



# 2024 Queensland State Election

## AVA Priorities

Submission of the  
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd  
QLD Division

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[www.ava.com.au](http://www.ava.com.au)



**Veterinarians are an integral part of the fabric of our community. They manage the health and welfare of our livestock that are crucial to our international trade and to the safety and security of our food, and they work in our public health sector on managing disease risks to animals and people alike. They care for the companion animals that are increasingly part of our families.**

The AVA is committed to working with the Queensland Government to address critical issues outlined in this paper, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the veterinary profession and the continued health and welfare of Queensland's animals and communities.

Unfortunately, the sustainability of the veterinary profession is at risk due to decades of underinvestment. Continued underinvestment in the veterinary profession will result in:

- Increased difficulty accessing veterinary diagnostic expertise and care (particularly in regional and remote areas);
- Greater delays in disease detection in production animal species;
- Impaired emergency animal disease response (e.g. Foot and Mouth Disease, Lumpy Skin Disease, African Swine Fever)
- Impaired response to zoonotic diseases (e.g. Hendra virus, Japanese encephalitis virus)

For the security of animal industries and the wellbeing of animals and people, it is crucial that the role of veterinarians in animal health and welfare and biosecurity is maintained. To do this, two things are needed:

- Support from regulators and the community to ensure that veterinary expertise and advice is integral to every level of decision making around biosecurity and the health and welfare of animals;
- Increased investment in 'public good' services to ensure that these vital services can be sustainably provided by the veterinary profession.

Furthermore, to support the long-term sustainability of the veterinary profession and provision of veterinary services it is critical to address the mental health crisis currently impacting veterinarians and its influencing factors (workforce retention, financial stress, working conditions, and client relations).

In recognition of the role for government in this, ahead of this Queensland State Election, the AVA is calling on the next State Government to support and/or address the following key areas:

- Enhanced biosecurity and funding for emergency animal disease (EAD)
- Rural and regional veterinary workforce support
- Support for veterinary students
- Support the provision of public good by veterinarians
- Mental health support for veterinary professionals



## Priority investments:

Issue	Investment needed
<b>Enhanced biosecurity and funding for emergency animal disease (EAD)</b>	
Insufficient government personnel to support biosecurity and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased funding for QLD Government veterinary positions especially in relation to emerging or exotic diseases, biosecurity, and AMR.</li> </ul>
Cost of EAD testing to primary producers and veterinarians means there is inadequate monitoring of the State's livestock flocks and herds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for any request for financial assistance to undertake a pilot program to subsidise laboratory sample transport costs for EAD exclusion testing, and any subsequent recurrent funding for subsidised lab transport costs that may be deemed necessary.</li> </ul>
Poor accessibility of Q fever vaccines are putting veterinary staff at serious risk and the cost of vaccination is a further barrier to protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved Government provided human medical services of Q fever pre-testing and vaccination to ensure accessibility for veterinary staff.</li> <li>Subsidised routine testing for Q fever, as well as provision of the Q fever vaccine, to veterinary industry personnel, including students in these disciplines.</li> <li>Enhanced education about Q fever risks and vaccination among veterinary professionals through government funded education and awareness programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Rural and regional veterinary workforce support</b>	
Prolonged shortages of veterinarians have significant impact on the availability of veterinary services. Improved workforce data and planning is needed to minimize these market gaps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supports the data collection and sharing needed for effective workforce analysis and support the development of a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.</li> </ul>
Other essential service workers have access to a range of support and compensation to encourage them to work in regional areas. Veterinary staff are just as essential however receive no support. The result is prolonged and severe shortages of veterinary staff in regional areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extending to veterinarians and veterinary personnel the same opportunities as other professions that are being encouraged to move to regional, rural and remote areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Support for veterinary students</b>	
Veterinary students have very high clinical placement requirements and the cost of these is borne by the student. This limits their ability to experience sufficient time in regional veterinary practice to influence their potential decisions to practice in regional Queensland once they graduate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supports veterinary students' exposure to rural and regional Australia through funding commitments to help them participate in work integrated learning (WIL) placements and address "placement poverty".</li> </ul>



<b>Support the provision of public good by veterinarians</b>	
<p>Veterinarians provide a range of public benefits through their work including biosecurity, emergency animal care during natural disasters, care for wildlife, and services for unowned animals. This cost of this is a burden on the veterinary business model that is adding to its financial unsustainability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Commits to including increased specific investment in veterinary services (particularly rural and regional) and supporting delivery of those veterinary services that deliver public good (e.g. getting veterinarians onto farms regularly to enhance biosecurity and animal welfare, similar to the Animal Welfare Pathway in the UK).</b></li> <li>● <b>Establishes a fund to support the provision of veterinary care to animals in natural disasters.</b></li> <li>● <b>Supports private veterinary businesses to assist with the cost of delivery of veterinary services to wildlife, unowned animals, and animals in the care of people experiencing vulnerabilities.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Mental health support for veterinary professionals</b>	
<p>Over 66.7% of veterinarians have reported experiencing a mental health condition, a concerning statistic compared to the general population. The AVA is working to address this through its THRIVE program, however additional support is needed to ensure that these services can meet the needs of the Queensland veterinary sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Supports the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary specific mental health support programs, including</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Expand the AVA 24/7 Counselling Service</b></li> <li>○ <b>Improved research and data</b></li> <li>○ <b>Expansion of the AVA graduate mentoring program to include non-members and encompass whole of career pathways</b></li> <li>○ <b>Cultivating Safe Teams program – Psychological health and safety awareness training sessions for all individuals working in the veterinary profession.</b></li> <li>○ <b>Training and toolkit for veterinary businesses to manage business-specific psychosocial risks</b></li> <li>○ <b>Mental health first aid for veterinary teams</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Undertakes a review of legislation that impacts veterinarians to explore ways these can function more effectively for contemporary veterinary practice.</b></li> </ul>



## About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our members come from all fields within the veterinary profession, with 34% of the AVA's membership residing and working in Queensland.

Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, aquatic animals, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, food safety and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical research and development and other commercial enterprises.

We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. The Association also has strong membership amongst our future veterinarians who are currently training in Australia's veterinary schools.

### 1. Enhanced biosecurity and funding for emergency animal disease (EAD)

The COVID-19 pandemic and more recent Japanese Encephalitis and Avian Influenza outbreaks have highlighted the importance of One Health approaches to disease management. Over 60% of emerging infectious diseases, including COVID-19, are zoonotic, with 71% originating from wildlife. To manage diseases that cross between humans and animals, an integrated approach is vital, and veterinarians play a crucial role as leaders in animal health and welfare.

Australian veterinarians are actively involved in Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) preparedness and response. With diseases like Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD), African Swine Fever (ASF), and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) posing constant threats, maintaining freedom from these diseases is crucial for livestock welfare and the economy. An outbreak would severely impact both international trade and domestic markets. Veterinarians are essential in surveillance and response efforts and have been instrumental in eradicating diseases like Equine Influenza and managing recent Avian Influenza outbreaks.

#### *Access to EAD testing laboratory*

In 2013, the Biosecurity Sciences Laboratory (BSL) facility in Oonoonba (Townsville) closed, leaving Coopers Plains (Brisbane) as the only QLD site for EAD testing. This requires samples to be transported over long distances, creating logistical, time, and cost challenges for veterinarians and clients in regional and remote areas. This can pose a biosecurity risk if samples are not being sent for exclusion testing due to cost and logistical constraints.

BQ and the AVA have worked together to gather data related to this, including conducting a survey of QLD veterinarians. While the survey sample size was small, the results supported the AVA's representations on behalf of members that a sample transport subsidy may assist with increasing submissions, with 60% of respondents indicating that transport costs were a barrier to submission. Most respondents indicated that it costs up to \$100 to transport samples to BSL. While nearly half of respondents indicated that animal owners/carers declined submitting samples to BSL due to results taking too long, the survey wasn't designed to inform whether this is due to sample transport delays or test result turnaround times. The AVA is of the belief that both are contributing factors.



The AVA thanks and acknowledges BQ's undertaking to conduct a communications strategy as the initial phase in response to the findings of the survey conducted. If the result of this first phase is unsatisfactory, then BQ may consider undertaking a pilot transport subsidy, for which Government support would be required.

### *Q fever protection*

Q fever in humans can range from asymptomatic to severe, causing conditions like meningitis, hepatitis, osteomyelitis, and bacterial endocarditis. The causative agent, *Coxiella burnetii*, is found in domestic and wild animals in Queensland, which may show no symptoms or have reproductive issues such as abortion and stillbirth.

Veterinary staff face significant risk of infection through several pathways, including direct contact with infected animals, tissues, or animal products, especially during parturition.

The Queensland Government health authorities recommend Q fever vaccination for all veterinary professionals, especially those who work directly with livestock and potentially infected animals. However, it is the WHS responsibility of the employer of veterinary workers to provide Q fever protection for these staff.

The majority of veterinary practices operate as small to medium-sized businesses, where the expense of around \$400 per staff member to provide Q fever protection may have a significant financial impact.

For these reasons, the AVA strongly advocates that the costs of providing Q fever protection for their staff should not be borne by the veterinary business owner. Precedent exists for this with the nationally funded Q fever vaccination program introduced in 2002 for abattoir workers and farmers. Addition of the vaccine to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is also recommended.

Input gathered recently by the AVA from Queensland veterinarians indicated a significant concern and challenge due to inadequate accessibility of Q fever testing and vaccination for veterinary team members. The need for improved education across the veterinary sector around Q fever was also highlighted.

### *Antimicrobial stewardship*

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a global health crisis, causing around 700,000 human deaths annually and requiring coordinated, multisectoral action. Antimicrobial stewardship aims to combat AMR by improving prescribing practices. In 2015, Australia introduced its first national AMR strategy, focusing on One Health surveillance. However, while human health surveillance received funding, animal health did not. The Office of Australia's Chief Scientist warns of rising antibiotic-resistant infections spreading between humans, animals, and the food chain. Despite Australia's reputation for safe animal products, there is insufficient scientific evidence to confirm this, and companion animal surveillance is lacking, particularly regarding the use of critical antibiotics.

To effectively address AMR, Australia needs concurrent human and animal research and surveillance. While private and university-led initiatives in the animal health sector have made progress, significant government investment is still required. The AVA has been leading efforts on AMR for nearly 30 years, providing veterinarians with best-practice prescribing resources. Without further government action, AMR



poses a serious threat to healthcare, the economy, and society. States like Victoria have funded AMR initiatives in animal health, and Queensland, with its vast and diverse regions, should prioritise adequate funding to understand AMR risks, especially in rural and remote areas.

#### Associated AVA documents

[AVA AMR Webpage](#)

[AVA policy: Use of antimicrobial drugs in veterinary practice](#)

[AVA Q fever protection in veterinary practice policy](#)

Q fever protection support project report (available on request)

#### Investments

- Increased funding for QLD Government veterinary positions especially in relation to emerging or exotic diseases, biosecurity, and AMR
- That the QLD Government supports any request for financial assistance to undertake a pilot program to subsidise laboratory sample transport costs for EAD exclusion testing, and any subsequent recurrent funding for subsidised lab transport costs that may be deemed necessary.
- Improved Government provided human medical services of Q fever pre-testing and vaccination to ensure accessibility for veterinary staff.
- The QLD Government subsidises routine testing for Q fever, as well as provision of the Q fever vaccine, to veterinary industry personnel, including students in these disciplines.
- Enhanced QLD Government funded education and awareness about Q fever risks and vaccination among veterinary professionals.

## 2. Rural and regional veterinary workforce support

Along with the rest of the country, Queensland is experiencing a significant shortage of veterinarians. The long timeframe for training veterinarians (5-6years) means that the profession and the community it serves are currently exposed to a prolonged shortage. This is most acutely felt in rural and regional areas of the State.

Without veterinarians in rural and regional areas, risks emerge in Australia's food production and add to biosecurity risks. Veterinary education is expensive to deliver and student experiences particularly in the rural and regional sectors come at an increasing cost to both veterinary students and the veterinary profession. This results in fewer graduates working and choosing to remain in rural and regional areas. Given the importance of the veterinary profession to society and the role the profession plays in biosecurity, food security, the human-animal bond, human health, and well-being, it is critical that veterinary positions in rural and regional areas be filled.

Currently the work is being done to improve the collection and analysis of veterinary workforce data. As much of the data is state based, it is important that data holders are enabled to share data that supports this. Further, this data needs to be used to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy. This strategy will help veterinary businesses, government, and other key stakeholders to minimise future mismatches in the supply and demand for veterinarians to avoid, or lessen, the length and severity of future shortages.

Further analysis into the education and training of veterinary professionals to address labour market shortages, specifically in regional and rural areas and amongst early career veterinarians, is required. In the interim, funding to assist students to increase their exposure to areas of the



profession that are suffering the greatest labour shortages, e.g farm animal veterinarians, public health, pathology, internal and external parasitology is likely to result in positive outcomes.

The support afforded to other essential health workers and professions, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers should be extended to the veterinary profession to attract and retain veterinary personnel. These include access to accommodation, child-care and other essential community supports.

### *Investments*

- That the QLD Government commit funding for further analysis of the veterinary workforce needs of QLD, especially regional and rural areas.
- That veterinarians and veterinary personnel are extended the same opportunities as other professions that are being encouraged to move to regional, rural and remote areas.

## **3. Support for veterinary students**

### *Student practical placement*

Veterinary students have some of the highest mandatory practical placement requirements of any degree. Students are required to do more than 52 weeks of placement across their 5-6 years of study, with the majority of that occurring during university holidays. This can impact significantly on a student's ability to undertake paid work, necessary to support themselves, when they are required to be available to attend practical placements which attracts no financial support for expenses.

Veterinary students are generally required to find and organise their own placements, pay for travel and accommodation, with many placements occurring far from a student's university base given the nature of the placements (e.g. farms, equine hospitals etc).

Given the contact requirements of the veterinary degree, students from low socio-economic and rural backgrounds are particularly disadvantaged by the added financial burden of meeting their practical placement obligations.

Veterinary students must also be included in practical placement financial support that has been made available to teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work students undertaking mandatory placement.

### *Investment*

- That the QLD government supports veterinary students' exposure to rural and regional Australia through funding commitments to help them participate in work integrated learning (WIL) placements and address "placement poverty".





#### 4. Support for the provision of public good by veterinarians

Veterinarians play a critical role in delivering [public good](#), often providing services that benefit the broader community, yet their contributions are frequently underappreciated and underfunded. The [Marsden Jacob Associates \(MJA\) report](#), commissioned by the AVA, highlighted the dual nature of the veterinary profession, where private benefits accrue directly to animal owners, while public benefits, such as protecting public health and animal welfare, serve the wider community. The report emphasised that the veterinary sector bears significant costs for these public goods, which exacerbates a situation already under pressure by workforce challenges and mental health concerns within the profession.

Similarly, the report made to the [2023 NSW Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage](#) underscored the substantial amount of pro bono or below-cost work undertaken by veterinarians, driven by both regulatory requirements and the vocational commitment of the professionals. This expectation for veterinarians to provide public good with little or no compensation has led to financial strain and professional burnout. The committee expressed concern that without government support, the willingness of veterinarians to continue offering these essential services may wane, threatening the sustainability of this critical public good.

Delivery of veterinary services is almost entirely privately funded and there is minimal public funding through government veterinary services or support of charities. The private veterinary profession provides veterinary services for individuals on a fee for service basis; however, the community and government also expect a large range of services that provide public benefit (or public good). Some of these are mandated by the government through veterinary registration while others are a community expectation. There is a long list that includes:

- Treatment obligations for pain and suffering;
- Accessibility of veterinary services for emergencies 24/7;
- Biosecurity obligations such as passive surveillance, diagnostic and reporting obligations;
- Discounted desexing to assist with animal population control;
- Treatment and care of unowned animals and wildlife; and
- Treatment of animals in disaster response.

Unfortunately, decades of public benefits provided by the private sector without adequate ability to recoup the costs has eroded the sustainability of the veterinary profession and, by extension, the public benefit that it provides for the community. Inability to recoup the costs associated with delivering public good is a significant factor in increasing vulnerability of the private veterinary business model, which has led to an under investment in the labour component of the profession, a key contributor to the work force shortage.

Providing mechanisms for the private veterinary sector to recoup the cost of delivery of veterinary services for public good will improve the sustainability of the veterinary profession. Through this, an increased investment in the labour component of the profession will lead to improved recruitment and retention.

Given that the structure of the profession has evolved to a predominantly privately funded system, the key to improving access to veterinary care to the whole community is to support the existing structure that is in place and ensure there is collaboration with government veterinary services and registered charities, especially around delivery of veterinary services that provide public good. Veterinary departments within government must be adequately funded, animal welfare and human welfare charities that provide veterinary services must be adequately funded and the private veterinary sector



who provides the majority of the public good must be able to recoup the costs associated with public good delivery.

We propose that the Queensland Government commit to funding delivery of private veterinary services that are for the public good, particularly in the areas of biosecurity, animal care during emergency disaster situations and veterinary services for wildlife, unowned animals, and animals in the care of people experiencing vulnerabilities.

### *Investments*

- **In its funding of the biosecurity system the Queensland Government commit to including increased specific investment in veterinary services (particularly rural and regional) and supporting delivery of those veterinary services that deliver public good (e.g. getting veterinarians onto farms regularly to enhance biosecurity and animal welfare, similar to the Animal Welfare Pathway in the UK).**
- **The Queensland Government establish a fund to support the provision of veterinary care to animals in natural disasters.**
- **The Queensland Government supports private veterinary businesses to assist with the cost of delivery of veterinary services to wildlife, unowned animals, and animals in the care of people experiencing vulnerabilities.**

## **5. Mental health support for veterinary professionals**

The burn-out and mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession are the result of a profession where the labour component has been chronically underfunded. Burn-out has been well recognised in the profession for some time and the cost to the profession is estimated to be 2.01% of its value due to poor retention and reduced working hours.

The AVA have undertaken research in this area ([AVA Veterinary Wellness Strategy 2021](#)) to better understand the size of the issue and to inform the development of a wellness strategy. It found over 66.7% of veterinarians said they had experienced a mental health condition at some stage, compared to 61.8% in the general population. Financial concerns, poor interactions with the community, and damaging social media have a significant role to play. Other factors include long working hours with a high case load, which has only worsened as the veterinary workforce shortage has continued.

The evidence suggests risk of death by suicide is increased in the veterinary profession compared to the general population. The profession as a whole is working hard in this area. The sole focus of awareness and intervention has now moved to also encapsulate prevention of risk factors and promotion of good workplace practices to improve these issues.

What was found from this research is that the issue needs to be addressed on multiple fronts, including financial stress, working conditions, high workload, long hours, poor remuneration and client relations.

The regulatory burden placed on individual veterinarians and veterinary businesses can also significantly impact their working conditions and mental health. Navigating complex and sometimes outdated regulatory requirements in contemporary veterinary practice consumes valuable time and resources, further adding to the daily pressures of the profession, this can lead to increased stress and job dissatisfaction, which combined with the fear of non-compliance investigations and



penalties, contributes to a high-pressure environment that can exacerbate mental health issues within the profession. Over time, the cumulative effect of these regulatory demands can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and attrition, ultimately affecting the overall well-being of veterinarians and the sustainability of veterinary practices.

Many of the issues that the veterinary profession face are common to a large number of the service professions, however as there is no public funding, these issues are accentuated.

## AVA support

For a number of years, the AVA has supported members, including students and new graduates, through programs such as the [AVA Graduate Mentoring Program](#), [24-hour telephone counselling](#) and [Mental Health First Aid Training](#). More recently we have initiated a pilot program to help mitigate psychological risks with the [“Cultivating Safe Teams” program](#). The AVA has relationships with external providers who are the subject matter experts in the delivery of these programs. Our internal organisational structure and experience in executing these offerings allows the AVA to upscale programs and institute new programs in an effective and efficient way.

The AVA has identified a range of areas in which governments could assist:

- *Mental health training and support for veterinarians* - Government support for dedicated mental health training and support for veterinarians that includes:
  - Whole of career mentoring (from undergraduate veterinarians to veterinarians approaching retirement and beyond);
  - Dedicated veterinary counselling services;
  - Funding for veterinarians, veterinary nurses and practice managers to complete mental health literacy training.

## Investments

- That the QLD Government work with the AVA in funding a dedicated mental health program for veterinarians and para-veterinary professionals.
- That the Queensland Government support the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary specific mental health support programs, including
  - Expand the 24/7 Counselling Service
  - Improved Research and data
  - Expansion of the AVA graduate mentoring program to include non-members and encompass whole of career pathways
  - Cultivating Safe Teams program – Psychological health and safety awareness training sessions for all individuals working in the veterinary profession.
  - Training and toolkit for veterinary businesses to manage business-specific psychosocial risks
  - Mental health first aid for veterinary teams
- That a review of legislation that impacts veterinarians is undertaken to explore ways these can function more effectively for contemporary veterinary practice.



## Contact:

The Australian Veterinary Association would welcome further discussion on the initiatives outlined in this 2024 QLD State Election Priorities.

For further information please contact the AVA Public Affairs and Advocacy Team at [publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au](mailto:publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au)