key to easing the transition into the next phase of students' veterinary journeys.

"I've never experienced such rapid cohesion and genuine buy-in for a program centered on young professionals' growth," said Dr. Desir. "The 'why' is established early and often, and it is supported by a flexible, autonomous structure and consistent community-building touchpoints."

It was natural to expand our partnership with MentorVet to provide the same structure beyond graduation as our Chewy Veterinary Leaders transition to the next stage in their careers. Program participants will receive a scholarship for MentorVet Leap's six-month early-career mentorship program, which they are encouraged to go through together as a cohort. We will also offer opportunities for alumni so graduates can remain connected as they begin their professional journeys.

Looking Ahead: Building a Lasting Legacy

As we prepare to welcome our second class in 2025, we remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting the veterinary profession. Applications are open now for second-year veterinary students at **awards.aavmc.org**.

The success of the Chewy Veterinary Leaders Program reminds us that the future of veterinary medicine depends on fostering the next generation of leaders. We are proud to partner with incredible organizations like the Diversity Veterinary Medicine Coalition, Pawsibilities Vet Med, and BlendVET in this important work. And we're just getting started.