

21<sup>st</sup> July 2023

Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW

**RE: Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales**

Animal Care Australia would like to thank the Portfolio Committee 4 for providing us with the opportunity to provide feedback for this Inquiry.

Animal Care Australia is a national incorporated association established to lobby for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

Several line items within the Terms of Reference fall outside of Animal Care Australia’s purview.

However, some Animal Care Australia Committee members have personal experience having worked within the veterinary industry with the other members having ongoing interaction with local veterinary practices, and accordingly the responses within the attached submission are based around that lived experience.

Animal Care Australia has outlined the ‘challenges and affects’ associated with the Terms of Reference points within the submission.

While Animal Care Australia acknowledge the importance doing this, we felt our response should concentrate on the implications of the industry’s staff shortage and recent legislative and regulatory changes are having on animal welfare in NSW. Most importantly we also want to concentrate on the solutions required to commence the repair of a breaking industry.

Therefore, Animal Care Australia’s proposed solutions are:

- ✓ **Community expectations need to be reset.** Customer facing roles are undesirable due to the behaviour of customers. This is a widespread issue and needs to be urgently addressed.
- ✓ **A concerted educational effort outlining the role of vets, nurses, other staff and the issues they face daily.** Making the general public aware that vets and their staff are also only human. They deserve respect.
- ✓ **Implement Education based incentives to enter the industry.** Subsidies or scholarships to study veterinary medicine should include a period of time that the recipient works in veterinary medicine, particularly in rural areas where education costs are waived or discounted in return for a number of years working in the industry after graduation.
- ✓ **Some shorter, free courses, ideally in animal emergency care (animal first aid) and animal training.** To educate and provide an insight for people considering, but not yet sure about a career in veterinary medicine.
- ✓ **Consider taking the nursing education structure back to a traineeship.** Nurses learn on the job - reducing over enrolments and run similarly to other trades where traineeships include a requirement of TAFE/Uni attendance at least one day per week.
- ✓ **Initiatives to improve and manage mental health issues.** Veterinary Medicine courses must include core subjects on mental health management and resources made available for those working in the field to access mental health support easily and free, or very cheaply.

- ✓ **Access to and use of all mental health services should be free for all members of the industry. Prevention is better than cure!**
- ✓ **A Veterinary Telehealth Service.** For animal owners to find and access urgent care for emergencies and euthanasia advice as well as for remote locations. A single number to call that could link an owner to an available veterinarian would be enormously beneficial.
- ✓ **Financial Incentives and better regulation of the Industry.** Update the Animal Care and Veterinary Services Award [MA000118] to increase the base rate of pay for all sectors of the industry. Amend conditions within the Facilitative Provisions of the Award to prevent empowered abuse by employers and improve the minimum working conditions.  
  
Recommend the amalgamation of the two existing union representative bodies (Professionals Australia and the United Workers Union) to create a standalone veterinary industry union that is dedicated to representing and improving conditions for the veterinary industry.  
  
Appoint a governing body responsible for representing the people of industry – one that is actually supported by all the industry.
- ✓ **Introduce financial benefits to working in rural, regional and remote areas.** Provide the same housing benefits, financial bonuses, etc as the government already provides to other essential workers.
- ✓ **Veticare Program?** While it is well intended, Animal Care Australia cannot currently support or oppose such a proposal.

Animal Care Australia acknowledges the exemplary work and commitment our veterinary industry displays every day. We want to thank every person who devotes their lives to protecting and assisting our animals through their toughest days. Those who give us a hug and empathise through every procedure.

This submission can be publicly listed.

We look forward to the opportunity of providing further information for this Inquiry should the Committee have supplementary questions.

On behalf of the Animal Care Australia Committee,



Michael Donnelly  
President, Animal Care Australia.  
0400 323 843



Animal Care Australia

2023

## **Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales**

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**Approved: 21<sup>st</sup> July 2023  
Animal Care Australia Inc.**

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# Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales

Animal Care Australia submission.

## ACA Background:

Animal Care Australia Inc. (ACA) represents the interests of all hobbyist and pet animal keepers nationally. Our members are comprised of most major animal keeping representative bodies including those representing dogs, cats, birds, horses, small mammals, reptiles, fish and exhibited animals.

## Opening statement:

Animal Care Australia would like to thank Portfolio Committee 4 for providing us with the opportunity to provide feedback for this Inquiry.

Several line items within the Terms of Reference fall outside of Animal Care Australia's purview.

However, some Animal Care Australia Committee members have personal experience having worked within the veterinary industry with the other members having ongoing interaction with local veterinary practices, and accordingly the responses within this submission are based around that lived experience.

## General comment:

Unlike their human medical professional counterparts, vets are required to have extensive medical knowledge of a number of species, coupled with the ability to ascertain what a problem may be with a patient who cannot tell them outright what hurts or where the problem is.

And like their counterparts, vets are also required to have well-developed human interaction and communication skills, as they are primarily dealing with an animal's owner during the process of diagnosing and treating the animal. Added to this and usually simultaneously there is a need to be working closely with their supporting/nursing staff to ensure the best possible outcomes.

We, as individuals, have a soft spot for our animals. We cherish their daily activities, we feed them, clean up after them, love them, share our homes with them and more and more they become a part of our family. So, when one of our animals is sick, we want the best for them and we want it right away. They deserve that immediate attention and care.

But when the waiting times are longer, the costs are greater and the emotional drain of watching them suffer is just too much – we tend to lash out or respond with an overwhelming sense of urgency and desperation. Who faces that? Who has to tell us our loved one is not in a good way and it's best to put them down?

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The members of the veterinary industry. The same people who have likely had to do that same thing the day before, the hour before - the next hour to come and the next day to come.

During the Covid-19 pandemic our veterinary industry were included as 'first responders' - essential workers with essential exceptions to the restrictions.

Today? They are once again relegated to an industry that is still stretched to its limit, understaffed, under-resourced, under-paid, overworked, and overwhelmed.

They have no united dedicated body standing up for them and fighting for them.

With that said: **Animal Care Australia acknowledges the exemplary work and commitment our veterinary industry displays every day. We want to thank every person who devotes their lives to protecting and assisting our animals through their toughest days. Who give us a hug and empathise through every procedure.**

**Today we say thank you.**

### **Terms of Reference:**

1. That Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW inquire into and report on the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) the shortage of veterinarians across the profession, including clinical (small and large animal practice), government, academia, research, industry and pathology
- (b) the challenges in maintaining a sustainable veterinary workforce, including recruitment and retention rates
- (c) the burn-out and mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession
- (d) the role of, and challenges affecting, veterinary nurses
- (e) the role of, and challenges affecting, overseas trained veterinarians
- (f) the arrangements and impacts of providing after-hour veterinary services
- (g) the impact of the current legislative and regulatory framework on veterinarians
- (h) the particular challenges facing the veterinary profession and the shortage of veterinarians in regional, rural and remote New South Wales
- (i) the role played by veterinarians in providing care to lost, stray and homeless animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations
- (j) the impact of the current veterinary shortage on animal welfare, including the impact on the economy, members of the public seeking veterinary care for animals, pounds and shelters, the animal agribusiness industry, companion animal breeders and others
- (k) current barriers to accessing veterinary care for members of the public, particularly those with lower incomes or who live in regional, rural and remote locations
- (l) strategies to support the current veterinary workforce, as well as ways to increase the number of practising veterinarians particularly in regional, rural and remote New South Wales
- (m) strategies to improve access to veterinary care

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(n) any other related matter.

## **Response to the Terms of Reference**

### **Shortages and challenges of staffing, training, and retaining the workforce.**

The primary issue with the veterinary industry is its lack of regulation. The award after 6 years of university for most vets is an average wage of \$75,000. While this may sound reasonable to some, their university debts would be 4 times this amount.

For vet nurses, there is a 1.5 year course full time or 2.5 years part time and 480 hours placement to be completed, and depending on the provider the students don't necessarily get the practical experience that they require. This is because with it being such a popular course, providers over enroll which has led to an abundance of inexperienced, and yet qualified nurses. With the inability for most of these nurses to obtain on the job training, they are really not accustomed to a busy veterinary practice or the pressures this then brings. With an average yearly wage of around \$50,000 for an experienced nurse, who is someone who can take blood, perform anesthesia, check vitals and keep the animals alive, today's cost of living crisis means they can't afford to survive, and leave the industry.

Just like all other emergency and first responders emotional and mental fatigue in the animal industry is at an all-time high. While their empathy and caring nature is very much needed to keep our animals alive and healthy, this also works to their detriment – they feel it all. They live it all.

While the industry itself is starting to step up and recognise compassionate fatigue is real and those living it require support, there is more room for improvement in this space.

Bringing in overseas vets has always been a challenge as there are a lot of gaps in the education here to that of other countries and we currently don't have a specific focus on providing that gap training. Usually, the international vets are expected to seek out and complete that practical experience within the industry and then take the appropriate gap-filler exams. This again places greater burdens on these individuals, when they are also needing to establish themselves in a new country.

### **Impact of legislative and regulatory frameworks on veterinarians .**

As outlined in more detail, further below in the '*animal welfare impacts of recent proposed solutions*' section, the Animal Rights agenda is impacting the veterinary space and some old-time vets are not coping with this, while others are frustrated and angry by the detrimental changes to animal welfare outcomes. Vets are seeing changes to assisted reproduction, techniques like debarking that can in certain cases save animals lives, restrictions on particular behavioural tools, and so on. Vets now find themselves unable to perform these procedures or assist the behavioural issues without the excessive use of medications, and yet these changes were made with no legitimate research just ideological voices stating its cruel.

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Animal Care Australia has seen the recent claims being made that specific breeds (such as brachycephalic animals) are causing a severe strain on the veterinary industry.

This is clearly an attempt by those extremist groups to justify yet another ban/restriction on animals.

The appropriate response is to educate about the current health concerns and to encourage a change of approach to how these animals are bred, and positively promote any attempts made improve the health and welfare outcomes of the animals. An example of this being trialed successfully are Merino farmers who are now selectively breeding rams and ewes that seem to be less susceptible to flystrike. Thus, passing this coveted trait onto future generations, so that eventually they won't have to mules the lambs, therefore increasing welfare.

Animal Rights advocates continually object to selective breeding regardless of whether selective breeding will improve welfare or not. This comes at the demise of entire breeds, and potentially species of animals. Currently breeding associations are updating their breed requirements to encourage greater genetic testing and the advancement of the reduction of issues such as 'short-snout', 'curly-tail', and the genetically linked health issues related to those particular genes. But if the associations and breeders are not able to continue in this area because of legislative or regulatory restrictions this will most definitely reduce animal welfare and health improvements to these breeds.

### **Challenges facing the veterinary profession and the shortage of veterinarians in regional, rural and remote New South Wales**

A number of veterinary industry staff have highlighted to Animal Care Australia the growing concern regarding when clinics have been taken over by a Corporate Veterinary body. It is reported that despite assurances to the contrary, the original staff is eventually pushed out or forced into casual positions with unrealistic work hour expectations. All in the name of more profit!

Many of the staff end up leaving due to the stress of this added pressure and changes in the job, and the culture that has entered via the corporate takeover, and how they operate.

There is also a growing trend where veterinarians will opt to locum rather than commit to a full-time position, as they are remunerated better for locum work. This clearly does not benefit the higher demand for rural and regional vets. Considering that the more lucrative roles are to be found in our cities, where vets can dictate their hours and client base, whether they are full-time or locum across multiple clinics, and performing services on only a limited number of species, what incentive is there for them to go regional or rural? The costs involved freighting consumables, getting technicians out to do maintenance on equipment, and other background practice costs are higher in rural/regional settings, particularly petrol costs as distances travelled are greater for callouts to tend to needs in regional, rural, and or remote areas.

**Impact of the veterinary shortage on animal welfare, including the impact on the economy, members of the public seeking veterinary care for animals, pounds and shelters, the animal agribusiness industry, companion animal breeders and others.**



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With the costs of most aspects of every day increasing so has the cost of veterinary care. This will continue to have an impact on animal welfare. When people can't ordinarily afford to see the vet, there is greater inability for them to when some vets charge rates well above what is realistic. A quick example is a quick look at the variation in consultation fees currently in Victorian-based Clinics which can vary from \$30-\$105. There is no real justification for such a cost difference and NSW is not that different.

Increasingly, it is becoming harder to find a suburban vet clinic (other than a specialist or emergency service/hospital) that will deal with animals outside the category of cat or dog. Animal Care Australia has heard of people needing to travel for over an hour to a vet that would provide a service for their pet rabbit, and in one case this was because not one of the 5 local vet clinics would even agree to look at the rabbit.

Considering that rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, mice, ferrets, birds of all types, and reptiles are all becoming more popular pets, Animal Care Australia finds this lack of availability in suburban Sydney to be concerning.

Many clinics are also leaning towards limiting their core business to just annual checkups, desexing, vaccinations, or dentals for cats and dogs only, while referring owners to specialist or emergency hospitals for more complicated matters – essentially only triaging or stabilising the emergency case, then referring elsewhere for treatment. This has ramifications for animal welfare.

There are also ramifications for the treatment of injured wildlife as vets who refuse to deal with species other than cats and dogs are becoming more prevalent.

Gone are the days when a suburban clinic will offer an after-hours service, as the rise in number of specialist emergency clinics in our cities has virtually made that sort of service redundant. This is even though those emergency clinics have made the cost of treatment prohibitive for most clients requiring an out-of-hours service. The fact that many of the emergency hospitals have been bought up by a corporate business has also meant that they have little competition in this area, so can charge whatever they see fit.

### **The Issues:**

The staff shortages in the veterinary industry appear to reflect country wide shortages for staff in all customer service sectors – from retail and hospitality, as well as skilled workers such as automotive, construction and medical fields.

All industries dealing directly with the public are facing similar issues, and these stem from a cultural outlook that is becoming more assertive and demanding, while moving away from prioritising societal and community cohesion.

'They can go elsewhere, and at SOME point, someone will accommodate their demands, or at least appear to'.



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This swing in societal behaviour now piles onto the already arduous task of interacting with the needs of the public and their animals. Everyone involved in the industry is faced with challenges that the public may only experience once a decade, while they need to deal with them daily, and often several times a day.

From informal discussions with veterinarians in companion animal and horse/livestock specialties across NSW, Animal Care Australia heard these common themes:

- Vets do not feel positive about the future of the veterinary industry, nor companion animal keeping
- New trainee vets and vet nurses are not completing the courses they start, and many of those that do, do not continue to employment in the industry. This means they have taken training places away from someone who would have worked in the industry.
- The veterinary industry does not benefit from skilled migrants in the same way that the hospital and medical fields do – despite some reporting to the contrary.
- Emotional burnout is rife across the industry, leading to early exits from the animal owner facing roles, or into related fields, such as research, pharmaceuticals and sales.
- Unrealistic animal owner expectations place additional pressures on vet clinics. These unrealistic expectations that owners deserve to receive more than they are willing to pay for have become part of Australian culture. We note these are not isolated to just veterinary related services.
- The cost-of-living crisis has placed additional pressures on families. The reality is that what vet care an animal receives is a financial, rather than an emotional decision, and to meet the urgent welfare needs of the animal, families are forced to opt for euthanasia, as it's the more affordable option to have a good compassionate welfare outcome.
- Some vets even felt that pet keeping will soon become a luxury for the very wealthy.

**Statistics of high suicide rates, mass departures from practices right through to university students not completing their studies prove something needs to change.**

### **Exploring the animal welfare impacts of recent proposed solutions:**

Over the past decade different approaches have surfaced as possible ways to deal with animal welfare concerns and Animal Care Australia was interested to see how these have impacted the veterinary industry and animal welfare.

In a small informal survey of veterinarians at a recent veterinary industry conference that Animal Care Australia attended, we asked the following questions and received the following feedback:

**“Does limiting the number of animals a person can own improve welfare”**

**Yes and no.**

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While most vets had no problem with a permit system required for additional animals, they all assumed that any such permit would be easy to obtain without any assessment (such as just registering with a local council).

All the vets agreed that poor welfare is seen with owners of a single animal more frequently than those with way too many.

They stated, limiting numbers does nothing to educate owners, and the risk of capping numbers means that people with more animals that they should not own, will not receive the necessary veterinary care due to fear of penalty/fines and seizure of animals.

They felt it needs to be easy for people to access a vet, and feel safe in doing so. The model in Victoria is a good example of how capping numbers fails in practice.

**“Could a Veticare system in NSW improve animal welfare?”**

**Resounding NO.**

The main argument was that no vet would want to work in the system, especially if it reflects our current Medicare model in any way that underpays doctors.

Vets felt that a Veticare system would pay less than private practices, which would lead to only newly qualified veterinarians and nurses, or those who are unemployable elsewhere, working through Veticare.

This would lead to poorer welfare outcomes as animals are only seen by vets with limited experience or past poor performance.

When asked if they **“would welcome a subsidised rebate from Veticare”**, the answer again was **‘No’**

Vets are already underpaid for the level of education, the emotional burden, and the ongoing professional education that they must undertake to maintain qualifications. A rebate (whether in full or in part) would create more work for the practice and would increase unrealistic expectations from pet owners.

A telehealth option that connected owners with urgent care vets was discussed as a more viable solution.

**“Would removing animals from property laws and giving them personhood improve animal welfare?”**

**Most of the vets thought this was a joke and laughed.**

None felt taking away the owner’s title to their animal would improve the care for or of the animal. If owners would not be the ones to make the decisions for their animals’ care – not just financial decisions, but also whether they had the capability (experience/time/confidence/knowledge) at home to follow through on the care the animal required, once they had left the vet clinic - this would

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inevitably result in more surrenders, or abandonment at the clinic. Adding to the burden on the vet clinic.

Some expressed that they would then probably be expected to treat surrendered animals for free, as they are currently expected to do with wildlife, and this concerned them. Litigation resulting from the decisions a vet made when overriding a 'guardians' wishes was also raised.

Vets do not see a benefit in seeing an animals' physical health maintained at the cost of their mental and emotional well-being.

Pets under veterinary supervision get well quicker at home with their owners and familiar surroundings and safe space. The hospital and pound environments are not ideal for animal welfare and should only be very temporary.

**Would “a phase-out of euthanasia for non-compassionate reasons and a ban on euthanasia by any method other than intravenous injection” benefit animal welfare (as proposed by the NSW Greens during the NSW Election).**

All the vets we spoke to were horrified by this proposal. At a time when there is a staffing shortage in the vet industry as a whole, and people even in cities and urban centres are waiting hours for access to a vet, even in an emergency, all the vets felt this was genuinely cruel, and not in the interests of animal welfare.

Owners must have the option of destroying an animal in an emergency. Intravenous injection is and SHOULD REMAIN a veterinary prescribed medicine, but that means only a vet can administer it.

There are also serious environmental impacts as a result of administering pentobarbitone– and strict controls on carcass disposal to not contaminate soils and waterways. Vets also pointed out that pentobarbitone is not the kindest option for euthanasia and made the point that it is 'kinder and more peaceful appearing for the owner to cope with, more than the animal'.

The reality is that people need to be in control of life and death decisions for their animals.

When pounds are overflowing and rescues are full, euthanasia is a viable option to improve welfare conditions for all the animals. If an animal's standard of living is going to downgrade, euthanasia – even of a healthy, happy animal, can be kinder for that animal. Restricting this will inevitably create new welfare issues, and additional behavioural issues in rehomed pets.

The vets also raised concerns about how restricting euthanasia would be enforced, how people would prove it was compassionate or if they would then avoid contacting a vet for advice as they fear legal action would ensue. This would also be a detriment to animal welfare.

**“Are Animal Rights and Animal Protection helping improve animal welfare?”.**

**No**

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Some vets said the less extreme animal rights campaigns, which were really about welfare, were beneficial, however animal rights and the many social media campaigns for extreme ideals were having a negative impact on animal welfare and setting up pet owners with unrealistic expectations when they arrived at the vet clinic. This is resulting in poor welfare outcomes, especially when the veterinary advice is dismissed to follow an unrealistic standard set by Animal Rights Extremists on social media (such as Facebook, Tik Tok and Youtube).

This was raised as a genuine burden to the industry, and that vets were concerned that declining animal welfare will inevitably continue as a result.

The **"Adopt! Don't shop!"** message was detrimental as people without the skills to rehabilitate a rescue pet felt the pressure to rescue rather than choosing a more suitable animal for their circumstances.

Medical issues are often not identified or disclosed. This creates welfare issues that could have been avoided and extended the poor welfare outcomes for the animals involved. Additionally, these issues cannot be solved in a single veterinary consult, and many owners were then faced with the challenge of financial restrictions. The decision must be made on whether to spend on preventative medical care and accessing behavioural help – both costly. In the long run, cheap rescue animals can cost much, much more than a well-bred and trained animal from an ethical breeder. On the flip side, not identifying an ethical breeder to purchase from, can result in excessive medical expenses for poorly bred animals with genetic issues.

It is good to see (in Animal Care Australia's view) that the vets recognised the pro's and cons of the current 'issues' and were able to place the welfare of the animals as centric to their daily interactions regardless of the 'customers' beliefs.

### **The solutions:**

There is no one quick fix for this extremely complex issue. While legislative and regulatory amendments will assist, these need to proceed with caution, and without question they must be fully consulted on with key stakeholders and the community alike. Quick and simple tweaks that are implemented to meet one agenda or a groups' ideologies is not the answer. Especially where there is evidence that previous attempts have only compounded the issues.

#### **What are the solutions to the current issues?**

- **Community expectations need to be reset.**

Not just for the veterinary industry, but in all service sectors. Customer facing roles are undesirable due to the behaviour of customers. This is a widespread issue and needs to be urgently addressed to improve the Australian culture.

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A concerted educational effort outlining the role of vets, nurses, other staff and the issues they face daily would be beneficial to making the general public aware that they are also only human. They deserve the same respect from clients as the clients demand from them. At the end of the day, their job is to do the best to HELP an ailing animal so help them to do that to the best of their ability.

- **Education based incentives to enter the industry.**

Subsidies or scholarships to study veterinary medicine should include a period of time that the recipient works in veterinary medicine, particularly in rural areas. Similar programs are in place for medical doctors, where education costs are waived or discounted in return for a number of years working in the industry after graduation.

Some shorter, free courses, ideally in animal emergency care (animal first aid) and animal training (such as an intro to clicker training) to educate first responders, community volunteers and people considering, but not yet sure about a career in veterinary medicine. They could then have a taste of what to expect and provide accreditation to volunteer for some work experience in veterinary or pound settings prior to commencing university or buying a new pet. This could prevent university dropouts but could also be offered to pet owners to educate them on first aid, when to call a vet, and educate owners to have realistic expectations of pet keeping.

Consider taking the nursing education structure back to a traineeship, where nurses learn on the job which means only the nurses with a position can do the course, thereby reducing over enrolments. This could run similarly to other trades where apprenticeships/traineeships include a requirement of TAFE/Uni attendance at least one day per week.

- **Initiatives to improve and manage mental health issues.**

Veterinary Medicine courses must include core subjects on mental health management for those in the industry, and resources made available for those working in the field to access mental health support easily and free, or very cheaply. Telehealth consultations with therapists familiar with the industry would be ideal. This must be available to those working in the field to access without needing to go through their employer.

Access to and use of all mental health services should (in addition to the current limited access via Medicare) be free for all members of the industry – and including all other essential workers. Prevention is better than cure!

- **A Veterinary Telehealth Service**

The adoption of “veterinary telehealth” for owners to find and access urgent care for emergencies and euthanasia advice as well as for remote locations (assuming they have communication services). All owners would prefer to see a vet in person, and all vets would prefer to see the animal in person, however the current climate calls for viable practical alternatives, to ensure that animal welfare can be maintained when the wait for a vet is literally hours away and the animal is suffering right now. A central system initiated by state or federal government would solve the current issue owners face of calling all the local vets in an emergency – which takes them away from caring for the animal in need – especially if they need to leave the animal to

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access phone reception. A single number to call (ideally with video call capability) that could link an owner to an available veterinarian would be enormously beneficial. Vet notes from the emergency call could then be digitally transferred to the animals' usual vet for follow up. Correct advice in the moment would:

- reduce the time an animal is suffering.
- address overanxious owners when the animal is actually fine saving another vet the travel time to attend
- help prevent litigation as a result of making a mistake in a panicked situation, and
- educate owners at the same time.

This would ideally be government funded and veterinarians paid for their time.

This would help retain experienced, semi-retired vets or those wishing to reduce their hours or work around family – as they could choose their hours, as emergencies happen at all times of day and night.

- **Financial Incentives and regulation**

Update the Animal Care and Veterinary Services Award [MA000118] to increase the base rate of pay for all sectors of the industry to meet the current cost of living. Amend conditions within the Facilitative Provisions of the Award to prevent empowered abuse by employers, and improve the minimum working conditions.

- Mistakes cannot be afforded in any medical profession, and people who are overworked and under extreme pressure will make mistakes. This becomes an animal welfare problem if staff and vets are unable to perform their duties safely and competently due to fatigue and stress.
- There should be incentives for full time permanent work for staff with wages that reflect the level of qualifications and skills required to do the job in which they are employed. People will stay in their work longer if they have security within their employment.
- Alternatively, long-term experienced staff could be encouraged to assist in the education of upcoming students, particularly re-purposed in the education system in a similar manner to the students traineeship requiring one day a week. This would encourage the experienced staff to teach one day a week. This may assist in preventing the loss of experience from the industry, boost the shortage of educators, help instill realistic expectations in trainees, as well as give long term employees a mental break from their demanding work..
- Recommend the amalgamation of the two existing union representative bodies (Professionals Australia and the United Workers Union) to create a standalone veterinary industry union that is dedicated to representing, and improving conditions for the veterinary industry.

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- Appoint a governing body responsible for representing the people of industry – one that is actually supported by all the industry and is not an odd and rather invidious position in this system.

Introduce financial benefits to working in rural, regional and remote areas. Provide the same housing benefits, financial bonuses, etc as the government already provides to other essential workers.

- **Veticare Program?**

Animal Care Australia is acutely aware that one of the sought after outcomes of this Inquiry is to provide the justification for a Veticare Program. While it is well intended, Animal Care Australia cannot currently support or oppose such a proposal.

The Victorian Government supported and passed a Veticare Program in its State without any financial costings, and without any structure. It's another proposition on paper with no actual foundations to stand on.

It would be remiss of Animal Care Australia to support this at this time without having the ability to scrutinize all the inner workings that would be required to make such an initiative functional.

Having said that, Animal Care Australia acknowledges there is a growing need for some form of financial assistance for animal owners that do struggle at different times to meet the costs of seeking care for their animals. That care might include, veterinary care, grooming, vaccination updates, desexing, temporary accommodation while the owner is incapacitated and so on.

Animal Care Australia strongly recommends the government considers measures that could enhance and expand the availability of such requirements.

Should that be through financial assistance, or through supporting other service providers (professional and volunteer) then Animal Care Australia equally recommends measures are put in place to uphold full transparency and accountability of the providers, the services offered, the access of the public, and the animals that benefit from that service. We would also expect a review of those initiatives to ensure there has been an improvement to animal welfare and the need still exists or requires further expansion.

Animal Care Australia also highlights there is a difference between animal owners who struggle 'at times' and those who continue to struggle in an ongoing capacity (such as animal hoarders). Greater education is required to highlight the need for some people to either reduce the number of animals they keep to an affordable capacity as this is in the animals' best interests. This education is essential as the growing cost of living extend the peoples' ability to financially support all of their animals, as well as the fact many individuals do hoard due to mental health illness and need greater support in coping with that illness AND still being able to keep some animals that bring great comfort and balance to their lives.



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Animal Care Australia acknowledges vets find themselves in the position of being confronted by all of the above issues and are often faced with the agonizing decision of determining the best way to assist their client and their animals. Often this is done at a financial cost to the vet.

With the government providing the access to services and education, this equates to more resources that the vets can access.

Again, we thank you for this opportunity and welcome any questions the Committee may have.  
This submission can be publicly listed.

On behalf of the Animal Care Australia Committee,



Michael Donnelly  
President  
Animal Care Australia