



2025 FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES



The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak body representing the veterinary profession in Australia.

Veterinarians are highly regarded, trusted community members.

The AVA has provided a united voice for the veterinary profession for over 100 years and is committed to championing and empowering the veterinary profession to thrive.

INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT



Assisting
16 million
Australian
pet owners



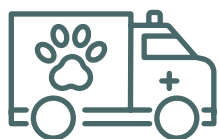
Supporting food
security for
26 million
Australians



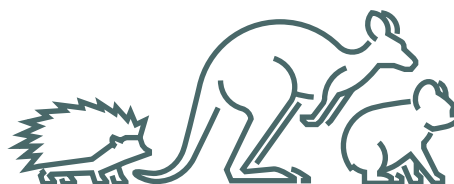
**Securing
428,000 jobs**
in Australian
livestock
industries¹



**Servicing
communities**
across Australia



**Emergency
care** for hundreds
of thousands of wild
animals every year



**Helping
protect**
Australia's
iconic species

¹ Meat and Livestock Australia State of the Industry Report 2022



About the AVA

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak body representing the veterinary profession in Australia.

The AVA has provided a united voice for the veterinary profession for over 100 years and is committed to championing and empowering the veterinary profession to thrive.

With over 7,500 members involved in all aspects of the veterinary industry, the AVA plays a crucial role in representing their interests. The AVA actively promotes public awareness and education about the veterinary profession and animal health and welfare. The AVA has a Division in each State and Territory in Australia, representing the Association to State and Local Governments, veterinary registration boards and other committees. Additionally, the 19 Special Interest Groups within the AVA represent different species and areas of practice.

Role of the veterinary profession

Veterinary services help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs nationwide and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply.

Veterinarians play a vital role in supporting animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and enhancing the associated health and wellbeing benefits for people.

Australia's veterinarians are highly regarded, trusted community members. Their expertise and dedication are essential to the health and welfare of our animals. The Governance Institute of Australia 2023 survey puts veterinarians in the top 10 ethical occupations, noting the occupation as very ethical¹.

Animals are not just a part of the Australian way of life; they are deeply embedded in it. Animals and their associated industries contribute significantly to society's social, cultural, environmental, and economic fabric.

The community regards veterinary services as essential, like human health care and education. The availability of veterinary services underpins the social licence by which animal industries operate. People responsible for animal health and welfare must have confidence that animal health care will be available when they need it. Similarly to human health, the community expects the veterinary profession to not only provide services for private (individual) benefit, but to also deliver services that provide public benefit (public good).

¹Governance Institute 2023 (<https://governanceinstitute.com.au/app/uploads/2023/11/2023-ethics-index-report.pdf>)

TOP PRIORITIES



The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has identified 5 urgent priorities to safeguard animal health and welfare, biosecurity, public safety, and the wellbeing of the Australian veterinary workforce.

The following priorities call for policies, investment, and funding to secure a sustainable and resilient veterinary sector:

- 1. ROBUST WORKFORCE**

- 2. MENTAL HEALTH FOR VETS**

- 3. PUBLIC GOOD FUNDING**

- 4. VETS FOR TOMORROW**

- 5. ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE**

Veterinary services help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs nationwide and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply.

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1

ROBUST WORKFORCE

Workforce shortages are currently affecting the veterinary profession. This is particularly so in rural and regional areas, where shortages have been persistent in the long term. Veterinarians are an essential community service, along with health, childcare, and education. Given Australians' love of their pets, if towns and regional areas don't have access to adequate veterinary services, it is harder for all employers to attract and maintain a workforce.

The AVA asks that the Federal Government extend veterinarians the same incentives provided to human health professionals to encourage them to move to and remain in regional, rural, and remote areas.

Investment

- > **\$5.76 million per year** for a commitment to rural practice scheme to forgive HECS-HELP debt. This would forgive the HECS-HELP debt of 80 new graduates per year, boosting the veterinary workforce in critically important regions.
- > Inclusion of veterinary sector into existing whole of government rural subsidy schemes. Extend existing rural and regional support for business infrastructure development, essential service business tax concessions, accommodation stimulus packages and preferential access to community services to include the veterinary sector.
- > Investment to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

Rural and regional Australia is affected by a lack of skilled workers across several sectors, including the veterinary sector. This, combined with changes in demand for differing types of veterinary services, has led to the profession having inadequate capacity to deliver veterinary knowledge and services to meet community demand. As a consequence:

- > Animal health is compromised
- > There are poorer animal welfare outcomes
- > There is an increased risk of biosecurity breaches, and
- > Increased risk to human health and wellbeing.

Veterinarians are more likely to be attracted to rural and regional Australia if there are flexible working conditions, minimal afterhours requirements, higher remuneration than urban centres, improved lifestyle and access to services, or Government financial assistance (such as educational fee relief).

To support the long-term viability of rural and regional veterinary practices, the Federal Government needs to extend to veterinarians the same opportunities provided to human health professionals, who are encouraged to move to regional, rural, and remote areas.

HECS-HELP forgiveness / Commitment to Rural Practice scheme

The AVA proposes that the Federal Government introduce a Commitment to Rural Practice scheme to forgive HECS-HELP debt for graduate veterinarians to assist in addressing the shortage of rural veterinarians, particularly in production animal services.

This relatively modest investment will help relieve the profession's current workforce shortages. Educational fee forgiveness schemes or bonding programs are in place for several professions, and including the veterinary profession using the existing policy structure is feasible.

Rural practice incentives

As veterinary services are essential services, the Federal Government should include the veterinary profession in schemes that support essential service business infrastructure development, essential service business tax concessions, accommodation stimulus packages, and preferential access to community services as a measure to improve the recruitment and retention of veterinarians in rural communities.

Investment to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy

While the above initiatives will assist in the short term, work is needed to better match supply and demand in the longer term. The AVA is working with Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer and other key stakeholders to improve the collection and analysis of veterinary workforce data. This needs to be coupled with government support in developing a national workforce strategy for the veterinary sector – as it does for other essential services.



2

MENTAL HEALTH FOR VETS

Australia needs resilient vets to support the community, livestock, and food production. Veterinarians are at high risk of poor mental health and have little to no access to industry-specific programs and assistance.

The AVA asks that the Federal Government support the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary-specific mental health support programs.

Investment

- > **\$2.1 million per year** from the Federal Government to fund the AVA's industry-led wellness initiative, THRIVE, which supports veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

The burnout and mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession result from a profession where the labour component has been chronically underfunded at a time of immense generational and societal change. Vets leaving the profession, or moving to reduced hours, means that the remaining vets work longer and harder. This puts the workforce under immense strain. Poor retention and reduced working hours attributed to burnout have been estimated to cost the profession 2.01% of its value².

Many of the issues the veterinary profession faces are common to essential service professions; however, with little Government funding, these issues are accentuated within the veterinary profession.

In 2019, the AVA undertook research in this area to understand the size of the issue better and to inform the development of a veterinary wellness strategy. This research found:

- > Over half (66%) respondents said they had experienced a mental health condition at some stage, compared to 61% in the general population. Of those, 60% said a medical professional had diagnosed their condition.
- > More than 25% of respondents took time off work due to stress or a mental health condition, and 33% did not disclose the reason to their employer.
- > 54% of the factors contributing to mental health issues were work-related (including work-related trauma, client interactions, workload, and after-hours work demands).
 - Work-related factors that contributed to poor mental health included challenging client interactions, working long hours, managing a high workload, dealing with staff shortages, poor remuneration, after-hours and on-call work, and poor workplace culture.

²CL Neill, CR Hansen, M Salois. The Economic Cost of Burnout in Veterinary Medicine. Frontiers in Veterinary Science. 2022;9

- Almost half of respondents felt their work had a negative or very negative impact on their overall mental health. Psychosocial risks commonly identified were:
 - Challenging client interactions and expectations - clients' high emotional state, financial investment, perceived self-efficacy, and sometimes unrealistic expectations are complex and exhausting. Additionally, the required financial conversation adds to the complexity, which has only worsened as the cost of veterinary care has increased. This situation is further compounded by the fear of public shaming through social or sensationalist media, causing significant mental anguish for veterinarians of all ages. Increased threats of complaints to regulatory bodies add to veterinarian's stress.
 - Working long hours (including after hours) and being unable to take sick or annual leave due to the inability to find someone else to cover.
 - High workload and pressure - 53% of respondents feel they do not have an appropriate workload.
 - Neglecting physical health due to the job.
 - Emotionally draining work - 72% of respondents feel they regularly leave work feeling emotionally drained.
 - Financial strain.

Funding for veterinary mental health and wellness initiatives

An integrated wellness approach is recommended when assessing and addressing workplace or workforce mental health.

The AVA has supported members through programs such as the AVA Graduate Mentoring Program, 24-hour telephone counselling and Mental Health First Aid Training for several years. In 2023 the AVA initiated a pilot program, called Cultivating Safe Teams, to help mitigate psychological risks within 50 veterinary workplaces across Australia. The AVA has relationships with external subject matter expert providers to deliver these programs.

To assist in addressing this, the AVA propose that the Federal Government support the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary-specific mental health support programs, including:

- Expansion of the 24/7 Counselling Service (\$680k over 4 years)
- Improved research and data (\$580k over 4 years)
- Expansion of the AVA graduate mentoring program to include non-members and encompass whole of career pathways (\$2.7m over 4 years)
- Cultivating Safe Teams beyond the pilot phase – Psychological health and safety awareness training sessions for all individuals working in the veterinary profession. (\$3.0m over 4 years)
- Training and toolkit for veterinary businesses to manage business-specific psychosocial risks (\$480k over 4 years)
- Mental health first aid for veterinary teams (\$760k over 4 years).

These bespoke programs provide psychological health and safety awareness training, mental health first aid, suicide prevention and counselling for veterinarians and the broader veterinary team.

The AVA's structure and experience in executing these offerings will allow the AVA to upscale the programs and institute new programs effectively and efficiently.



3

PUBLIC GOOD FUNDING

Veterinary businesses provide significant public benefits beyond the private veterinary services they offer, however, there is little Government funding to support this work. This places the veterinary business model under considerable strain and risks the loss of these public benefits as veterinary capacity declines.

The Federal Government should fund private veterinary services that are performed for the public good, particularly in biosecurity, animal care during emergency natural disasters, veterinary services for wildlife and veterinary financial assistance for people experiencing vulnerabilities.

Investment

- > **\$7.5 million dollars per year for 4 years** for National Veterinary Care Emergency Fund Pilot Program for private veterinary businesses to assist in treating Australian wildlife.
- > The expansion of Wildlife Health Australia's Sentinel Clinic Surveillance Program to all private veterinary clinics that provide services to wildlife.
- > Creation of a national animal disaster fund to support veterinary care to animals in natural disasters.
- > Fund a strategy and pilot program to support people experiencing vulnerabilities, requiring respite care or urgent health care for their animals.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

There is minimal 'public good' funding and charity support for veterinary services, yet the community and government expect veterinarians to provide an extensive range of services that deliver a public good. The government mandates some of these through veterinary registration, while others are a community expectation. The long list includes:

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

Decades of public benefits provided by the private sector without an adequate ability to recoup the costs of service have eroded the sustainability of the veterinary profession and, by extension, the public benefit it provides for the community. This cost burden significantly increases the vulnerability of the private veterinary business model, which has led to underinvestment in the labour component of the profession, a key contributor to the workforce 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.

Treatment of wildlife by private vets

Veterinary businesses provide significant amounts of unpaid care to wildlife every year. Research provides evidence that private veterinary practices are not able to recoup their costs for services provided to wildlife, with 92% of survey veterinary respondents stating that they never or rarely received reimbursements³. The same study found that the pro bono nature of wildlife care limited the timeliness and extent of the care able to be delivered to the animals.

The rising cost of providing veterinary care to wildlife is rapidly becoming unsustainable. The public expects that Australian native wildlife is the responsibility of the Government and are often shocked to find that veterinarians don't receive any assistance with the provision of care.

The AVA recommends the Commonwealth Government commit to a pilot program that will allow private veterinary businesses to recoup the cost of delivery of veterinary services to Australia's wildlife.

Expand the Sentinel Surveillance Program

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) provides funding to a small number of veterinary clinics around Australia to participate in its Sentinel Clinic Surveillance Program. The program commenced in 2014 and currently includes 10 key wildlife veterinary clinics that have a high wildlife caseload or that expand the geographic and species coverage of the surveillance system.

This surveillance program monitors Australian wildlife populations and provides valuable data in understanding disease threats to our biosecurity. This also helps protect public health and contributes to the protection of our livestock industries,

Participating clinics see over 35,000 free-ranging wildlife cases each year and provide invaluable information on wildlife diseases around Australia. Additional funding would allow this program to expand to more clinics providing wildlife services, delivering greater benefits.

National animal disaster fund

Whilst it is the responsibility of owners to care for their animals in times of disasters, often assistance is needed to ensure animal welfare needs are met, regardless of an owner's financial capacity. It is a requirement of veterinary registration to render first aid to all animals who require it. Owned animals are often caught up in disasters along with people, so veterinarians have an important role in disaster response and recovery activities.

It's essential to urgently address animal welfare needs following disasters such as bushfires and floods to prevent prolonged suffering. Veterinarians play an important role by assessing the requirements of animals needing veterinary care, including euthanasia of those severely injured, to ensure animal welfare is indeed met. Veterinary hospitals are also important in reuniting companion animals with their owners, a well-accepted expectation of society.

Both the obligations of veterinary registration and the expectations of society by the standards detailed in legislation, set an expectation that veterinary care is provided if required. Often the financial burden of a disaster response to treat impacted animals is imposed onto veterinarians, through community and government expectations. However, funding of these expectations is currently inadequate, such that veterinary treatment and care is often provided by veterinarians out of their own pocket or at reduced cost. No other Australian businesses have such a significant and sustained cost shift onto its sector for providing mandatory services to support community and government disaster recovery activities.

³Orr and Tribe, Animal welfare implications of treating wildlife in Australian veterinary practices, Australian Veterinary Journal, 2018;12

To ensure veterinary services provided to disaster impacted animals is adequately funded, the AVA strongly believes that funding needs to be allocated at a national level to support private veterinarians caring for animals in natural disasters.

Fund a strategy to support people experiencing vulnerabilities

Delivering the 21st-century veterinary care that the community expects is expensive. Given the lack of public funding, the full care cost must be passed on to the animal owner. As a result, affordability particularly impacts those with lower incomes. Unfortunately, the misconception that human health care is inexpensive due to a heavily funded system leads to unrealistic expectations of animal owners that all people should have access to the highest-quality care for their animals at little cost.

Mechanisms to address this affordability are currently in the form of pet insurance and buy-now-pay-later schemes. They have assisted to some degree in the mid to higher socioeconomic community groups. Still, they are inadequate for lower socioeconomic groups as they are expensive or can increase debt exponentially. In addition, many of these clients are ineligible for credit products or struggle to be approved promptly when their pet requires treatment. Many veterinarians experience moral distress in cases where a client is unable to afford care for their pet, again contributing to poor mental health and a lack of job satisfaction.

The historical premise of managing affordability through small individual veterinary businesses offering significant discounts or lines of credit is not acceptable. It can lead to substantial business stress and reduce the sustainability of veterinary practice.

Animal charities offset some of the challenges around affordability for lower socioeconomic groups; however, their geographical locations often limit them in the majority to urban centres. Where charity mobile services are offered, it risks further eroding the financial viability of those local services that are already in the area.

A targeted strategy and pilot program is needed to support people experiencing vulnerabilities, requiring respite care or urgent health care for their animals.



4

VETS FOR TOMORROW

Training a new veterinarian at a university takes at least 5 - 7 years. This long training timeframe, along with the strain on the veterinary education sector, is a crucial reason the supply of veterinarians takes so long to adjust to changing market demand.

The AVA proposes that the Federal Government increase funding for veterinary education and include veterinary students in its Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme.

Investment

- **\$9.5m per annum** to fund practice placement for veterinary students.
- Increase the funding rate per veterinary Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL) by at least 30 per cent to cover more of the cost of training a vet.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

Veterinary degrees are among the most expensive courses in Australia, and university income falls significantly short of the cost.

Australia's veterinary education system is approaching a crisis, with changing needs for veterinarians to train in increasingly complex areas and pressure on universities to trim costs and transform their teaching and research offerings. Current approaches to veterinary science education, research, and service delivery will not be sustainable or allow Australia to deliver its long-term needs for veterinary workforce renewal and enhanced research capability.

Veterinary science courses are among the most expensive university programs due to unique factors. Unlike fields like medicine, there are no publicly funded hospitals to support veterinary training, so universities must maintain livestock herds and flocks for teaching and research purposes. Additionally, to meet the high competency standards required for registration, veterinary students incur personal costs for mandatory work-integrated learning at animal establishments and veterinary practices, both during holidays and term time.

Unlike medical students, who complete residency training in publicly funded hospitals, veterinary graduates must be proficient in a wide range of clinical skills - including diagnostics, anaesthesia, dentistry, and surgery - at graduation. This also differs from human dental training, which receives public support via public clinics, and involves only one species. The added complexity of handling diverse animal species further drives up the need for practical, hands-on training in veterinary programs.

Since 2021, veterinary science has been in the highest federal cluster within the Commonwealth Federal Grant Scheme (CGS), with agriculture, medicine, dentistry, and pathology, which provides funding for domestic students.

For students commencing in 2023, this cluster receives a standard annual CGS payment of \$28,196 per Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL). Veterinary domestic students also contribute to the second highest level of \$11,800 p.a., with most students utilising the income-contingent HECS/HELP scheme to cover these amounts. However, the net funding amount per student place still needs to be improved, with the cost per EFTSL of the total Government plus student fee (cost-to-funding ratio) being 148 per cent in 2018, an underpayment rate observed in previous studies.

The 2022 Veterinary education review made 25 recommendations to address the changing needs of the veterinary education system. Even if all structural reform opportunities are implemented, Veterinary Science education will remain significantly more expensive than Medicine and Dentistry. It will therefore be necessary to increase the funding rate per veterinary EFTSL without disadvantaging other courses and for universities to prioritise this extra funding specifically to support Veterinary Science programs (e.g. for the operation of veterinary teaching hospitals).

The AVA supports the majority of recommendations of the [veterinary education review by the Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand](#), particularly recommendations 15 and 16:

- Recommendation 15 - The Australian Government move quickly to increase the funding rate per veterinary EFTSL by at least 30 per cent – and, where relevant, lift the maximum basic grant funding of universities to accommodate this increase in revenue.
- Recommendation 16 - The Australian Government consider providing a clinical training loading for a designated number of veterinary students' clinical training in priority areas.

Commonwealth Prac Payment Scheme

One key way of helping veterinary students consider future practice in regional areas is to give them positive experiences of regional life when they undertake practice placements during their studies. However, significant financial barriers exist to doing so, with the student or practice having to cover the associated costs. Practice placement support that allows veterinary students to engage in regional practice in a meaningful way is essential.

In the 2024 budget, it was announced that students studying teaching, nursing, midwifery, and social work would receive a newly introduced Commonwealth Prac Payment of \$319.50 per week for the duration of their mandatory job placement. The reasoning was that it would allow students to avoid what has been termed 'placement poverty' while they complete compulsory practical placement.

The AVA is calling on the Government to extend this payment to veterinary students. Veterinary students are required to complete approximately 52 weeks of clinical placement during their study. This is often in rural and regional areas in practices performing livestock or mixed animal practice. Students bear the burden of the cost of travel, accommodation, and forgoing regular part-time work. Veterinarians are just as vital for communities to function as other professionals. Additionally, they provide essential services to monitor Australia's livestock for biosecurity breaches.



5

ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Veterinary services underpin Australia's animal industries, however the demand for production animal veterinary services in the private market tends to fall below the optimal level for maximising overall community benefit.

This exposes the agricultural economy to significant risks, and it is important that as a community we invest in managing these risks. Loss of markets for our animal products would severely impact the whole Australian economy.

Mitigating these risks and maximising the economic benefits of a strong animal welfare framework needs improved engagement of veterinarians in primary production.

Additionally, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a threat to both human and animal health, contributing to about 700,000 deaths worldwide every year. We need sustainable, multisectoral approaches to address it.

Investment

- > **\$5 million per year** for a national veterinary antibiotic usage and resistance surveillance system.
- > The Federal Government develop and implement an incentive scheme for primary producers to engage with veterinarians focused on improving animal health and welfare and biosecurity.
- > The Federal Government continues the renewing of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

All Australians expect a high standard of animal welfare. A failure to progress animal welfare standards to date has caused significant public concern for Australians as well as international communities and trading partners.

Antimicrobial Resistance

Australia's Chief Scientist has observed an increasing number of antibiotic-resistant infections appearing in the community, which are acquired during international travel and represent a looming public health issue.

Between 2015 and 2019, the Australian Government released a national strategy to combat antimicrobial resistance in humans and invested millions in it. However, there has yet to be funding to enable similar work in animals.

It has been shown that antimicrobial resistance can be passed to humans through the food chain. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of food safety issues related to AMR. While there is good reason to believe that Australian animal products are among the world's best in this regard, we lack the hard scientific evidence to demonstrate our favourable status.

We cannot fully understand any emerging threats without concurrent human and animal AMR research and surveillance in Australia. The AVA estimates that an effective surveillance system for animals could be established for around \$1.6 - 2 million per annum.

Several antimicrobial stewardship initiatives have already been implemented through private efforts in the animal health sector. The AVA has been providing leadership to veterinarians on the issue of AMR for nearly 30 years, including investing in developing resources to promote best practice prescribing of antimicrobial therapies. While the veterinary profession has stepped up to the challenge, significant investment is still needed from the Australian Government if we are to win this fight. Without action, AMR poses a significant threat to our healthcare systems, national economy and way of life.

Australian Animal Welfare Strategy

A robust, independent standards-setting process with adequate scientific input is crucial to a modern animal welfare system. The AVA supports renewing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy and calls on the Federal Government to continue that commitment and increase its funding.

There is a significant backlog of standards as the current process relies too heavily on individual jurisdictions taking the lead in the development of standards. Although all Australian states and territories agreed in 2005 that voluntary Model Codes of Practice for animal welfare should be updated and transitioned to nationally consistent Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines, only six Model Codes have been updated into Standards and Guidelines, and state/territory legislation implementation has been inconsistent. Furthermore, there needs to be a mechanism to coordinate national animal welfare policy and standards development and publicly assess state and territory implementation and enforcement effectiveness.

Improving veterinarian engagement

The work veterinarians undertake in the production animal sector has significant public benefits. These were identified as far back as the Frawley Review 2003, where biosecurity and Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) risks were highlighted. More recently, community and consumer concerns over animal health and welfare have added a further layer, impacting the animal industry's social licence to operate.

Veterinarians are well-respected professionals and experts in animal health and welfare. Their critical thinking and problem-solving skills developed and honed in an animal health context, coupled with their subject matter expertise, make them essential for animal health and welfare. The veterinary profession also helps maintain and enhance this social licence.

Many primary producers recognise the value of veterinary expertise. However, this is far from universal and engagement of veterinarians on farms remains too low. The private financial investment of primary producers that do engage veterinarians delivers the twin benefits of improving the economic viability of the individual farm, while also contributing to a 'herd immunity' effect that offers protection, in terms of social licence to operate and biosecurity, to other primary producers who are not contributing financially to this benefit.

The challenge is that as biosecurity risks rise and animal health and welfare issues continue to rise in consumers' minds, the critical mass of veterinarians on farms needed to maintain the level of protection also rises. Mechanisms are required to improve the primary production engagement of veterinarians.

Animal-related industries with a more precarious social licence to operate have incorporated veterinary input into their operating systems. For example, horse racing regulatory requirements require veterinary input into numerous aspects of the operating system to protect animal health and welfare.

While animal health risks may have been managed in the broader livestock sector to date, there is always the prospect of a more significant threat, and the incapacity to deliver appropriate veterinary services is likely to limit the effectiveness of any response.

The value of livestock farming to the Australian economy is substantial. Currently, the protection of economic value is interlaced with the social licence for farming to operate. However, due to the agricultural business model, limited Government support for producers and veterinary services being a user-pays system, producers may be reluctant to engage with veterinary services. Increased emphasis on animal welfare by the media, the retail sector, and consumers suggests engagement will be expected to rise in the future.

The implications are that one of the most critical future investments in protecting Australia's significant meat, dairy, and animal fibre industries lies in the health and welfare of livestock. While this involves a range of measures, the advisory and interventional roles of the veterinarian are critical to every innovation, and their absence would be to the detriment of overall animal welfare.

The optional model of veterinary engagement with some animal industries, particularly extensive farming systems, means that risk mitigation techniques around EAD, such as surveillance, are no longer occurring. In Australia 10 years ago, areas with the highest surveillance activity intensity aligned well with the distribution of the likelihood of disease introduction, establishment, and spread, with the exception of the Northern Australian coastline, and these aligned with the locations of private and Government veterinarians. Given the continued erosion of the supply of veterinary services in rural and regional areas, it is unclear if this remains the case. The widespread distribution of the recent EAD Japanese Encephalitis Virus before detection is a cause for concern.

The key is getting veterinary expertise onto farms to undertake passive biosecurity surveillance and work with primary producers to improve farm planning and practices.

Incentive schemes like Animal Welfare Pathway in the UK are needed, which fund annual veterinary health and welfare reviews and support improved on-farm infrastructure and programs to improve health and welfare.

VETERINARY IMPACT



Pet care expenditure⁵

\$33.2bn



Dogs **\$20.5bn**

Cats **\$9.1bn**



Revenue of Australian
Veterinary industry³

\$5.6bn

Veterinary Businesses
(Practices) in Australia¹

3,651

The Veterinary
sector employs:

29,008 people⁴

15,816 vets

with total wages \$2bn⁶

The gross value of fisheries
and aquaculture¹²



\$4bn



Livestock disposals and
livestock products¹¹

\$32.2bn

\$13.9bn (43.2%)
for cattle and calves

\$4.1bn (12.7%)
for sheep and lambs

\$3.6bn (11.2%)
for poultry

\$1.5bn (4.7%)
for pigs

\$3.0bn (9.3%)
for wool

\$6.1bn (18.9%)
for milk

The gross revenue
of racing
(horse and greyhound)¹³

\$4.6bn



1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 13 IBISWorld 2024

5 Animal Medicines Australia 2022

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022-2023

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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