



Report from Inquiry into Veterinary Workforce Shortages in NSW

AVA Representations and Response

August 2024



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. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock, laboratory animals, aquatic animals, exotic animals and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, and biosecurity and quarantine systems while other members work in industry, education and research, veterinary laboratory/pathology services and teaching. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Inquiry Background

The establishment of the Inquiry and its subsequent deliberations were heavily influenced by the AVA's extensive advocacy on veterinary workforce issues, particularly for the 2023 NSW Election through the AVA NSW Election Platform. The AVA engaged with all political parties and key parliamentarians, both before and after the New South Wales (NSW) election to raise awareness and seek Government action on the key issues facing the veterinary profession.

Throughout the Inquiry process, from supporting its initial inception, the AVA has made extensive representations to ensure complex and multifaceted veterinary concerns are thoroughly examined and addressed. The AVA provided an Initial Inquiry Committee briefing on the veterinary profession, followed by a comprehensive AVA Submission that detailed the numerous key issues and proposed solutions. The AVA were active participants in the Inquiry Hearing and provided further responses to the Inquiry's questions on notice and Committee supplementary questions.

Inquiry Report Recommendations, AVA Representations, and AVA Responses

The Australian Veterinary Association thanks the NSW Parliament and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee 4 for the significant investment into, and care for, the concerns being faced by the veterinary profession. The release of the Report of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in NSW was a positive moment for the veterinary profession and the Report will have significant implications in NSW and across the country.

The metaphor 'perfect storm' is apt for the complex combination of factors that produced an environment unable to be rectified by the veterinary profession alone. External influences including the regulatory framework, market forces, and community expectations are contributing to the difficulties faced by veterinarians. This is severely impacting their health and the sustainability of their careers.

The investment by Portfolio Committee 4 has provided a 166 page report that shows genuine understanding of the concerns of the veterinary profession, with 17 findings and 34 recommendations.

Given the importance of this Inquiry to the profession the AVA made a significant investment in providing information and representation. The 188 mentions of the Australian Veterinary Association is testament to this.

The AVA will now push for the implementation of many of the Inquiry recommendations. To help inform the AVA's future work and advocacy on the outcomes of the Inquiry Report, we surveyed members views on the Inquiry Recommendations.

This document provides extracts from the AVA representations to the Inquiry that informed the Inquiry recommendations, notable extracts from the Inquiry Report content, and AVA Response to the Inquiry Recommendations, and how aligned the Inquiry Recommendations are to AVA representations.

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INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 1

That the NSW Government provide dedicated, ongoing funding for the provision of veterinary services to wildlife, including for:

- wildlife rescue organisations
- existing wildlife hospitals
- support the expansion of wildlife units at other hospitals
- private veterinary practices to contribute to reasonable costs for services.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 10: The NSW Government commits funding to develop and implement a framework that provides regulatory and appropriate financial support to the provision of veterinary services for lost, stray and homeless animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations provided by all sectors of the profession (charities and the private veterinary sector).

The AVA submission talks extensively of the unpaid work that veterinarians undertake (including wildlife care) and the need for funding to support this.

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.22 Inquiry participants noted that veterinarians face undue financial, physical and emotional burdens for providing a significant public good.

2.24 'stakeholders noted that despite being obliged to treat wildlife, vet practices are often not recompensed for this service. Inquiry participants also raised concerns about whether vets are appropriately trained to treat these animals.'

2.25 'Apart from private non-specialist veterinary practices, there are few options for treatment of injured or sick wildlife.'

2.28 'Despite the lack of financial return, WIRES noted a survey conducted on behalf of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage found that almost 75 per cent of veterinary practices were willing to treat wildlife. This was reflected in evidence to the committee by a number of veterinarians who discussed the financial burden that providing free care to wildlife places on their practices'

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA strongly agrees with Finding 3 'That veterinarians provide a significant public good by providing services to injured wildlife, and stray, lost and homeless animals that is not currently appropriately recompensed by the NSW Government.'

The Australian veterinary profession provides a significant amount of public good from the private market from which most of the veterinary profession practices, such as private veterinary hospitals and charitable associations. Obligations of veterinarians exist through professional conduct as acknowledged the Inquiry Report, Chapter 1 and 2.20.

Public good provided by veterinarians is most obviously demonstrated in attending to animals that are not privately owned and, therefore, are without a private owner to take financial responsibility for them, such as wild, stray, lost and homeless animals,

Without recompense, veterinary services are provided through good will or are dependantdependent on insecure income such as charitable donations or grants.

Lack of sustainability in this area has implications for both animal welfare and veterinarians.

Although there is a demand for wildlife services, without adequate recompense for public good, undue financial, physical and emotional burdens are faced by veterinarians (noted in Inquiry Report, 2.22).

Adequate and secure recompense for public good work is required to cover costs of treatment, provide adequate facilities, provide secure paid employment and support of maintaining veterinary skills in these areas.

Without sustainable veterinary services, animal welfare and veterinary welfare is negatively impacted.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 2

That the NSW Government consider amending the Companion Animals Act 1998 to:

- ensure local government authorities collect stray animals from licensed veterinary clinics
- ensure that appropriate funding is provided to local government authorities to ensure that there is a consistent interpretation of the Act across all local government areas.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 9: The AVA calls upon the NSW Government to explore solutions that support the veterinary sector in its role with stray animals, addressing the key issues outlined and promoting overall animal health, welfare, and public health.

AVA Recommendation 10: The NSW Government commits funding to develop and implement a framework that provides regulatory and appropriate financial support to the provision of veterinary services for lost, stray and homeless animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations provided by all sectors of the profession (charities and the private veterinary sector).

“Despite the collection of animal management fees, impoundment fees and government grants for decades by local government, there is no consistency of payment for use of veterinary services or private infrastructure for the animal management of lost, stray, and homeless animals and is frequently borne by the private veterinary sector.” (AVA Submission p48)

“The costs associated with delivering this public good, that have been unable to be recouped and contributes to consequences of financial vulnerability, is leading to a reduction of provision of these services.” (AVA Submission p48)

“...AVA survey conducted in September 2022 regarding veterinary practices engagement with NSW councils/pounds. The survey revealed that 96% of responding veterinarians receive strays at their practices, with 81% not receiving payment for their care and 92% indicating that any payment received fails to cover the full cost of housing and treatment.” (AVA Submission p48)

“In some instances, councils refuse to collect strays, particularly cats, shifting the responsibility and costs onto veterinarians.” (AVA Submission p48)

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.38 ‘As previously mentioned, vets are obliged to provide care for lost, stray and homeless animals. However, the cost of care for these animals is generally not recouped.’

2.39 strays are often delivered to the vet (as the operator of an approved premise). Moreover, there is no obligation for a council officer to collect a stray from the veterinary hospital.

2.41 ‘Many vets also provide discounted services to organisations who rescue and rehome unclaimed pets.’

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

Stray, lost and homeless animals are another area of veterinary public good acknowledged by the Inquiry Report. Management of stray animals and population management is required for maintaining animal welfare.

Without a private owner or council to take financial responsibility, veterinary services and facilities are utilised for public good without adequate recompense. This negatively impacts the financial viability of veterinary practices presented with stray, lost or homeless animals.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 3

That the NSW Government develop a clearer regulatory framework for the provision of telehealth veterinary services to complement the delivery of after-hours services and potentially help reduce the burden on the veterinary workforce.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 7: The NSW Government provide resources to fund a think tank to develop an afterhours model that is sustainable for the profession and allows veterinary services to be delivered to the NSW community in both urban and rural areas 24/7.

“Legislative reform that would provide flexibility to the veterinary team around the way veterinary knowledge and services are delivered in rural and remote environments (e.g., telemedicine).” (AVA Submission p.56)

“Considerations and Potential After-Hours Models for Best Practice: All of these examples require financial resourcing to plan for and then execute. Financial resources that many practices, particularly rural and regional ones don't have available. The Inquiry's initiative to fund a think tank dedicated to developing a sustainable after-hours model is timely and essential. By amalgamating the best elements from existing models, learning from challenges, and innovating new solutions, there's potential to create a framework that ensures animal welfare without compromising the well-being of veterinary professionals.: (AVA, QoN Pg3,4)

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.43 'vets are obliged to ensure ongoing care is provided to any animal that they treat. In practical terms the AVA explained that this means that veterinary clinics must provide care after-hours or make arrangements with other clinics to provide an after-hours service for them.'

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Support

Alignment with AVA Representations: 50%

Noting:

While the AVA strongly supports this recommendation, telemedicine is only one part of the solution needed with respect to afterhours veterinary services. Telemedicine and tele-triage can assist in managing the demand for afterhours veterinary care and help ensure that veterinarians are only called out to cases that genuinely cannot wait until regular business hours.

Share of afterhours loads in regional veterinary practices is a major factor affecting veterinarian's choices around where to work. In particular, regional veterinary practices with a smaller number of veterinarians on staff find it significantly more difficult to recruit staff (AVA Workforce Survey 2023).

Telehealth was recommended by the Inquiry; however, the Inquiry acknowledged a number of current limitations around treatment advice and prescribing, which make telehealth difficult to employ without regulatory change.

A broader support is needed to assist the veterinary sector in identifying and developing a sustainable afterhours model. Hence the AVA's original recommendation of government funding for a think tank to explore the issue.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 4

That the NSW Government consider amending the Veterinary Practices Act 2003 and other relevant legislation to ensure that mobile veterinary clinics can be easily registered to deliver veterinary care, particularly in areas with no clinic within a reasonable distance. Any changes must ensure mobile clinics work collaboratively to ensure they can provide essential additional veterinary services without causing detriment to local clinics.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 14: The NSW Government commit to legislative and regulatory reform to safeguard the role of the veterinary profession in the delivery of animal health and welfare, whilst making it adaptable to a constantly changing environment. This could be achieved by a review of the veterinary practice act and consider the interactions with other legislation including the prevention of cruelty to animals act.

“Supporting mobile veterinary clinics or outreach programs that can bring veterinary care directly to underserved areas, especially in rural and remote regions improves access to veterinary care.” (AVA Submission p.59)

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.52 'requirements for veterinary practices are set out in the Veterinary Practices Act 2003, including that the premises of veterinary hospitals need to include land.... this limits the viability and operation of mobile vet clinics.'

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Support

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

Mobile clinics have several advantages, including being able to reach a variety of areas and having lower infrastructure cost. However, they also have limitations on the services that they are able to provide (such as more complex medical and surgical cases) and they are unable to provide ongoing and after-care services. It is important that treated animals have access to ongoing veterinary services that meet their care requirements.

The AVA is pleased to see the Inquiry Report acknowledge potential impacts on existing veterinary businesses - this must be a key factor in determining how and where mobile clinics are allowed to operate.

Any amendments to the Veterinary Practices Act for mobile veterinary clinics must ensure they work collaboratively with, and not compete with or cause detriment to, local veterinary clinics.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 5

That the NSW Government consider reviewing the Veterinary Practices Act 2003 to ensure that the Veterinary Practitioners Board NSW complaints investigation process is updated to allow for a streamlined process, and to distinguish between substantial complaints and those which are frivolous or vexatious.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 14: The NSW Government commit to legislative and regulatory reform to safeguard the role of the veterinary profession in the delivery of animal health and welfare, whilst making it adaptable to a constantly changing environment. This could be achieved by a review of the veterinary practice act and consider the interactions with other legislation including the prevention of cruelty to animals act.

“Indeed, the AVA observed that the complaints process ‘is not meeting contemporary practice’. The association also signalled that the community is increasingly litigious, which increases psychological risk for veterinarians, and leads to an added administrative burden.” (2.63; AVA Submission p.6)

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.63 ‘the AVA observed that the complaints process ‘is not meeting contemporary practice’. The association also signalled that the community is increasingly litigious, which increases psychological risk for veterinarians, and leads to an added administrative burden.’

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA and other stakeholders have long recognised the need for reform of the Veterinary Practice Act 2003. This includes the need for streamlined complaints processing and consideration.

The reform needs to allow complaints processes to be fair for both the public and veterinarians, whilst streamlining the process to reduce burden and stress for veterinarians.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 6

That the NSW Government advocate to the Australian Government to:
align visa requirements for veterinarians with those in the human medical field
amend working holiday visa requirements for veterinarians to enable longer stays with a single employer.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 6: The NSW Government support changes to visa provisions including lifting of the age cap for permanent residency to be in line with the human medical field.

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.67 'the veterinary workforce includes veterinarians who have acquired their degree overseas.'

2.68 Overseas trained vets fall into two categories: those whose degrees are recognised through the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) and those whose degrees are not ('non-equivalent' degrees). In both cases evidence to the inquiry indicated that visa requirements can be a barrier.'

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

It is important to reduce unnecessary administrative barriers for overseas veterinarians. There is a rigorous process which ensures that veterinarians trained overseas meet Australian standards. International equivalency facilitates the migration of veterinarians to assist with immediate workforce demands, and visa requirements need to allow for this process to occur quickly and smoothly.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 7

That the NSW Government prioritise a review of the Veterinary Practitioners Act 2003 and its associated regulation immediately following, or in conjunction with, the review of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 and associated regulations and codes.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 14: The NSW Government commit to legislative and regulatory reform to safeguard the role of the veterinary profession in the delivery of animal health and welfare, whilst making it adaptable to a constantly changing environment. This could be achieved by a review of the veterinary practice act and consider the interactions with other legislation including the prevention of cruelty to animals act.

Inquiry report content extracts:

2.92 We note that the Veterinary Practitioners Act 2003 is more broadly overdue for review. Additionally, it is acknowledged that that during the next sitting period the Legislative Council will consider the Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024. The earliest this may occur is August 2024. If this bill is passed, the staged repeal of the Veterinary Practice Regulation 2023 will be postponed from 1 September 2024 to 1 September 2025 as a review of the Act is underway. We recommend that the NSW Government prioritise a review of the Veterinary Practitioners Act 2003 and its associated regulation immediately following, or in conjunction with, the review of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 and associated regulations and codes.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA strongly supports this Inquiry recommendation and appreciate the Inquiry Committee adopting the AVA's recommendation.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 8

That the NSW Government continue to work with the Australian Government to increase the availability of childcare places, particularly in regional and rural areas.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 8: The NSW Government Veterinary professionals are extended the same opportunities as other professions that are being encouraged to move to regional, rural and remote areas.

AVA Recommendation 16: The NSW Government includes veterinarians in existing mechanisms to sustain medical and paramedical workers in rural areas of NSW.

Costs of childcare and the impact on the profession was raised in the submission (AVA Submission p.30, 45)

“A comprehensive approach, inclusive of both industry and government supported initiatives, is essential to effectively address the challenges and facilitate access to childcare for veterinary professionals. Proposed initiatives that could be considered by Government include:

- **Priority Childcare Placements:** A potential pathway could be to include essential workers, like veterinarians, priority access to childcare placements.
- **Tax Incentives:** Offering tax breaks and other mechanisms to support veterinarians in obtaining childcare is an approach worthy of further investigation to address some of the challenges.
- **Childcare in Rural Areas:** Government initiatives to enhance childcare facilities in rural areas would significantly benefit veterinarians working in these regions. **Government Intervention:** While government funding can act as a catalyst for veterinarians to re-join the workforce, it's imperative to understand that monetary aid alone is insufficient. Ideally, a portion of such funding should be channelled towards training and supporting the veterinary sector to assist parents to re-enter the profession, for example the AVA Return to Work program.” (AVA, QoN Pg 9)

Inquiry report content extracts:

- 3.22 'the lack of childcare places, plus the extended hours often worked by vets made it challenging for some vets to remain in the workforce once they had children.... further compounded by low salaries for vets, which means they are not necessarily the main earner in the household.'

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

For veterinarians to return to work and remain in the workforce, childcare needs to be available during veterinary working hours and accessible on a veterinary income. Veterinarians need to be considered as essential workers and provided the same opportunities as other essential workers, including priority in childcare placements and financial benefits to facilitate childcare accessibility. Childcare availability and the cost of childcare relative to veterinary income are significant concerns for veterinarians and veterinary nurses, particularly when returning to work. Lack of childcare access affects the ability of the veterinary profession to retain all workers.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 9

That the NSW Government provide grants to appropriate organisations to raise awareness and educate clients about the impact of their behaviour on veterinarians.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 4: The NSW Government consider funding a public awareness campaign to address the rising rates of verbal and physical assault of veterinary teams and to educate the community on the impact of their actions. For example, similar to the NSW Ambulance 'It's Never Okay' campaign.

Inquiry report content extracts:

3.58 The committee is very concerned at the level of mental stress and burnout reported in the veterinary profession. Much of this is related to stressful client interactions and increased workloads. The committee notes that poor customer behaviour is considered a stressor in other professions, including the health professions.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA strongly supports the recommendation for increased awareness of the impact of the public's behaviour on veterinarians and the veterinary team.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 10

That the NSW Government consider funding the Australian Veterinary Association to support its work developing mental health programs for veterinarians.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 3: The NSW Government commit funding to AVA's wellness initiative, THRIVE to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.

Inquiry report content extracts:

3.28 In addition to the challenges identified in Chapter 1 and previously in this chapter, stakeholders identified a range of other factors that can increase stress and affect the mental health of veterinarians, and may lead to some leaving the profession:

- emotional investment in patient outcomes.
- poor interactions with the community and damaging social media.
- moral distress when owners cannot afford to pay for treatment, and therefore the animal suffers, or they are asked to put it down.
- aggressive clients.
- distressing situations at pounds where there is pressure or a requirement to euthanise animals.
- lack of mentoring and other support in the workplace.
- poor workplace culture, including double standards for men and women.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA commends the Inquiry Committee for acknowledging the significant work the AVA has invested into supporting the mental health of the profession and for recommending the support of AVA's wellness initiative THRIVE.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 11

That the NSW Government consider how it can support and promote the establishment of the field of Veterinary Social Work in New South Wales.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

“To improve access to veterinary care the AVA would like to see...Collaboration with other sectors to allow improved access to social supports for people experiencing vulnerabilities.” (AVA Submission, p.11)

“In the human health sector, there are allied industries that provide mechanisms for people to access human health care. In the veterinary profession such mechanisms are very limited, with the concept of veterinary social work being very new and evolving. An uptake of veterinary social work by the profession is likely to reduce the barriers in this group of people, however, resourcing should not be borne by the private veterinary sector.” (AVA Submission, p.54)

“Veterinary Social Work (VSW) is an emerging field in Australia, and veterinary social workers provide the added benefit of being trained and experienced to embrace a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach to managing often complex human social needs in the context of veterinary care. The inclusion of this skill set in the clinical environment team improves the wellbeing and mental health of veterinary teams.” (AVA Submission, p.61)

Inquiry report content extracts:

3.39 ‘The AVA was also very supportive of the emerging field of ‘Veterinary Social Work’ as a means of reducing the mental health burden on veterinarians:’

3.41 ‘RSPCA NSW was also supportive of increasing the use of veterinary social workers in Australia, as a way to support the mental health of veterinary practitioners:’

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

Providing for the needs of animals overlaps with human social factors which, unlike in the human health system, is not supported by allied health. Veterinary Social Work is an emerging field. In pursuing this recommendation, the NSW Government should work closely with the veterinary sector for the advancement of this field and consider funding NSW based pilot programs.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 12

That the NSW Government, through the Agricultural Ministers Council, seek national support for a national veterinary workforce database, as proposed by the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 13: The NSW Government provide funding to resource the development of prioritisation and planning of the longer-term strategies that will have the most effective workforce outcomes for all stakeholders the veterinary profession serves and the profession itself.

Inquiry report content extracts:

3.42 'A number of inquiry participants told the committee that planning and strategies to address veterinary workforce challenges were hampered by a lack of comprehensive data at a state level and nationally.'

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 75%

Noting:

Effective workforce planning is underpinned by quality data. The lack of consistent and accessible workforce data is one of the major challenges the veterinary sector faces. However, data is only one part of the issue. Despite the veterinary profession being seen as essential, there is a severe lack of investment in veterinary workforce data collation. Investment is also needed to build on the data to develop a veterinary workforce plan, similar to those the Government supports for other essential sectors.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 13

The Minister for Mental Health, in conjunction with the Minister for Agriculture, take steps to ensure suicide prevention programs are made available which are specifically targeted at veterinarians.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 14

That the NSW Government examine data held by NSW government agencies regarding the suicide rate in the veterinary profession across the state over the last two decades, including all causal factors and develop a framework to better support mental health of veterinarians.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

"If funded by the government,...Here are the programs and services that would be provided with this funding:

- **Industry-Specific Training:** Financial support to deliver tailored training around managing challenging client interactions, which can be significant stressors in the veterinary field.
- **Research and Data Collection:** Investment in research that gathers more accurate data on suicide statistics within the profession, as well as broader research into industry-specific psychosocial hazards.
- **Addressing Psychosocial Hazards:** Developing a practical program tailored for veterinary businesses to assess and manage their specific psychosocial risks.
- **Mental Health Training & Support:** Specialised mental health training for veterinarians, veterinary nurses, and practice managers, including programs to improving workplace culture and support individuals for example the 24/7 Counselling Service:
- **Expansion of the dedicated counselling service.** • **Veterinary-Focused Mental Health Education:** Creating campaigns and resources, led by the veterinary profession, to bolster veterinarian well-being, enhance career satisfaction, and promote the sustainability of the profession. (AVA, Questions on Notice pg6)

Inquiry report content extracts:

Finding 11 Suicide risks reported by the veterinary profession are highly concerning, and urgent action must be taken.

3.63 The committee was also deeply concerned about the evidence suggesting high suicide rates in the veterinary profession.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA has been concerned with and made significant investment in researching and providing support for mental wellness in the veterinary profession. The AVA commends the recommendations and sincerely thanks the Inquiry Committee for their concern and recognition for the mental ill-health and suicides occurring in the veterinary profession.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 15

That the NSW Government considers providing financial incentives for veterinarians who work with livestock, to ensure an adequate number of large animal practitioners are available to support primary producers in regional areas.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 1: The NSW Government commit to ongoing recognition and support of veterinarians to continue to build and maintain capacity for Emergency Animal Disease surveillance and response activities.

AVA Recommendation 11: The NSW Government through funding encourages industry and the veterinary profession to collaborate and develop a framework or solution that will improve integration of veterinary services into animal production systems that is workable for all parties.

The AVA Submission notes that strategies that could be considered include, “Mechanisms to increase veterinary involvement in animal production systems through either mandatory requirement of veterinarians in the supply chain of all livestock products or through the provision of funding to encourage producers to engage with veterinarians around biosecurity and welfare in a scheme similar to the Animal welfare pathway that the UK has just instituted.” (AVA Submission, p.57)

Further, the AVA 2024/25 Commonwealth Pre-Budget submission more formally recommended this, “Recommendation 3.1 - Biosecurity funding: In its funding of the biosecurity system the Commonwealth 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).”

All these factors have led to an overall decrease in engagement of the private veterinary sector with livestock production systems with a substantial number of producers not engaging with veterinarians for years. In many instances where the veterinarian may have previously been the first point of contact, producers are now actively deciding not to involve veterinary services (AVA Submission, p.44)

Inquiry report content extracts:

4.14 The committee heard that treating large animals presents specific challenges for vet practices, including that:

- there are few current graduates that have an adequate understanding of large animal medicine, herd health and the role of livestock in sustainable food and fibre production in Australia.
- producers are increasingly self-sufficient, for example, drug deregulation has allowed some drugs to be sold in stock stores.
- large animal vets are usually used in a ‘reactive’ manner to treat sick animals, rather than being proactively engaged for preventative measures such as herd health and nutrition.
- the financial cost of intervention for individual animals on farms may outweigh the value of the animal concerned thus veterinary assistance tends to be selective.
- the low demand for veterinary services by livestock producers has meant that large animal practices are less sustainable, and likely to close.
- some producers have not had a veterinarian on farm for a number of years.

4.16 It was noted that the decreasing demand for large animal veterinarians and the ageing workforce may hinder the development of the next generation of large animal practitioners.

4.32 The committee observes that many of the challenges faced in rural and regional areas are similar to those faced by all veterinarians. However, we find that there are specific additional challenges that hinder service provision and the availability of veterinary practices in these areas, including, but not limited to, the tyranny of distance, difficulties recruiting and retaining vets, particularly for large animal work, and the lack of engagement by primary producers.

4.48 . In saying this, we strongly encourage primary producers to proactively engage with their local veterinarians to assist in managing their livestock and bio-surveillance.

4.52 The committee acknowledges the important work of veterinarians in emergency response situations such as floods and bushfires. The evidence to the committee from the Department of Primary Industries noted that the NSW Government, having learnt from recent natural disasters, is working to implement a framework to train, register, deploy and compensate vets who assist in these situations.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 15 - CONTINUED

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA supports financial incentives for veterinarians that work with livestock to address the supply of veterinarians in rural and remote areas. It was noted that student debt forgiveness alone would not be enough of a solution.

Veterinary services to primary producers result in positive externalities (particularly in terms of biosecurity, along with animal health and welfare) that benefit the wider animal industries and the community. However, when the level of demand is driven solely by the private market, it tends to undervalue and underinvest in veterinary services. We strongly encourage the NSW Government to work with the AVA and our production animal veterinarians to ensure these incentives are appropriately targeted and effective.

Such a policy would have the twin gains of maximising the “whole of community” benefit of veterinary services and increase the viability of veterinary infrastructure in broader areas of the state.

Financial incentives will assist veterinarians to consider regional areas, but demand for veterinary services is required to ensure ongoing viability of veterinary practices in these areas.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 16

That the NSW Government advocate for the Australian Government to trial incentives, including waiving HECS debt, to attract and retain veterinarians in New South Wales, and particularly in rural and in regional areas.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 15: The NSW Government considers funding around educational fee relief to encourage early career veterinarians to work in rural NSW.

Inquiry report content extracts:

4.43 It was not clear to the committee, however, that student debt forgiveness alone will necessarily lead to more vets working in large animal practice, or relocating to the regions. There was convincing evidence that graduates are less willing to work in large animal practice. Moreover, the shortage of professionals in the regions is not unique to the veterinary profession; areas outside the large cities have struggled to recruit medical professionals and teachers for many years.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 75%

Noting:

Education debt forgiveness (including HECS) is encouraging as a mechanism for attracting early career veterinarians to regional areas. The AVA notes, however, that this is only one of many concerns that need addressing. Wide and complex liveability impacts, such as childcare, medical services and education, that affect all people in rural areas also need addressing.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 17

That the NSW Government provide funding for targeted grants to enhance mentoring for first year graduates in private practice in New South Wales, and particularly in areas outside of large cities.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 15: The NSW Government considers funding around educational fee relief to encourage early career veterinarians to work in rural NSW.

AVA recommendation to fund Thrive includes a mentoring component.

“If funded by the government,...Here are the programs and services that would be provided with this funding: • Whole of Career Pathways Mentoring (peer to peer): Providing mentorship throughout the career of veterinary professionals, from undergraduate students to retirees.”(AVA, Questions on Notice pg6)

Inquiry report content extracts:

4.45 There was also evidence put to the committee that early career vets were not getting the support they needed from their employer in order to develop their skills and thrive in their roles. There was discussion from witnesses about the need for better mentoring new graduates, particularly in rural and regional areas.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

Transition from university to veterinary practice is particularly challenging for veterinarians in all areas and disciplines. This is largely under supported and becomes the responsibility of private practice during a veterinary graduates' first employment. The AVA provides graduate mentoring and welcomes the recommendation and additional support in this area, recognising the particular challenges for new graduates in regional areas.

The AVA 2023 Workforce Survey notes that rural and regional veterinary practices find it particularly difficult to recruit staff. We understand that this is partly driven by prospective employees concerns over after-hours workload, but it is also driven by the in-clinic support that is available. Increased investment in mentoring for recent graduates working in regional areas will assist in offsetting these concerns.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 18

That the NSW Government to consider providing incentives for veterinarians to take up NSW Local Land Service veterinary roles in regions where recruitment has been difficult.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 1: The NSW Government commit to ongoing recognition and support of veterinarians to continue to build and maintain capacity for Emergency Animal Disease surveillance and response activities.

AVA Recommendation 2: The NSW Government consider the pressing concerns experienced by government veterinarians and conduct a comprehensive review and develop a proactive strategy to support the critical work of our government veterinarians, ensure the health of our livestock, and maintain our ability to respond effectively to biosecurity threats and animal welfare issues.

AVA submission noted the challenges in recruiting Govt vets, "Anecdotal evidence suggests that while historically, LLS employed veterinarians enjoyed better support for work-life balance and a salary premium of 15-20 thousand dollars compared to privately employed veterinarians, this benefit is no longer apparent. Private employers have improved workplace flexibility and wages such that the benefit is reversed, with LLS veterinarians now often earning less than similarly experienced private practitioners." (AVA Submission, p24)

Inquiry report content extracts:

4.46 We acknowledge the challenges for veterinary professionals locating to regional and rural areas, and stakeholders' proposals to use incentives to entice individuals to the regions, similar to those used for attracting teachers and medical professionals. The committee considers this suggestion has strong merit, particularly with respect to NSW Government veterinarians.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 50%

Noting:

The AVA strongly support the inquiry recommendation to provide incentives for veterinarians to take up Local Land Service roles in regions where it has been difficult to recruit. It is essential that these incentives are structured to attract veterinarians to the LLS region without worsening storages of other veterinary services in that location.

However, the AVA in its representations called for greater support for all government veterinarians and views this recommendation doesn't go far enough.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 19

That the NSW Government conduct an assessment of the capacity of the government veterinary diagnostic services workforce, in particular veterinary pathologists, to respond to an emergency animal disease outbreak and to also meet projected future demands for diagnostic services. This assessment should be publicly released.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 1: The NSW Government commit to ongoing recognition and support of veterinarians to continue to build and maintain capacity for Emergency Animal Disease surveillance and response activities.

AVA Recommendation 2: The NSW Government consider the pressing concerns experienced by government veterinarians and conduct a comprehensive review and develop a proactive strategy to support the critical work of our government veterinarians, ensure the health of our livestock, and maintain our ability to respond effectively to biosecurity threats and animal welfare issues.

“Until the early 1990s, in most jurisdictions, diagnostic samples from livestock were examined in public state-run veterinary laboratories at no charge to the submitter or owner as a part of surveillance for, and response to, serious livestock diseases. This provided a fertile training ground for veterinary pathologists, microbiologists, parasitologists and epidemiologists. Public government veterinary laboratories have moved to a largely fee-for-service model, although most jurisdictions still maintain them, animal disease surveillance has become far more targeted.” (AVA Submission, p.26)

“The Australia-wide veterinary pathology active workforce has contracted from 140 FTE in 2007 to 112 FTE in 2023 despite a growth in demand for pathology diagnostic services over this period. This contracture largely reflects retirement (as 50% of the workforce in 2007 were over 50 years of age) and a lack of sufficient training positions over this period.” (AVA Submission, p.27)

“The Plant and Animal Health Laboratory at Menangle within the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute (EMAI) remains the only government veterinary laboratory in NSW. The regional veterinary laboratories in Armidale and Wagga Wagga laboratories were closed in 1996, and the Orange and Wollongbar laboratories were closed in 2009. As a result, the EMAI laboratory services the whole of NSW to detect and respond to every EAD event.” (AVA Submission, p.27)

Inquiry report content extracts:

4.50 In the event of a biosecurity threat the committee seeks assurance from the NSW Government that there is sufficient workforce of veterinary pathologists and the necessary infrastructure to meet future demands for services, including in the event of an emergency animal disease outbreak.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA welcomes a review of the veterinary workforce pathology capabilities and notes several reasons for current concern. The move to ‘fee for service’ from a ‘no charge’ model in public state-run veterinary laboratories has implications for private veterinary practices to ensure samples are submitted and paid, in addition to implications for the training of pathologists. Urgent support is immediately needed to rectify pathology capabilities, support the uptake of pathology testing for biosecurity, and for the training of veterinary pathologists.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 20

That the NSW Government, through the relevant Ministerial Council, advocate that veterinary schools and the accreditation body work together to action the recommendations of Rethinking Veterinary Education, the recent review of veterinary education commissioned by the Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand, which would help reduce the cost of course deliver.

AVA inquiry representations extracts::

“Much commentary has been put forward by the profession around veterinary education. For the committee’s awareness the Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand have released a review of veterinary education. The AVA is supportive of the majority of the recommendations as they pertain to the profession.” (AVA Submission, p.61)

Inquiry report content extracts:

5.7 Challenges for universities include recruiting suitably qualified teaching staff, the high cost of delivering veterinary courses, and selecting suitable candidates for entry into the courses.

5.18 This is reflected in the findings of the VSANZ report (2022) which found that funding to veterinary schools is inadequate to meet the costs of teaching the degree. The report made a number of recommendations to address the high cost of delivering degrees, including:

- that the AVBC, along with veterinary schools, review the accreditation process to improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency of course delivery: – ‘to remove requirements that duplicate the many other accountability and quality assurance processes of Australasian universities’ – ‘review the necessity and cost-effectiveness of each accreditation requirement in the light of the desired learning outcomes’ – ‘accelerate the transition from assessing teaching inputs to assessing learning outcomes as the principal basis for accreditation of veterinary programs’.
- calling on the Australian Government to increase the funding rate per veterinary student by at least 30 per cent.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA are supportive of this Inquiry recommendation and the recommendations from the Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand review of veterinary education report ‘Rethink Veterinary Education’ that have direct and indirect relevance to the veterinary profession.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 21

That the NSW Government, through the relevant Ministerial Council, advocate for the Australian Government to increase its per student contribution to universities for students studying to become veterinarians.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 22

That the NSW Government, through the relevant Ministerial Council, advocate for the Australian Government to provide funding for clinical training for veterinary students training in large animal practice.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

The AVA indicated broad support for the majority of the recommendations in the VSANZ report.

More specifically, the AVA has previously indicated support of increased funding for veterinary education (<https://www.ava.com.au/news/ava-welcomes-the-release-of-the-vsanz-education-review--rethinking-veterinary-education/>)

Inquiry report content extracts:

5.55 The committee is aware that it will take time to implement the recommendation above, so urges immediate action to increase funding to universities to assist them with the cost of delivering courses for students studying to become veterinarians. To this end, we recommend that the NSW Government, through the relevant Ministerial Council, advocate for the Australian Government to increase its per student contribution to universities for students studying to become veterinarians.

5.56 The review, Rethinking Veterinary Education, also recommended that the Australian Government provide funding for clinical training for veterinary students training in priority areas. The committee strongly supports this recommendation as a means of encouraging students to acquire their skills, and concurs that large animal training should be targeted. We therefore recommend that the NSW Government, through the relevant Ministerial Council, advocate for the Australian Government to provide funding for clinical training for veterinary students training in large animal practice.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The VSANZ report explains that the highest costs of courses are due to the need for practical and clinical training in both large and small animals to produce omnicompetent veterinary graduates. (VSANZ Rethinking veterinary education pg 30).

The high cost of clinical teaching and the difficulty of maintaining adequate staffing and case load in all veterinary fields have led to varying degrees of outsourcing to the private sector and other universities. (VSANZ Rethinking veterinary education pg 31)

The AVA strongly supports a substantial increase in funding of veterinary education which will have flow on implications for veterinary students and the private veterinary profession which provides distributed clinical teaching.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 23

That the NSW Government, through the relevant Ministerial Council, advocate for universities to continue to review their student admission processes, to ensure that suitable candidates are chosen to study veterinary science.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

“There is oppositional commentary within the profession around the expectations of the early career veterinarians. Mid to late career veterinarians are often of the opinion that the veterinary education systems are incorrectly selecting students, or not adequately preparing them for the profession, as they are perceived to lack resilience. Early career veterinarians and veterinary educators often comment that the profession has been slow to adapt to the changing expectations of recent generations. The lack of the ability of the profession to adapt is complicated by underinvestment in the labour component of the profession which leads to higher than desired attrition rates in early career.” (AVA Submission, pp.33-32)

Inquiry report content extracts:

5.19 There was some concern amongst stakeholders as to whether the students who gain entry to veterinary science courses are suitable for the challenges of the profession. Indeed, certain submissions from individual vets, particularly those who had been in the profession for many decades, suggested that universities need to select students that are better suited to the ‘rigours’ of veterinary practice.

5.21 In response to these concerns, the University of Sydney and Charles Sturt University outlined their admission processes for veterinary science courses. Both universities have a multi-step process and are not solely reliant on academic marks.

5.57 Additionally, we note concerns that universities are not enrolling vet students who are suited to the realities veterinary practice. While at least one university uses an interview as part of its admission system and there are requirements for applicants to show they have work experience in the industry, evidence suggests that academic marks are still used as the first ‘cut’ for determining the pool of potential students. The committee considers that using academic marks for this purpose may be removing highly suitable candidates from eligibility for veterinary studies.

5.58 The committee understands that universities are continually assessing their admission process to ensure students from a broad range of backgrounds, including from rural areas, are admitted.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 75%

Noting:

The AVA are supportive of continued reviews and improvements for veterinary education, including for selection and admission processes.

Furthermore, considering the concerns regarding the widespread shortage of veterinarians and the prevalence of mental health issues in the profession, it is crucial to recognise that the current veterinary environment is complex with multiple causes behind the current workforce challenges. Modernisation of the veterinary sector is needed to meet changing generational expectations, rather than attributing the workforce challenges solely to a lack of resilience within the veterinary profession.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 24

That the NSW Government seek to introduce a regulatory framework for veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians in New South Wales. The framework should encompass:

- minimum qualification requirements, in line with those already in use, specifically the Australian Veterinary Nurse and Technician Registration Scheme, and the scheme in Western Australia
- title protection, where only those who meet the minimum qualification requirements can use the protected titles
- professional standards, including a code of professional conduct
- oversight by a professional board
- appropriate rates of pay.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 25

That any regulatory framework for veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians in New South Wales:

- be provided under the same legislation as the regulation of veterinarians
- be consistent with the scheme already in place in Western Australia, and aligned as much as possible with the Australian Veterinary Nurse and Technician voluntary

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 26

That the NSW Government advocate for a nationally consistent registration scheme for veterinary nurses and technicians through the Ministerial Council for Agriculture and other appropriate forums.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 27

The NSW Government review the Veterinary Practice Act 2003 to determine whether some restricted acts of veterinary science could be extended to veterinary nurses and technicians who are regulated under the same legislative framework.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 14: The NSW Government commit to legislative and regulatory reform to safeguard the role of the veterinary profession in the delivery of animal health and welfare, whilst making it adaptable to a constantly changing environment. This could be achieved by a review of the veterinary practice act and consider the interactions with other legislation including the prevention of cruelty to animals act.

“The existing regulatory framework in NSW only regulates veterinarians, not the other members of the veterinary practice workforce, such as veterinary paraprofessionals like veterinary technicians and nurses. This is limiting the capacity of the workforce and efficacy of the veterinary team. We would like to see a regulated veterinarian led team. Registration of veterinary nurses and para-veterinary staff by the Veterinary Practitioners Board (VPB), legislated through the Veterinary Practice Act (VPA), would allow the setting of professional standards for this group to work under the supervision of registered veterinarians.” (AVA Submission, pp.6-7)

“Expansion of the regulatory framework of the veterinary profession to include veterinary nurses, veterinary technicians and potentially paraprofessionals. These professionals would need to operate under the licensure and supervision of a registered veterinarian to ensure monitoring, accountability, and maintenance of required and regulated standards.” (AVA Submission, p.11)

“The AVA recommends that all persons using the title ‘Veterinary Nurse’ must possess veterinary nurse qualifications and conform to standards appropriate to professional veterinary practice. And that these standards should be subject to regular review by a national professional body. The AVA supports and endorses the VNCA’s TOR (d) submission to the NSW Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage.” (AVA Submission, p.37)

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION - CONTINUED

Inquiry report content extracts:

6.15 Stakeholders identified that challenges for veterinary nurses and technicians fell into two broad categories:

- a lack of recognition and utilisation of their skills and abilities by their employers which leads to dissatisfaction in the workplace.
- challenging workplace conditions, including workload, low salaries and poor customer behaviour.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA are strongly supportive of these Inquiry recommendations. It is essential for the NSW Government to work closely with the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA), the NSW Veterinary Practitioners Board, the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council, and the AVA in the development of these amendments.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 28

That the NSW Government provide support for the Australian Veterinary Association to develop educational materials for pet owners containing information about:

- how veterinary clinics operate
- how pet owners should budget for unexpected costs
- how to create a positive relationship with the veterinary team
- the potential benefits of pet insurance. This information should be available in a range of community languages.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 29

That the NSW Government consider using the NSW Pet Registry to provide educational material to pet owners.

AVA inquiry representations extracts::

“While population growth has previously been a useful indicator of companion animal demand for veterinary services, this appears to have been decoupled in recent decades as animal ownership rates fluctuate, consumer expectations on levels of service have grown and the complexities of modern veterinary care have developed. Hence, the relatively rapidly growing profession still falling behind growth in demand for veterinary hours.” (AVA Submission, p.17)

“The common psychosocial risks identified consistently were: • challenging client interactions & expectations” (AVA Submission, p. 35)

Inquiry report content extracts:

Finding 17 That difficulties accessing veterinary care for pets and large animals, whether due to restricted service capacity or affordability, can impact on animal welfare.

7.1 The committee heard from a range of stakeholders, including pet owners, animal welfare organisations and veterinarians. In all cases the greatest barrier identified related to the affordability of veterinary care. However, the issue of access to a local veterinarian, including out of hours, was regularly raised. Other barriers included lack of access to appropriate transport, and language. There was also evidence that unrealistic and poor education about the realities of pet ownership create obstacles.

7.10 Many stakeholders noted that affordability was the most significant barrier that prevented pet owners from accessing adequate and/or timely care for their pets. For some owners this includes the cost of basic care such as vaccinations and desexing, whereas other owners indicated that they have been faced with bills of thousands of dollars.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 75%

Noting:

The AVA supports increased education for pet owners to understand how the veterinary hospitals operate and the necessary team relationship between veterinarian, owner and animal in order to provide medical care for pets throughout their life.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 30

That the NSW Government advocate to the Australian Government for veterinarians to access the Translating and Interpreting Service for clients who hold Centrelink cards.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

AVA Recommendation 12: The NSW Government support extending access to the national Translating and Interpreting Service for veterinarians.

The AVA submission noted that language is one of the barriers to obtaining veterinary treatment for pets.

Inquiry report content extracts:

7.79 The committee also notes that the AVA has proposed that the NSW Government support extending access to the national Translating and Interpreting Service, and that this proposal was supported by a number of stakeholders. The committee notes that this service is free to medical practitioners providing Medicare rebateable services. The committee recommends the NSW Government advocate to the Australian Government for veterinarians to access the Translating and Interpreting Service for clients who hold Centrelink cards.

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Strongly Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA strongly supports this proposal and appreciates the Inquiry Committee adoption of AVA's recommendation.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 31

That the NSW Government investigate strategies to best ensure veterinary care for pet owners particularly low income earners can be made more affordable.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 32

That the NSW Government investigate providing subsidised vet care to low-income earners, pensioner and animal rescue groups.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 33

That the NSW Government provide funding to animal rescue organisations and the university sector to increase subsidised treatments at their veterinary hospitals and provide increased training opportunities for veterinary science students and others.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

“The AVA’s top welfare objective is that any animal that is under human care in Australia should be able to access veterinary care, and strategies must address the barriers to veterinary care. Strategies to improve the sustainability of the profession through supporting the workforce will improve access to veterinary care.” (AVA Submission, p.58)

On Veticare, the AVA stated, “Although the AVA appreciates the acknowledgement of the benefits of pet ownership and the pro bono work of veterinarians, the mechanism to provide government funded public veterinary hospitals in competition, rather than in support of the current investment of veterinary infrastructure and public good by local veterinarians and charities, could undermine the provision of local veterinary services and reduce the ability to apply appropriate rates for indicated care (market failure) whereby adding to the problems. The AVA fully supports increased government funding to support veterinary care, however suggests supporting the extensive infrastructure and educational investment already operating in local communities. The unintended consequence of increasing competition with veterinary hospitals advantaged by government funding may further drive down the appropriate invoicing for indicated services, impacting already low remuneration and working conditions of veterinarian and their teams. Rather, supporting the broad areas of public good provided in local communities such as wildlife, stray animals, free and low-cost services for hardship and people experiencing vulnerability, to assist local veterinary practices to be appropriately remunerated for work in private - public partnerships. This will support the veterinary profession to be sustainable and acknowledge the work of veterinarians.” (AVA Submission, p. 61-62)

Inquiry Report: “...the AVA was strongly opposed to the introduction of government funded public veterinary hospitals, as it considered these clinics would be in competition with privately owned veterinary infrastructure which is already struggling to meet costs. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the AVA is supportive of government funding to existing veterinary practices to continue the public good they already offer, such as care for wildlife and strays, and subsidies for providing services for those on low incomes.” (7.46)

Inquiry report content extracts:

7.17 Following on, a central tension in discussions about affordability was whether the individual or the community should be responsible for the care of pets. On one hand, there were inquiry participants who were of the view that pet ownership is a personal choice and responsibility.

7.18 Alternatively, other stakeholders suggested that animal care and welfare is the responsibility of the entire community.

7.24 Animal welfare groups have provided subsidised pet care to owners, primarily funded by private donations with some government support, for many years. Despite growing demand, this subsidised care is increasingly difficult to provide due to rising costs, the closure of vet practices and practices no longer willing to discount treatment. As discussed in Chapter 2, subsidised care providers also faces regulatory challenges, particularly the use of mobile veterinary clinics.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION - CONTINUED

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 50%

Noting:

For private veterinarians working in private practices or charities to be able to provide the community with minimum standards of animal health and welfare and public health, there needs to be an ability for these services and standards to be government supported or paid by the animal owner. Animal welfare groups employing paid or volunteer veterinarians, largely funded by private donations, have tried to meet this need.

The AVA supports investigating strategies to ensure the veterinary care needs of animals in our community are effectively met for low-income earners that is means tested and pensioners.

The challenge is to support demand, whilst maintaining the viability of local veterinary practices to continue to service the needs of the community. The NSW Government must ensure that any subsidisation doesn't undercut local veterinary practices and reduce their financial viability.

INQUIRY RECOMMENDATION 34

That the NSW Government consider options for trialling companion-animal friendly public transport.

AVA inquiry representations extracts:

“Limited access to reliable transportation (private and public transport options that will allow animals to be transported, especially if unwell) can pose a barrier for animal owners, particularly those in rural or low socioeconomic areas.” (AVA Submission, p.54)

AVA Policy background, “In Australia, individuals and society as a whole derive many benefits from interacting with animals as companions, and uniform legislation should be promoted for example to permit pets in flats, pets on public transport and pets in restaurants.” (<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-management-and-welfare/the-responsible-ownership-of-dogs-and-cats-and-the-human-animal-bond/>)

Inquiry report content extracts:

7.1 ... Other barriers included lack of access to appropriate transport, and language. ...

AVA response to inquiry recommendation:

AVA Response: Supported

Alignment with AVA Representations: 100%

Noting:

The AVA supports increased access to transport for pet owners and consideration of the human social factors which impact accessibility of veterinary services. Pet ownership is an integral part of the human-animal bond and plays an important and positive role in the health and wellbeing of the community. Increasing the access of veterinary services and accessibility of transport for people with pets overall will have benefits for the community.