

Australian veterinary workforce modelling

An Australian Veterinary Association initiative

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Foreword

Veterinarians have important roles to play in animal, human and community wellbeing. Veterinarians in rural and regional areas ensure the safety of the food we eat and export, care for the health and welfare of livestock, and are necessary to our biosecurity, helping identify and respond to a serious disease outbreak.

Veterinarians are also important to the two-thirds of households which now include companion animals, and pets are increasingly valued as important family members. There is a significant body of evidence that pet ownership has benefits for the health and wellbeing of individuals and the community.

For the veterinary profession to have a sustainable future, it is essential that the nation has the right number of vets to meet the needs of Australia's animals, owners and communities; that those vets have the right skills, and are in the right places. This requires effective workforce planning, via an evidence-based and co-ordinated approach. Planning an effective veterinary workforce is one of the Australian Veterinary Association's five strategic priorities.

There have been concerns within the profession for some time about a potential future imbalance between the veterinary workforce and the demand for their services. Over the past 10 years the establishment of three new veterinary schools combined with increased student intakes from the existing schools led to a significant growth in the number of veterinary graduates. There are reports that indicate a recent increase in unemployment among new graduates; we have seen a reduction in the income of veterinary graduates compared with professionals who have obtained similar professional degrees.

The *Australian veterinary workforce modelling* report provides Australia's first major, long-term national projections for the veterinary workforce and presents the best available information to inform the planning for our future veterinary workforce.

Although there have been government and industry reports in the past about ensuring veterinary services are meeting Australia's needs, these have often focused on rural services. There has never before been a reliable Australian veterinary workforce analysis. Until now there have been no efforts to quantify current demand for veterinary services, or project future demand. Filling this data and analysis vacuum is the necessary first step to planning an effective veterinary workforce in Australia.

This report provides a sound evidence base for policy-makers and workforce planners. It is the culmination of one of several projects initiated by the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) to facilitate more effective veterinary workforce planning. Integral to this project was the development of a computer simulation model of the veterinary workforce. This can be used to estimate future supply and demand under alternative scenarios, and allows the AVA to periodically update projections as additional information becomes available.

The size of the veterinary workforce depends on graduate numbers, retention rates and immigration, and is influenced by age, gender and working hours of veterinarians. The model looks at the relationship between the projected workforce and projected demand for veterinary services.

This report has been produced by independent and respected workforce planning experts, based on best available data. The tools and methodology are the same as those used by Health Workforce Australia to assess the human health workforce. This report will be used to inform essential, coordinated, long-term reforms by government, the profession and higher education providers to secure a sustainable and affordable veterinary workforce capable of maintaining high quality veterinary care.

Key findings

The projections contained in *Australian veterinary workforce modelling* report show that unless we initiate change, Australia will experience a significant oversupply of veterinarians. Significant unemployment or underemployment is likely unless fewer veterinarians are trained or new demand for services is generated.

The most significant outcome of this project and its findings is evidence that reform and action is needed to ensure a sustainable, affordable veterinary workforce for the future. It is simply not tenable to continue with a business-as-usual approach.

Key documents

Australian veterinary workforce modelling

The report that follows includes the summary of the findings of an environmental scan which was a systematic approach to collecting and analysing information relating to the workforce's internal and external environment influencing the role and practice of the veterinary profession. This process involved a literature review and conduct of telephone interviews with key stakeholders. The report also provides a summary of the technical paper which was prepared to provide more detailed analysis of current and historic supply and demand data, document assumptions supporting the projection modelling and report on findings from the projection modelling including scenario projections.

Australian veterinary workforce environmental scan

The environmental scan provides information relevant to the analysis of the internal and external environment for the veterinary workforce. The environmental scan includes:

- knowledge and understanding of the external environment (government policies and funding arrangements, the regulatory environment)
- business models and commercial arrangements regarding ownership and provision of veterinary services in the private sector
- government and research organisations and their roles and responsibilities
- educational authorities and the courses offered
- demand drivers for the workforce
- current workforce characteristics
- analysis of current workforce data and relevant data sources
- financial factors influencing the workforce
- potential sources of risk in undertaking modelling and relevant to analysing the findings.

This information was compiled from a range of source documentation, stakeholder interviews and workshops.

Australian veterinary workforce technical paper

The technical paper has been prepared to report on the findings of the data analysis undertaken for the project. It documents characteristics of the workforce (age, gender, average hours worked, employment status, location) as well as demand assumptions and preferred data sources. This document has been prepared to report in detail on the data analysis undertaken to support the projection modelling of future supply and requirements until 2030 for the veterinarian workforce in Australia.

This technical paper also reports in detail on the results of the modelling for the national workforce and the workforce by practice area. It also details the results of the scenario modelling.

Next steps

To address the findings of this report, a clear set of actions is needed. The actions and an implementation plan are currently in development. All interested parties who would like to give feedback relating to the report and its findings should email them to Debbie Neutze debbie.neutze@ava.com.au by 16 March 2015.

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