



# Developing the Second National Action Plan NATIONAL RECOVERY & RESILIENCE AGENCY

Response to discussion paper

MAY 2022

Submission of the  
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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## The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) appreciates the ability to contribute to discussions to assist in mitigating the risk to Australia and Australians when individual animals, Australian homes with animals and industries involving dependent on animals, are threatened.

The 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

There are a range of systemic disaster risks that require veterinary involvement. Catastrophic weather events such as bushfire, floods, extreme heat or cold, biosecurity including zoonosis and exotic disease, and the lack of sustainability of the veterinary workforce to respond and maintain animal health and welfare overall, are current and real risks.

Consequences include the impact to legislated standards of animal health and welfare, human health through zoonotic disease risk, food shortage and food safety or the protection of human well-being through positive physical, mental and social well-being from pets in most homes as well as the significant contribution to the Australian economy- with animal industries and research contributing over \$70 billion and dependent on the health of animals and the maintenance of current disease status of Australian agriculture.

Social license to operate explains the values-based lens used by the Australian and International community for the use of animals, without which, risk to the Australian economy occurs through risk to both domestic and international trade.

Risk is not isolated to individual animals and people, but entire industries, animal populations, the human population and Australian economy, as we have seen with the zoonosis Covid-19 and the economic impact.

Registered veterinarians are central to the capability of veterinary response affecting animal and human health, critical veterinary infrastructure, management of human and infrastructure resources, impact on agriculture, education, community, climate adaptation and land use and social policy around the use of animals impacting every Australian.

Registered veterinarians work as clinical practitioners with companion animals, horses, production animals (such as cattle and sheep), wildlife and laboratory animals and provide the private veterinary hospital infrastructure that services animals across Australia.

Non-clinical veterinarians work in a range of areas including government, public health, quarantine, private enterprise, academic teaching and research to provide the non- tangible infrastructure required for animal health and welfare.



Annual state veterinary registration is only granted to individuals who achieve accredited veterinary education and maintain the competency required for modern Australian standards of veterinary practice. Conversely, it is an offence for individuals without registration to claim the title or perform veterinary practice.

Similar to human health care, delivery of modern veterinary care is costly requiring heavily regulated standards of facilities, staffing and competency as evidence of the requirement by the community and significant contribution to the social license of animal industries to operate.

It is suffering from marked underinvestment, predominantly around labour investment. This is placing considerable pressure on the wellbeing of veterinarians and on the sustainability of veterinary service provision, which is now well evidenced through workforce shortage, poor mental health and high rates of suicide.

The capacity of registered veterinarians to respond when required is under threat and needs correction.

## Answers to discussion paper questions

**Q1 What do you understand your shared responsibility to be for reducing systemic disaster risk (for yourself, your organisation or on behalf of others) and ideally, what should collaboration look like?**

The Australian veterinary profession is highly trained and highly regulated to provide capability for essential veterinary services through private veterinary hospitals across Australia, but with responsibilities for mitigating public risk.

Part of our shared responsibility is to ensure that as a profession we are prepared and are able to respond when required by identifying what we need to allow us to contribute.

It is well understood that animal and human health are interdependent. Veterinary services are essential services to maintain the standards of animal health and welfare which affect human health and safety both positively and negatively.

This is recognised through the One Health paradigm, which acknowledges the health threats shared by people, animals and the environment such as zoonotic infectious diseases (e.g. COVID 19), antimicrobial resistance, food safety and security.

Further, with pets as family members in almost 70% of Australian homes, the positive impact on human health and wellbeing is a significant public health benefit for most Australians and conversely a significant threat if veterinary services are not available to treat animals who are members of families.

Collaboration with all levels of government needs to occur to produce strategies for veterinary involvement, boundaries around responsibility required to be taken by veterinarians including funding and support for veterinarians across Australia to respond and fulfill this essential work when required.

This includes the AVA communicating that to have veterinary capacity to assist in time of public need without significantly impacting our profession's health and wellbeing, the veterinary profession in turn needs to be supported.

The AVA is working towards a sustainable model for measurable, positive change to mental ill-health within our profession with programs such as THRIVE – a veterinary wellness initiative.

However, the veterinary profession also needs to address workforce sustainability and how veterinarians can continue to work with other organizations to assist in coordinating a response to public need.



## Q2 What examples can you share about what you are doing to prevent or limit the potential severity of future disruption arising from climate and disaster risks? What is working well, and what isn't?

Very few agreements exist between government departments and the private veterinarians who service animal health nationally. Veterinary relief generally occurs by private veterinary hospitals coming to the aid of the public or the requirement of government, but mainly without any support, remuneration or even reimbursement of costs incurred.

This is causing risk to Australia and an unsustainability of the veterinary profession through under support affecting veterinary businesses, individual remuneration, workplace attrition, workforce shortage and high levels of mental health and suicide.

Examples of this are the recent floods in NSW, bushfires in WA last summer, risk to biosecurity though surveillance requirements of Japanese Encephalitis and other notifiable disease such as Foot and Mouth disease and Lumpy skin disease on Australia's doorstep in Indonesia.

Surveillance across Australia is imperative to early detection of exotic and notifiable disease to maintain Australian disease status, required for trade.

Communication to government by the AVA about the requirements for veterinarians to be considered in emergency planning, recognized as part of the emergency response team and have workforce needs catered rather than a heavy reliance on veterinary good will, is currently occurring through submissions such as this.

## Q3 What is enabling your efforts to reduce disaster risks? Conversely, what is impeding your efforts to reduce disaster risks and why should it be addressed in the second National Action Plan?

Disaster risk and response requiring veterinary involvement is enabled by the willingness of the private veterinarians providing and working in local veterinary hospitals across Australia to step up when required.

The capability and infrastructure is provided but the underinvestment and inclusion into risk and disaster management strategy leaves veterinarians responding at their own personal and professional risk and commonly, financial detriment.

The poor mental health of the veterinary profession has been identified as having a significant financial component with recommendations for the veterinary profession to improve the financial stress veterinarians face in order to correct the risk to the veterinary profession itself.

Structural and financial support of essential veterinary services need urgent consideration.

## Q4 If the second National Action Plan included ~5 nationally significant strategic initiatives or actions to focus collective efforts over the next 2-5 years, what should they be? What would make the most difference nationally?

Analysis to assess aspects of risk, emergency and disaster are currently not well supported and there needs to be a strategic initiative to include veterinary services and animal health and welfare.

Once identified, mechanisms as to how to address these gaps need to occur such as a national blueprint to inform each state, before disaster such as exotic disease outbreak occur.

The Australian Veterinary Association presented an election platform to government prior to the 2022 Election which included strategic initiatives and actions to address risks of veterinary workforce sustainability as well as animal health and welfare.



This Election Platform 2022 can be found at: <https://www.ava.com.au/news/get-involved/2022-Federal-Election/> and included:

*Recommendation 1.1: Australian Government support of \$3m over five years to implement programs to address key findings of the Superfriend report on a Veterinary Wellness Strategy.*

*Recommendation 1.2: The Australian Government to implement an Assistant Minister for Wellness.*

*Recommendation 2.1: Development of a mechanism to allow consistent secure payment for veterinary services delivered in natural disasters and to unowned animals, including wildlife.*

*Recommendation 2.2: A mechanism to provide subsidisation of pet insurance.*

*Recommendation 3.1: Creation of a HECS bonding scheme for regional and rural vets*

*Recommendation 3.2: Funding for further analysis of education and training needs of the profession to address labour market shortages in rural and regional areas and to increase students' exposure to rural and regional Australia.*

*Recommendation 4.1: Harmonisation of veterinary licensing across all jurisdictions in Australia via an inter-governmental committee comprising all Australian Governments, state or territory veterinary boards and the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council.*

*Recommendation 5.1: The introduction of a national One Health framework for disease prevention and control in Australia.*

*Recommendation 6.1: Benchmarking of Australian animal welfare practices against trading partners, protecting our competitive advantages while ensuring modern animal welfare is achieved.*

*Recommendation 7.1: Sector-based emissions reduction transition strategies to be prepared and involvement of AVA in any working groups to progress the matter*

#### Q5 Anything else you would like to add?

The veterinary profession is an Australian resource of highly trained, highly regulated veterinarians with capability for mitigating risk but currently without capacity through long term underinvestment.

For the Veterinary workforce to plan for systemic disaster risks and to respond in emergencies, marked investment to formally include the veterinary workforce in strategy and provide for this with labour investment is required.

This will not only mitigate animal and human health risk, remove potential harm from animal industries but will provide opportunity for advancements in veterinary medicine, animal health and welfare, increased production and value of Agriculture, research and services for the Australian public and animal industries.

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