



The veterinary sector

Essential for a healthy Australia

2026-2027
Pre-Budget submission
to the Australian Government

Submission of the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd
January 2026

ava.com.au

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Veterinary Association acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia.

We pay our respect to them, their culture and their leaders, past, present and emerging.

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ROLE OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION

Veterinary services are the cornerstone of Australia's public health system, biosecurity and food security frameworks. They protect the health of our animals and the integrity of our livestock supply chain. By detecting, preventing, monitoring and managing disease threats, veterinarians protect Australia's agricultural productivity, maintain the confidence of trading partners, and ensure continuity of lucrative export markets. This work underpins hundreds of thousands of jobs across rural and regional communities, protects public health, and helps ease cost-of-living pressures by securing a safe, reliable, and affordable food supply.

Animals are not just part of the Australian way of life—they are deeply woven into our social, cultural, environmental, and economic fabric. From companion animals that strengthen the human-animal bond to livestock that drive our agricultural economy, veterinarians play a vital role in supporting animal and community wellbeing. Their work sustains industries that contribute billions to the national economy.

Veterinarians play a pivotal role in advancing the global “One Health” movement, which recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. **Australia's global reputation** as a nation delivering **safe and reliable food**, both to the domestic and international markets, is underpinned by **comprehensive disease surveillance**, proactive biosecurity management and high-standard food safety systems, all of which are **completely reliant on veterinary services**. This demonstrates the multi-faceted work of veterinarians - from community wellbeing and individual pet care to safeguarding Australian food security and the economy.

The veterinary sector underpins the social license to operate for all animal industries. This veterinary involvement ensures credibility and that responsible practices are upheld. Amid escalating biosecurity threats and global food supply challenges, **the veterinary profession stands not merely as a service provider, but as a strategic partner in securing Australia's resilience and future prosperity.**

Australia's veterinarians are highly regarded, trusted professionals and community members. Their expertise and dedication are essential to the health and welfare of our animals and to our nation's economic and biosecurity outcomes. In 2025, Australians recognised veterinarians to be in the top 10 most ethical professions¹. **Our profession now needs the Australian government to recognise the unique contribution of the veterinary sector to Australian communities and our national economy.** A sustained and impactful government investment will ensure a robust veterinary workforce capable of strengthening animal health systems, safeguarding biosecurity, and supporting the resilience of our agricultural and aquaculture industries. This investment will benefit all Australians today, and in the years to come.

1. Governance Institute 2025 (<https://www.governanceinstitute.com.au/app/uploads/2025/09/2025-Ethics-Index-Report.pdf>)

VETERINARY IMPACT

Pet care expenditure⁵



\$21.3bn

Dogs \$13.21bn

Cats \$5.91bn



Revenue of Australian
veterinary industry³

\$5.7bn

Veterinary businesses
(practices) in Australia¹

3,793

The veterinary sector employs:

29,661 people⁴

15,816 vets

with total wages \$2.1bn⁶

The gross value of fisheries
and aquaculture¹²



\$4bn



Livestock disposals and
livestock products¹¹

\$32.2bn

\$12.8bn

for cattle and calves

\$3.7bn

for sheep and lambs

\$4.0bn for poultry

\$1.7bn for pigs

\$2.7bn for wool

\$6.2bn for milk

The gross revenue of racing
(horse and greyhound)¹³

\$4.6bn



1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 13 IBISWorld 2025

5 Animal Medicines Australia 2025

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2024-2025

TOP PRIORITIES

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has identified **5 critical priorities to ensure the veterinary profession can continue to deliver essential services** including animal health and welfare, biosecurity, public health and food security. **These are critical for the safety and wellbeing of all Australians.**

The following priorities call for policies, investment, and funding to secure a sustainable and resilient veterinary sector:

1. ROBUST VETERINARY WORKFORCE

2. VETS FOR TOMORROW

3. MENTAL HEALTH FOR VETS

4. SUSTAINABLE DISASTER RESPONSE AND WILDLIFE CARE

5. PROTECTING ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Veterinary services help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs nationwide and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply.

Veterinarians play a vital role in supporting animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and enhancing the associated health and wellbeing benefits for over 27 million Australians.

INVESTMENT SUMMARY

PRIORITY	WHAT IS NEEDED	IMPACT
Robust veterinary workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$24 million per year for a HECS/HELP forgiveness scheme to incentivise new veterinarians to relocate to regional areas by partially or fully forgiving their tertiary education debt. • \$1 million per year to develop a national veterinary workforce strategy, commencing with coordinated and consistent workforce data collection and analysis, to address critical skills shortages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End the 9-year veterinary workforce shortage across Australia to increase much needed capacity, provide critical animal health care, aid regional primary producers, and underpin Australia's food security and trade. • Minimise future workforce and skills shortages using accurate data to support rural and regional development.
Vets for Tomorrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$12.2 million per year to include veterinary students in the existing Commonwealth Prac Payment Scheme, to allow travel and exposure to more regional areas of Australia during their studies. • \$2.5m per year to assist veterinary businesses to accelerate the post-university skill development of veterinary graduates working in livestock services. • 30% increase to funding rate per veterinary Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL) to improve the financial viability of university veterinary courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost regional development by increasing practical placements for undergraduate veterinary students to improve the likelihood of regional employment post-graduation. • Accelerate livestock training and skill development for veterinarians post-graduation to support growth of Australia's \$32.2 billion agriculture industry. • Strengthen the veterinary education pipeline for a critical national profession.
Mental health for vets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1.5m per year for 4 years to fund the extension of the AVA Cultivating Safe Teams project, building psychosocial safety awareness and risk management in veterinary workplaces. • \$1.4m per year to further support the delivery of the AVA THRIVE Program to drive improved mental health outcomes for vets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased reach of programs will reduce the risk of burnout and significant mental health challenges for veterinarians and their teams across the country, supporting economic stability and growth. • Improving veterinary mental health increases career longevity and sustainable access to veterinary care, supporting animal and human health and wellbeing.
Sustainable disaster response and wildlife care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a national animal disaster fund that will subsidise private veterinary care for animals during natural disasters or extreme weather events. • \$7.5 million per year for 4 years for a pilot program to compensate private veterinarians who treat injured wildlife. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting veterinary business sustainability and capacity in disaster response and emergencies is critical to community and animal health and welfare. • Targeted investment provides veterinary care for Australia's unique wildlife and enhances the financial viability of veterinary businesses, who are currently unpaid for this work.
Protecting animal health and welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$5 million per year for a national veterinary antibiotic usage and resistance surveillance system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate usage and resistance data strengthens Australia's One Health governance, supports sustainable animal health practices and protects human health.

1 ROBUST VETERINARY WORKFORCE

Issue

Veterinarians provide essential services that support and grow regional, rural and metropolitan communities. The workforce deficit in regional and rural Australia is now critical and there is an urgent need to attract and retain veterinarians to these areas. A national veterinary workforce strategy, with sustained government investment, is required to revitalise the profession which has faced a workforce deficit for nearly a decade.

Investment

- > **\$24 million per year** for a HECS/HELP forgiveness scheme that will incentivise new veterinarians to relocate to regional areas by partially or fully forgiving their tertiary education debt.
- > **\$1 million per year** to develop a national veterinary workforce strategy, commencing with coordinated and consistent workforce data collection and analysis, to address critical skills shortages.

Why does it matter?

The Australian veterinary sector is now in its 9th year of workforce shortage. The length of study and limited international supply of qualified veterinarians results in a workforce that is slow to respond to changing demands - including the rapid growth in pet ownership that arose during and since COVID-19 (73% of the population/households now own a pet²).

Rural and regional Australia is particularly impacted by a lack of skilled workers across several sectors, including the veterinary sector. This, combined with changes in demand for differing types of veterinary services, has led to the profession having inadequate capacity to deliver veterinary expertise to meet community demand. Reduced veterinary input results in:

- Compromised animal health and welfare.
- Compromised biocontainment and biosecurity.
- Compromised human health and wellbeing.

To support the long-term viability of rural and regional veterinary practices, the Australian Government needs to extend the same opportunities to veterinarians that are provided to human health professionals, who are incentivised to move to regional, rural, and remote areas upon graduation.

An Australian Government-funded Rural Practice Scheme to forgive HECS-HELP debt for graduate veterinarians would assist in addressing the shortage of rural veterinarians, particularly in livestock services.

Using the existing infrastructure in place for several other sectors, this relatively modest investment will significantly impact the current workforce shortages of the veterinary profession and positively support rural and regional development and growth.

Moving to long-term solutions, improved workforce data is the first step to minimising future shortages - you can't manage what you can't measure. Currently Australia has limited accurate or detailed data on the veterinary workforce, with inconsistencies in scope and access to data between different jurisdictions. Existing and future workforce shortages can only be managed with improved national workforce data. The AVA has collaborated with the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer and other stakeholders to develop potential data solutions. This National Veterinary Workforce Strategy will require government investment to implement and support.

2. Animal Medicines Australia (2025) Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people (<https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/resources/pets-in-australia-a-national-survey-of-pets-and-people-3/>)

2 VETS FOR TOMORROW

Issue

Despite representing the future of the profession, veterinary students face major challenges during their training. A mandatory yet arduous requirement to complete 52 weeks of unpaid practical placement over the duration of their study, a mentally and physically demanding workload and the length of the veterinary course itself, places veterinary students under extreme financial pressure. As a result, rural and regional experiences are often limited due to the expense of travel and accommodation required to undertake each placement. Unfortunately, these prohibitive expenses remain self-funded and are without subsidy.

Early exposure to rural veterinary practice during training influences career pathways and, due to the expense of travel and accommodation, these rural and regional experiences are often limited for veterinary students.

Veterinarians graduate with a broad range of veterinary knowledge and skills. However, learning is lifelong and further skill development is required after graduating to refine expertise and knowledge in focused areas of interest. Livestock veterinarians frequently work in isolation from each other and rapid upskilling of graduates in livestock services is an urgent requirement in rural practices. This is hampered by the ongoing workforce shortage and limited capacity of experienced veterinarians to train new graduates.

Investment

- > **\$12.2 million per year** to include veterinary students in the existing Commonwealth Prac Payment Scheme, to allow travel and exposure to more regional areas of Australia during their studies.
 - > **\$2.5m per year** to assist veterinary businesses to accelerate the post-university skill development of veterinary graduates working with livestock.
 - > **30% increase to funding rate** per veterinary Equivalent Full-Time Student Load (EFTSL) to improve the financial viability of university veterinary courses.
-

Why does it matter?

Early exposure to rural practice positively influences the likelihood of a veterinarian choosing a career in a regional area post-graduation. Extending the Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme to veterinary students will help remove financial barriers, provide opportunity for rural placement and improve the rural veterinary workforce in the future. This is essential for sustaining animal welfare services for these communities as well as protecting and maintaining Australia's biosecurity, food security and public health responsibilities. The Commonwealth Prac Payment scheme is already established, with a proven concept that functions effectively. Inclusion of veterinary students within the scheme is a natural solution that will assist in addressing the rural workforce shortage to ensure Australia not only has vets for today but also vets for tomorrow.

Early-career veterinarians face ongoing challenges, particularly in the livestock sector. Whilst their veterinary knowledge is derived from the latest research, new graduate veterinarians often lack the applied knowledge of the livestock industries, which is essential to help primary producers maximise productivity and profitability. This knowledge gap limits the profession's ability to deliver on Australia's agricultural and food security goals. Additionally, an absolute shortage of livestock veterinarians limits our nation's ability to respond effectively in the event of an Emergency Animal Disease event.

A targeted investment in post-graduate learning for livestock veterinarians is essential. This would include an accelerated program that provides each graduate with an experienced livestock clinical mentor to help equip them with industry knowledge of various production animal systems. This approach bridges the gap between clinical veterinary knowledge gained at university and feasibility on farm with a focus on efficiency, sustainability, and resilience across Australia's \$32 billion livestock industry. Ultimately this accelerated livestock training and skill development for veterinarians post-graduation will support productivity growth in Australia's \$32.2 billion agriculture industry.

Veterinary degrees rank among the costliest in Australia, yet universities receive funding well below the actual cost of delivery. This imbalance places the system under significant strain, as veterinarians are increasingly expected to operate in complex domains such as biosecurity, food security, and production efficiency—while universities struggle to sustain world-class teaching and research under mounting financial pressure. Without urgent intervention, Australia's veterinary training schools remain under acute financial pressure. This risks the potential closure of some facilities and cost cutting at others that will undermine the standard of training veterinary science requires. As such, Australia faces a looming shortfall in veterinary capability.

3 MENTAL HEALTH FOR VETS

Issue

Long working hours, disproportionately low wages, emergency calls and duties, increasing client expectations, veterinary staff shortages and constrained finances are frequent challenges faced by today's veterinarians.

If not addressed and managed, these pressures can lead to compassion fatigue and mental burnout, furthering the veterinary workforce crisis.

Investment

> **\$1.5m per year for 4 years** to fund the extension of the AVA Cultivating Safe Teams project, building psychosocial safety awareness and risk management in veterinary workplaces.

> **\$1.4m annually** to further support the delivery of the AVA THRIVE Program to drive improved mental health outcomes for vets.

Why does it matter?

Burnout and mental health challenges within the veterinary profession stem from chronic underfunding of its labour component, which has been compounded by profound generational and societal shifts. As more veterinarians choose to actively manage their workload by either reducing their hours or even leaving the profession altogether, those who remain inevitably work even longer hours to cope with the staff shortfall, intensifying the strain on an already vulnerable workforce.

In 2019, the AVA conducted research to assess the scale of mental health challenges within the veterinary profession and to guide the development of a wellness strategy. The findings were stark: more than two-thirds of respondents reported experiencing a mental health condition at some point—significantly higher than the rate in the general population.

As a result of this research, the AVA has strengthened its mental health initiatives, prioritising an integrated wellness approach that better assesses and addresses mental health challenges across the veterinary workforce.

In 2023/24, the AVA piloted Cultivating Safe Teams (CST) to reduce psychosocial risks in veterinary workplaces, increasing participant understanding of hazards from 33% to 95%. The program is now split into CST Aware, which raises awareness, and CST Action, which helps clinics take meaningful steps to manage risks. The AVA THRIVE program further supports mental health, offering 24/7 Counselling Support and Mental Health First Aid for immediate and ongoing assistance. The Graduate Mentoring Program connects new veterinarians with experienced mentors to strengthen professional support networks. Together, these initiatives aim to build safer, healthier workplaces across the veterinary sector.

To help address the significant mental health challenges faced by the veterinary profession and increase reach, the AVA is seeking funding from the Australian Government to expand its suite of veterinary-specific mental health support programs and to strengthen ethics approved research, evaluation, and benchmarking of these initiatives, including:

- CST Aware (\$750k per year for 4 years)
- CST Action (\$750k per year for 4 years)
- Expansion of the 24/7 Counselling Service (\$500k per year for 4 years)
- Extend research, evaluation and benchmarking (\$145k per year for 4 years)
- Expansion of the AVA Graduate Mentoring Program to encompass whole of career pathways (\$675k per year for 4 years)
- Mental Health First Aid for veterinary teams (\$100k per year for 4 years)

These programs provide psychosocial health and safety awareness training, mental health first aid, suicide prevention, and counselling for veterinarians and the broader veterinary team.

Without urgent government investment, veterinary mental health outcomes will continue to decline, and the profession will be unable to sustain provision of essential services to Australian communities into the future.

4 SUSTAINABLE DISASTER RESPONSE AND WILDLIFE CARE

Issue

The veterinary workforce provides critical veterinary care during natural disasters including frontline treatment of injured wildlife, often without any payment, subsidy or reimbursement of expenses incurred.

Each year, natural disasters seem to grow in frequency and severity. The profession's altruism, strong sense of duty and commitment to high-quality care places immense pressure on limited personal and financial resources and overburdens an already stretched workforce. This manifests in declining mental health outcomes and unsustainable work patterns that compound the nation's growing veterinary workforce shortage.

Investment

- > Establish a **national animal disaster fund** that will subsidise private veterinary care for animals during natural disasters or extreme weather events.
 - > **\$7.5 million per year for 4 years** for a pilot program to subsidise private veterinarians who treat injured wildlife.
-

Why does it matter?

There is minimal public funding or charitable support for veterinary services, yet both the community and government expect private veterinarians to provide and self-fund a wide range of services with public benefits. Some of these are mandated through veterinary registration, while others are community expectations. These responsibilities include:

- Treating animal pain and suffering
- Responding to animals in disasters
- Providing 24/7 emergency access
- Caring for wildlife and unowned animals
- Fulfilling biosecurity obligations, including surveillance, diagnostics, and reporting
- Offering discounted desexing to support population control of domestic pets.

Decades of providing these public benefits without cost recovery has eroded the sustainability of veterinary businesses and, by extension, the public benefit they deliver.

Veterinary practices provide substantial unpaid care for wildlife, yet research shows 92% of respondents rarely or never receive reimbursement for their professional time or expenses. This pro bono approach limits both the timeliness and scope of care.

Rising costs make this model increasingly unsustainable. While the public expects government responsibility for native wildlife welfare, many are surprised to learn that private veterinarians receive little or no support in providing this care.

A government-funded pilot program to compensate private veterinarians treating injured wildlife, partnered with the establishment of a national animal disaster fund, will recognise the professional time and expertise that veterinarians contribute, whilst directly improving the sustainability of veterinary businesses, particularly in rural communities.

Without targeted investment, Australia will continue to rely on the goodwill of an already overstretched profession to deliver essential public-benefit services during disasters and in wildlife care. Establishing sustainable funding mechanisms will strengthen disaster preparedness, protect animal welfare and ensure veterinarians can continue to serve communities without sacrificing their wellbeing or the long-term viability of the veterinary workforce.

5 PROTECTING ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Issue

Vets are Australia's frontline in protecting our world class animal health and welfare standards. Vets provide trusted expertise in maintaining and protecting these standards, which underpin the nation's lucrative trade and export relationships and food security outcomes.

A critical component of this expertise is detection and surveillance of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which poses a direct threat to animal and human health, market access, and global confidence in Australian products. Stronger investment in a national veterinary antibiotic usage and resistance surveillance system is essential to protect public health, animal health, the success of our livestock industries and to secure the nation's food supply.

Investment

> **\$5m per year** for a national veterinary antibiotic usage and resistance surveillance system.

Why does it matter?

Animal welfare standards and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) are serious concerns for governments, communities, international trading partners, and public health.

AMR threatens both human and animal health, contributing to approximately 700,000 deaths globally each year. Australia's Chief Scientist has noted a rise in antibiotic-resistant infections acquired abroad, highlighting a growing public health risk.

The National AMR Strategy - 2020 and Beyond builds on Australia's first National Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Strategy 2015-2019. While the government has invested millions in a national human AMR strategy, no comparable funding exists for animal-sector AMR research or surveillance. Pathogens with AMR can transfer to humans by direct contact with animals and through the food chain. Consumers are increasingly aware of the associated food safety risks. Accurate usage and resistance data strengthens Australia's One Health governance, supports sustainable animal health practices and protects human health.

Without coordinated human and animal AMR monitoring, emerging threats cannot be fully understood. The AVA estimates that an effective animal surveillance system could be implemented for \$5 million per year.

About the Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the peak body representing the veterinary profession in Australia.

Veterinarians are highly regarded, trusted community members.

The AVA has provided a united voice for the veterinary profession for over 100 years and is committed to championing and empowering the veterinary profession to thrive.

Our members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health, and quarantine systems, while other members work in industry, research, and teaching. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Contact Details

Melissa King

Chief Executive

Australian Veterinary Association

publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au

0422 216 254



ava.com.au

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