Consultation on the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia
Phase 1

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

October 2025

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About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The AVA is the peak professional body representing veterinary professionals and students across Australia. For more than 100 years we have been the united voice of the veterinary profession.

Veterinarians are among Australia's most trusted and respected professionals, dedicated to safeguarding animal health and welfare and supporting the communities they live in.

Our vision and purpose

Vision A thriving veterinary profession

Purpose Building a vibrant future for veterinary professionals.

At the AVA we champion the veterinary community, advance professional excellence, foster connectivity, and deliver exceptional member experiences to achieve our vision of a thriving profession.

Essential role of the veterinary profession

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

Beyond agriculture, veterinarians support companion animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and promoting the associated mental and physical health benefits of pet ownership. Animals are not just a part of the Australian way of life; they are deeply embedded in it - socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically, and veterinarians are an essential part of every vibrant Australian community.

Veterinarians play a pivotal role in maintaining the social licence of animal industries, ensuring animal health and welfare meets community expectations. Like human healthcare and education, veterinary services provide both private benefits to individuals and critical public benefits to society, in areas like biosecurity surveillance, wildlife treatment and health and emergency animal disease management.

Recognised among Australia's most ethical and trusted professionals, veterinarians are highly respected and trusted members of their communities. The Governance Institute of Australia's 2023 Ethics Index ranked veterinarians among the nation's top 10 ethical occupations[1].

[1] Governance Institute 2023 (https://governanceinstitute.com.au/app/uploads/2023/11/2023-ethics-index-report.pdf)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) welcomes the release of the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1 Report. We commend Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) for this initiative, which provides a thoughtful framework to understand, measure and address workforce challenges that are central to the wellbeing, prosperity and resilience of regional, rural and remote communities.

We particularly acknowledge the emphasis placed on essential services as a foundation for healthy and sustainable regions. As the Roadmap notes, access to healthcare, education and emergency services underpins not only community wellbeing but also regional economic growth and social inclusion. We recommend that veterinarians are included in the defined metrics around essential services.

The AVA support the Roadmap's structure around five key areas: addressing barriers, developing skills, quality jobs, meeting demand, and efficient matching. Our submission sets out how veterinary services align with these priorities, and why veterinarians should be recognised as essential occupations within JSA's metrics.

Background on the veterinary workforce issues

The AVA's workforce analyses and consultations highlight key areas that align with the objectives of the Roadmap. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has identified **5 critical priorities** to safeguard animal health and welfare, biosecurity, public safety and the wellbeing of the Australian veterinary workforce. An analysis on the workforce shortage can be found in our White Paper, "Destination Thriving: A Roadmap for the Australian Veterinary Workforce" (https://www.ava.com.au/member-updates/new-ava-white-paper-a-roadmap-for-a-sustainable-veterinary-workforce/).

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

- **Robust workforce** - Rural and Regional areas need veterinary services to grow and attract a broader workforce. This supports farmers as primary producers and the broader community as pet owners in conjunction with safeguarding biosecurity of our nation.
- **Mental health for vets** - Australia needs resilient vets to support the community, livestock, biosecurity and food production.
- **Public good funding** - Vets provide biosecurity surveillance, care for animals during natural disasters and treatment of injured wildlife, often without payment - which causes greater strain on already stretched (financial and people) resources.
- **Vets for tomorrow** – Vet students are required to complete 52 weeks of work experience (Prac Placement) at their own cost. This financial impost, without support, limits their exposure to rural and regional practice which is crucial to meet essential community needs across biosecurity, food safety and animal health and welfare.
- **Animal health and welfare** - Australia's world-leading standards are underpinned by the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy which requires ongoing support and regular review to ensure the success of our livestock industries and the food security of our nation.

The value of the veterinary sector and the need to address the ongoing workforce shortage is well recognised. In 2024, Jobs and Skills Australia reaffirmed that the veterinary profession remains in shortage for the eighth consecutive year, and in 2025 it called for a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy[2]. 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.

Vision principles

The JSA report and roadmap identifies five key principles with a number of important metrics within each principle. Below we consider two of these and offer a number of recommendations on refinement. These are based on our experience and research around the veterinary sector.

2. Developing Skills

Training veterinarians is a long process that involves 5-6 years of full-time university study. Currently there are seven universities in Australia that offer veterinary degrees (with an 8th currently in development). Veterinary degrees are among the most expensive programs for universities to run, meaning it is important that the existing veterinary schools are leveraged as much as possible and there are significant limits on the expansion on the number of universities offering the course.

While 'home grown' veterinarians are to be encouraged, student from regional areas face significant financial costs in attending these universities.

In addition to 'home grown' veterinarians, the experience in the veterinary sector also sees city-based students who opt for veterinary careers in regional areas after being exposed to the value of regional life through clinical placements undertaken while studying.

Suggested metrics for JSA:

- Add further granularity to the 'Youth tertiary participation rate' to include a measure of the participation rate in tertiary study for identified essential occupations (including veterinarians).
- Add a measure of proportion of students in tertiary study for identified essential occupations who are undertaking rural placements.

4. Meeting Demand

Veterinarians make unique and essential contributions across multiple dimensions of regional life:

- **Public health and safety**: Veterinary services safeguard food safety, zoonotic disease prevention, and antimicrobial stewardship – all integral to the *One Health* framework

- **Agricultural productivity and biosecurity**: Veterinarians provide frontline defence against animal disease incursions, supporting export market access and national food security. Evidence from Europe demonstrates that when regional veterinary services collapse, local agriculture soon follows. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe warns that "veterinary desertification is the last sign before agricultural desertification". In other words, the absence of veterinarians signals that farms and rural economies cannot remain viable.

[2] https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/essential-ingredient-food-supply-chain-workforce

- **Community wellbeing and liveability**: With around 73% of Australian households owning a pet[3], veterinary services are not a luxury, but a basic community need. Access to veterinary care is increasingly a factor in decisions about whether families move to – or remain in – regional areas. Just as households assess access to hospitals and schools, they also consider whether a town has a functioning veterinary clinic. Without this, regional towns are less attractive, undermining efforts to attract and retain populations.

Suggested metrics for JSA:

- We recommend that veterinarians be added to the definition of essential services for the purposes of JSA's reporting and metrics. This would provide a more accurate measure of regional service needs, support better workforce planning, and enable more tailored policy responses.

Conclusion

The AVA strongly supports the Roadmap's objectives and urges Jobs and Skills Australia to formally recognise veterinarians as an essential service occupation within its metrics framework.

International evidence makes clear that veterinary shortages not only threaten animal welfare and public health, but also the viability of agriculture and the liveability of rural communities themselves. Recognising veterinarians in workforce metrics will ensure that planning adequately reflects their critical contribution to the health, safety, productivity and sustainability of regional Australia.

The loss of veterinary expertise in regional areas undermines agriculture, food security, and the liveability of regional towns. International evidence shows that when veterinary services disappear, agricultural decline soon follows.

By including veterinarians in JSA's measures across barriers, skills, quality jobs, demand, and matching, workforce planning can fully reflect their critical contribution to the health, safety, productivity, and resilience of regional Australia.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further input and collaborate with Jobs and Skills Australia in Phase 2 of the Roadmap's development.

Contact

Graham Pratt

National Manager, Advocacy & Division Governance

Email: publicvetaffairs@ava.com.au

[3] 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/)