



AVA Submission to the SA Parliamentary Inquiry into the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Veterinarians in South Australia

February 2025

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About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The AVA is the peak professional body representing veterinary professionals and students across Australia. For more than 100 years we have been the united voice of the veterinary profession.

Veterinarians are among Australia's most trusted and respected professionals, dedicated to safeguarding animal health and welfare, and supporting the communities they live in.

Our vision and purpose

Vision A thriving veterinary profession

Purpose Building a vibrant future for veterinary professionals.

At the AVA we champion the veterinary community, advance professional excellence, foster connectivity, and deliver exceptional member experiences to achieve our vision of a thriving profession.

Essential role of the veterinary profession

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

Beyond agriculture, veterinarians support companion animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and promoting the associated mental and physical health benefits of animal ownership. Animals are not just a part of the Australian way of life; they are deeply embedded in it - socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically, and veterinarians are an essential part of every vibrant Australian community.

Veterinarians play a pivotal role in maintaining the social licence of animal industries, ensuring animal health and welfare meets community expectations. Like human healthcare and education, veterinary services provide both private benefits to individuals and critical public benefits to society, in areas like biosecurity surveillance, wildlife treatment and health and emergency animal disease management.

Recognised among Australia's most ethical and trusted professionals, veterinarians are highly respected and trusted members of their communities. The Governance Institute of Australia's 2023 Ethics Index ranked veterinarians among the nation's top 10 ethical occupations (Governance Institute, 2023).

Executive Summary

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Veterinarians in South Australia. Veterinarians play a critical role in ensuring animal health and welfare, safeguarding public health, and supporting essential industries, including agriculture, food production, and companion animal care. However, the veterinary profession is currently facing a profound and persistent workforce shortage, compounded by demanding working conditions, financial pressures, and high rates of mental health challenges and suicide, particularly in rural and regional areas.

The veterinary profession is vital not only for the health of animals but also for the broader economic, social, and emotional wellbeing of South Australian communities. Veterinary services contribute significantly to biosecurity, public health, food security, and community safety, while delivering important public goods such as emergency care for injured wildlife, support for vulnerable pet owners, and management of stray animals. Despite this, much of this essential work remains underfunded, unrecognised, and unsustainable within the current veterinary business model.

This submission outlines the challenges facing the veterinary profession in South Australia and provides a comprehensive set of recommendations to support workforce sustainability, improve mental health outcomes, enhance workplace safety, and secure the future of veterinary services across the state.

Key recommendations include:

- Investment in workforce data collection and research to quantify the public and economic value of veterinary services.
- Introduction of education debt forgiveness and financial support schemes to attract and retain veterinarians, particularly in rural and regional areas.
- Funding for mental health and wellbeing initiatives, including the AVA's THRIVE program and Cultivating Safe Teams workplace safety program.
- Public awareness campaigns to address client aggression and promote respect for veterinary teams.
- Development of sustainable after-hours service models and legislative reforms to support veterinary practices.
- Regulatory recognition and formal registration of veterinary nurses to alleviate pressure on veterinarians.
- Financial and regulatory support for veterinary services provided to stray animals, wildlife, and during natural disasters.
- Strategies to improve access to veterinary care for disadvantaged communities and vulnerable pet owners.
- Increased government funding for veterinary education and student placement support in regional South Australia.

Without immediate and coordinated action, South Australia's veterinary workforce will continue to face unsustainable pressures, placing animal welfare, biosecurity, and public health at risk.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the SA Government work with other Australian governments and key stakeholders to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.

Recommendation 2: The South Australian Government commit to supporting national measures to appropriately collect, manage, analyse, and share data on the national veterinary workforce.

Recommendation 3: The South Australian Government support further research to understand the economic value of veterinary services – particularly with respect to the impact of veterinary services on public health, biosecurity, as well as the broader economy.

Recommendation 4: That the SA Government support calls for the AVA Education Debt forgiveness scheme.

Recommendation 5: That the SA Government explore measures to increase engagement between primary producers and veterinarians.

Recommendation 6: The SA 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.

Recommendation 7: The SA Government commit funding to AVA’s wellness initiative, THRIVE to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.

Recommendation 8: The AVA calls upon the SA 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.

Recommendation 9: The SA 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 unowned animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations provided by all sectors of the profession (charities and the private veterinary sector).

Recommendation 10: That the SA Parliament introduce regulation of veterinary nurses and technologists that includes registration, title protection, and defined set of restricted activities that can be done under veterinarian direction and supervision.

Recommendation 11: The SA 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 SA community in both urban and rural areas 24/7.

Recommendation 12: The SA Government commit funding to AVA’s Cultivating Safe Teams program.

Recommendation 13: The SA Government work with key stakeholders to develop a strategy to support access to veterinary services (that utilises existing private veterinary businesses) for vulnerable sections of the community.

Recommendation 14: The Australian Government increases government funding per Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL) by at least 30% to cover operational costs.

Recommendation 15: That the SA Government provide a clinical placement support to veterinary students undertaking placements in rural and regional areas of the state.

Background to the veterinary workforce shortage

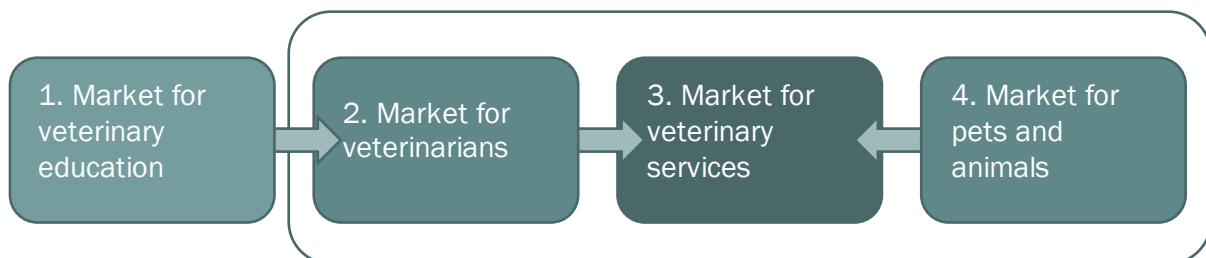
The veterinary workforce has been in shortage for the last 8 years. Jobs and Skills Australia confirmed in its October 2024 report that it remains so¹. This persistent shortage has put significant strain on the veterinary sector and the long training time for new veterinarians has meant that the market has been slow to adjust.

Veterinary services are different to many other goods and services in the economy as they deal with the health and welfare of animals. The application of an increasingly purely private market framework to the delivery of these services over the past several decades has led to an under-delivery of the veterinary services that provide public benefit and has also left the veterinary business model financially vulnerable.

As recommended by the recent Jobs and Skills Australia Report on the food supply chain workforce (JSA, 2025), a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy is needed to help better matching of supply and demand for veterinary services in the future.

Veterinary markets

There are reported to be 4 distinct but interrelated veterinary markets (Neill, 2022). Three of these markets interconnect to form the ‘veterinary services’ market.



In the ‘veterinary services’ market, the supply is the labour supply, that is the number of hours that veterinarians are prepared to work at a particular hourly rate, and the demand is the market for animals, that is the cost of purchase and ownership.

The equilibrium point is the trade off in the willingness to supply services at a given price, and the willingness of owners to pay for those services at that price (Neill, 2022).

Demand for veterinary services

The market for animals varies between sectors, and as a consequence so does the demand for veterinary services.

Veterinary services for companion animals

The strong connection between people and their pets, and the desire to provide a duty of care for them is a foundation of companion animal veterinary practice. Australian companion animal ownership is high, with 69% of households having at least one pet. This was boosted during COVID-19 where dog ownership in particular increased. The number of animals coupled with veterinary advances and client expectations are key drivers for the growth in demand for veterinary services. This sector has led the strong growth in demand for veterinary services over the past decade.

¹ <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-shortages-analysis/occupation-shortage-list>

Veterinary services for livestock

As animal production business models evolved and profit margins were increasingly influenced by many factors outside a producer's control, combined with the production sector veterinary services market becoming a "user pays" system, veterinary care has become considered an optional cost (Secombe, 2024).

Consequently, there has been a long-term decline in the demand for veterinary services in the production animal sector. This is likely to be attributed to several factors, including challenges around widespread adoption of preventive veterinary services, improved self-efficacy of producers through advancement of knowledge, and concern by producers over the role of veterinarians in production animal systems (Secombe, 2024).

Long term decline in demand for livestock veterinary services has resulted in an erosion of the veterinary services that animal production systems utilise to below a threshold level. Although most producers continue to have a demand for veterinarians to be available for reactive services for individual animals, the maintenance of this expertise to deliver production animal veterinary services and to serve Industry on an as required reactive basis has not been sustainable. Veterinary businesses have had to adapt to remain viable, which in the majority of cases has involved shifting to a companion animal focus.

Veterinary services that deliver essential public good

Superimposed on private market factors is the provision of veterinary services that deliver essential public good. Frawley (2003) discussed this with respect to production animal veterinary services and more recently Dr Kristen Steele has applied the concept of public good to the delivery of companion animal and wildlife veterinary services.

While research is continuing in this space, there are clear areas where veterinarians provide public benefit and absorb those costs into their private businesses.

In 2022, the AVA engaged Marsden Jacob Associates (MJA), advisors in economics, public policy, markets and strategy who produced "The value of veterinarians to Australia: Public and private benefits" (MJA, 2022).

The [report](#) explored several key areas, where the delivery of private veterinary services are:

1. Adequately recouped through private fees.
2. Where services (public benefits) are needed to be provided to the public despite being underfunded, to meet the level of care expected by the community and required by the state, e.g. where veterinarians are required by legislation to provide a level of service to an animal regardless of the owner's ability to pay (or whether there is an identifiable owner at all).
3. When private services create positive spillovers (externalities) which benefit the community but are unable to be recompensed, e.g. where there are additional benefits to the community in the delivery of a private service, like passive biosecurity surveillance or herd immunity effects that owners of unvaccinated animals obtain as a result of vaccinations paid for by other animal owners.

Points 2 and 3 highlight situations where veterinarians are not compensated for the public benefits delivered.

Other examples include 24/7 availability of veterinary care, disease surveillance to maintain biosecurity, safe food production, animal population control, pro bono and heavily subsidised

veterinary services for vulnerable people who own animals, wildlife and stray animals and veterinary care to animals affected by disasters.

The willingness of the individual animal owner to pay for veterinary services that deliver public good is limited, and in many cases the profession bears the cost of delivery of these services. The other impact of there being no compensation for these services, in that the overall level of veterinary services provided to the community will be lower than is economically optimal.

Supply of veterinary services

As the majority of veterinary services are provided by the private sector, the supply of services is dependent on a functional veterinary business model that is able to operate within the private market. Like all businesses, service delivery incurs fixed and variable costs (including labour costs). In order for a business to be sustainable in the private market a return on investment is required.

The challenge in the Australian veterinary context is that, irrespective of expectations, there is a threshold that owners are willing to pay for veterinary services which often does not always reflect the true cost of delivery of the care. Complicating this is the Australian experience of a heavily funded human public health system, which distorts the community's understanding of the true cost of delivery of human health care, and in turn, distorts community expectations of the true cost veterinary health care.

There is little flexibility in the fixed and variable costs other than labour. The supply of veterinary services relies heavily on the supply and demand of the labour market for veterinarians to undertake the work.

The supply of veterinarians to the Australian veterinary labour market is broadly from 3 sources:

- Graduating new veterinarians from Australian universities
- Immigration
- Veterinarians who return to the workforce after a break.

The largest influence on the labour market supply is the number of graduating new veterinarians produced each year. Australia is recognised as graduating a very high number of veterinarians every year (between 600 - 800 annually) - one of the highest rates per capita in the world.

Table 1 Veterinary Science Graduates from Australian Universities (Source: Dept Education)²

Institution	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Charles Sturt University	55	54	61	64	64	60	55	59	60	60
The University of Sydney	125	104	132	142	63	128	111	130	131	111
The University of Melbourne	120	106	125	118	115	110	120	111	127	139
James Cook University	54	52	56	66	87	80	< 5	156	77	100
The University of Queensland	106	106	104	130	105	93	129	103	116	116
Murdoch University	68	88	80	97	147	79	84	92	95	97
The University of Adelaide	46	59	42	59	50	52	np	79	52	70
TOTAL Australia	574	569	600	676	631	602	542	730	658	693

² <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data> (NB: incomplete data available in 2020)
2024 data not yet available.

Supply is also influenced by remuneration. There is an equilibrium point in the labour market that is determined by the average wage per hour veterinarians are willing to work and the numbers of hours they are willing to work (Neill, 2022).

A workforce shortage is recognised when there is not a sufficient labour supply to deliver the required supply of veterinary services.

Causes of veterinary workforce shortage

Although the drivers of demand for veterinary services vary between sectors, the underlying cause of the workforce shortages can be broadly categorised into those:

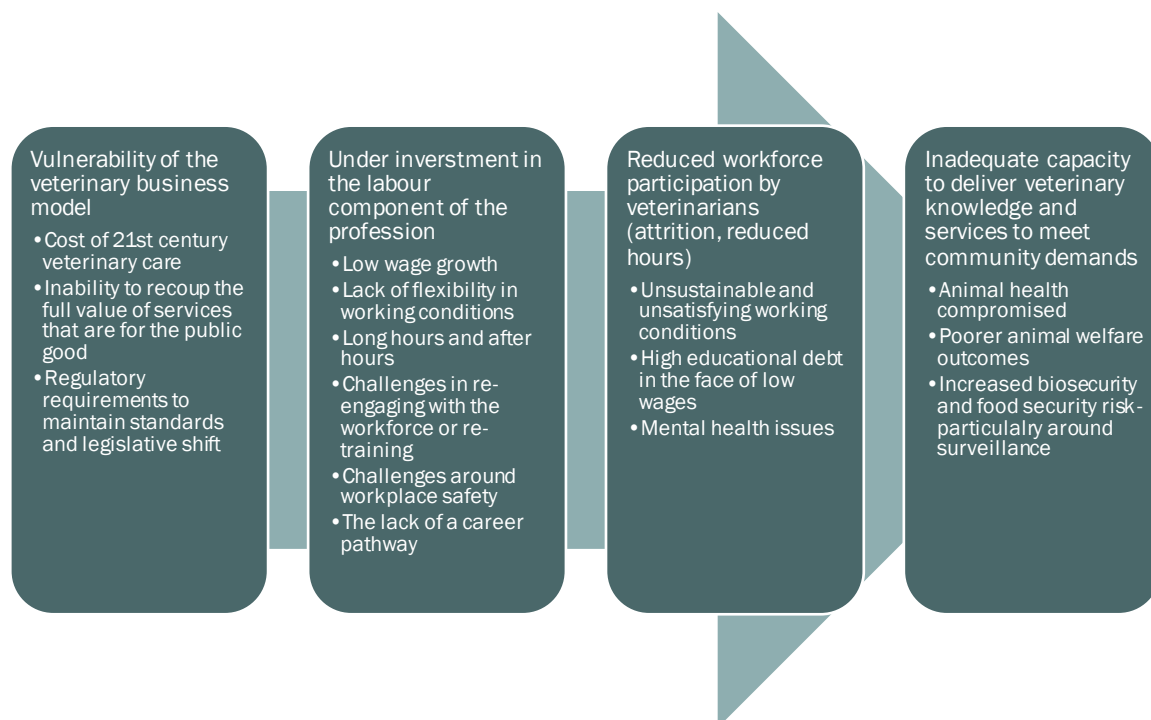
1. Driven by the private sector veterinary profession's business model vulnerability, and those
2. Due to generational and societal change.

Private sector veterinary profession's business model vulnerability

While attempting to balance the delivery of veterinary services that serve both the private and public good and the willingness of individual consumers to pay, the vulnerabilities of the veterinary business model have been exposed. This has led to an underinvestment in the labour component required to maintain veterinary business viability.

The long-term consequence of this underinvestment has been a reduction in labour supply. This has, in turn, resulted in inadequate capacity to deliver veterinary knowledge and services to meet community demand (figure 1).

Figure 1 – Pathway to a reduction in veterinary knowledge and services to meet community demand



Generational and societal change

Generally, changes in societal expectations of veterinary care have mirrored those in human health care and the evolution of veterinary services has resulted in improved animal health and welfare outcomes. However, the much greater complexity associated with the supply of veterinary services has also resulted in an increased cost of delivery. The Australian community has limited understanding of the true costs of delivery of human health care due to the publicly funded human health system, leading to a disconnect between the veterinary services they expect and the cost to deliver these services.

There have also been generational and societal changes in workforce participation. In the last 20 years, the hours veterinarians work has evolved to reflect that of greater society, with the average work week of the profession reducing to 35.5 hours/week (Pratt, 2023; AVA, 2024).

Recent veterinary workforce data suggests that 30.5% of veterinarians work part time (AVA, 2024). This is approximately the same as the general population where part-time share of work is 29.9% (ABS, 2024). Within the general population the part-time participation rate for males is increasing and is likely to continue to increase.

The profession is currently not meeting the generational change of expectations of early career veterinarians. Mid to late career veterinarians, irrespective of decade of birth, are often of the opinion that the veterinary education system is incorrectly selecting students, or not adequately preparing them, for the profession often perceiving graduates to lack resilience. Early career veterinarians and veterinary educators often comment that the profession does not adapt to the changing expectations of incoming generations.

Interventions to improve capacity

To achieve the welfare objective that any animal that is under human care in Australia should be able to access veterinary care, strategies are required to improve the sustainability of the veterinary profession, which includes supporting the workforce.

The current challenges faced by the veterinary profession are decades in the making and while there are some short-term strategies that can be put into place to assist, for sustained improvement longer term strategies are required.

Long-term strategies require complex system thinking, collaboration, innovation, and data collection to produce strategies where the outcomes do not have unintended consequences, and are not to the detriment of animal welfare, the community or the profession.

The veterinary workforce is a complex system and as the recent Jobs and Skills Australia report noted, a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy is urgently needed to ensure the future delivery of veterinary services to meet Australia's needs (JSA, 2025).

Recommendation 1: That the SA Government work with other Australian governments and key stakeholders to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.

In addition, the AVA has identified and is actively working on several broad strategies to improve capacity:

- **Mechanisms to recoup the costs of delivery of public good incorporated into the veterinary model** - By receiving payment for public good work undertaken, increased investment in the labour component of the profession is possible, which in turn will lead to improved recruitment and retention. While further research will likely uncover

additional areas of veterinary service public benefit and better quantify those that we are already aware of, there are some areas where the public benefit delivered by veterinarians are clear. These should form the first areas for additional public investment:

- Animal care during emergency disaster situations
 - Animal management of strays/homeless animals
 - Veterinary care of animals owned by the Crown (wildlife)
- **Assisting regional and primary production veterinary services** - Broader investment, particularly in rural and regional veterinary services, in recognition of the public benefit that these services provide and the risk of losing them without appropriate investment is part of this support. Similar to other professions, rural and regional Australia has become increasingly less attractive to veterinary professionals. In this context, solutions are multifaceted:
 - Support for getting veterinary students and graduates to rural and regional Australia
 - Funding through educational fee relief to graduate veterinarians committed to rural, and particularly production animal, practice.
 - Making rural and regional veterinary practice more attractive as an ongoing career option
 - Modernised after-hours model
 - Legislative reform to provide flexibility to the veterinary team i.e. utilisation of remote technologies.
 - Mechanisms that provide business support through infrastructure or other incentives for the private veterinary sector to have a presence in rural communities.
 - Equipping veterinarians for modern production animal practice
 - Ensure that we are training the next generation of production animal veterinarians
 - Improving primary producer engagement of veterinarians
 - Getting veterinary expertise onto farms to work with primary producers.
 - Recognition that the veterinary profession is essential for standards required, not optional, and regulatory support for the role of the veterinary team - Veterinary care must be regulated to protect animal health and welfare of all species and the safety of the community. All veterinary services, irrespective of species served, must be delivered by appropriately regulated veterinary team members under the overarching supervision of a veterinarian. Effective and efficient provision of veterinary services would be enhanced by:
 - Legislative reform that would provide flexibility to the veterinary team
 - Strategies to improve efficiency around the required regulatory burden
 - Legislative reform to enable the costs of legislated requirements of basic care to all animals (e.g. relief of pain and suffering or first aid) to be recouped
 - Support of the lifelong learning required by the profession to remain contemporary
 - **Continue to build on mechanisms to promote sustainable employability and satisfaction of veterinary careers** - Mechanisms used must acknowledge and adapt to societal and generational change or it is likely that they will fail. Mechanisms that have been identified to be important include:

- An integrated wellness approach - THRIVE mental health and suicide prevention framework
- Mechanisms to improve workplace culture and safety, workload, and flexibility
- Increasing wellbeing in the profession through recognition of the importance of non-technical skills and other factors
- Career progression and recognition pathways
- Collaboration with veterinary educators to allow the profession to prepare for generational change

The AVA is committed to advocating for change to achieve solutions and have a number of programs currently underway. Additional support is needed to help these initiatives maximise their impact on the veterinary profession and the clients and animals it serves.

Addressing the Terms of reference

In the following sections, this submission addresses the terms of reference directly.

Terms of reference:

- a) quantifying the significant economic, social and emotional benefits that veterinary industry brings to society and having this acknowledged by government and industry;
- b) measures that can be taken to improve veterinarian retention rates, including incentives for working in rural and regional areas;
- c) working conditions, including remuneration, unpaid hours, safe workplace culture and client conduct standards;
- d) measuring and identifying initiatives to prevent the high rates of suicide and burnout among veterinarians, particularly in regional and rural areas;
- e) the role played by veterinarians in providing care to lost, stray, and homeless animals and injured wildlife, dealing with emergency situations, and the financial burden incurred by veterinarians in those circumstances;
- f) reviewing the roles and responsibilities of veterinary nurses with a view to relieving pressure on veterinarians, as well as the training of veterinary nurses and the related workforce;
- g) regulation of veterinary practices, including compliance with psychosocial legislation for the workplace, maximum work hours and after-hours practices;
- h) strategies to improve access to veterinary care during a cost-of-living crisis, including pricing transparency, pet insurance, and other support for disadvantaged animal owners;
- i) the role of universities in preparing veterinarians for practice and the transition to the workforce; and
- j) any related matter.

(a) Quantifying the significant economic, social and emotional benefits that veterinary industry brings to society and having this acknowledged by government and industry

Recommendations

Recommendation 2: The South Australian Government commit to supporting national measures to appropriately collect, manage, analyse, and share data on the national veterinary workforce.

Recommendation 3: The South Australian Government support further research to understand the economic value of veterinary services – particularly with respect to the impact of veterinary services on public health, biosecurity, as well as the broader economy.

Discussion

The veterinary profession plays a vital role in society, ensuring the health and welfare of animals, safeguarding public health, and supporting essential industries such as agriculture, food production, and animal care. Beyond its direct impact on animal wellbeing, the veterinary sector contributes significantly to Australia's national economy, social cohesion, and the emotional wellbeing of individuals. In Australia, the veterinary industry is essential not only for companion animal care but also for livestock health, biosecurity, and wildlife conservation.

Economic Value of the Veterinary Sector

Revenue Generation and Employment

The economic value of the veterinary sector is significant. In Australia, the annual veterinary sector revenue is estimated to be \$5.6 billion. The sector employs over 29,000 people, including approximately 15,816 veterinarians with a total wage bill of \$2 billion (iBIS World, 2024). As at 30 June 2024, in South Australia there are 977 Registered Veterinarians (VSBSA, 2024). The industry provides a wide range of services, from general animal healthcare to specialised treatments such as surgery, diagnostics, and emergency care.

There are over 3,651 veterinary businesses across Australia (at 30 June 2024 there were 239 veterinary businesses in South Australia) (ABS, 2024). These range from small private clinics to large corporate veterinary chains. In recent years, the industry has experienced consolidation, with corporate entities now controlling a growing market share.

Veterinary Services as Essential Health Infrastructure

Veterinarians play a crucial role in maintaining public health by preventing zoonotic diseases (diseases that spread from animals to humans), ensuring food safety, and supporting biosecurity measures. Veterinarians are integral in monitoring livestock, wildlife, and companion animals for signs of disease, ensuring early detection and rapid containment of outbreaks. Australia's livestock sector relies heavily on veterinary services to prevent outbreaks of diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease and Avian Influenza, which would have devastating consequences for both the economy and public health.

Economic Value of the Industries That the Veterinary Sector Supports

Livestock and Agriculture

Veterinary services are integral to Australia's annual \$34 billion livestock industry, which includes cattle, sheep, poultry, and other livestock.

- Cattle and calves contribute \$13.9 billion to the economy annually
- Poultry production contributes \$3.6 billion
- Sheep and lambs contribute \$4.1 billion (ABS, 2024)

The health and welfare of these animals directly impacts agricultural productivity, profitability, and sustainability. Without the provision of vital veterinary care, which includes active and passive surveillance, disease outbreaks can lead to mass culling, loss of trade, disruption of food supply to consumers, and severe economic consequences. Outbreaks also undermine public confidence in food safety and public health.

Racing and Equine Industry

The horse and greyhound racing industry in Australia generates \$4.6 billion annually, relying on veterinary expertise for health assessments, injury prevention, and ethical standards enforcement. Equine and greyhound veterinarians are essential for helping to maintain the integrity of these industries, ensuring that animals receive the best care possible.

Companion Animal Industry

Companion animal ownership has surged in recent years, fuelling a \$33 billion Australian pet care industry, which includes pet food, grooming, accessories, and veterinary services. More than 69% of Australian households have a companion animal, demonstrating the scale of the industry's economic footprint (AMA, 2022).

Wildlife Conservation and Environmental Protection

Veterinarians play an essential role in protecting wildlife and biodiversity. They provide emergency care for injured wildlife, manage disease outbreaks in wild animal populations, and contribute to conservation programs aimed at preserving endangered species.

Social Benefits of the Veterinary Sector

Enhancing Community Wellbeing

Veterinary services contribute to public wellbeing by ensuring that animals remain healthy, reducing the risk of disease transmission, and supporting community safety. In rural and regional areas, access to veterinary services is critical for maintaining the viability of farming communities.

Strengthening the Human-Animal Bond

Veterinarians enhance the lives of millions of animal owners by ensuring that their animals receive the best possible care. Many people view their companion animals as family members, and access to veterinary services supports them to maintain strong, healthy relationships with their animals.

Contribution to Human Mental Health and Social Support

Animal ownership has been linked to reduced stress, lower blood pressure, and improved mental health outcomes. Veterinarians indirectly contribute to these benefits by ensuring animals remain healthy and providing emotional support to clients during difficult times.

Supporting Vulnerable Populations

Veterinary services are particularly valuable for vulnerable populations, including the elderly, people experiencing homelessness, and survivors of domestic violence. Many veterinarians provide discounted or free services to help these groups maintain their bonds with their animals,

which are often their primary source of emotional support. This is another example of the public good that veterinarians provide, usually at a business or personal cost

Benefits of Animal Ownership and Role of the Veterinary Sector

Physical and Mental Health Benefits

Research has shown that animal ownership can lead to improved cardiovascular health, reduced anxiety and depression, and greater overall happiness. Animals provide companionship, encourage physical activity, and offer emotional stability.

Assistance and Therapy Animals

Veterinary professionals also play a role in supporting therapy and assistance animals, which help individuals with disabilities, PTSD, and other health conditions. These animals require specialised care to perform their roles effectively, and veterinarians ensure their long-term health and welfare.

Reducing Loneliness and Social Isolation

Animal ownership has been linked to decreased loneliness and increased social interactions. Many animal owners form strong community bonds through dog parks, animal-friendly events, and social media groups centred around animal care.

Unpaid Veterinary Services and Public Good

Emergency Animal Care

Veterinarians frequently provide unpaid or heavily subsidised care for injured wildlife, stray or unowned animals, and those owned by low-income individuals. For example, during natural disasters such as the 2019-2020 Australian bushfires, veterinarians worked tirelessly to save thousands of animals, often absorbing the financial burden for this public good.

Disease Surveillance and Biosecurity

Veterinary professionals contribute to passive biosecurity surveillance, identifying and reporting animal diseases that could impact public health and agriculture. This work benefits society as a whole but is often conducted without direct financial compensation.

Education and Community Outreach

Many veterinarians engage in public education efforts, teaching responsible animal ownership, disease prevention, and ethical treatment of animals. These efforts help create a more informed and compassionate society, resulting in improved animal welfare outcomes..

Measures to Address

There are a number of measures that are currently being undertaken that will assist in addressing gaps in data.

- AVA Workforce Survey – this survey has been conducted several times since 2012 and provides key data on the veterinary workforce (<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/advocacy/workforce-sustainability/workforce-data/>).
- Office of Chief Veterinary Officer (OCVO) Veterinary Workforce Data Taskforce – In 2024 the OCVO hosted a Roundtable on workforce data. This resulted in the establishment of a

Taskforce looking at veterinary workforce planning data needs and options for collection, governance, and use of that data. The Taskforce began its work in February 2025.

- Animal Medicines Australia (AMA) Pets in Australia – this survey research is undertaken every three years. It is commissioned by AMA with financial support from the AVA. The research looks at the trends in pet ownership and expenditure (<https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/report/>).
- Unpaid veterinary services – in 2024 a survey of veterinarians and veterinary practices was undertaken by Dr Kristen Steele as part of PhD studies. The survey was supported by the AVA and is aimed at better quantifying the areas and scale of veterinary services that are either discounted or unpaid.

In addition to this, further work is needed. Firstly, the workforce data model that the OCVO Taskforce develops will need ongoing support to see it implemented and delivering the data that is needed for veterinary workforce planning.

Secondly, while some of the benefits of veterinary services are clear, the public health benefits of animal ownership and the veterinary component of this is not sufficiently understood. If appropriate levels of public funding support is to be implemented, better data in this area is important to ensure that this funding is at the optimal level.

(b) Measures that can be taken to improve veterinarian retention rates, including incentives for working in rural and regional areas

Recommendations

Recommendation 4: That the SA Government support calls for the AVA Education Debt forgiveness scheme.

Recommendation 5: That the SA Government explore measures to increase engagement between primary producers and veterinarians.

Discussion

Workforce retention in the veterinary profession has become a critical challenge, with many veterinarians leaving clinical practice within a few years of graduation. High turnover rates are straining veterinary services, exacerbating workforce shortages, and impacting the overall sustainability of the profession. The reasons behind poor retention are multifaceted, including workload pressures, financial strain, mental health challenges, lack of career progression, and workplace culture. Addressing these issues requires systemic reforms and targeted strategies to improve job satisfaction and long-term retention.

1. High Workload and Long Hours

One of the primary reasons for veterinarian attrition is the intense workload and long working hours. Many veterinarians, particularly in small animal, equine, and production animal practice, work well beyond standard business hours, with emergency and after-hours services increasing the burden. In rural and mixed-practice settings, veterinarians are often on-call 24/7, leading to physical exhaustion and burnout.

Excessive workloads can lead to:

- Decreased job satisfaction due to an imbalance between work and personal life.
- Increased risk of burnout, making veterinarians more likely to leave the profession.

Workforce shortages further exacerbate these conditions, creating a vicious cycle where fewer veterinarians must handle more cases, intensifying stress and job dissatisfaction.

2. Financial Struggles and Low Compensation

Despite the high cost and duration of veterinary education, many veterinarians struggle financially due to relatively low salaries compared to their education investment. Veterinary school tuition can leave graduates with significant student debt, yet the median entry-level salary \$76,800 per year (QILT, 2024) which is much lower than those of other medical professionals.

Financial concerns drive veterinarians out of the profession due to:

- Disproportionate student debt-to-income ratios making veterinary medicine less financially viable.
- Lack of salary progression in private practice, discouraging long-term career commitment.
- High operational costs for those who attempt to open independent clinics.

Many veterinarians transition to industry or other roles, where they can earn higher salaries with better job stability and conditions, further draining talent from clinical practice.

3. Mental Health Challenges and Burnout

Veterinary professionals experience alarmingly high rates of mental health struggles, including stress, anxiety, depression, and compassion fatigue. The profession has one of the highest suicide rates among healthcare workers. In research undertaken by the AVA, there were 5 common psychosocial risks identified (AVA, 2021b):

- Challenging client interactions & expectations
- Interpersonal conflict with colleagues
- Working long hours
- Experiencing financial strain
- High workloads & pressure

Veterinarians face unique and significant stressors that demand tailored mental health support. Like medical professionals, they operate in high-stakes, emotionally charged environments, making critical decisions that impact life and wellbeing. However, the absence of a public healthcare safety net places added pressure on veterinarians, as clients often have limited financial resources to support necessary treatments. Furthermore, the inability of animal patients to communicate their pain or progress heightens the diagnostic burden, increasing professional strain. These factors, combined with the emotional toll of working with owners of animal who are themselves often in complex situations, underscore the need for bespoke mental health strategies to support veterinary professionals.

Without appropriate support systems and workplace wellness programs, many veterinarians leave clinical practice in search of less stressful career alternatives.

4. Workplace Culture

People's ability to prevent or sustainably navigate challenges and to find satisfaction, wellbeing and motivation in veterinary work is influenced by both a person's individual characteristics, social psychological elements, and the workplace management choices, leadership styles and culture which frame their daily personal experiences (Crane, 2021; Rolf, et al, 2021). For example, veterinarians' decisions to stay at or leave their current workplace are strongly influenced by remuneration, flexibility, leadership and skill progression, reduced after hours work and better work-rest-of-life balance (AVA 2021a).

The systems and culture of an organisation also contribute directly at every career stage to a person's work engagement, satisfaction and wellbeing, for example through an individual's job demands and their perceived capability and resources to cope with those demands (Baker, et al, 2017; AVA, 2020). According to the AVA Wellness report, nine of the top ten contributors to Australian veterinarians' mental health conditions, and almost all the common and veterinary-specific risk factors for such problems, relate to workplace management, leadership and culture (AVA, 2021b).

A positive and inclusive workplace culture can significantly enhance retention by fostering mentorship, teamwork, and mutual respect.

The AVA is actively addressing workforce retention challenges and broader veterinary workforce sustainability through a multi-faceted approach. Below are a number of proposals that we believe will have a positive impact on regional recruitment and retention. In addition to this, there are a number of mental health and wellbeing projects in our THRIVE program that could have extended reach with additional funding. These are considered in discussions on other terms of reference.

Education debt forgiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other measures

There are a series of other measures detailed in this submission that will assist with retention, however we have addressed these in discussion on other terms of reference. Particularly:

- After hours model
- Mental Health program funding
- Public awareness campaigns on treatment of veterinarians

(c) Working conditions, including remuneration, unpaid hours, safe workplace culture and client conduct standard

Recommendations

Recommendation 6: The SA 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.

Discussion

The veterinary profession is facing significant challenges related to working conditions and workplace culture, which contribute to high turnover rates, poor mental health, and workforce shortages. The demanding nature of veterinary work, coupled with long hours, emotional strain, and financial pressures, makes it difficult for many professionals to sustain long-term careers.

1. Long Working Hours and Poor Work-Life Balance

Veterinarians frequently report long and unpredictable working hours, including on-call and after-hours shifts. This is especially true for rural and mixed-practice veterinarians, where emergency services are often required outside of regular business hours. The NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage found that the obligation to provide 24/7 services without adequate support contributes significantly to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and retention issues.

Veterinary professionals, particularly in emergency settings, often work 12+ hour shifts with minimal breaks, leading to chronic fatigue and reduced job satisfaction. This has resulted in:

- High rates of part-time work and reduced work hours, despite demand for services.
- Veterinarians leaving clinical practice early in their careers due to the physical and emotional toll.

2. Low Salaries Compared to Educational Investment

Despite requiring a minimum of five to six years of tertiary education, veterinarians earn significantly less than their counterparts in human healthcare. According to QLIT, median new graduate annual fulltime salaries is \$76,800 AUD, which does not align with the high cost of education and student debt.

Additionally, low salaries persist even as veterinarians gain experience. The economic vulnerability of veterinary businesses, many of which are small or medium-sized enterprises, limits their ability to offer competitive wages.

3. High Workload and Staffing Shortages

Veterinary practices across Australia are experiencing severe workforce shortages, leading to increased workloads for those remaining in the profession. Factors contributing to this include:

- Difficulty in attracting veterinarians to regional and rural areas, where demand for services remains high.
- A lack of support staff, including veterinary nurses and technologists, exacerbating stress on veterinarians.

4. Client expectations and behaviour

Clients' high emotional state and financial investment, along with their perceived self-efficacy and sometimes unrealistic expectations, are challenging and exhausting. It is also not uncommon for veterinary staff to receive verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse from clients.

Additionally, the required financial conversation adds to the complexity, and this has only worsened as the cost of veterinary care has increased, alongside the current cost of living crisis.

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.

“The relationship between pets and people has changed in the time I have been a vet. They are now “children “to “pet parents” and owners are aware of the extensive range of treatments available should they need veterinary care but not all owners can afford this. Many then get angry because they are used to our public funded Medicare system This anger / grief/ distress then leads to a negative impact on the profession with an increase in reports to the Vet Boards, increased social media abuse, traditional media abuse (A Current Affair is a prime example of this) and sadly there is an escalating amount of face to face personal abuse of vets and vet staff.”

The best-case scenario for those with mental health challenges and burn out is that they receive the help they need and put into place mechanisms to safeguard their health and welfare whilst still being able to continue to contribute to the profession. The worst-case scenario for those with mental health challenges is death by suicide. The evidence suggests risk of death by suicide is increased in the veterinary profession compared to the general population. The profession as a whole is working hard in this area and the sole focus of awareness and protection of individuals has now moved to also encapsulate prevention and promotion of good workplace practices to improve these issues.

Given the interconnectedness of many of the terms of reference for this Parliamentary Inquiry, we have addressed some of this in our consideration of TOR (g). There we discuss the role and value of the AVA Cultivating Safe Teams program.

Our key recommendation in this section relates to addressing client behaviour and expectations. Here we see value in public awareness campaigns that specifically address the incidence of verbal and physical assault directed at veterinary staff.

(d) Measuring and identifying initiatives to prevent the high rates of suicide and burnout among veterinarians, particularly in regional and rural areas

Recommendations

Recommendation 7: The SA Government commit funding to AVA's wellness initiative, THRIVE to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.

Discussion

The veterinary profession is grappling with a mental health crisis that is often overlooked. Behind the scenes of compassionate care and life-saving treatments, veterinarians face immense emotional, financial, and professional pressures. The result is one of the highest suicide rates among professions, coupled with widespread burnout that is pushing many professionals to the brink. The AVA and other industry bodies are working to address these issues, but the challenges remain deeply entrenched.

The NSW Parliamentary Inquiry found that interviews with veterinary professionals have revealed that almost every veterinarian knows of a colleague lost to suicide, emphasising how deeply this issue affects the profession.

The Weight of Burnout: When Passion Becomes Exhaustion

Burnout is widespread among veterinarians, with 66.7% reporting they have experienced a mental health condition, a rate higher than the general population. Many professionals work over 50 hours per week, often with limited opportunities for rest or self-care. Emergency veterinarians and those in rural, remote and regional areas face an even greater burden, as they are often on-call around the clock, leaving little time for recovery.

The physical toll is significant, but the emotional weight is even heavier. Veterinarians are responsible for life-and-death decisions daily, managing cases that range from saving a beloved companion animal to euthanising an animal whose owner cannot afford treatment. This moral distress contributes to compassion fatigue, a state of deep emotional exhaustion that can lead to disengagement and depression.

The Hidden Struggles: Client Abuse, Financial Stress, and Unrealistic Expectations

Client interactions, often seen as a fulfilling part of the profession, can also be one of the most stressful aspects of veterinary work. A growing number of veterinarians report verbal abuse, threats, and even assault from clients, particularly when they are unable to provide discounted or free services.

Financial strain is another significant factor. Unlike human healthcare, which is subsidised by Medicare, the PBS and Public Hospitals, veterinary services are almost entirely privately funded. Many animal owners expect high-quality care at low costs, without understanding the operational expenses involved. This leads to frustrating and emotionally draining conversations about treatment affordability, often leaving veterinarians feeling guilty, undervalued, and emotionally exhausted.

Adding to the pressure is social media harassment, where disgruntled clients can publicly attack veterinarians, leaving damaging social media reviews and even making vexatious complaints to regulatory boards. The fear of public shaming has led some veterinarians to hesitate in making difficult but necessary decisions, further contributing to mental strain.

AVA's 2021 research into veterinary wellness showed that 66% of people working in the veterinary profession have experienced a mental health condition, with over 40% reporting to having done so in the last 12 months prior to the survey. More than 50% of the 2,500 participants involved in the research thought their work harmed their mental health (AVA, 2021b).

The AVA has been actively working to address the mental health crisis, burnout, and high suicide rates within the veterinary profession. Through advocacy, mental health initiatives, workplace reforms, and legislative recommendations, the AVA is implementing short- and long-term strategies to improve well-being and create a sustainable workforce.

AVA Thrive Program

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

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

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

An integrated wellness approach is recommended when assessing and addressing workplace or workforce mental health. This is built on the THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework (see appendix 1).

THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework



In 2023, the AVA initiated a pilot program, Cultivating Safe Teams, to help mitigate psychosocial risks within 50 veterinary workplaces across Australia. To assist in addressing the mental health challenges faced by the profession, the AVA propose that the Australian Government support the extension of a suite of AVA veterinary-specific mental health support programs, including:

- Expansion of the 24/7 Counselling Service
- Improved research and data
- Expansion of the AVA graduate mentoring program to include non-members and encompass whole of career pathways
- Cultivating Safe Teams beyond the pilot phase – Psychological health and safety awareness training sessions for all individuals working in the veterinary profession
- Training and toolkit for veterinary businesses to manage business-specific psychosocial risks
- Mental health first aid for veterinary teams

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

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

(e) The role played by veterinarians in providing care to lost, stray, and homeless animals and injured wildlife, dealing with emergency situations, and the financial burden incurred by veterinarians in those circumstances

Recommendations

Recommendation 8: The AVA calls upon the SA 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.

Recommendation 9: The SA 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 unowned animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations provided by all sectors of the profession (charities and the private veterinary sector).

Discussion

Veterinarians play a significant role in providing medical care, treatment, and support to lost and unowned animals, as well as injured wildlife. This helps to ensure their well-being and increases their chances of finding a safe and caring home or returning to their natural environments, as animal welfare is a major tenet of a veterinarian's workload.

The management of stray or unowned animals, treatment of injured and ill animals (large and small) is expected when affected animals are presented to a veterinary practice, but as these animals are either owned by the crown, are unowned or displaced. The costs of care provided by the veterinary practice is generally unable to be financially recouped.

The majority of the roles that veterinarians play in providing care to this group of animals also require infrastructure and equipment to deliver. As a generality this is provided either through animal welfare charities and organisations that may receive government funding (such as the RSPCA), or by the private veterinary sector. Animal welfare charities and organisations who employ veterinarians can target their funding and other resources for these clients and animals. The private veterinary sector endeavours to provide similar services without dedicated resources or funding, which comes at a cost to their business – and the wellbeing of their team.

Furthermore, the funding that is available to animal welfare charities and organisations is highly competitive and not guaranteed, adding a further burden to these providers and the veterinary teams who work with them.

There are numerous roles that veterinarians have when providing care to these animals, listed here:

- **Examination and Diagnosis:** When stray, unowned or wild animals are presented to veterinary clinics or shelters, veterinarians conduct thorough examinations to assess their overall health. They diagnose any underlying medical conditions, injuries, or diseases that may require immediate attention.
- **Medical Treatment or Euthanasia:** Veterinarians provide essential medical treatments to address injuries, infections, diseases, and other health issues. This may involve wound care, administration of medications, vaccinations, parasite control, and surgeries when necessary. In some cases where animals are severely injured or suffering with no chance of recovery, veterinarians may have to make the decision to euthanase them.

- **Emergency Care:** During emergency situations, such as accidents or natural disasters, veterinarians are often at the forefront of providing immediate care to injured animals and holding lost or displaced animals until owners are in a position to collect them.
- **Rehabilitation and Long-term Care:** Veterinarians are involved in the development of rehabilitation plans.
- **Collaboration with Animal Welfare Organisations:** Private sector veterinarians often work closely with animal shelters, rescue groups, and other animal welfare organisations to provide comprehensive care to lost and unowned animals. They may participate in desexing programs (which are all provided below the cost of delivering this service, even before any additional “discount” is applied to charities and other organisations), vaccination campaigns, and educational initiatives to promote responsible animal ownership and population control.
- **Wildlife Rehabilitation:** Veterinarians play a vital role in treating and rehabilitating injured or orphaned wildlife. They assess their conditions, provide medical care, and work towards their successful release back into their natural habitats.
- **Local Government “agencies”:** Private veterinary practices are increasingly burdened with acting as de facto agencies for local government when stray or unowned animals are not collected promptly. Delays, particularly over weekends, leave clinics responsible for housing, feeding, and caring for these animals without compensation. This places a significant strain on already limited resources, impacting staff workload, clinic capacity, and financial sustainability, while diverting attention from paying clients and critical veterinary services.

Unowned and stray animals

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 unowned animals and is frequently borne by the private veterinary sector. This is individual local council dependant with some supplementation from government and privately funded charities, which rely on donations to provide payment for veterinary services.

The cost and impact of the provision by the veterinary profession service has been unrealistically ignored in the drafting of legislation which transfers responsibility and costs from an agency to the veterinarian. For example, the *Dog and Cat Management Act* declares that veterinary practices are one place to which stray cats can be taken.

There is a lack of consistency between local councils of how they interpret legislation, engage and pay veterinary practices to manage strays and provide expertise around animal management in times of crisis.

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. Charity organisations are also at capacity, and the overall outcome is a decline in animal welfare.

When these strays are brought into veterinary practices, the initial protocol is to scan for a microchip and try to contact the registered owner. This process aims to swiftly reunite lost pets with their owners before contacting council. However, veterinarians often face labour, housing, and resourcing costs associated with providing these public good services. Adding to the complexity, emergency care may be necessary for some of these stray animals. In cases where the owner cannot be reached, this leaves veterinary practices in a predicament where they need

to balance their ethical and regulatory responsibility towards animal welfare with the substantial financial implications of providing emergency treatment without any guarantee of compensation.

It is essential that the costs of delivery of these services and the value it brings to the community is understood as it one area that is at risk of not continuing to be delivered if it is not adequately supported.

Animal care in natural disasters

During natural disasters such as bushfires and floods, animals, like humans, often suffer significant impacts, requiring urgent veterinary attention to prevent prolonged suffering. Despite the essential nature of these veterinary care services, the financial burden often falls on veterinary private business.

Wildlife care

There is little data available as to the financial and social value of the delivery of privately funded veterinary care to wildlife. 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 (Orr, et al, 2018). Furthermore, in that study it was estimated that the costs borne by surveyed veterinary practices annually was \$111,000 (Orr, et al, 2018).

(f) Reviewing the roles and responsibilities of veterinary nurses with a view to relieving pressure on veterinarians, as well as the training of veterinary nurses and the related workforce

Recommendations

Recommendation 10: That the SA Parliament introduce regulation of veterinary nurses and technologists that includes registration, title protection, and defined set of restricted activities that can be done under veterinarian direction and supervision.

Discussion

In modern veterinary practice, veterinary nurses and technologists play a vital role in providing high-quality animal care. Their responsibilities extend far beyond basic support; they are essential to surgical procedures, diagnostics, anesthesia monitoring, emergency care, and client education. However, despite their growing importance, systemic challenges such as lack of professional recognition, regulatory inconsistencies, limited career pathways, and workforce shortages continue to hinder their full integration into the veterinary healthcare system.

As veterinary practices face increased demand and workforce shortages, the need for better utilisation and expanded roles for veterinary nurses and technologists has never been greater. However, barriers such as legal restrictions, inadequate pay, and unclear career progression opportunities continue to limit their potential.

A Profession in Need of Recognition and Regulation

One of the most significant challenges facing veterinary nurses and technologists is the lack of formal recognition and national regulation. Unlike human healthcare professionals, such as registered nurses and paramedics, veterinary nurses and technologists in Australia do not have mandatory national registration, leaving their qualifications inconsistent across states.

- The AVA has called for a national framework to regulate and register veterinary nurses and technologists, ensuring consistent professional standards and accountability.
- The absence of title protection means that individuals with varying levels of training and experience may be classified as veterinary nurses, leading to skill discrepancies and safety concerns.
- Without formal recognition, many veterinary nurses and technologists struggle for professional respect, impacting job satisfaction and career longevity.

Veterinary nurses and technologists are an integral part of modern veterinary practice. The registration, quality training, and continuing professional development of veterinary nurses and technologists are essential components of veterinary practices.

Veterinary nurses and technologists, under the direction, supervision, and responsibility of veterinarians, provide nursing care to sick animals, and communicate with, and educate owners on the health care of their animals. They also provide support to the veterinarian with technical work, surgical and peri-operative procedures, medical procedures, diagnostic testing, and critical care. The veterinary profession benefits greatly when working as a team with appropriately educated and regulated veterinary para-professionals.

Outside of Western Australia, there is no regulation of veterinary nursing. The AVA supports the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia's (VNCA) stated position that unqualified and unregulated veterinary support staff potentially expose the public and animal patients to harm and increase

liability for veterinary practices. Mandatory professional registration for veterinary nurses and technologists would bring rights and responsibilities, as well as increasing professionalism - to the benefit of the veterinary profession and the public it serves.

The Australian Veterinary Nurses and Technicians (AVNAT) Voluntary Registration Scheme was set up by the VNCA. By creating the AVNAT Registration Scheme, the VNCA has established a self-regulation program, which will set standards for the professional practice of veterinary nurses and technologists across Australia.

(g) Regulation of veterinary practices, including compliance with psychosocial legislation for the workplace, maximum work hours and after-hours practices

Recommendations

Recommendation 11: The SA 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 SA community in both urban and rural areas 24/7.

Recommendation 12: The SA Government commit funding to AVA's Cultivating Safe Teams program.

Discussion

Veterinary practice regulation plays a critical role in ensuring high standards of animal care, public health protection, and workplace safety. However, the profession faces challenges in compliance with psychosocial workplace legislation, enforcement of reasonable work hours, and management of after-hours care. These issues contribute to mental health risks, workforce shortages, and ethical dilemmas within the veterinary sector.

Veterinary professionals operate under high-stress conditions, making compliance with psychosocial risk regulations critical. The Safe Work Australia framework outlines the obligation of employers to manage risks to employees' psychological well-being, yet many veterinary workplaces struggle to meet these requirements.

For many veterinarians, the passion for animal care is undeniable, yet the reality of their daily workload tells a different story—one marked by overwhelming demands and serious mental health challenges. More than half (53.2%) of veterinarians feel their workload is unmanageable, leading to chronic stress, burnout, and deteriorating mental well-being. The high-pressure nature of the profession is compounded by inadequate staffing and a lack of structured breaks in many clinics, forcing veterinarians to push through exhausting shifts with little respite.

The emotional toll of the job is significant. A striking 72.5% of veterinarians report frequently leaving work feeling completely drained, a testament to the emotional demands of treating sick and injured animals, often in life-or-death situations. Beyond patient care, interpersonal conflicts and client aggression add to the strain. Veterinarians frequently encounter hostility, including verbal and physical threats and violence, as well as online harassment, as animal owners struggle to cope with the emotional and financial burdens of veterinary care.

Moreover, the profession's relentless pace leaves little room for self-care. Many veterinarians neglect their physical health, sacrificing sleep, exercise, and proper nutrition to meet the constant demands of their jobs. This cycle of overwork and self-neglect contributes to chronic stress and, ultimately, burnout—placing not only veterinarians' well-being at risk but also the sustainability of the profession as a whole.

Working hours and after-hours

In the veterinary context, while there is increasing corporatisation within the sector, most veterinary practices are small businesses that are run by practicing veterinarians who are themselves struggling with the same pressures as their staff. The veterinary business model, as it has developed over decades, struggles with the issues of working hours and after-hours service

delivery. A change to the after-hours model, while essential, requires a re-examination of the broader veterinary business model and public expectations on what is reasonable.

The methods the profession has of managing this vary depending on the species and geography. In the case of urban companion animal practice, it is common practice to have large emergency centres that service the community outside business hours, rather than individual practices. Emergency centres tend to operate on a shift basis model to provide their service. Some veterinarians work in emergency centres in addition to their primary workplace.

Generally, in large animal practice and in rural areas, veterinary practices provide an “on call” service for management of ongoing care of animals and emergency animal care. This is usually managed by the same team that work during the day and is an additional workload for veterinarians.

When viewing the profession in its entirety, 38% of the profession participate in afterhours (on call), with around 40% of those doing >30hours per week on call and spending 1-10 hours per week seeing patients (AVA, 2021a). Equine veterinarians had a much higher rate of participation in afterhours, 89% participated in after-hours rosters and spent around 48 hours/ week “on call” (Bell, et al, 2021).

“It also takes a huge toll on the vets in terms of working hours. It is not unheard of for a vet to be on call and see multiple cases in a night, only to front up and work a fully booked day in clinic the next day. It is usually not financially viable for rural practice owners to employ a sole emergency hours vet and not have them do regular hours work, as the afterhours calls can be so variable in number and thus income for the practice. It is also problematic that if the on-call vet does have a large after-hours caseload, there is difficulties in re-scheduling the day’s routine consultations and surgeries.”

The requirement to provide an afterhours service has a negative impact on working conditions and level of satisfaction for many veterinarians. Sixty six percent of veterinarians would prefer to do less or no “on call” work. Being “on call,” as well as being poorly remunerated for it, was consistently ranked as one of the least satisfying aspects of equine work and people who left the equine sector were more dissatisfied with after-hours work than people who stayed in the equine sector (Bell, et al, 2021).

After hours has also been raised as a factor that contributes to poor mental health, particularly the requirement to be available 24/7 with no ability to rest and protect wellbeing (AVA, 2021b).

The requirement to participate in afterhours rosters without adequate time off and remuneration is a factor that impacts recruitment and retention. Anecdotally, recruitment and retention are very difficult in practices with afterhours commitments and small veterinary teams due to the requirement of afterhours. The Award that veterinarians fall under remunerates afterhours very poorly and there is little incentive to participate.

The accepted model for managing the provision of afterhours has not been sustainable for veterinary teams. A mechanism veterinary practices are using to manage this is to reduce the provision of afterhours veterinary service and referring after-hours cases to another practice. This has arisen out of sheer necessity to safeguard (and comply with employment regulations) the health and wellbeing of their employees. The consequence is an overall reduction in veterinary services available to the community outside business hours which negatively impacts animal welfare.

Psychosocial safety and the AVA Cultivating Safe Teams (CST) Program

The *Cultivating Safe Teams* (CST) program is an initiative developed by the AVA to address psychosocial risks in veterinary workplaces. Launched as a pilot program in 2023, by the end of 2024, 714 veterinary industry professionals across 50 practices had undertaken CST training (3 in South Australia).

The strategic intent of Cultivating Safe Teams is to create a long-lasting industry-led “movement”, a chain reaction of safety and wellbeing from participant to participant that honours the pledge to safeguard veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous, and healthy careers.

The purpose of the program is to:

1. Articulate the definitions of psychological health and safety, workplace culture and ‘safe teams’ for veterinary and animal health businesses
2. Provide evidence-based and strengths-based examples of a safe team
3. Inspire individuals to consider how they can help build a safe veterinary team through personal responsibility and accountability
4. Encourage practice leaders, managers, and entire teams to define and commit to cultivating a workplace that is safe, equitable and well.

Snapshot of participant feedback:

- *I hope that this pilot program can access greater funding so that it can be rolled out in as many Veterinary workplaces as possible. In an industry that can be considered low pay and high stress, we need to ensure the psychological safety and have the tools to support our up-and-coming Vets and Vet Nurses.*
- *I found the workshop to be very informative and engaging. I believe the content is a necessity for all businesses to learn and was great to see the effort and passion put into creating safe workplaces! Also, a great reminder of the wonderful workplace I'm a part of and highlighted the improvements we can make as a team for it to be even better. I hope every business gets the chance to participate. Thank you THRIVE, team!*
- *Great session. There was such a good focus on practical identification of hazards and what we can do in our workplace. This is the first time I have walked away from a mental health workshop with ideas of what I can do to improve things.*
- *I found the course to raise awareness on people’s behaviors that are not acceptable and think this will be so valuable in so many workplaces. Thank you.*
- *The session was fantastic, having someone go through all of this specifically through the lens of the veterinary profession meant it was very relatable and relevant discussion on psychosocial factors and their effects.*

The core aim of *Cultivating Safe Teams* is not just to establish a standalone program, but to inspire a meaningful and sustainable cultural transformation in the workplace. By fostering safety, trust, and collaboration, it seeks to ignite a broader movement that positively reshapes how veterinary teams operate and thrive together.

Following the success of the pilot, a peer training model is being implemented, where individuals are selected and trained to serve as facilitators for the CST program. These individuals will be

equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver CST training to their peers, creating a ripple effect of awareness and fostering a culture of safety and wellbeing across the profession.

In 2025, the pilot will transition into a multi-tier, integrated and long-term offering that supports the profession and is aligned with the AVA's strategic and advocacy goals.

(h) Strategies to improve access to veterinary care during a cost-of-living crisis, including pricing transparency, pet insurance, and other support for disadvantaged animal owners

Recommendations

Recommendation 13: The SA Government work with key stakeholders to develop a strategy to support access to veterinary services (that utilises existing private veterinary businesses) for vulnerable sections of the community.

Discussion

The rising cost of living has significantly impacted pet owners' ability to afford veterinary care, leading to delayed treatments, economic euthanasia, and increased demand for subsidised services. As veterinary costs continue to rise, barriers to care have widened, particularly for low-income earners, pensioners, and those living in rural and remote areas. The AVA and other stakeholders have been advocating for systemic changes to improve access to affordable veterinary care while maintaining the viability of veterinary businesses.

Access to veterinary care for members of the public, particularly those with lower incomes or who live in regional, rural, and remote locations, can be hindered by several barriers. The same social determinants of health that impact human health outcomes also have impacts on animal welfare.

These can be divided into several areas.

Affordability in light of the costs of delivery and business model

This particularly impacts those with lower incomes. As discussed above, the cost of delivery of 21st century veterinary care that the community expects is expensive to deliver. Given the lack of public funding, the full cost of care needs to pass on to the animal owner. The profession's desire to manage affordability for animal owners and deliver public good has resulted in underinvestment in the labour component contributing to the shortage.

"The current business model used by the profession is one of payment for services rendered and goods sold, and where the cost of goods and services must be slightly lower than the price paid. Unless the business is viable, it will close."

The spectrum of economic groups within the community from high to low socioeconomic status means that the profession offers contextualised care to try and cater for a variety of needs. Unfortunately, the misconception that human health care is inexpensive to deliver due to a heavily funded system leads to unrealistic expectation of animal owners - that all people should have access to the highest quality care for their animals at little cost.

"There is a disconnect between the true cost of care and perceived cost of care due to Australia's wonderful public health system including Medicare. The public needs to be educated on the true cost of healthcare, and why looking at raw figures veterinary care is so much cheaper compared with the human equivalent. Animal ownership is a responsibility and with that comes the financial planning for appropriate veterinary care."

Mechanisms to try and address this affordability is currently in the form of pet insurances and buy-now-pay-later schemes. They have assisted to some degree in the mid to higher socioeconomic community groups but are not adequate for lower socioeconomic groups as they

are expensive or can increase debt exponentially. In addition, many of these clients are ineligible for credit products or struggle to be approved in a timely fashion when their animal is requiring treatment. Many veterinarians experience emotional conflict in cases where a client is unable to afford care for their animal, again contributing to poor mental health and a lack of job satisfaction. Pet insurance is still a small industry in Australia and needs to mature into a more cost-effective system if greater uptake is going to be realised.

The historical premise of managing affordability through small individual veterinary business offering large discounts or lines of credit is not acceptable and can lead to significant business stress and underinvestment in the labour component of the profession.

With the veterinary shortage, the remuneration of veterinarians has improved somewhat, due to private market forces. This has resulted in an increase in fees to animal owners, which has further reduced the affordability within the lower socioeconomic groups.

Animal charities offset some of the challenges around affordability for lower socioeconomic groups; however, their geographical locations often limit them in the majority to urban centres. Further, their funding sources are highly competitive and subject to fluctuations.

Inability of the profession to service people experiencing vulnerabilities

People who are responsible for the care of animals may be experiencing vulnerabilities which can create barriers to accessing veterinary services. People experiencing vulnerabilities are often in low socioeconomic groups. These vulnerabilities can include:

- homelessness or risk of homelessness
- domestic and family violence
- advanced age
- physical disabilities
- mental health challenges
- neurodiversity
- language and cultural barriers

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 and allied social services 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.

Distance to travel

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. The distance to the nearest veterinary clinic or hospital may be prohibitive, making it challenging to seek veterinary care in a timely manner, or at all. This is increasingly problematic in rural areas for both large and small animals when veterinary services have been discontinued.

The advent of digital technologies has the potential to enhance the way veterinary care can be undertaken, especially in rural and remote areas. Unfortunately, current regulatory requirements are not able to nimbly adapt to allow full adoption of such technologies to help address the barrier of distance to travel.

Stigma or Fear of Judgment

This is a factor for those in lower socioeconomic groups and in those participating in animal related industries. Financially disadvantaged animal owners may feel embarrassed or judged when seeking veterinary care, so they decline to do so.

In the production animal sector, producers may see veterinarians as having a conflict of interest, in that veterinarians may be potentially seen as inspectors or “welfare” officers who could/would flag real or perceived short fallings on properties concerning disease surveillance. This is supported by a recent survey examining engagement of private veterinarians with disease surveillance activities where 54.3% of respondents advised that they had wanted to submit samples to exclude a notifiable/reportable disease, however the owner/carer has declined consent to do so. One of the main reasons recorded for declining testing included the owner/carer is worried their property will be quarantined 52%. (unpublished Biosecurity Queensland/Australian Veterinary Association, Emergency animal disease testing survey analysis, 2023)

Financial support

The AVA fully supports increased government funding to support veterinary care. This should be done through supporting the extensive infrastructure and educational investment already operating in local communities. Approaches that create new public veterinary hospital have unintended consequence of increasing competition with veterinary hospitals advantaged and 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.

(i) The role of universities in preparing veterinarians for practice and the transition to the workforce

Recommendations

Recommendation 14: The Australian Government increases government funding per Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL) by at least 30% to cover operational costs.

Recommendation 15: That the SA Government provide a clinical placement support to veterinary students undertaking placements in rural and regional areas of the state.

Discussion

Universities play a crucial role in preparing veterinarians for the diverse and evolving demands of the profession. However, significant challenges exist in veterinary education, including high costs, difficulties in recruiting teaching staff, gaps in practical training, and the preparedness of graduates for clinical practice. As the demand for veterinarians grows, addressing these challenges is critical to ensuring a sustainable and well-trained workforce.

The Cost of Delivering Veterinary Education

Veterinary degrees are among the most expensive university programs in Australia, primarily due to:

- The need to maintain livestock herds and companion animals for teaching and research purposes.
- High costs of clinical training, requiring universities to operate teaching hospitals and specialist clinics.
- Low student-to-teacher ratios, which are necessary to provide high-quality hands-on training but increase the cost per student.

The Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ) recently conducted a review, finding that veterinary education is at a crisis point due to inadequate funding and growing financial pressures on universities. Unlike medical students who train in publicly funded hospitals, veterinary students must gain clinical competency before graduation, leading to higher educational costs.

Vets for Tomorrow – Practice placement support

Veterinary services help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs nationwide and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply. Training a new veterinarian takes at least 5 - 7 years with 52 weeks practice placement which significantly exceeds (3x) the requirements of other degrees.

Veterinary degrees are among the most expensive courses in Australia, and university income falls significantly short of the cost. Australia's veterinary education system is approaching a crisis, with changing needs for veterinarians to train in increasingly complex areas and budgetary pressure on universities to transform their teaching and research offerings. Current approaches to veterinary science education, research, and service delivery will not be sustainable or allow

Australia to deliver its long-term needs for veterinary workforce renewal and enhanced research capability.

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

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

The AVA is calling on the government to extend this payment to veterinary students as they must complete approximately 52 weeks of clinical placement during their study. This is often in rural and regional areas in practices engaged in livestock or mixed animal practice.

At this stage there is no federal commitment to fund this, however there is opportunity for State and Territory governments to step in and support the development of their regional veterinary workforces. In its 2024/25 State Budget, Tasmania allocated funding to support veterinary students from the mainland in undertaking clinical placements in Tasmania. In the absence of a Commonwealth scheme, the South Australian Government should provide similar funding to veterinary students undertaking their clinical placements.

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Appendix 1 - THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

Thriving individuals in thriving communities



Executive Summary

The Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework is informed and led by stakeholders in the veterinary profession and is for all members of the veterinary community. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is proud to champion the framework on behalf of the veterinary industry, and we wish to acknowledge and thank all those involved in bringing it to life.

In 2021 the AVA commissioned workplace mental health experts, SuperFriend, to undertake research into the mental health and wellbeing of the veterinary workforce. This included building an understanding of psychosocial risk and protective factors in the industry, and gathering input and insights into potential initiatives, interventions, and solutions to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the profession.

The research showed that 66% of the 2500 participants who took part in the survey had experienced a mental health condition, with over 40% affected in the previous 12 months. More than 50% of respondents indicated their work had a negative impact on their mental health. This reinforces other scientific evidence that suggests that working in the veterinary industry may cause or exacerbate mental ill-health and suicide risk.

Of the several recommendations resulting from the research two were considered a priority - forming a Veterinary Wellness Steering Group and developing a nationally consistent mental health and suicide prevention framework specific to the veterinary profession.

The THRIVE Veterinary Wellness Steering Group was formed, and in October 2022 veterinary professionals from a range of disciplines and roles came together for a roundtable discussion. The participants committed to collaborating as one profession to create resources to support a mentally healthy veterinary community.

The steering group developed this Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework in consultation with veterinarians, veterinary nurses, technicians, students and other stakeholders. It aims to support individuals, workplaces, and organisations to implement well-being strategies that positively impact mental health outcomes for all veterinary team members.

Effective partnerships and strategic connections in the veterinary industry and the broader community will bring the framework to life - designing and embracing initiatives that address each of its components and supporting the wellbeing of veterinary workers and the sustainability of the industry.

Mental health and suicide prevention at work

An integrated wellness approach is recommended when assessing and addressing workplace or workforce mental health. This encompasses three main areas of activity:

- (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;
- (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. We see the framework as a living document which will evolve and improve over time.

The THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework underpins our industry-led veterinary wellness initiative, THRIVE - which aims to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.



THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework Snapshot

PREVENT

Preventing harm from psychosocial hazards in the industry

We are well prepared to fulfill our roles in the veterinary industry.

We work in a safe and supportive team environment.

Regulatory frameworks support our psychological health and safety.

PROMOTE

Promoting strengths, capabilities and the rewards of work

We are recognised and rewarded for the work we do and the value that it brings.

We work in an industry where belonging and diversity are embraced.

We are supported to grow and to be well.

PROTECT

Protecting us when we experience stress and are unwell

We are able to speak openly about stress and mental ill-health.

We check in and support each other to get the help we need.




Our work-places make reasonable adjustments to allow us to contribute.



ava.com.au/THRIVE

THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

The Australian veterinary industry recognises the value of an integrated approach to workplace mental health and suicide prevention, one that supports the profession through three founding pillars: prevention, promotion, and protection.

 <p>Prevent</p>	<p>PREVENT: Preventing harm from psychosocial hazards in the industry</p> <p>Ready to work in the veterinary industry. Our training is holistic, building our self-awareness, and equipping us with the non-technical skills that allow us to effectively apply our knowledge when we enter the workforce.</p> <p>Safe and supportive workplaces. All members of veterinary teams work together to identify psychosocial risks. Safe, open conversations create the trust that allows a collaborative approach to the design and management of work, reducing or eliminating the impact of hazards.</p> <p>Industrial awards and legislation set us up for success. Regulatory and membership bodies advocate for awards and legislation that act as minimum standards. Compliance with legal obligations prevents harm.</p>
 <p>Promote</p>	<p>PROMOTE: Promoting strengths, capabilities, and the rewards of work</p> <p>Meaning and value. Our work is meaningful and positively impacts our mental health. We are valued and rewarded for the work that we do. We are recognised for the essential contribution we make to animals, communities, and businesses.</p> <p>Diversity, inclusion and belonging. Equity and diversity in our community is embraced and contributes to our strength. The acceptance and tolerance of ideas and identities is paramount. We work as a team, as part of a veterinary community that accepts us and encourages us to be our real selves.</p> <p>Whole person wellbeing and growth. Life-long personal and professional development is promoted and tailored to the unique interests and values of each individual. We are supported to find the balance between work and the other aspects of our life that allows us to be well.</p>
 <p>Protect</p>	<p>PROTECT: Protecting us when we experience stress and are unwell</p> <p>Raising awareness and reducing stigma. We may have times when we are stressed or experience mental illness. We feel safe to share this with others knowing that it will not have a detrimental effect on our careers.</p> <p>Early intervention and support. We check in with each other regularly. Responding quickly and compassionately helps people to locate and access the support that they need.</p> <p>Flexibility. The people working in our industry have diverse needs. We learn from people's lived experience and make reasonable adjustments that allow them to contribute sustainably to the workplace.</p>

Resources

As a veterinary industry we are working together to maintain the most relevant mental health resources available. We have included information on some resources that will get you started.

The Australian Veterinary Association has made a commitment to manage more detailed and veterinary-specific information on their website. Please visit ava.com.au/THRIVE to find further resources that assist to prevent, promote, and protect mental health.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the passion and commitment of all individuals who have contributed to this framework. Those with lived experience of mental ill-health, veterinary professionals and stakeholders who identify strongly with the veterinary profession. Thank you for sharing your unique voice, and for your pledge to veterinary wellness.



PREVENT: Resources and support services for understanding the legislation and regulation that help prevent harm in our industry.

- **Fair Work Australia**
- **Safe Work Australia***
 - Model Code of Practice - Managing psychosocial hazards at work
- **Animal Care and Veterinary Services Award**
- **Australasian Veterinary Boards Council:** Promoting the integrity and sustainability of the veterinary profession.

PROMOTE: Resources and support services that promote team strengths and capabilities.

- **Beyond Blue** – Work and mental health: Providing details on how to build a mentally healthy workplace.
- **Head to Health:** An online platform provided by the Australian Government that offers information and support for mental health.
- **SANE:** 1800 187 263: A national mental health organisation providing information, resources, and support for people with complex mental health issues in Australia and for the families and friends that support them.
- **Employee Wellness Programs:** Workplace wellness programs that focus on stress management, healthy lifestyle choices, and work-life balance can help employees cope with the demands of their job and reduce the risk of burnout.
- **Individual, leadership and/or business development training and coaching:** Supporting individuals and teams with their non-technical skill set, mindset, and workplace culture.
- **THRIVE Cultivating Safe Teams Pilot Program:** Supporting the mitigation of common stressors in veterinary workplaces and promoting a culture of psychological safety.
- **Mentoring programs** such as the AVA new graduate mentoring program, can help to support diversity goals, increase productivity, develop leadership skills, and shift culture.

PROTECT: Resources and support services for protecting team members when they are unwell. The asterisked services (*) are available 24/7.

- **Lifeline*** | 13 11 14: A national crisis support and suicide prevention helpline offering support for anyone in need.
- **Beyond Blue*** | 1300 224 636: A national non-profit organization that provides information and support for people with depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. They offer a helpline, online resources, and counselling services.
- **Suicide Call Back Service*** | 1300 659 467: A free nationwide service providing phone and online counselling to people affected by suicide.
- **headspace*** | The National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25-year-olds.
- **Mensline Australia*** | 1300 78 99 78: Support for men.
- **QLIFE** | 1800 184 527: A national support service for LGBTIQ+ folks operating daily from 3pm-12am.
- **13 YARN*** | 13 92 76: An Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders crisis support line.
- **Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)** | 1300 687 327: The AVA provides members, the vet professionals that work for them (who may not be members) and family members with access to counselling services, as well as a range of other support services, including financial advice, legal support, and personal assistance.
- **Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA)** | The VNCA provides members access to professional counselling services and wellbeing resources.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)** | Provide confidential counselling services for employees and their families, including support for mental health and wellness.

Please visit the AVA website ava.com.au/THRIVE for further resources.

*Please seek advice and support from your state/territory regulator

For more information

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