Pet Care Innovation Prize

Startups across the pet industry can apply for a chance to win up to $50,000 in non-dilutive funding

ST. LOUIS, Aug. 13, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- Today, the Pet Care Innovation Prize powered by Purina opened the application process for the tenth year of the competition. Each year, Purina, a global leader in pet care, hosts the prize competition to select five pet-focused startups from across the country to receive $25,000 each in non-dilutive funding. Winners also receive mentorship support from leaders from Purina and Active Capital as the startups work to scale their businesses. Early-stage companies that are redefining the future of pet care through novel products or services can apply for the 2026 Pet Care Innovation Prize here by Sept. 21, 2025.

"As we mark a decade of the Pet Care Innovation Prize, we're incredibly proud of how this program has become a catalyst for breakthrough innovations that benefit pets and their people," said Patrick Mullen, co-lead of Purina's 9 Square Ventures group and vice president of strategic planning at Purina. "Over the past 10 years, we've had the privilege of supporting remarkable entrepreneurs who are reshaping the pet care landscape with their creative solutions. We're excited to open applications once again and discover the next wave of innovators who will help drive the future of pet care forward."

The Pet Care Innovation team at Purina and partners at Active Capital will review applications and announce five winners in early 2026. The selected winners will receive $25,000 in non-dilutive prize money, as well as the opportunity to participate in an accelerator boot camp at Purina's headquarters in St. Louis, MO. They will also have the chance to compete for an additional $25,000 grand prize at a live pitch competition at the Global Pet Expo in Orlando, FL in March 2026.

A Decade of Pet Care Innovation
Since partnering with investing leaders at Active Capital to create the Pet Care Innovation Prize in 2016, Purina has awarded more than $1.5 million in non-dilutive funding to help early-stage startups take their businesses to the next level. Past prize winners have gone on to successfully scale their businesses, secure additional rounds of funding and be acquired by leading companies in the veterinary and pet care spaces.

"Participating in Purina's Pet Care Innovation Prize was a pivotal moment for SwiftPaws. What started as a garage project born from my passion for giving dogs better enrichment has grown into a company that's helped tens of thousands of pets stay active and engaged," said Meghan Wolfgram, founder of SwiftPaws, a health and wellness brand for pets offering lure coursing kits and more. SwiftPaws was a 2024 Pet Care Innovation Prize winning company and, Meghan has also appeared on Shark Tank, where she secured a deal with Lori Greiner.

"The support and mentorship we received through the program was invaluable as we navigated our transition from serving professional canine sports to bringing that same quality enrichment directly to pet owners' backyards. The Prize didn't just provide resources – it connected us with a community that truly understands the importance of improving pets' quality of life through innovation and helped us scale our mission of making professional-grade exercise and mental stimulation accessible to dogs everywhere," said Wolfgram.

Another Pet Care Innovation Prize success story is 2019 finalist Basepaws, a petcare genetics company that offers screening tools for the early recognition of disease risks in pets, which has since gone on to be acquired by Zoetis, a leading animal health company.

"Winning Purina's Pet Care Innovation Prize in 2019 came at a crucial time for Basepaws. We were navigating significant resource constraints while working to bring the world's first comprehensive at-home cat DNA test to market," said Anna Skaya, founder of Basepaws. "The Prize provided not just financial support, but credibility and industry validation that opened doors for us. That recognition helped propel us forward—leading to opportunities like our Shark Tank appearance and ultimately our acquisition in 2022. The Pet Care Innovation Prize believed in our mission to give cat owners the same genetic insights that dog and human owners had access to. That early support was instrumental in helping us close the gap in feline healthcare and expand our impact across the pet genetics landscape. Today, I run AniVC, a venture fund focused on backing the next generation of pet health innovators—and it all traces back to this moment."

Shameless Pets, which makes pet treats using upcycled ingredients to combat food waste, was a 2019 Pet Care Innovation Prize finalist. Since participating in the pitch competition, Shameless Pets has expanded its distribution nationwide in top retailers including Chewy, Amazon Prime, Pet Supplies Plus, Whole Foods and more.

"Being recognized as a Pet Care Innovation Prize winner was a game-changer for Shameless Pets. We had launched just two years earlier with a bold vision to tackle food waste by turning surplus ingredients into nutritious pet treats, but as a startup pioneering the upcycled pet food category, we faced the challenge of educating both retailers and consumers about our approach," said James Bello, co-founder of Shameless Pets. "The Prize provided us with an incredible platform and the backing of an industry leader like Purina, which was instrumental in helping people understand that upcycled means innovative, not inferior. The recognition and resources we gained through the program fueled our expansion and helped position Shameless Pets as a serious player driving meaningful change in how the pet food industry thinks about ingredients and waste."

Bringing the Pet Care Innovation Network to SUPERZOO and Beyond

At this week's SUPERZOO, one of the largest pet industry trade shows in North America, Purina and Active Capital are bringing past finalists and prospective Pet Care Innovation Prize participants together for a variety of events, including panels, pitch competitions, investor networking and more. SUPERZOO attendees are welcome to view the LAUNCH Pitch finale co-sponsored by Purina and WPA, where three startups will compete for $10,000. More information on the pitch competition can be found here.

Purina and Active Capital will also take the Pet Care Innovation Network on the road, hosting networking events for entrepreneurs in New York on August 27 and in Scottsdale, Arizona on September 8. The events are open to the public and those interested in attending can register here.

For more information about the Pet Care Innovation Prize powered by Purina, visit PetCareInnovation.net.

About Purina

Nestlé Purina PetCare creates richer lives for pets and the people who love them. Founded in 1894, Purina has helped dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives by offering scientifically based nutritional innovations.

Purina manufactures some of the world's most trusted and popular pet care products, including Purina ONE, Pro Plan, Friskies and Tidy Cats. Our more than 11,000 U.S. associates take pride in our trusted pet food, treat and litter brands that feed 46 million dogs and 68 million cats every year. Nearly 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians, and pet care experts ensure our commitment to unsurpassed quality and nutrition.

Over the past five years, Purina has contributed more than $150 million towards organizations that bring, and keep, people and pets together, as well as those that help our communities and environment thrive. Purina is part of Nestlé, a global leader in Nutrition, Health and Wellness. For more information, visit **purina.com** or **subscribe here** to get the latest Purina news.

About Active Capital:
Active Capital is a St. Louis-based impact investing leader, helping startups and investors come together to grow innovative products and initiatives. Active Capital manages the Pet Care Innovation Prize.

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