



2022 AVA ROUNDTABLE REPORT

VETERINARY WELLNESS

Abstract

Developing an industry led veterinary wellness initiative that aims to support veterinarians, and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.

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SUMMARY REPORT - AVA 2022 VETERINARY WELLNESS ROUNDTABLE

INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday the 26th of October 2022, veterinary professionals from a range of disciplines, industry experts in the field of mental health, and the AVA's newly formed veterinary wellness steering group, convened in Sydney to discuss the state of wellness in the veterinary profession. The roundtable was hosted by The Australian Veterinary Association CEO, David Andrews, moderated by Jorgen Gullestrup, Director, Semicolon Consulting, and kindly supported by Zoetis.

The purpose of the roundtable was to discuss how to effectively work together as one veterinary community; with the outcome of (a) holistically supporting veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers and (b) the clients that veterinarians serve.

Participants were provided with a roundtable pack that included a copy of the 2021 AVA/SuperFriend veterinary wellness stakeholder report and the Mind Matters International Statement on Mental Health and Wellbeing, and invited to review the documents and these high-level questions prior to attending the roundtable:

- 1. What are your initial reflections on the following objectives? The THRIVE mission statement: Supporting veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers. Our collective commitment to the Mind Matters International Statement is "Supporting and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing across the veterinary community". We plan to achieve this by seeking to prevent mental health injury from mental health hazards in the industry, promoting the positive aspects of working in the industry and promoting wellbeing amongst our colleagues, and protecting those of us who experience a mental health crisis so they can return to our industry and thrive.
- 2. How do you feel the nine key issues identified in the 2021 AVA/SuperFriend veterinary wellness stakeholder report cover the mental health issues faced by veterinarians and veterinary teams generally were there any important issues missing?
 What weighting do you feel we should give to the five key recommendations and the specific recommendations addressing the nine key workplace issues?
- 3. We have a high-level strategy with clear objectives for what we want to achieve. We also have a clearly articulated problem statement with recommendations about what should be done. Between the objectives and problem statement, there must be actual action. What can be done now? Who should be the primary driver for this? Will we, as an industry be able to take the coordinated approach recommended by the report?

The roundtable will assist us to identify any gaps in current approaches and help to formulate the necessary industry frameworks, guidelines, and resources for a mentally healthy veterinary community.



ATTENDEES

David	Anarews	Chief Executive Officer, AVA
Maddalina	Awad	Chief Veterinary Officer Creek

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Monika Cole Executive Officer Wellness, AVA

Rebecca Coventry President, Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia

Sue Crampton Business Manager, AIRC/Provet Covetrus

Anna Dawson Assistant State Inspector Psychological Safety Team, SafeWork

NSW/AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering Group

Anemie Fourie Technician, Manly Road Veterinary Hospital

JorgenGullestrupRoundtable ModeratorAliciaKennedyFounder, Cherished Pets

Debbie Neutze President, ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board/AVA Veterinary Wellness

Steering Group

Bronwyn Orr Department Of Agriculture, Water, and the Environment - ACT

President, AVA

Rosie Overfield Owner, Mindpod Consulting Pty Ltd/AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering

Group

Michael Paton Member, World Small Animal Veterinary Association's Professional

Wellness Group/AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering Group

Michelle Phipps Chief People Officer, Vet Partners

Amy Regis Clinical Director/Owner, West Blacktown Veterinary Clinic

Brianna Ritota Associate, VETHQ Sydney

Annabel Robertson Professional Veterinary Affairs Manager, Hill's Pet Nutrition

Tracey Saines-Casey WHS Manager - APIAM

Ben Smith Partner, West Gippsland Vet Care/AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering

Group

Kristen Steele Senior Advocacy Officer, AVA Veterinary and Public Affairs

Julie Strous Executive Director, Australasian Veterinary Boards Council

SandraSuraceHead of Workplace Mental Health, SuperFriendDavidTabrettFounding Director, Sustainable Veterinary CareersKateToyerPresident, Australian Rainbow Veterinarians and Allies

Warwick Vale Owner, Vale Veterinary and Consultancy Services/Chair AVA Veterinary

Wellness Steering Group

Cathy Warburton Owner, Make Headway/AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering Group

Bridget Webster Secretary, Australian Veterinary Student Group

Scott Williams Executive Officer, Veterinary Schools of Australia, and New Zealand

Erin Williams Senior People and Culture Partner, SASH

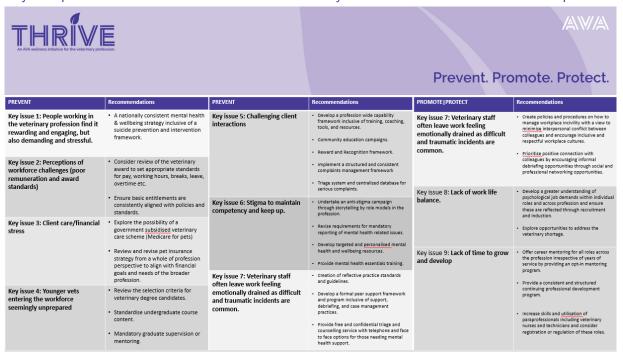


ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION POINTS

The roundtable discussion was shaped by (6) key questions prepared by the AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering Group – and answered in an open debate format. Participants were seated at five tables and feedback was obtained both from their table group and individually. Key insights (per question) included:

- 1. What do you hope to get out of today's roundtable discussion?
 - A sense of belonging to an industry
 - Action
 - Empowerment
- 2. What are two words that best describes your feelings about the SuperFriend recommendations and the Thrive mission statement?
 - "Hopeful" and "platform" cynicism around the profession since the report came out, that we are going to do nothing with it this day marks the start of what actions we are looking to start.
 - "Action" and "empowered" the report makes us feel that we are empowered as we have the data, some words that came up was ownership of the problem, leadership, collaboration, and action. The importance of finding a balance to be more positively oriented in the way our industry is portrayed.
 - A sense of commitment from the profession to "Storytelling" and the report gives us a "pathway" A sense of frustration that we want action, it may not be perfect, but that we are making progress;
 (Progress over perfection). Storytelling will help to personalise and normalise what it is like to be a vet.
 Create a connection with each other and a sense of belonging through storytelling.
 - "Optimistic" and motivated by the snapshot presented by the report, "roadmap" group spoke about the sense of being seen and that the data and conversations was very much about being heard.
 - "Action" and "articulated" SuperFriend report told us the story of what we needed to be doing and that we want to get specific about what our future actions are.

Key workplace issues identified in the 2021 Veterinary Wellness Stakeholder Research Report





- 3. The MATES in Construction story an industry led approach to workplace mental health; what are the parallels in our profession that we can utilise to inform our next steps?
 - After several suicides in the industry, they commissioned the AISRAP Report within the Queensland commercial building and construction industry.
 - They included all professionals within the industry; and looked at the profession warts and all. What was highlighted from this was:
 - Workers Lack of Job Security
 - o Employers A Hyper Competitive Environment
 - o Industry Fractured and Conflictual Relationships
 - Mental Health Professionals advised that men were not likely to seek help.
 - Their measurement for success: We have succeeded when MATES in Construction is no longer a program run on sites, but the way our industry does business.
 - Higher aim than just "running programs" they wanted continuous improvement, rather than a start
 of a program and an end of a program.
 - It was important to provide a service that was "free of charge" and able to be done at a local level so that individuals could ask for support immediately as well as being able to volunteer to be a connector or helper on site.
 - They identified that they needed to shift the culture from the ground up engaging with workers, not the employers. Conversations were started with the building manager onsite.
 - The training system they utilise for their program is LivingWorks <u>safeTALK</u> and <u>ASIST</u> (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) the mission was to deliver this to every building site in Australia.
 - Important to embed this into the worksite WHS as important as physical safety is on site.
 - One of the key success factors is that MATES is branded very visibly stickers on hard hats. If you need help, you knew who to go to for assistance.
 - Accrediting participating work sites and workplaces as MATES accredited sites, was a powerful way to take the program from a single site intervention to an industry standard.
 - MATES was initially a suicide intervention program but after some years the industry requested that the program be expanded upstream. The industry developed the Australian Building and Construction Industry Blueprint for Better Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to support business with further upstream initiatives.
 - While MATES provided all services at no charge to the industry, MATES industry partnership program allowed business to buy into the social capital being in the MATES brand. Business would purchase the right to brand themselves as a MATES industry partner - this was done on a sliding scale so all types of business could afford to participate.
 - Being an industry wide initiative with wide participation, the Government in Queensland opted in.
 Mentally healthy business saves the government money in health, compensation, and social issues.
 - As volunteers are essential to providing the onsite support there is no charge for the training.
 - Continuous data is collected, and a report is produced annually.
 - Volunteers see themselves as part of a "movement" as they are in this "together".
 - The MATES brand is part of the eco-system of the construction industry today integral to their success story was not compromising on the standards they set.
 - Construction industry is defined by a solution (MATES), veterinary industry is defined by a problem.
 - Important to focus on our strengths not our deficits.
 - MATES partners with Deakin University to review the coronial data pertaining to suicide rates in the construction profession; it is not always accurate. The same issue is faced when collecting data for the veterinary profession. It is important to ask ourselves if we really need to collect this data. Do we know enough to know we have a problem, if the answer is yes, then what does the data really signify?



- The things that protect us and threaten us are the same, we need to be able to accept this and focus on the positives.
- Bottom-up approach used by MATES and that the industry owns the problem and solution.
- Peer to peer support and the small steps taken to build on the program, rather than seeking perfection at the start.
- Building up the skills set, rather than a knowledge base; what does it look like, rather than what it feels like.
- How can we make our message go viral? What is our hard hat sticker equivalent, is it a stethoscope sticker?
- There a screening questions for the psychosocial work environment MATES are developing indicator questions that could highlight if a worksite has a psychosocial problem these screening questions will be applied during MATES training and the site manager can then be informed about any upstream issues required to be addressed.
- We could do the general awareness talks and going out to clinics and speaking to staff and offer the same opportunity to volunteers to be able to support others.
- More relatable to speak to peers who have been through a similar situation in the workplace, rather than a mental health professional.
- Storytelling to help destigmatize mental ill health.
- Understand the barriers to be able to focus on the strengths eg. staff shortages are an issue, but also a huge driver for change.
- As a profession we have trained Mental Health First Aiders within a clinic, however, we need to also focus on what clinics do after that; provide resources, so they are aware of who they can go to for services that are needed.
- Important to have a service that is free.
- Not a mandated service, there needs to be passion.
- Reluctance in our industry to say that we have a problem; training in permission to seek help use help seeking as a metric in whatever we establish; not waiting until we are broken.
- Making the training attractive for all clinics, versus one size fits all.
- Mental health aspect to the work we do in supporting our clients.
- Whenever we find a barrier, let's flip that to finding the strength.
- Measure what we are doing to make sure we have good benchmarks.
- Make sure our industry approach is highly visible we can make it "normal" to use the system we
 develop. Making sure we have resources available. Taking the training into the vet schools.
- Building what we do sustainably, not trying to do something too quickly. View the MATES program as the "ideal" – think big but start small.









- 4. What does a thriving and sustainable future for the veterinary profession look like? What are we missing?
 - a. Early Career How were you prepared for your early career? How did the workplace receive you? How do you know you are appreciated in the industry?
 - Overarching statement: Support and success; support that is in place will determine the outcomes and retention.
 - Support needs to be measured.
 - Day one competencies, strong industry specific induction programs into the workplace, and support systems in place will assist to alleviate the fear students have regarding entering the profession.
 - Not all students have an understanding coming into the veterinary course regarding what the
 outcomes will be, the same experience is had by veterinary nurses. Reality versus the ideal don't
 always align.
 - Good to have a stronger uptake of mentorship programs.
 - Workplaces to have a name badge from day one is a simple way to demonstrate a positive message at the start of a job.
 - Vision: the transition from training to work is seamless.
 - b. Employees Are employers aware of WHS obligations to manage psychosocial hazards under WHS Legislation and is it done through design? How do you support each other? How do you know you are valued in the profession?
 - Overarching statement: Employers are aware of the psychosocial hazards of the profession.
 - Vet boards to regulate the WHS guidelines as part of a checklist that clinics must show evidence of completing before they are approved to open.
 - Lack of understanding of the definition of a psychosocial hazard; training employers and employees throughout the industry. Pathways for understanding and building on the conversation between both parties.
 - Good to embrace different styles of learning when formulating our messages around the psychosocial hazards. Bringing awareness to everyone regardless of the medium; idea presented of a 30 second tic-toc video to understand the purpose and the meaning.
 - Praise and recognition, both a hazard and protective factor.
 - Vision: We have an industry where we jointly celebrate our successes and obtain constant feedback on what is and isn't working.
 - c. Employers What resources do you have available? What is provided by your profession collectively and what do you create? How is your workplace and business culture?
 - Overarching statement: To embrace, adapt and evolve to the continuum of change and expectations of clients, the vet health care teams, the business, and the industry.
 - Employers have a multitude of resources available to them, from vet boards, associations, HR hotline, WHS frameworks, mental health first aid courses, corporatisation, and support frameworks, all to assist in our seeking positive improvements for change.



- Barriers experienced are awareness levels from an employee perspective, fragmentation of the information available, and understanding the various legislation.
- Need to embrace teamwork and enabling opportunities to have a positive culture in practice.
- Personalised training that fits into the needs of the business.
- Leadership is critical walking the talk and accountability.
- Communicate more effectively "employers are also permitted to be vulnerable". Helps to bridge the gap between employers and employees exposing these vulnerabilities.
- Leadership by example.
- Structured career pathways for a thriving profession. Rather than a structured map that is vertical or horizontal, embrace an EVP (employer value proposition) approach of example showing and storytelling, which is an integrated approach, rather than a structured approach. Demonstrating what a wonderful satisfying career you can have in the veterinary industry at any touch point.
- Progress not perfection. Agile management system, fail fast and fail small. Culture of failure whereby people can learn from mistakes.
- New graduate induction processes being readily available and supported for employers of independent, smaller practices, to help engage, support, and grow our younger grads more effectively.
- d. Industry How are we working together as an industry? What are our respective roles as training providers, employers, and employees? How do we know we fill them? What is the standing of the profession in the general community?
- Overarching statement: A unified voice and approach that frames an accountable pledge or charter that demonstrates what a mentally healthy workplace looks like.
- If someone identifies as belonging to the veterinary industry, then they are a voice that should be involved in finding solutions. Bringing all voices together in a unified message that can be taken to the community, government, and all broader stakeholders.
- Who is in the veterinary industry tent; do we include consumers, suppliers as well as veterinarians, and veterinary team members?
- Describing who we are, a veterinary industry, a team, a family, a community?
- e. Training providers How do we know we are attracting the right candidates? Do we continue to train candidates as we are doing? What training is needed to ensure a thriving workplace?
- Overarching statement: Embrace diversity and flexible approaches to training both pre- and postgraduate.
- Diversity helps to attract best fit candidates but is there ever a right candidate? Perhaps we need to think more broadly regarding how we get more diversity into the profession.
- Focussed training on communication skills, traineeships, different pathways.
- Getting the right people into the profession, not just those with high marks and who can afford the course.
- Minimum standards to employ graduates so they have the best support after studies are complete.
 Support for the clinic as well as the graduate they employ.
- Continued training throughout the career pathway.
- Day one competency training for new graduates; navigating financial conversations with clients concerns students.



- Vet school curriculum encompasses clinical as well as non-clinical skills, however they don't have a handle on graduate outcomes to measure how effective this training is. Schools are in discussion to have a single survey to obtain this data. Note: important to feed this information back to the profession.
- Curriculum is already large, with increasing pressure to provide more. Extending the non-clinical training into the workplace may help to alleviate some of the pressure.
- Scaffolding from graduate to practice.
- Educating employees on their WHS rights, including psychological safety providing resources such as podcasts to empower individuals to what a "thriving workplace" could look like.
- 5. Are there existing programs identified by participants that might help build a thriving and sustainable veterinary community and how does the veterinary industry collaborate effectively to bring this to all veterinary stakeholders?
 - a. Where are the existing gaps?
 - Leverage consistencies across vet board jurisdictions; assist with the complaints process by reinvigorating the AVA ethics committee rather than all complaints going to vet board. Provide an alternative mediation/resolution method, that takes less time and less toll on mental health.
 - Lack of cooperation across the sector to know what each stakeholder group is doing.
 - Vet social worker role fills the criteria for prevent, promote, protect. Human-animal bond demonstrate that human wellbeing is affected through the work that the profession is doing.
 - Recognising the social and economic value of veterinarians in the community.
 - Further exploration of an internship year for new graduates.
 - b. Will programs have to be tailored for veterinary professionals or will generic programs work just as well?
 - Start with generic programs and build vet specific ones from these.
 - Utilising existing programs in the mental health space such as the free accidental counsellor course and amplify these programs.
 - c. If we look at the key issues identified in the 2021 AVA/SuperFriend Veterinary Wellness Stakeholder Research Report, can we leverage any existing initiatives to achieve Prevent, Promote and Protect?
 - Go back to basics build on the storytelling aspects at a practice level.
 - Currently programs are fragmented but we can pull existing work into a more comprehensive framework.
 - Approach this through bite sized chunks and build as we go.
 - Continue with mental health first aid training.
 - Increasing fees across the profession to help ease financial burdens.
 - Increasing engagement with students and mentoring uptake in both veterinary and vet nurse courses.



d. What will success look like and how will we know we are there?

- True collaboration. Ensuring we hear from all veterinary professionals, veterinary nurses, and technicians.
- We accommodate all sorts of people, both in training and the workplace, people look forward to and enjoy their work and life most of the time.
- We all do something and take steps; we make that commitment.
- Success is being able to build the career you want and having a professional world that you are proud of.
- An industry approach, with a holistic employer to employee approach to training, that speaks to "whole person wellbeing" and promotes a workplace where people thrive.

6. What is the best approach for industry collaboration to achieve our aim of preventing harm, promoting the positive, and protecting those experiencing mental ill-health?

- A pledge or commitment statement acknowledging our mental wellness rights, that is self-regulated. Single page document that explains what mental wellness rights are, and whoever signs the pledge are held accountable to honour it.
- Potential to become an alliance working under the same pledge; a commitment to uphold the minimum standards that we set.
- Develop the Australian version of the Mind Matters statement and ask all veterinary stakeholders to sign up to this. Build a framework that demonstrates what we are all doing in the wellness space; helping to drive initiatives together and not reinventing the wheel.
- An overarching commitment statement with the Mind Matters statement sitting above this; embraced by all veterinary professionals, and representative bodies VNCA, VSANZ, AVBC, etc. An industry approach that everyone in the profession is encouraged to join and make a commitment to uphold what we are doing.
- Continue to come together in a collective way, like today potential for a veterinary mental health summit each year and all interested parties share what they are doing, and report back on progress made. Hold the summit each year until we believe we have made progress.
- 1st step is socialisation of the statement that we are going to commit to promote this actively together and create a culture shift.
- AVA to demonstrate that we are open to collaboration and build up trust within the profession by our actions.
- Co-brand THRIVE and the multiple organisations that have signed up to the mission statement.
 Managed by the AVA but everyone is signed up to it.
- Different ecosystems within the profession to become an alliance, in a similar manner to the Corporate Mental Health Alliance.
- THRIVE could transcend AVA being an all of industry initiative that is hosted through the AVA.



a. What can we start first?

- A more formalised minimum standards for practices to employ graduates and an industry specific induction process.
- Develop a checklist that practices need to undergo with the vet-boards before they can employ new graduates.
- Compulsory CPD for non-clinical skills and improved leadership skills to be able to support new grads and build sustainable practices.
- Day one competencies for new graduates.
- Focus on the needs of undergraduates and early career professionals leveraging this to have a flow on affect to also include other professionals in the veterinary team.
- A system that creates a more supportive environment for new graduates to thrive, as well as the whole team, allowing all professionals to feel valued.
- All of workplace conversation with a specific tone for our graduates.
- Stronger messaging that psychological safety is everyone's responsibility.



FINAL TAKE-AWAYS

We have been given a gift through our 2021 Veterinary Wellness Stakeholder Research. We can use this report to embrace moving forward as an industry that "leads" the discussion of wellness across the whole profession, rather than an industry that is lead.

The roundtable discussion has informed the AVA that an industry project is acceptable to stakeholders. Collectively we agreed that the Mind Matters statement is an industry benchmark and we can broaden this statement through our THRIVE mission statement – an industry led veterinary wellness initiative that aims to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous, and healthy careers.

What I need to support my mental health is better industry standards... less client abuse, reasonable work hours, better work/life balance and appropriate remuneration.

Whilst support is important if/when people may struggle with their mental health, this is a band aid fix if the workforce issues aren't addressed.

We need to address the cause, not the result – fix the things that break us... don't try to fix us after we are broken.



POTENTIAL PILOT PROGRAM IDEAS

Psychological safety training across the workplace

- Pledge or commitment statement for all veterinary professionals to sign up to, that demonstrates the rights to psychological safety in the workplace. A psychological safety charter for the profession.
- Workplace training including basic "rights and OH&S focused" modules with specific focus on protecting vulnerable workers (such as new graduates) - not talking to only young workers directly but those around them.
- Endorsement for a psychologically safe workplace for all and giving common language to talk about it.
- Participating workplaces are united it is a movement rather than a workplace initiative.

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS AGREED ACTIONS

- Commitment to continue to collaborate; and we may underpin this with a mission statement that we sign off on as a starting point.
- Sharing what we have learnt at the roundtable within our own stakeholder groups/organisations and a consensus to follow through on outcomes from these discussions at a future time.
- Learn from other industries to develop a sustainable course of action for the veterinary profession.
- As an industry we need to demonstrate leadership and a coordinated holistic approach.

LEARN MORE

https://www.ava.com.au/Thrive/



My career is extremely rewarding
the joys of helping and caring
for the animals and being able to
celebrate those small wins and
successes with my team gets me
through.

