



# Election Platform

## 2021 Western Australia state election

Submission of the  
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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## The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. The AVA consists of over 8500 members who come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

## Background

Veterinary roles extend beyond caring for the health and welfare of our pets and production animals. Veterinarians are the inspectors, field officers and pathologists that secure the safety of our food, ensure market access for our exports, and help to safeguard the human population from zoonotic diseases (those that pass from animals to humans). The veterinary profession strives to protect the health and welfare of our animals and our community. The Australian Government, at federal as well as state and territory level, have a crucial role to play in leading and supporting these efforts. As we head into the 2021 Western Australia election, the AVA is calling on all political parties and candidates to commit to creating pet friendly communities, strengthening biosecurity and improving veterinary regulation.

## Building pet friendly communities

Ownership of pets contributes to a number of human health benefits such as fewer doctor visits, stress reduction, overall improvement in mental health and increased social support for individuals. Pet ownership can improve cardiovascular health - with dogs in particular acting as a stimulus for exercise. Research shows that pet ownership encourages physical activity, and that children aged 5-6 in families which own a dog are less likely to be overweight or suffer from allergies compared with those who do not own a dog. Studies have found a correlation between the presence of companion animals and the alleviation of depression, loneliness and low morale, and improved ability to cope with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, dementia and cancer. All of these health benefits contribute to significant savings in human health expenditure each year.

One of the greatest barriers to pet ownership is pet-unfriendly property. Over half (53%) of Australians would like a new type of pet, but of those, only 13% confirmed that they intended to buy a pet in the next 12 months, which indicates there are significant barriers to owning a pet. The shift towards higher-density housing in urban areas of Australia to manage population growth is the biggest current threat to pet ownership in Australia - particularly in the current environment of landlords disallowing tenants to have pets and strict body corporate or strata rules which exclude pets in multi-dwelling developments. Owning a pet and seeking rental accommodation that will allow you to keep your pet can be very challenging and can unfortunately lead to the pet owner having to choose between their ideal home and keeping their pet, resulting in pets being surrendered to animal shelters. This is neither a good result psychologically for the owner nor a good outcome for the pet.

Both NSW and Victoria have changed state legislation to make pets in units permitted as a default position, in recognition of the important role pets play in the wellbeing of the family and community.



Further to this, in Australia, individuals and society as a whole derive many benefits from interacting with animals as companions, and uniform legislation should be promoted for example to permit pets in flats, pets on public transport and pets in restaurants. Many people and pet owners rely on public transport for their needs. The inability of people using public transport with their pets restricts their access to routine veterinary care and emergency veterinary care is compromised. It also restricts the access of pets of these owners to beneficial public places like parks and beaches.

### Recommendation

- That the default option in WA Strata legislation should be that the keeping of pets is permitted.
- Policies and procedures should be developed to enable pets to be taken on public transport.

### Biosecurity

WA veterinary practitioners play an important role in monitoring private properties for outbreaks of exotic, zoonotic and emergency animal diseases. These diseases, such as African Swine Fever currently affecting China, can cause significant economic and social impacts to the Australian economy if an incursion occurs and the diseases are not readily detected.

In 2015 the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) reviewed Australia's veterinary services and recognised Australia as a world leader in animal health and biosecurity. It did, however, raise concerns about the nation's ability to manage a disease emergency with the current government veterinary staffing levels.

The AVA recommends that the government proactively employs and trains veterinary graduates to fill gaps left by retiring government veterinarians, and fund appropriate biosecurity training for private veterinarians who continue to monitor private properties as part of their core activities.

Livestock industries are vital to the Western Australia economy. The state also plays an important role in our national monitoring for outbreaks of exotic diseases. Investment in biosecurity monitoring and response underpins our continued access to international markets. Disease outbreaks in other jurisdictions (such as Equine Influenza) would have stretched WA resources beyond breaking point.

### Recommendations

- That the next government proactively employs and trains veterinary graduates to fill the gaps as older government veterinarians retire, and invests in the development and retention of those already working in government roles to ensure their expertise is not lost.
- That the government increase resourcing for animal biosecurity to ensure that it can meet the needs of the coming decade.

### Red tape

Consumer expectations on veterinary care are constantly increasing. Veterinarians work hard to meet these expectations; however their abilities can be restricted by the regulatory environment within which they operate. Many of the tools available to veterinarians in other parts of Australia are denied to Western Australian veterinarians. The use of Computer Tomography (CT) is a valuable diagnostic tool within veterinary medicine and allows significantly improved outcomes for animal health and welfare. With the costs of CT and fluoroscopic equipment becoming lower it is becoming increasingly feasible for veterinary practices to invest in this equipment. However, without a pathway for veterinarians to become licenced in the use of this equipment, practices will be



required to attempt to access medical radiographers or continue to use research and other facilities. CT equipment, by its nature, involves significantly higher doses of radiation than traditional diagnostic x-rays used in veterinary practice. As such, it is important that the housing of this equipment is carefully planned and that operators are appropriately trained. To date the State Government has not been willing to licence Western Australian veterinarians to use CT unless they hold a Fellowship with the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists (ANZCVS) in Radiology. This requirement is out of step with other jurisdictions within Australia, where CT diagnostics are a routine part of referral and emergency practice.

There are currently a limited number of Radiology Fellows in Western Australia and the qualification itself is much more extensive than that which is required to operate CT equipment. In other jurisdictions the existing university training that registered veterinarians have undergone is deemed sufficient to operate this equipment. We believe this should also be the case in Western Australia.

Further, the AVA believes that the current Certificate IV in Veterinary nursing appropriately prepares veterinary nurses to perform basic x-ray procedures. As such, the qualification should be recognised in licencing of nurses for this procedure. This is already in place in other Australian jurisdictions, including Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

### Recommendation

- That the government recognise a veterinary degree as sufficient for licencing to operate a CT unit.
- That veterinary nurses with the Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing be eligible to be licenced to operate x-ray equipment, consistent with all other Australian jurisdictions.

## Veterinary legislation

For the past several years the profession has been working with the Veterinary Surgeons Board and the government on a new Veterinary Surgeons Act. While this legislation was finally introduced to Parliament in the late stages of 2020, timing of the State Election means that it will not be passed.

The current Act was first drafted in 1960 and is significantly out of date. Animal welfare, biosecurity and food safety issues are very different now to what they were in 1960 and to be effective in dealing with these issues, it is important that the state have up to date legislation.

The nation is also moving to a system of national recognition of veterinary registration. This has assumed increasing importance in the past decade with the growing need to remove obstacles to the delivery of cross-border veterinary services. In addition, one of the objectives is to allow greater competition within the veterinary services market. As production animal enterprises consolidate or specialise and performance animals travel to compete nationally, reforms which enable the integrated delivery of veterinary services on an Australia-wide basis are vital so that the profession is able to meet existing and future market demand for veterinary services.

It is time for new legislation that accommodates these necessities. Last year the Government undertook a public consultation on a draft Bill to replace the Veterinary Surgeons Act. The AVA provided a detailed submission on this consultation. At the end of last year a Bill to amend the Act was introduced to State Parliament. While the final Bill incorporated a number of the recommended changes proposed by the AVA, there remains a significant number of additional amendments that the AVA would like included prior to the final passage of the Bill.

### Recommendations

- That national recognition of veterinary registration be fully implemented in Western Australia



- That proposed amendments to the Veterinary Surgeons Act be revised in consultation with the AVA
- That an amended Bill be reintroduced to Parliament with the aim of being enacted within the first year of the next parliamentary term.

## Murdoch University School of veterinary science

We recognise that all universities are under increasing financial pressure and that this has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. The veterinary profession has a strong interest in the continued operation and sustainability of Australia's veterinary schools.

The AVA is mindful of the potential effect that changes at the Veterinary School may have on many aspects of our community, such as:

- Student learning and clinical experience
- Specialist and emergency veterinarians
- Veterinary practices which utilise University services
- Veterinary practices which provide clinical rotation placements for students
- Access to specialised veterinary health equipment and services

The Veterinary School at Murdoch University provides significant benefit to our community. It is important that the State Government work with the University and the veterinary profession to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the School. Part of this sustainability is financial, but part is also the continued ability to train our future veterinary professionals to a standard required for practice, both domestically and abroad. For many years Murdoch University has been considered one of Australia's top veterinary schools both domestically and worldwide. It was the first veterinary school in Australia to be recognised and accredited to hold the NAVLE examinations so that Murdoch graduates were eligible to work and practice in America. Murdoch University should be supported to survive the recent loss of international students during the COVID epidemic so that it can remain a flagship for the quality of WA learning.

## Recommendations

- That the State Government lobby the Commonwealth Government to increase funding to the veterinary program
- That the State Government investigate what in-kind support it can provide or partnerships it can facilitate to support the sustainability of the veterinary school.

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