A first-of-its-kind program is now underway at the School of Veterinary Medicine to reduce disease and behavior problems among cats and dogs housed in animal shelters.

Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program aims to improve the welfare and “adoptability” of dogs and cats in shelters by providing diagnostic and medical support, population health studies, and specialized veterinary training in all aspects of shelter medicine.

The program is made possible by a $2.2 million grant from Maddie's Fund, a pet-rescue foundation headquartered in Alameda, California.

UC Davis veterinarian Janet Foley, director of the new program, says, “A large number of animals come into shelters healthy but get sick once they are exposed to animals that are not healthy. The youngest and oldest are most severely affected, as are animals that stay in shelters for prolonged periods. We need to work together to prevent the spread of diseases in shelters, which calls for a large-population approach.”

For cats, the most common problems in shelters are upper respiratory infection, gastrointestinal disease, feline infectious peritonitis, and retroviral diseases such as feline leukemia. For dogs, serious problems continue to be parvovirus and distemper.

“UC Davis is making a huge statement with the launch of Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program,” says Laurie Peek, consulting veterinarian for Maddie’s Fund. “Now a premier school of veterinary medicine is bringing national attention to the increasing importance of animal shelters in society, the necessity to train veterinarians to work in shelters and the need to make shelters safer and healthier places for our companion animals.”

Several Northern California shelters and the school’s Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, Center for Companion Animal Health, and Center for Animals in Society will play a role in the shelter medicine program. Nearly a