

The PON International Preservation Alliance



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PONIPA.org



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PIPA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, volunteer-led group founded in 2025 with international members. The vision is to establish the Polish Lowland Sheepdog as the gold-standard for canine health. The core mission is to create a cooperative, worldwide community to preserve genetic diversity. Scientific evidence shows PONs have extremely low genetic diversity, risking breed loss without intervention. PIPA will create a Pedigree Database and Semen Banking to maximize genetic diversity and provide support and education to breeders and members.

THE VISION AND MISSION

PIPA's vision is to make the Polish Lowland Sheepdog the gold standard for canine health. The mission is to create a cooperative worldwide PON community that will focus on initiatives to better understand health problems, develop cooperative solutions to those, and preserve the genetic diversity of the breed.

The problems faced by the breed cannot be managed by a single breeder, a single club, or even a single continent. They require global cooperation, and PIPA aims to make that cooperation easier.

GENETIC DIVERSITY

The Current State of the Breed

When considering many of the difficult health problems found in the breed, genetic diversity is the ultimate reason why—most health problems can be traced back to the shallow gene pool.

Scientific evidence establishes that genetic diversity is a problem in PONs, compared to other breeds. A study found that genetic diversity in PONs is among the lowest of all breeds tested to date. The breed has kept only 26% of genetic diversity that exists in canids. One of the most alarming findings was the extreme lack of genetic diversity in regions of the genome that control the immune system, potentially explaining allergies and other autoimmune disorders in our dogs.¹

Another study found that inbreeding measures were high and genetic variability was small compared to other dog breeds.²

Surveys produced by various breed clubs suggest that, even though PONs are generally healthy, the health conditions that are most prevalent would be better addressed through international collaboration.

For decades, PONs have been a hardy breed. However, based on current breeding practices, the gene pool will almost certainly continue to shrink, and deliberate intervention is needed to protect the existing gene pool. Genetic diversity in a closed population (such as a breed) is much more easily lost than gained.

As the gene pool shrinks, we will start to see an increase in the frequency of certain diseases, a depression or reduction of fertility, and eventually, these two factors combined will likely lead to losing the breed.

Key Finding:

The Polish Lowland Sheepdog retains only 26% of existing canid genetic diversity — and has among the lowest genetic diversity measured in any breed.

A GLOBAL SOLUTION

In order to preserve the breed for the future, there must exist an international organization solely dedicated to the health of the breed. This organization needs to research PON health issues, and provide access to a central PON database to monitor

the global state of the breed. This organization needs to make international collaboration as easy as possible and provide support to move health decisions forward. PIPA was founded to fill this need.

PIPA is positioned to implement solutions that will maximize the breed's surviving genetic diversity. PIPA has a number of initiatives, only some of which are outlined below.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Initiative 1: International Pedigree Database

An international PON pedigree database would allow any person, member or not, to look up the ancestry of any PON. With the owner's consent, additional searchable information can be attached to the pedigree, such as health tests, whether or not the dog is available for breeding or has frozen semen, health problems, location, owner's contact information, etc. This will make it easier to find optimal mates for planned breedings.

However, for most breeders, the choice of stud is geographically limited, which can lead to inbreeding. To help solve this problem, PIPA proposes to establish a network of semen banks.

Initiative 2: The International Semen Bank

A second initiative is to establish an international semen banking system. Currently, shipping frozen semen across large distances can be prohibitively expensive. This can keep European breeders from using studs located in the Americas, and vice versa, even if that stud would likely be a better match than local studs.

PIPA will invite breeders to collect semen from their dogs and, retaining full control of breeding decisions, allow PIPA to coordinate shipping and storage to regional bank locations. For example, PIPA will ship semen collected from several dogs from America to Poland, where it can be stored until the owner agrees to release it to a European breeder. This reduces barriers to using dogs that would otherwise be located too far away to be considered.

A second benefit of this system is that PIPA can encourage dogs with rare genetics to be collected and stored so that the genetic variants they carry can be preserved. The semen bank will provide semen to breeders now, but also in the future, and will reduce barriers to accessing international breeding options, all while preserving breeder autonomy in making their own breeding decisions.

Key Initiative:

The semen bank will reduce barriers to accessing international breeding options and preserve the breed's genetic diversity—all while allowing breeders the autonomy to make their own breeding decisions.

Initiative 3: Best Practices for Breeders

Currently, breeding practices vary greatly from region to region. Recently, many countries have enacted legal requirements or bans for certain breeding practices, which impacts the choices that breeders can make regarding with whom and how to breed their dogs. Additionally, most breeders learn their craft from mentors instead of textbooks, which creates regional variations in breeding practices.

PIPA aims to collaborate internationally on best practices for PON breeders, especially when it comes to health testing, selecting mates, and preserving genetic diversity. Recommendations and advice rooted in science allow breeders to have the information to make the best decisions for their dogs.

Initiative 4: Research Support and Education

Research on the Polish Lowland Sheepdog is currently very limited, but it is key to move the state of the breed's health forward. To improve the body of literature on the PON, PIPA will identify opportunities for scientific research.

PIPA will provide support to breeders regarding how to interpret and use genetic testing and other health results such that genetic diversity is not lost to bottlenecks. PIPA will develop solutions and strategies to reduce inbreeding, and gather and communicate genetic and health research results that are relevant to the breed. Finally, PIPA would like to offer ways for breeders to feel more supported in making decisions backed by research, such as by providing opportunities to consult with experts.

INCORPORATION AND LEADERSHIP

The PON International Preservation Alliance (PIPA) is a 501c3 organization, which is a designation in the United States for a non-profit tax-exempt charitable organization. Even though PIPA was incorporated in the US, it is comprised of international members in the PON community.

PIPA has a slate of officers who run the day-to-day operations, standing directors that lead committees focused on mission items, and regional directors who provide two-way communication to and expertise about their geographical area.

PIPA currently has no paid staff, so volunteer labor helps reduce costs. To help offset costs and generate income to fund projects, PIPA relies mostly on member donations, dues, and fundraisers. In addition, PIPA has engaged a number of corporate donation programs and plans to seek grants from foundations.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to anybody with an interest in the health and genetic diversity of the Polish Lowland Sheepdog. Membership applications can be found at PONIPA.org and are open to individuals only.

SUMMARY

The PON International Preservation Alliance is a non-profit that focuses on global solutions to improving the health and genetic diversity of the breed. Flagship initiatives include a pedigree database, international semen bank, best practices for breeders, and research support and education.

REFERENCES

- UC Davis Veterinary Medicine Veterinary Genetics Laboratory. (2024). *Genetic Diversity Testing for Polish Lowland Sheepdog*. <https://vgl.ucdavis.edu/canine-genetic-diversity/polish-lowland-sheepdog>
- Michels, P. W., & Distl, O. (2020). *Genetic Variability in Polish Lowland Sheepdogs Assessed by Pedigree and Genomic Data*. *Animals*, 10(9), 1520. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10091520>

