

# Protecting Australia's animal health industries through future-proofing the veterinary profession



## About The Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national professional association representing all veterinarians in Australia, with 8,500 members across a diverse range of interests. We empower the veterinary profession to thrive by providing voice, education, community and support.

## About the veterinary profession

Veterinary professionals are highly regarded, trusted members of our community. Their contribution is crucial to the social licence afforded to animal use. The critical thinking and problem-solving skills developed and honed in an animal health context, coupled with their subject matter expertise make veterinarians essential to maximising animal health and welfare. This value also extends beyond animal health given the interconnectedness of animal, human and environmental health.

Animal-related industries are valued at around \$67 billion to the Australian economy. There are 13,993 veterinarians to look after Australia's animals including our wildlife, split across multiple sectors (e.g. government, private, industry). The private veterinary sector includes 3744 veterinary businesses embedded in local communities.

Unfortunately, the sustainability of the veterinary profession is at risk due to decades of underinvestment. Underinvestment in the veterinary profession may result in:

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

The pathway to a reduction of veterinary knowledge and services in the community:

### Reduced financial viability

Cost of delivery of 21st Century veterinary care  
Inability to recoup the full value of services that are for the public good

### Under investment in the labour component of the profession

Low wage growth  
Lack of flexibility in working conditions  
Long hours  
Reduced career development opportunities

### Veterinarians leaving the profession early due to

Unsustainable working conditions  
High educational debt in the face of low wages  
Mental health issues > general population

### Reduction in veterinary knowledge and services available to the community

Animal health compromised:  
- Poorer animal welfare outcomes  
- Poorer production outcomes  
Increased biosecurity risk  
particular around surveillance

*"It's the model for practice in Australia that is broken – not the career path of being a veterinarian"<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Industry Insights

<sup>2</sup> Workforce sustainability in equine veterinarians – perceptions of stayers and leavers

## What is required?

Public investment in the veterinary profession, and recognition of the important role veterinarians play in society.

## What does this look like?

- Improve the sustainability of the veterinary profession
  - Improve financial viability through changing the business model to ensure all veterinary services that deliver public benefits do not come at a cost to veterinary businesses
  - Include veterinarians in schemes that incentivise professionals to deliver services rurally (e.g. HECS bonding scheme for rural and regional vets similar to doctors, access to subsidies)
  - Support of veterinary profession infrastructure (e.g. adequate funding for veterinary training to ensure Australia can continue to supply local veterinary graduates and support for workforce planning)
  - Provide sectoral support to improve workforce wellbeing and address the mental health crisis facing the profession
  - Plan for, and fund, veterinary services in areas of public need:
    - Animal welfare
    - Biosecurity - surveillance, testing and control of disease through vaccination
    - Animal population control (e.g. desexing animals)
    - Care of animals owned by the crown (e.g. wildlife)
    - Emergency care of owned animals in natural disasters
- Ensure the veterinary profession is involved in animal welfare planning and implementation
  - Develop a national animal welfare strategy and implementation plan that ensures Australia's animal welfare standards are world leading
  - Remove exemptions for animals such as wildlife and production animals from animal welfare legislation to maintain consumer confidence in modern animal welfare legislation
- Embed the veterinary profession in any Australian Centre for Disease Control and acknowledge the important role the sector plays in One Health surveillance, disease prevention and control

**The Australian Veterinary Association would welcome further discussion on any of the initiatives outlined. For further information please contact Dr Cristy Secombe, Head of Veterinary and Public Affairs by email on [publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au](mailto:publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au)**