



# The veterinary sector

## An essential part of a healthy Australia

**2025–2026**  
Pre-Budget submission  
to the Australian Government

Submission of the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd  
January 2025

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



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Veterinary Association acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respect to them, their culture and their leaders, past, present and emerging.

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## Contact details

### Graham Pratt

National Manager Advocacy  
Australian Veterinary Association

[publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au](mailto:publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au)

0439 628 898

### Melissa King

Chief Executive  
Australian Veterinary Association

[publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au](mailto:publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au)

0439 628 898

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## 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.

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. 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.

The community regards veterinary services as essential, like human health care and education. The role 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 needed. Similarly to human health, the community expects the veterinary profession to not only provide services for private (individual) benefit, but also to deliver services that provide a public benefit (public good).

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<sup>1</sup>.

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





# VETERINARY IMPACT

Pet care expenditure<sup>5</sup>

**\$33.2bn**



Dogs **\$20.5bn**

Cats **\$9.1bn**



Revenue of Australian  
Veterinary industry<sup>3</sup>

**\$5.6bn**

Veterinary Businesses  
(Practices) in Australia<sup>1</sup>

**3,651**

The Veterinary  
sector employs:

**29,008 people**<sup>4</sup>

**15,816 vets**

with total wages \$2bn<sup>6</sup>

The gross value of fisheries  
and aquaculture<sup>12</sup>



**\$4bn**



Livestock disposals and  
livestock products<sup>11</sup>

**\$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)<sup>13</sup>

**\$4.6bn**



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

5 Animal Medicines Australia 2022

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022-2023



## 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. Vets for Tomorrow**
- 4. Public Good Funding**
- 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.

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.

## Investment Summary

<b>Robust Workforce</b>	<b>\$5.76 million per year</b> to implement a Rural Practice Scheme to forgive HECS-HELP debt for 80 new graduates per year, boosting the veterinary workforce in critically important regions.
<b>Mental Health for Vets</b>	<b>\$2.1 million per year</b> to fund the AVA's industry-led wellness initiative, THRIVE, to provide tools and networks for veterinarians and veterinary staff to minimise mental health challenges thus supporting the social and economic fabric of society.
<b>Vets for Tomorrow</b>	<b>\$9.5m per year</b> to extend the Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme to veterinary students.
<b>Public Good Funding</b>	<b>\$7.5 million per year for 4 years</b> for a National Veterinary Care Emergency Fund Pilot Program for private veterinary businesses to assist in treating Australian wildlife.
<b>Animal Health and Welfare</b>	<b>\$5 million per year</b> for a National Veterinary Antibiotic Usage and Resistance Surveillance System.



## 1. Robust Workforce – Education debt forgiveness

**Issue:** Workforce shortages have affected the veterinary profession for the past 8 years. This is especially in rural and regional areas, where shortages have been persistent in the longer-term. Veterinarians are an essential community service, along with health, childcare, and education. If towns and regional areas don't have access to adequate veterinary services, all employers struggle to attract and maintain a workforce, particularly given Australians' great love for their pets.

**Solution:** The Australian Government to introduce a Rural Practice Scheme to forgive HECS-HELP debt for graduate veterinarians to address the shortage of rural veterinarians, particularly in production animal services. This extends to veterinarians the same incentives provided to human health professionals to encourage them to move and remain in regional, rural, and remote areas.

### Investment

**\$5.76 million per year** for a 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.

### Why does it matter?

Rural and regional Australia is impacted 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, this 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
- There is an 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 Australian 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.

An Australian Government backed Rural Practice Scheme to forgive HECS-HELP debt for graduate vets will assist in addressing the shortage of rural veterinarians, particularly in production animal services. A scheme supporting 80 students per year is estimated at \$5.76 million. A further option is to extend this to all recent graduates who commit to working in rural and regional areas (funding investment for this is estimated at \$24 million per year).

**This relatively modest investment will significantly help to relieve the profession's current workforce shortages.**

Educational fee forgiveness schemes are in place for several professions. Including the veterinary profession in these schemes using the existing policy structure is feasible.





## 2. Mental Health for Vets

**Issue:** 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.

**Solution:** The Australian Government to invest in the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary-specific and tested mental health support programs for the veterinary profession thus supporting the social and economic fabric of society.

### Investment

**\$2.1 million per year** to fund the AVA's industry-led wellness initiative, THRIVE, which supports veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous, and healthy careers and supports the social and economic fabric of society.

### Why does it matter?

Burnout and mental health challenges the veterinary profession face result from severe and long-term underfunding of the labour component of the profession during a time of immense generational and societal change. Veterinarians leaving the profession or moving to reduced hours, mean that remaining vets are working longer and harder.

In 2019, the AVA undertook research in this area to better understand the extent and depth of the issue across the profession to inform the development of a veterinary wellness strategy. This research found over two-thirds of respondents said they had experienced a mental health condition at some stage, which is higher than the general population.

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

In 2023, the AVA initiated a pilot program, Cultivating Safe Teams, to help mitigate psychosocial risks within 50 veterinary workplaces across Australia. To assist in addressing the mental health challenges faced by the profession, the AVA propose that the Australian 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 psychosocial 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. Vets for Tomorrow – Practice placement support

**Issue:** 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. Training a new veterinarian takes at least 5 - 7 years with 52 weeks prac placement which significantly exceeds (3x) the requirements of other degrees.

**Solution:** The Australian Government to extend the Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme to veterinary students.

#### Investment

**\$9.5m per year** to fund practice placement for veterinary students.

#### 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 budgetary pressure on universities to 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.

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, with the student or practice having to cover the associated costs. Practice placement support that allows veterinarians to meaningfully engage students in regional practice 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 as they must complete approximately 52 weeks of clinical placement during their study. This is often in rural and regional areas in practices engaged in livestock or mixed animal practice.







## 4. Public Good Funding for Wildlife Care

**Issue:** Veterinary businesses provide significant public benefits beyond the traditional veterinary services with little government funding to support this service, placing significant strain on veterinarians and their businesses.

**Solution:** The Australian Government to fund a National Veterinary Care Emergency Fund Pilot Program for private veterinary businesses to assist in treating Australian wildlife.

### Investment

**\$7.5 million per year for 4 years** for a National Veterinary Care Emergency Fund Pilot Program for private veterinary businesses to assist in treating Australian wildlife.

### 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 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.

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 respondents stating that they never (or rarely) received reimbursements. The same study found that the pro bono nature of wildlife care limited the timeliness and extent of the care that could be delivered to the animals.

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



## 5. Animal Health and Welfare

**Issue:** Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a threat to both human and animal health, contributing to about 700,000 deaths worldwide every year.

**Solution:** The Australian Government to establish a sustainable, multisectoral research surveillance system to identify and monitor emerging threats.

### Investment

**\$5 million per year** for a National Veterinary Antibiotic Usage and Resistance Surveillance System.

### Why does it matter?

Australians expect a high standard of animal welfare. The failure to progress animal welfare standards with respect to AMR is a significant concern for Australians, our international trading partners and communities.

Australia's Chief Scientist has observed an increasing number of antibiotic-resistant infections appearing in the community acquired during international travel and representing 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.

Without concurrent human and animal AMR research and surveillance in Australia, we cannot fully understand any emerging threats. The AVA estimates that an effective animal surveillance system could be established for \$5 million per annum.



## About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

**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.

Our members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock, and wildlife.

Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, and quarantine systems, while other members work in industry, research, and teaching. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

