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Veterinary Telehealth Transforming Animal Care in India

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Introduction

Imagine it's a rainy evening and your pet suddenly appears unwell-perhaps a slight limp or a patch of irritated skin. A decade ago, the only options were to wait and watch or travel through traffic to a crowded veterinary clinic. Today, technology is transforming this experience through veterinary telehealth.

Veterinary telehealth refers to technology-enabled animal healthcare services such as teletriage, where veterinarians assess whether a case is urgent, and telemedicine, where consultations, follow-ups, and treatment advice are provided remotely. In India, this approach is gaining rapid momentum as digital connectivity expands across both urban and rural regions.

As the country moves toward a digitally integrated livestock sector, initiatives led by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying under the National Digital Livestock Mission are promoting tele-veterinary services and digital livestock databases. This shift is particularly important in a nation where one veterinarian may serve thousands of animals, creating a significant gap in access to timely care.

Through platforms such as Bharat Pashudhan and emerging private applications, veterinarians can now consult remotely-whether advising a pet owner in Chandigarh or supporting a dairy farmer managing Murrah buffaloes in Hisar (Haryana). Veterinary telehealth is therefore becoming a vital bridge between digital innovation and accessible animal healthcare in India

Defining the Digital Toolkit

Understanding veterinary telehealth starts with a few key terms:

- **Telehealth:** A broad term covering all digital tools used for remote veterinary services, including education, advice, monitoring, and consultations.
- **Tele-triage:** The use of digital communication to assess an animal's condition and determine whether it requires an emergency clinic visit or can wait.
- **Telemedicine:** The most advanced form of virtual care, involving diagnosis and treatment plans. It generally requires an established Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR).

The Present Landscape

Veterinary telehealth has evolved from a temporary solution during the pandemic to an essential system helping manage India's 50+ crore livestock population despite the limited number of veterinarians.

- **Digital Animal Identity:** Platforms such as Bharat Pashudhan allow animals to receive a "Pashu Aadhaar" (12-digit unique ID), enabling veterinarians to access vaccination, breeding, and health records remotely during tele-consultations.
- **Efficient Emergency Screening:** Through the 1962 Mobile Veterinary Unit (MVU) service, farmers can send photos or videos of symptoms (e.g., mastitis or FMD lesions) for quick tele-triage. This ensures mobile units are dispatched mainly for critical cases, while minor problems are handled via digital advice or e-prescriptions.
- **Monitoring Dairy Production:** Telehealth also supports dairy farmers by enabling remote follow-ups for metabolic disorders, ration balancing, and recovery monitoring of high-yielding animals.
- **Rural Access Through Digital Centres**: In villages with limited smartphone access, over 1.6 lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs) function as digital clinics where farmers can connect with veterinarians via video consultation.

Overall, telehealth is improving accessibility, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making in India's veterinary healthcare system.

Pros and Cons

Feature	The Impact in India
PROS	
Stress Reduction	In India's extreme heat, transporting sick animals—especially large livestock or brachycephalic dog breeds like Pug—can increase the risk of heatstroke.

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	Telehealth allows animals to remain in a familiar and shaded environment while receiving veterinary advice.
Biosecurity & Disease Control	During outbreaks such as Lumpy Skin Disease or Glanders, tele-consultations reduce farm-to-farm disease transmission by limiting physical movement of veterinarians.
Expert Access for Rural Areas	Farmers in remote regions can consult specialists from institutions like Indian Veterinary Research Institute or Rajasthan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences without travelling long distances.
Economic Savings	Telehealth eliminates travel expenses that often exceed treatment costs for small and marginal farmers
CONS	
Hands-On Limitation	Many veterinary diagnoses in India require physical examination, such as rectal palpation for pregnancy or checking rumen motility in dairy animals.
Legal Constraints	Regulations from the Veterinary Council of India require an established Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) before prescribing certain drugs.
Connectivity Gaps	Remote and hilly regions may still experience weak internet connectivity, affecting video consultations and accurate clinical assessment.
Risk of Quackery	Digital platforms can be misused by unqualified practitioners, increasing the risk of improper treatments and antimicrobial resistance.

The goal of telehealth in India is not to replace the vet's visit, but to ensure that the vet's visit is truly necessary. It acts as a digital filter that prioritizes critical cases while providing immediate relief for minor ones.

The Future

The future of veterinary care in India is shifting from reactive treatment to proactive, data-driven health management.

- **Smart Monitoring:** With integration under the National Digital Livestock Mission, wearable technologies such as rumen boluses and smart ear tags are increasingly used in livestock. These devices monitor parameters like heart rate, rumen activity, and heat cycles, alerting farmers before productivity declines. For companion animals, smart collars can detect abnormal behaviors—such as excessive scratching or changes in gait—helping veterinarians identify potential health issues early.
- **AI-Powered Diagnostics:** Artificial intelligence is emerging as a valuable support system for veterinarians. AI-based tools can rapidly analyze X-rays or skin lesion images,

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assisting clinicians in making faster and more accurate decisions. Predictive systems like NADRES v2 also help forecast disease outbreaks such as Lumpy Skin Disease or Foot-and-Mouth Disease, enabling early preventive action.

- **The "Phygital" Model:** The future lies in combining physical and digital care. Routine monitoring and follow-ups occur digitally, while veterinarians provide hands-on treatment for complex procedures. This hybrid approach ensures continuous care, better monitoring, and reduced stress for animals.

Conclusion

Veterinary telehealth, artificial intelligence, and wearable technologies are reshaping the future of animal healthcare in India by making veterinary services more accessible, efficient, and proactive. These innovations are not meant to replace traditional veterinary practice but to extend its reach, particularly in a country with a vast livestock population and limited veterinary workforce. Supported by initiatives such as the National Digital Livestock Mission, digital platforms are enabling remote consultations, continuous health monitoring, and data-driven decision-making for both livestock and companion animals. As regulatory frameworks evolve under the guidance of the Veterinary Council of India, the integration of telehealth with conventional veterinary care will strengthen disease surveillance, improve productivity, and enhance animal welfare. Ultimately, this digital transformation promises a more resilient veterinary system capable of delivering timely and high-quality healthcare to every animal, from household pets to India's vast herds of livestock.

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