



2025 Tasmanian State Election AVA Priorities

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd
Tasmanian Division

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Veterinarians are trusted professionals and a vital part of our community.

They manage the health and welfare of our livestock that are crucial to our international trade and to the safety and security of our food, and they work in our public health sector on managing disease risks to animals and people alike.

They care for the companion animals that are increasingly part of our families.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak body representing the veterinary profession in Australia. The AVA has provided a united voice for the veterinary profession for over 100 years and is committed to championing and empowering the veterinary profession to thrive.

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.

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

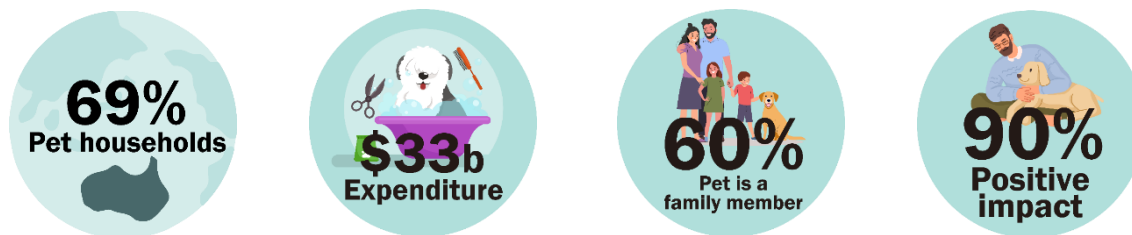
AVA Special Interest Groups





Impact of the Veterinary Sector

Pets are important to Australians as evidenced by one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world.



Around 90% of pet owners report that pets have a positive impact on their lives, and over 60% of pet owners refer to their pet as a member of the family, and the human-animal bond provides a myriad of benefits that directly and indirectly improve the health and wellbeing of the community.¹ The expenditure in pet care for 2022 was \$33 billion in Australia.²

The livestock industry in Australia is worth over \$31 billion annually and valued at \$1.2 billion in Tasmania³. Veterinarians are essential to all aspects of livestock health, welfare, and production. Veterinarians are also essential to the performance animal sector including animals involved in racing, pleasure, competition, and general assistance work.

Whether you own an animal or not, animals are deeply embedded into the Australian way of life. Our pets are part of the family. They offer companionship and support the physical and mental health of our community. The livestock industries deliver food security and underpin our economic prosperity. Working and sporting animals enhance our productivity and entertainment. Together animals contribute significantly to the social, cultural, environmental and economic fabric of society.

These animals are sentient beings, and the community rightly expects a certain level of care for their health and welfare. They see veterinary services as essential in this, as essential as human health care.

The availability of veterinary services underpins the social licence by which animal industries operate. Similar to human health, the community expects the veterinary profession to not only provide services for private (individual) benefit, but to also deliver services that provide public benefit (public good), for example disease surveillance to maintain biosecurity, and safe food production, as well as treatment of wildlife and stray animals.

¹ Animal Medicines Australia. Pets and the Pandemic: A social research snapshot of pets and people in the COVID-19 era. 2019. Available from: https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/AMAU005-PATP-Report21_v1.41_WEB.pdf

² Animal Medicines Australia. Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people. 2022. Available from: https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AMAU008-Pet-Ownership22-Report_v1.6_WEB.pdf

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, value of livestock disposals and products by Australia, state and territory 2023-24 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/agriculture/australian-agriculture-livestock/2023-24#data-downloads>



INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT



¹ Meat and Livestock Australia State of the Industry Report 2022



Top Veterinary Priorities for Tasmania

As of June 2024, there are 387 registered veterinarians in Tasmania⁴. However, unfortunately, the sustainability of the veterinary profession is at significant risk due to decades of underinvestment.

Continued underinvestment in the veterinary profession will result in:

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

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

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

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

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

1. Veterinary workforce shortages and attracting veterinarians to Tasmania
2. Support for veterinary students and recent graduates
3. Supporting the public good provided by veterinarians
4. Mental health support for veterinary professionals

⁴ June 2024 Register of Tasmanian Veterinarians <https://nre.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/veterinary-board-of-tasmania/veterinary-register>



Summary of Support Needed

1. Veterinary workforce shortages and attracting veterinarians to Tasmania

That the Tasmanian Government:

- Commit funding for analysis of the veterinary workforce needs of Tasmania, especially regional and rural areas.
- Provide veterinarians and veterinary personnel with the same opportunities and support offered to other professions being encouraged to relocate to Tasmania and rural areas.
- Support the development of a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.

2. Support for veterinary students and recent graduates

That the Tasmanian Government:

- Provide targeted funding to support veterinary students undertaking clinical placements in Tasmania. Specifically, the Government should introduce allowances to cover accommodation and travel costs for students, addressing the financial barriers associated with “placement poverty.”
- Implement an incentive scheme that provides a financial payment to recent graduates who begin their veterinary careers in Tasmania. The incentive could be in two parts, firstly an initial payment that is aimed at supporting the relocation costs incurred by the recent graduate. A second payment would be available once a recent graduate had completed at least five years veterinary practice in Tasmania.
- Advocate to the Australian Government to trial incentives, including waiving HECS debt, to attract and retain veterinary professionals to Tasmania, and particularly in rural and in regional areas.

3. Supporting the public good provided by veterinarians

That the Tasmanian Government:

- As part of its biosecurity funding, commit to increased and targeted investment in veterinary services. This should include enhanced support for surveillance and response activities, as well as the delivery of veterinary services that provide significant public good.
- Assumes responsibility for and financially supports the costs incurred by veterinary practices when treating or caring for Crown-owned wildlife and also unowned or lost animals.
- Establish a disaster response and recovery funding program (similar to NSW) to support the provision of veterinary care to animals impacted in natural disasters
- Supports private veterinary businesses to assist with the cost of delivery of veterinary services to animals in the care of people experiencing vulnerabilities.

4. Mental health support for veterinary professionals

That the Tasmanian Government commit to funding to support THRIVE, the AVA's wellness initiative, which supports Tasmanian veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers. This includes the expansion of a range of existing programs being undertaken by the AVA for the veterinary profession and implementing new programs under the areas of prevent, promote and protect. These bespoke programs, include:

- Expand the 24/7 AVA Counselling Service
- Cultivating Safe Teams program –Psychological health and safety awareness training sessions for all individuals working in the veterinary profession in Tasmania.
- Mental health first aid for veterinary teams



1. Veterinary Workforce Shortages and Attracting Veterinarians to Tasmania

Workforce shortages are currently affecting the whole veterinary industry, including in Tasmania. The local veterinarian is considered an essential service along with health, childcare and education. Tasmania particularly faces unique challenges in attracting and retaining veterinarians, particularly recent graduates and students. Given Australians' connection and commitment to animals, if Tasmania doesn't have access to adequate veterinary services, it makes it harder for all employers to attract and maintain a workforce.

Support Needed

That the Tasmanian Government:

- Commit funding for analysis of the veterinary workforce needs of Tasmania, especially regional and rural areas.
- Provide veterinarians and veterinary personnel with the same opportunities and support offered to other professions being encouraged to relocate to Tasmania and rural areas.
- Support the development of a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

Tasmania, like the rest of the country, is experiencing a critical shortage of skilled workers across multiple sectors. In the veterinary profession, this shortage, combined with rising demand for services, has led to inadequate capacity to meet community needs.

The consequences include:

- Compromised animal health and welfare
- Increased risks to biosecurity
- Heightened threats to human health and well-being

The shortage leads to greater competition for veterinarians and increases recruitment and retention challenges for veterinary businesses. This has further exposed the increasing strain that the veterinary business model is under. In this environment, it becomes even more challenging to attract veterinarians to certain areas, like Tasmania.

The Australian Veterinary Association's (AVA) 2023/24 Workforce Survey highlights the severity of the recruitment issue, The survey revealed that, across Australia, over half of the advertised veterinary roles took more than 6 months to fill and 36.8% took longer than 12 months or remained unfilled.⁵

Across all localities (urban and rural) there has been a significant increase in demand for veterinary services. Demand for veterinary services continues to rise, particularly in the companion animal sector, where owners have a strong emotional or financial bond with animals such as dogs, cats, horses, and livestock in peri-urban settings. As demand grows, the pressure on an already stretched workforce increases.

Veterinarians are more likely to be attracted to work in Tasmania if they are offered:

- Flexible working conditions
- Minimal after-hours responsibilities
- Competitive remuneration

⁵ https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/advocacy/workforce-survey/ava-2023_2024-workforce-survey-report.pdf



- Access to lifestyle benefits and services
- Targeted government incentives (e.g. relocation grants or education debt relief)⁶

Veterinarians should be offered the same supports provided to other essential professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers. These supports include access to accommodation, childcare, and other vital community services. To ensure the long-term viability of veterinary practice in Tasmania, the Government needs to implement proactive and targeted measures to attract and retain veterinary professionals.

Using Data to Build a Sustainable Workforce

Efforts are underway to improve the collection and analysis of veterinary workforce data. As much of this data is held at the state level, it is vital that data holders are empowered to share this information.

Further, this data needs to be used to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy. This strategy will help veterinary businesses, government, and other key stakeholders to minimise future mismatches in the supply and demand for veterinarians to avoid, or lessen, the length and severity of future shortages. Further analysis into the education and training of veterinary professionals to address labour market shortages, specifically in regional and rural areas and amongst early career veterinarians, is also required.

Noting the Parliamentary Inquiry into Veterinary Workforce Shortages in NSW

In June 2023, the NSW Parliament established an inquiry into veterinary workforce shortages in NSW. The AVA provided a comprehensive submission to the Inquiry that discussed the complex challenges, suggested strategies, and provided 16 vital recommendations. AVA representatives also participated in the Inquiry public hearing (transcript and recording) and provided further information for the Committee supplementary question and questions on notice.

The findings and recommendations in the NSW inquiry report are highly relevant to Tasmania, which faces similar workforce challenges in the veterinary profession. The NSW inquiry report, published in June 2024, included 17 key findings and 34 actionable recommendations, many of which could be adapted to address workforce issues in Tasmania.

The AVA and NSW Government's strong endorsement of the inquiry's recommendations demonstrates a framework the Tasmanian Government could consider adopting. By leveraging insights from the NSW inquiry, Tasmania has an opportunity to proactively address veterinary workforce shortages and strengthen the sector through collaborative policy development with stakeholders like the AVA.

⁶ Australian Veterinary Association. Veterinary Workforce Survey. 2021. Available from: <https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/news/ava-workforce-survey-analysis-2021-final.pdf>



2. Support for Veterinary Students and Recent Graduates

Veterinary students must complete around 52 weeks of practical placement, which heavily influences their career choices. However, Tasmania's lack of a veterinary school and the high costs of travel and accommodation deter students from choosing placements there. Government support for these expenses would increase student exposure to Tasmanian practice and help attract future vets to the region.

Veterinary graduates face high education debts and relatively low starting salaries, making rural practice less appealing. The AVA proposes financial incentives for new graduates to relocate to Tasmania, including an initial payment and a retention bonus after five years. Similar schemes in other professions show this approach can effectively address workforce shortages.

Support Needed

That the Tasmanian Government:

- Provide targeted funding to support veterinary students undertaking clinical placements in Tasmania. Specifically, the Government should introduce allowances to cover accommodation and travel costs for students, addressing the financial barriers associated with “placement poverty.”
- Implement an incentive scheme that provides a financial payment to recent graduates who begin their veterinary careers in Tasmania. The incentive could be in two parts, firstly an initial payment that is aimed at supporting the relocation costs incurred by the recent graduate. A second payment would be available once a recent graduate had completed at least five years veterinary practice in Tasmania.
- Advocate to the Australian Government to trial incentives, including waiving HECS debt, to attract and retain veterinary professionals to Tasmania, and particularly in rural and in regional areas.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

Veterinary student placements in Tasmania

Veterinary students are required to complete one of the most extensive practical placement programs of any university degree, typically undertaking around 52 weeks of placement throughout their studies. The type of veterinary practice they are exposed to and the regions in which these placements occur can play a significant role in shaping their career preferences and influencing where they choose to work after graduation.

One of the key ways of helping veterinary students consider future practice in Tasmania is to give them positive experiences of life here when they undertake practice placements during their studies. However, there are significant financial barriers to doing so, with the student or practice having to cover the associated costs.

The majority of practical placement occurs during university holidays. This can impact significantly on a student's ability to undertake paid work, necessary to support themselves, when they are required to be available to attend practical placements which attracts no financial support for expenses. Veterinary students are generally required to find and organise their own placements, pay for travel and accommodation, with many placements occurring far from a student's university base



Tasmania does not have a veterinary school, meaning no local veterinary students are based in the region. The prohibitive costs of travel and accommodation deter students from pursuing placements in Tasmanian veterinary facilities, which are vital for exposing students to the Tasmanian profession and fostering a pipeline of future veterinary staff for Tasmania.

During their education, veterinary students participate in various clinical placements, but these activities receive no financial support from the university. Consequently, students are responsible for covering their own travel and accommodation expenses for these placements. This economic burden restricts the frequency of student placements in Tasmania. Without sufficient exposure to the advantages of Tasmanian veterinary practice, students may not view it as a desirable career location after graduation.

Tasmanian Government allowances for accommodation and travel costs associated with students undertaking clinical placements the Tasmanian area will increase the number of students that are properly exposed to veterinary practice in the region and will increase the likelihood that they will see Tasmania as attractive options upon graduation.

Incentives for recent graduates to practice in Tasmania

Veterinarians complete five to ten years of study before graduating with significant debt of \$70,000 to \$80,000 for Commonwealth-funded students and up to \$300,000 for full-fee-paying domestic or international students.

Despite this educational financial burden, veterinary salaries remain low compared to similar professions. QILT data highlights that this disparity is particularly pronounced for recent graduates, whose modest starting salaries are further strained by substantial education debts. Compared to graduates from similarly intensive programs, veterinarians face a significant financial disadvantage. Surveys indicate that financial pressures strongly influence veterinary students' career decisions post-graduation.



Postgraduate coursework median full-time salaries by study area (2023)⁷

The AVA proposes that the Tasmanian Government implement an incentive scheme that provides a financial payment to recent graduates who begin their veterinary careers in this state. The incentive would be in two parts, firstly an initial payment that is aimed at supporting the relocation costs incurred by the recent graduate. A second payment would be available once a Recent Graduate had completed at least five years veterinary practice in

⁷ Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching. Graduate Outcomes Survey 2023
[https://qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey-\(gos\)](https://qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey-(gos))



Tasmania. This is to encourage the veterinarians to stay in Tasmania long enough to ‘put down some roots’.

A [survey](#) of Australia’s veterinary students shows 100% of respondents would consider working in a regional or rural practice if their HECS/HELP debt was wiped. The survey, by the AVA, presents a clear solution to help address regional veterinary shortage which has now reached crisis point, leaving many communities without access to essential veterinary services.

The survey results follow the [2023 announcement from Education Minister Jason Clare](#) that up to 2,000 of Australia’s most remote teachers can have their HECS/HELP debt cut by \$35,000 this year. This is on top of the Albanese Government’s [announcement in November 2022](#) that it will wipe the HECS/HELP debt of doctors and nurse practitioners who live and work in the most remote parts of Australia.



3. Supporting the Public Good Provided by Veterinarians

Veterinarians provide vital public services despite little government funding, placing financial and resourcing strain on private veterinary services for the community. Veterinarians provide biosecurity surveillance, management and care of strays, treatment of injured wildlife, caring for animals during natural disasters, and supporting the pets of vulnerable people in our community often without payment.

Support Needed

That the Tasmanian Government:

- As part of its biosecurity funding, commit to increased and targeted investment in veterinary services. This should include enhanced support for surveillance and response activities, as well as the delivery of veterinary services that provide significant public good.
- Assumes responsibility for and financially supports the costs incurred by veterinary practices when treating or caring for Crown-owned wildlife and also unowned/lost animals.
- Establish a disaster response and recovery funding program (similar to NSW) to support the provision of veterinary care to animals impacted in natural disasters
- Supports private veterinary businesses to assist with the cost of delivery of veterinary services to animals in the care of people experiencing vulnerabilities.

What is the issue and why does it matter?

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

In 2022, the AVA engaged Marsden Jacob Associates to assess the value of the veterinary profession in Australia, exploring both private benefits to animal owners and public benefits to the broader community. The [report](#) examined the roles veterinarians play, from treating individual animals to protecting public health, highlighting the tension between private, fee-based services and [public goods](#) where costs are often borne by the profession.

The study identified market failures within the sector, notably high workforce attrition and mental health challenges, which are not adequately captured by economic data. While veterinary services are primarily privately funded, the profession also provides numerous public benefits, such as emergency care, biosecurity, population control, and wildlife treatment, many of which are government-mandated or expected by the community. The inability of private practices to recoup the costs of delivering these public goods has eroded the sustainability of the profession, contributing to workforce shortages and underinvestment in labour.

To address these challenges, the report recommended mechanisms for the private veterinary sector to recoup public good costs, improved funding for government veterinary services and charities, and collaboration across sectors. It also noted the significant burden placed on private practices to treat unowned animals and wildlife, often without compensation. Legal and ethical obligations further complicate the issue, as veterinarians are expected to care for animals in distress, even outside business hours.



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

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

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

When an injured or sick animal is brought to a veterinary clinic, regardless of time, day, or ownership, it invokes both legal and ethical obligations. While veterinary laws may not explicitly require veterinarians to provide treatment, animal welfare laws impose a duty of care, making it an offence to neglect an animal in distress. Veterinary boards often interpret this as a legal obligation for veterinarians to offer immediate aid.

The inability to recoup the costs associated with delivering public good is a significant factor in increasing vulnerability of the private veterinary business model, which has led to an under investment in the labour component of the profession, a key contributor to the work force shortage. Providing mechanisms for the private veterinary sector to recoup the cost of delivery of veterinary services for public good will improve the sustainability of the veterinary profession. Through this, an increased investment in the labour component of the profession will lead to improved recruitment and retention.

Decades of underfunding in Tasmania for veterinary public good work has significantly strained private veterinary practices, jeopardising their ability to sustain these essential veterinary services. We propose that the Tasmanian Government commit to funding delivery of private veterinary services that are for the public good, particularly in the areas of biosecurity, strays, veterinary treatments for wildlife, animal care during emergency disaster situations, and veterinary services to vulnerable people.

Biosecurity

In many animal industries, particularly extensive farming systems, farmers are not required to engage veterinarians for routine care or disease management. This optional approach to veterinary involvement has led to a reduction in risk mitigation practices, such as regular disease surveillance, which are essential for effectively managing the threat of EAD.



In Australia 10 years ago, areas with the highest surveillance activity intensity aligned well with the distribution of the likelihood of disease introduction, establishment, and spread, with the exception of the northern Australian coastline, and these aligned with the locations of private and government veterinarians.⁸ It is unclear if this remains the case, given the continued erosion of supply of veterinary services in rural and regional areas. The widespread distribution of the recent EAD Japanese Encephalitis Virus before detection provides cause for concern.

The recent federal senate inquiry report looking at the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to Foot and Mouth Disease and Varroa mite,⁹ acknowledged these risks and recommended that the Australian government work with relevant industry bodies to increase utilisation of rural and remote veterinarians in disease surveillance and monitoring activities. Increased Tasmanian investment and streamlining of funding mechanisms for onshore disease surveillance and associated diagnostic capabilities for private veterinarians and increased capacity within government veterinary services is requested.

Animal health, welfare and biosecurity are significant public goods that are valued by our community. Government support, at all levels, is needed to ensure that these public goods continue to be delivered. The key is getting veterinary expertise onto farms to undertake passive biosecurity surveillance, supported by accessible EAD testing, and to work with primary producers to improve farm planning and practices. A critical element of this support is providing veterinarians with resources for timely and accurate disease detection and response.

This integrated approach strengthens our biosecurity framework and protects the health of animals, people, and the economy.

Strays

Veterinary practices often are the first port of call for many people who have found stray dogs, cats or litters as well other community requirements in respect to animal care and reliable information. The community has a perception or preference to bring stray dogs and cats to veterinary practices instead of direct to council rangers and pounds.

The provision of services by council pounds that are accessible to the public to meet these needs is extremely challenging.

The AVA calls upon the Tasmanian Government to fund the investigation and implementation of a state-wide consistent policy for the interaction between local government and veterinary practices in management of stray dogs and cats. This policy needs to address the issues identified with the stray animal intake process to councils, the management of injured strays, including reimbursement for veterinary treatment, housing, and arrangements addressing the associated financial impacts on veterinary practices for receiving, treating, and housing stray animals.

⁸ IJ East, RM Wicks, PAJ Martin et al. Use of a multi-criteria analysis framework to inform the design of risk based general surveillance systems for animal disease in Australia. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine*. 2013;112:230-247.

⁹ Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to foot and mouth disease and Varroa mite. 2022. [Cited 2023 October]. Available from: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024957/toc_pdf/AdequacyofAustralia'sbiosecuritymeasuresandresponsepreparedness,inparticularwithrespecttofoot-and-mouthdiseaseandvarroamite.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf



Wildlife

Australia has varied and unique wildlife of high intrinsic value and cultural importance. Their interaction with humans is high and many wildlife animals require veterinary services, either as a result of harmful interactions with humans, naturally occurring disease, or natural disasters.

The data available provides evidence that private veterinary practices are not able to recoup their costs, with 92% of survey veterinary respondents stating that they never or rarely received reimbursements for services provided to wildlife.¹⁰ The same study found that the pro bono nature of wildlife care limited the timeliness and extent of the care able to be delivered.

The rising cost of providing veterinary care to wildlife is rapidly becoming unsustainable for private practice.

The Crown (i.e Government) owns the Australian wildlife and these protected animals are considered the property of the State or Crown. The public expects that Australian wildlife is the responsibility of the Government and are often shocked to find that veterinarians don't receive any assistance with the provision of care to injured or diseased wildlife.

Disaster response

Disasters pose significant threats not only to human lives but also to animals, both domestic and wild. In such circumstances, veterinarians and veterinary nurses play a pivotal role in disaster response, treating affected animals, and when necessary make informed decisions regarding euthanasia for severely injured animals.

While it is the responsibility of pet and livestock owners to ensure the welfare of their animals during disasters, assistance is frequently required, often beyond the owner's financial capacity.

The current National Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), a cost-sharing initiative between the Australian Government and State/Territory Governments, commendably aids individuals, businesses, and communities following disasters. However, a critical gap exists in its provisions, as it fails to clearly include emergency veterinary care for disaster-affected animals as an eligible relief and recovery measure.

This omission means veterinary support varies significantly between jurisdictions, with no formal arrangements in [Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements \(TEMA\)](#) compared to the structured support in [NSW emergency management arrangements](#) that clearly detail the role of veterinarians and [provide funding arrangements to support veterinary treatments](#) to disaster impacted animals.

We note with concern the [TASAlert advice for Animal Welfare](#) and [RSPCA Animal Welfare Response Unit Deployment Plan](#) (listed as a supporting agency in TEMA) both talk about transporting injured and lost livestock, companion animals (including lost pets), and wildlife animals to veterinary practices for treatment, yet fails to provide details for the payment of veterinary services.

¹⁰ B Orr, A Tribe. Animal welfare implications of treating wildlife in Australian veterinary practices. Australian Veterinary Journal. 2018;96:475-480.



The lack of clear information on Tasmania's veterinary disaster arrangements has caused confusion among veterinarians, animal owners, wildlife carers, and emergency personnel. Particularly in crisis times when clear information is most needed. This uncertainty places a heavy financial and operational burden on veterinarians, who are expected to provide care to disaster impacted animals during disasters without support, driven by community expectations, legal obligations, and professional ethics.

Funding of these expectations is currently inadequate, such that veterinary care is often provided by veterinarians out of their own pocket or at reduced cost. This situation leads to a financial strain on private veterinary practices which in the short term can delay essential care for animals, potentially resulting in prolonged suffering. For animal owners, the confusion can exacerbate the stress and anxiety already associated with disaster events. In the longer term the inability to recoup costs associated with delivering public good threaten the viability of veterinary profession, a profession that is almost exclusively privately funded. Operationally this means an overall reduction of veterinary services available to the community.

To ensure animal welfare is sufficiently supported, the AVA strongly believes that arrangements for veterinary services to disaster impacted animals needs to be clearly recognised within the [Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements](#) and assistance measures provided (similar to those in NSW). This will ensure the provision of necessary veterinary services in disaster impacted areas, safeguarding animal welfare and reducing the financial strain on private veterinary businesses.

Animals of vulnerable persons

The Human-Animal bond has been shown to provide significant health benefits to humans, including improvements in mental and physical well-being. Over 69% of Australian households own a pet, with the majority of these owners reporting positive impacts on their quality of life. This bond contributes to stress reduction, enhanced cardiovascular health, and improved social interaction. These benefits, by extension, help reduce the demand on government-funded health services, such as mental health support and chronic disease management. Consequently, promoting pet ownership and animal care aligns with broader public health goals, benefiting both individuals and the public health system.

Any animal that is under human care in Australia should be able to access veterinary care, and strategies must address the barriers to accessing that veterinary care. Strategies to improve the sustainability of the profession through supporting the workforce will improve access to veterinary care.

Given that the structure of the profession has evolved as a predominantly privately funded system, the key to improving access to veterinary care to the whole community is to support the existing structure that is in place and ensure there is synergy and symbiosis with government veterinary services and charities.

The recent [NSW Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in NSW](#) considered these issues and recommended that the Government investigate providing subsidised veterinary care to low-income earners. The issues discussed in NSW are equally applicable to other jurisdictions, including Tasmania.

Currently, financial support of veterinary services for clients facing hardship is only available through charities such as [Pets In The Park](#), [RSPCA Tasmania Emergency Vet Program](#) or



through the provision of discounted or pro-bono services by the veterinary practices themselves. While veterinarians are best placed to deliver these veterinary services, it is not appropriate that they are expected to also fund it. Most veterinary practices are small businesses, and this places significant strain on their financial viability.

The community increasingly has stronger expectations on the need to care for the welfare of animals (whether they be pets or livestock). Part of this welfare is access to appropriate veterinary care. As such, the community itself (through government) needs to make provision for the costs of this care where individual owners cannot.

A further area of concern is animals in domestic and family violence situations. An inability to have safe accommodation for pets can be a barrier to victims in leaving dangerous situations. There is a need for government support to ensure that there are animal-friendly facilities and emergency accommodation available.



4. Mental Health Support for Veterinary Professionals

Australia needs resilient veterinary professionals to support the community, livestock, and food production. Veterinarians have a high risk of mental ill health and little to no access to industry specific programs and assistance.

We propose that the Tasmanian Government support the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary specific mental health support programs, including the Cultivating Safe Teams training program, mentoring, and 24/7 counselling in the [Thrive initiative](#).

Support Needed

The AVA recommends that the Tasmanian Government commit to funding to support THRIVE, the AVA's wellness initiative, which supports Tasmanian veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers. This includes the expansion of a range of existing programs being undertaken by the AVA for the veterinary profession and implementing new programs under the areas of prevent, promote and protect.

These bespoke programs, include:

- Expand the 24/7 AVA Counselling Service
- Cultivating Safe Teams program –Psychological health and safety awareness training sessions for all individuals working in the veterinary profession in Tasmania.
- Mental health first aid for veterinary teams

What is the issue and why does it matter?

The burn out and mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession are the result of a profession where the labour component has been chronically underfunded at a time of immense generational and societal change. Many of the issues that the veterinary profession face are common to a large number of the essential service professions, however, as there is minimal public funding, these issues are accentuated within the veterinary profession.

Burn out has been well recognised in the profession for some time^{11 12 13} and the cost to the profession is estimated to be 2.01% of its value due to poor retention and reduced working hours.¹⁴ In 2019 the AVA undertook research in this area to better understand the size of the issue and to inform the development of a wellness strategy.¹⁵

This research found:

- Over half (66.7%) of people said they had experienced a mental health condition at some stage. Of those, 60% said their condition had been diagnosed by a medical professional.

¹¹ BS Kipperman, PH Kass, M Rishniw. Factors that influence small animal veterinarians' opinions and actions regarding cost of care and effects of economic limitations on patient care and outcome and professional career satisfaction and burnout. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 2017;250:785-794

¹² PH Hatch, HR Winefield, BA Christie et al. Workplace stress, mental health, and burnout of veterinarians in Australia. *Australian Veterinary Journal*. 2011;89:460-468.

¹³ IC Moore, JB Coe, CL Adams et al. The role of veterinary team effectiveness in job satisfaction and burnout in companion animal veterinary clinics. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 2014;245:513-524.

¹⁴ CL Neill, CR Hansen, M Salois. The Economic Cost of Burnout in Veterinary Medicine. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*. 2022;9

¹⁵ Australian Veterinary Association. Veterinary Wellness Strategy: Summary of research findings. 2021. Available from: <https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/resources/thrive/documents/ava-short-report-research-findings.pdf>



- Over 25% of people took time off work due to stress or a mental health condition and 33% did not disclose the reason to their employer.
- 54% of factors contributing to mental health issues were work related (include work related trauma, client interactions, workload, afterhours).
Work related factors that contributed included; challenging client interactions, working long hours, managing a high workload, dealing with staff shortages, poor remuneration, after hours and on-call work and poor workplace culture.
- Almost half of people felt their work has a negative or very negative impact on their overall mental health. The common psychosocial risks identified consistently were:
 - challenging client interactions & expectations. - Clients' high emotional state and financial investment, along with their perceived self-efficacy and sometimes unrealistic expectations, are challenging and exhausting. Additionally, the required financial conversation adds to the complexity, and this has only worsened as the cost of veterinary care has increased. This situation is further compounded by the fear of public shaming through social or sensationalist media, causing significant mental anguish for veterinarians of all ages. Moreover, the increased threats of vexatious complaints to regulatory bodies add to their stress.
 - working long hours (including afterhours) and inability to take sick or annual leave due to inability to find someone else to cover.
 - high workload and pressure - 53.2% of people feel as though they do not have an appropriate workload.
 - neglecting physical health due to the job.
 - emotionally draining work - 72.5% of people feel they regularly leave work feeling emotionally drained.
 - financial strain.

An integrated wellness approach is recommended when assessing and addressing workplace or workforce mental health. This is outlined in the THRIVE [mental health and suicide prevention framework](#), part of the [THRIVE](#) initiative, a profession led wellness initiative that the AVA is championing.

This framework encompasses the philosophies of prevent, promote and protect:

- (i) Preventing harm and mental ill-health from psychosocial hazards in the industry;
- (ii) Promoting mental health by leveraging protective factors such as strengths, capabilities, and the rewards of work; and
- (iii) Protecting individuals who experience stress and mental ill-health.

We are all responsible and accountable to prevent, promote and protect ourselves and each other. By collaborating, workplaces can manage the risks and cultivate ways of working that move towards eliminating, minimising, and preventing psychological harm. This framework is applicable to everyone in the veterinary community from students to people working in clinical practice, those in academia, industry, government and any other related veterinary field.

For a number of years the AVA has been running several of these programs (counselling, mentoring,) and instigated pilot programs (cultivating safe teams) for members. The AVA has relationships with the external providers who are the subject matter experts in the delivery of these programs. Our internal organisational structure and experience in executing these offerings would allow us to upscale the programs and institute the new programs in an effective and efficient way.



To assist in addressing this, the AVA proposes a commitment from the Tasmanian Government of to support the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary specific mental health support programs for the whole veterinary profession. These programs aim to benefit all members of the veterinary profession, including veterinarians, veterinary nurses, veterinary technicians, and other veterinary staff.

Programs and services that could be provided with this funding include:

- Broadening the Cultivating Safe Teams Initiative: Expansion of this pilot program would ensure that every veterinary workplace in Tasmania receives training focused on psychological health and safety, fostering a culture of well-being.
- 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.
 - Industry Health Checks: Conducting periodic surveys, possibly annual or biennial, to assess the overall health of the veterinary industry and measure the impact of wellness initiatives.
- Whole of Career Pathways Mentoring (peer to peer): Providing mentorship throughout the career of veterinary professionals, from undergraduate students to retirees.
- 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.

In essence, the funding of THRIVE would pave the way for a holistic approach to mental well-being in the veterinary sector, creating resilient professionals and ensuring the long-term health of the industry.

Contact

The Australian Veterinary Association would welcome further discussion on the priorities outlined in this 2025 Tasmanian State Election Priorities Document pre and post the election.

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