# Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in NSW Australian Veterinary Association – Initial Summary



The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Thirty percent of the AVA's membership reside and work in NSW and come from all fields within the veterinary profession.

## Veterinary Profession Summary

- In Australia there are 15,000 registered veterinarians to look after 30.4 million pets, this does not include livestock or wildlife. To provide a comparison there are about 130,000 doctors to look after 26.5 million people.
- In NSW there are 4396 registered veterinarians. 61% are within metro area. 31% in Inner Regional Australia, 8% rural and remote. 30% of Australia's veterinary practices are within NSW, which is around 1000 private veterinary businesses.
- The veterinary shortage is felt across the whole profession in NSW and nationally across every sector, including clinical (small and large animal practice), government, academia, research, industry, and pathology. For the last 7 years it has been formally recognised by the National Skills Commission Skills Priority List that the whole veterinary sector has workforce shortages.
- In 2021 in NSW 40.51% (compared to a national rate of 38.65%) of veterinary job vacancies took more than 12 months to fill. When separating out rural practices 46% were not filled after 12 months

#### The Problem - Pathway to inadequate capacity to deliver veterinary knowledge and services to meet community demand Inadequate Under investment in capacity to deliver Not enough Financial the labour veterinary veterinarians component of the knowledge and vulnerability available profession services to meet community demand Unsustainable and Animal health Cost of delivery of 21st Low wage growth compromised unsatisfying century veterinary care working conditions Lack of flexibility in Inability to recoup the Poorer animal working conditions High educational welfare outcomes full value of services debt in the face of that are for the public Long hours Increased low wages good biosecurity and **Reduced career** Mental health food security risk Regulatory development particularly around issues > general requirements to opportunities population surveillance maintain standards and legislative shift.

# Why are there not enough veterinarians available?

## The Solutions

Intervention points to break the pathway to inadequate capacity to deliver veterinary knowledge and services to meet community demand

#### External support the profession needs

Mechanisms to recoup costs for services that deliver public good.

Examples of public good: Biosecurity, animal population control, animal health and welfare, care of crown owned animals, local emergency care in natural disasters

Regulatory support for the role of the veterinary team as the veterinary profession is essential for standards required and is not optional.

Regulation of the whole veterinary team.

Improved efficiency around the regulatory burden

Animal health and welfare - the veterinary profession is essential not optional

#### What the profession needs to do

Increased collaboration and support from other sectors to advance animal health and welfare

Demonstrating how we add value to all animal industries

Mechanisms (education and resources) to improve sustainable employability and satisfaction of veterinary careers

Career progression and recognition

Mechanisms to improve workload and flexibility. For example, adoption of a shared afterhours model

Increase wellbeing in the profession including collegiality, recognition of non-technical skills

Workplace culture and safety – role of human factors

The solutions required to address this issue are complex and multifactorial, and will need to be considered in the context of long-term outcomes and unintended consequences.

The AVA believes we need some interventions with short term outcomes to provide breathing space while the longer-term outcomes are addressed. The short-term policy projects that would be of assistance now are:

- Educational fee relief to increase the number of early career veterinarians into rural areas.
- Improvements in the migration pathway to assist veterinarians and veterinary nurses to enter the country and get PR would also be useful.
- Inclusion of registered veterinarians within other current mechanisms to sustain medical and paramedical workers in rural areas, under the accepted OneHealth model approach for health in Australia.

Further data and resourced creative strategic thinking are required to progress the longer-term solutions that will provide the greatest impact.

With collaboration and careful thinking this problem can be solved. We are hopeful that outcomes of this inquiry will allow strategies and solutions to be developed and actioned in NSW, that will not only make NSW a sought-after destination to attract and retain veterinarians, and appropriately sustain veterinary practices, but also as a pilot for how this issue could be addressed at a national level.