

OPINION

## Microchipping your pets doesn't have to be expensive. Paying for registration is a scam.

The use of microchips significantly increases the chance that a lost pet will be returned to its family, reducing euthanasia of unclaimed pets.



Dr. Gary Michelson operates the free Found Animals Microchip Registry *David Hume Kennerly*

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When I had my rescue Whippet [microchipped](#) – the [most reliable means](#) of permanent pet identification and return to owner – the veterinarian charged me \$75 for the microchip and the "procedure." That was in 2005. I was unaware that the ["procedure"](#) was nothing more than a subcutaneous

injection, similar to any other injection that a cat or dog might receive, such as puppy shots or rabies vaccination.

When I paid the bill, I was handed the paperwork to register the microchip. The microchip, which is quite small, has [no power source](#). It simply shows a barcode or number sequence when interrogated by a handheld scanner device. It is that number

that the chip seller requires you to register so that if the pet is lost, it can be scanned by animal control, most veterinarians, and others and then tracked back to the pet's owner.

The charge at the time for the registration was \$19.95 for the initial registration and then \$9.95 per year, each year thereafter, to keep the registration active. I went ahead and signed up.

## Identifying and protecting animals

Then came [Hurricane Katrina](#) with televised images of abandoned pets stranded on rooftops, hopelessly [swimming in](#)

[desperation](#), and with some being pulled into passing boats. For lack of identification, [most of those animals](#) that did survive were never reunited with their families.

I was devastated. I had always been an advocate for animals. In my third year in medical school in the 1970s, I refused to participate in the “[dog lab](#)” that required students to remove healthy organs from living dogs.

Following the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, I decided to bear the cost of providing these microchips as widely as possible and for as close to cost as possible – which I found to be about \$5 – and to provide [lifelong pet registration](#) absolutely for free.



The use of microchips [significantly increases](#) the chance that a lost pet will be returned to its family, and in turn, can dramatically [reduce euthanasia](#) of [unclaimed pets](#). It also saves shelters money by

reducing the number of days a pet is kept before its family is located.

This system is so effective that [in 2020, California passed a law](#) prohibiting public

animal shelters and animal control agencies from releasing a dog or cat to an owner seeking to reclaim or adopt the animal [unless it is or will be microchipped](#).

So what is the problem?

In general, shelters source microchips from the lowest bidder, with no consideration of the cost to be passed on to the pet's new owner. Through this process, unaware owners are funneled into paying outrageous charges for services that are freely available. Many simply choose not to, leaving their pets [chipped but unregistered](#), utterly defeating the very purpose of the chip.

I have no problem with companies that readily disclose to new customers that they offer absolutely free pet registrations but, in addition, offer "concierge" services that provide greatly expanded recovery services for those who wish to pay for those additional services.

## Registering your pets – for free?

So my purpose is two-fold. First, I want to make pet owners aware that, regardless of what company provided the microchip, that any chip can be registered with one of the free registries for life.

And second, to put the municipal animal services and veterinarians who purchase these chips on notice, that they should make their decisions not just on the minimal cost of the microchip alone, but rather on the total costs that their clients will be forced to pay for the microchip and the registration. These same parties should advise their clients, regardless of from whom they purchase the chips, that there are high-quality services providing free lifelong pet registrations.

*Dr. Gary Michelson is the founder and funder of the [Michelson Found Animals Foundation](#), which operates the completely free [Found Animals Pet Microchip Registry](#). The registry was recently acquired by pet health insurance company [Pethealth](#), which also operates its own free pet registry.*