



Victorian State Election 2022

Election Platform

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

October 2022

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

Victoria protects this by the high standards required of veterinary registration and professional conduct.

About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. The AVA consists of members who come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Resourcing essential Veterinary Services

The work of veterinary professionals impacts the daily lives of all Australians and their animals in a multitude of ways. The contribution veterinarians make to the community is highly valued, essential for the health of our pets and significantly contributes to the social license of animal industries to operate. The continued access for our wool, meat and dairy products to premium international markets, which secures much of Victoria's rural and regional prosperity, is underpinned by the work of our veterinarians.

Veterinarians are highly skilled, highly regulated and trusted members of our community whose work provides public benefits well beyond what happens in the consult room, or the treatment of animals in the field.

Veterinarians provide many services in their daily work that generate primarily public benefits and are undertaken for the public good. Examples include the necessity of meeting animal welfare imperatives requiring treatment and management of un-owned sick and injured animals including wildlife and playing a vital role in surveillance for the early detection emergency animal diseases.

However, this is at risk.

There is an increasing market failure situation emerging in delivering public good outcomes. There has been little financial support for the significant amount of obligatory and ethically necessary work vets do for public good (not private) and this is having a serious consequence.



For the security of animal industries, 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 into 'public good' services to ensure that these vital services can be sustainably provided in the veterinary profession.

This is key to the future sustainability of the veterinary services sector and the value it provides to our community.

Ahead of this Victorian State Election, the AVA is calling on the next State Government to support three key areas:

- Sustainability of essential veterinary services for public good.
- Animal care and protection legislation
- Mental Health

Public good veterinary services at risk

Veterinary contribution is crucial to the health and safety of animals and humans, the social licence afforded to animal use, the function of most homes with animal family members and the responsibility of society towards wildlife and animals without owners.

Animal related industries are essential for the daily function of Victorians for food supply, research, and recreation, and collectively generate huge financial benefits through international trade of meat, fibre and dairy products. Economically, animal-related industries are valued at over \$70 billion¹ to the Australian economy, currently under threat through exotic disease such as foot and mouth disease and lumpy skin disease and the continuous risk to social licence and trade when accepted standards are not maintained.

This value of veterinarians to Victoria extends beyond animal health and results in the safety of humans. Victorians have a better understanding of public health and the interconnectedness of animal and human health having faced the recent zoonotic global pandemic COVID-19. Veterinarians deal with many less publicised zoonosis every day in many species to minimise the impact that certain animal diseases can have on public health.

Unfortunately, the sustainability of the veterinary profession is at risk due to decades of under-resourcing the delivery of veterinary public good, relying on the good will of veterinarians.

Private veterinarians service animal health and welfare across Victoria. The lack of commitment to support private veterinarians in areas of public good (such as treatment obligations for pain and suffering, treatment of wildlife, emergency/ disaster response, emerging animal disease, surveillance, community education, disease prevention, animal population control), creates significant financial and

¹ [BISWorld, June 2021](#); [Animal Medicines Australia 2021](#); [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), [Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences](#); [Australian Industries and Skills Committee](#)



professional vulnerability and inequity for veterinarians and local veterinary practices, and escalating market failure risks that governments must respond to in partnership with the profession.

Without payment for work in obvious areas of public good there is the inability to recover costs or be compensated for work. This has great effect on individual veterinarians, veterinary nurses and teams, and the veterinary profession overall, changing veterinary workforce capability as veterinarians must change their service delivery models to make a living in areas where they can be paid, regardless of their vocational interests and training.

Recommendations

- In consultation with the veterinary profession through the AVA, the Victorian Government commits to planning for, and allocating adequate funds to, veterinary services in areas of public need:
 - Animal welfare
 - Biosecurity – surveillance for early detection of emergency animal diseases, development of farm biosecurity plans, testing and control of disease through vaccination for production and companion animals
 - Animal population control (e.g. desexing companion animals and feral animal control)
 - Care of animals owned by the crown (e.g. wildlife)
 - Emergency care of owned animals in natural disasters
 - Subsidisation of private animal insurance for veterinary treatment to achieve animal health and welfare, without requiring veterinary goodwill.

Animal Care and Protection Legislation

The Victorian Government is currently developing new legislation to replace the current *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*. The AVA has been actively involved in the reviews of this legislation over recent years.

AVA fully supports the aims of the proposed legislation in recognising sentience of all animals and actively guiding the Victorian community to treat animals well, rather than only safeguard against cruelty.

Humans have a duty of care to protect animals. Where a person does not meet his or her obligations to animals in his or her care, animals may suffer. When this happens, the law must be able to adequately intervene to enforce compliance.

Animals have intrinsic value and should be treated humanely by the people who benefit from them. Owned animals should be safe from physical and psychological harm. They need access to water and species-appropriate food and shelter and should be able to fulfil their important behavioural and social needs. All animals must receive prompt veterinary care when required, without exemption, and have as humane a death as possible.

The local and international community has expectations of animal health and welfare, underpinned by the high-level training, education and experience of required of veterinarians to achieve Australian standards of veterinary practice.

The AVA supports renewal of the State's animal welfare legislation to responsibly modernise aspects of the existing Act; by ensuring that professional veterinary knowledge is at the centre of animal health and welfare and that animals receive the care and protection provided by veterinary registration and professional conduct as sentient beings.



Recommendation

- That the next Victorian government commits to the continued development and implementation of new Animal Care and Protection legislation which will:
 - Recognise the sentience of animals
 - Remove the inequity of animal exemptions to allow uniform animal welfare across all animals, agreed by the recognition of sentience, for Victoria's continued economic safety.
 - Allow the alignment of animal welfare and veterinary legislation so that only qualifications, skills and competencies determine who may perform what are considered 'veterinary competencies' in order to maintain modern standards of animal welfare.
 - Explicitly set out a duty of care of animal owners to seek veterinary care if an animal is in pain or distress (including for animals who are the responsibility of government such as wildlife, pests, and unowned animals)

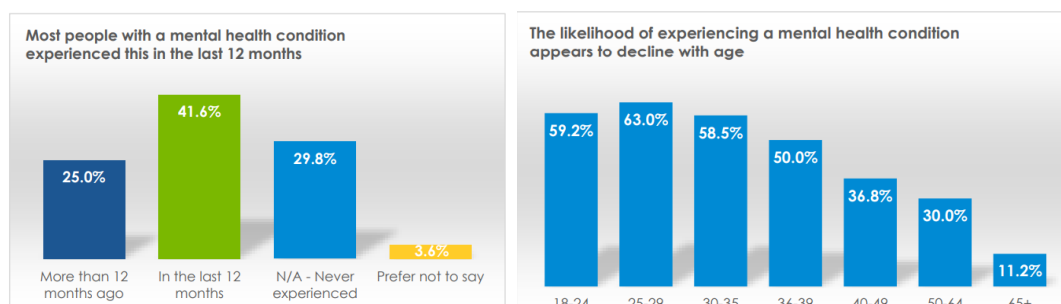
Veterinary professionals – at greater risk of poor mental health

Even prior to the onset of COVID 19, there were considerable wellness problems across a number of sectors in the veterinary profession. COVID 19 has exacerbated mental health issues within the veterinary profession. AVA commissioned independent research by workplace mental health consultants, SuperFriend, to investigate mental health amongst the profession. What has been found 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. All of which are financially centred.

The SuperFriend Veterinary Wellness Strategy Final Report found:

...a significant proportion of individuals have experienced a mental health condition, in particular in the last 12 months. Over half (66.6%) of respondents said they have or are experiencing a mental health condition. ... SuperFriend's multi-year research shows the prevalence of self-reported mental ill-health has increased during the recent years of the global pandemic, the veterinary profession sits 4.8% above other industries.²

More specifically, 41.6% of respondents to the survey indicated that they had experienced a mental health condition in the past 12 months:



² Superfriend, *Australian Veterinary Association Veterinary Wellness Strategy – Final Report, 2021.*



This is more prevalent in the younger age categories, with 63% of respondents between 25-29 indicating they had experienced a mental health condition in the past 12 months. These younger cohorts represent the sections of the veterinary workforce suffering from the greatest attrition.

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, nurses and practice managers to complete mental health literacy training

Recommendation

- That the Victorian Government work with the AVA in funding a dedicated mental health program for veterinarians.

Conclusion

The Australian Veterinary Association wishes to thank you for your consideration of our concerns and to assist in looking forward to what will determine the health and safety of animals, Victorians and the economic viability of Victoria.

The AVA has identified a range of carefully considered and informed potential solutions which it looks forward to working through with Victoria's next government.

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