

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: *I'm asking all witnesses the same question. Take it on notice, please, so you don't have to do it today. The Australian Veterinary Association has given us 16 recommendations in its submission. I'd be grateful if you could just have a look at those in your own time and come back to the Committee.*

If some you strongly agree with and some you strongly disagree with, just let us know why. It's an important organisation, there are serious recommendations and I'd be interested in any input that you have.

Responses are below. I have highlighted in yellow the ones that I consider the most urgent.

Recommendation 1: The NSW Government commit to ongoing recognition and support of veterinarians to continue to build and maintain capacity for Emergency Animal Disease surveillance and response activities. **AGREE - these veterinarians provide critically needed services and need all the support they can get.**

Recommendation 2: The NSW Government consider the pressing concerns experienced by government veterinarians and conduct a comprehensive review and develop a proactive strategy to support the critical work of our government veterinarians, ensure the health of our livestock, and maintain our ability to respond effectively to biosecurity threats and animal welfare issues. **AGREE - the health and welfare of livestock and farm animals is equally as important as any other animal.**

Recommendation 3: The NSW Government commit funding to AVA's wellness initiative, THRIVE to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers. **AGREE - we need to make this industry as attractive as possible to encourage students to study in this field and also importantly, to care for the wellness and for the lives of veterinarians.**

Recommendation 4: The NSW Government consider funding a public awareness campaign to address the rising rates of verbal and physical assault of veterinary teams and to educate the community on the impact of their actions. For example, similar to the NSW Ambulance 'It's Never Okay' campaign. **AGREE - I think most people are unaware of the extreme pressures and the true costs that are faced by veterinarians and veterinary staff. Most people are unaware that veterinarian workers jobs and clinics are in jeopardy.**

Recommendation 5: The NSW Government consider funding for the profession to provide work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for overseas veterinarians wishing to work in NSW as well as funding to assist international NSW applicants undertake the Australian veterinary examination process without financial hardship. **PARTIALLY AGREE - only if there is an extreme shortage of veterinarians in any given area and all other avenues have been exhausted.**

Recommendation 6: The NSW Government support changes to visa provisions including lifting of the age cap for permanent residency to be in line with the human medical field. **AGREE - only if there is an extreme shortage of veterinarians in any given area and all other avenues have been exhausted.**

Recommendation 7: The NSW Government provide resources to fund a think tank to develop an afterhours model that is sustainable for the profession and allows veterinary services to be delivered to the NSW community in both urban and rural areas 24/7. **AGREE - this type of service is sorely needed in both cities and rural areas for pets, native animals and farm animals. Recognising that most animals are sentient beings that have equal capacity to humans, to feel pain, fear and love, and therefore absolutely need to have professional veterinary services 24/7. The life threatening hardships that our native wildlife has had to endure through the devastating and continuing**

bushfires as well as land clearing means that every single injured animals needs to be medically attended to as soon as possible.

Recommendation 8: The NSW Government Veterinary professionals are extended the same opportunities as other professions that are being encouraged to move to regional, rural and remote areas. **AGREE** - veterinarian professionals are highly skilled and have spent many years studying, even more than most human medical staff and so their services must be recognised and appreciated and rewarded.

Recommendation 9: The AVA calls upon the NSW Government to explore solutions that support the veterinary sector in its role with stray animals, addressing the key issues outlined and promoting overall animal health, welfare, and public health. **AGREE** - not only do stray animals pay a high cost in suffering, but the community also pays a high personal cost to those who willingly and voluntarily feed and neuter animals daily. Stray animals can also be a human health problem as far as being visually distressing to see, a hazard on the roads and problematic for urban animals.

Recommendation 10: The NSW Government commits funding to develop and implement a framework that provides regulatory and appropriate financial support to the provision of veterinary services for lost, stray and homeless animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations provided by all sectors of the profession (charities and the private veterinary sector). **AGREE** - not only do stray animals pay a high cost in suffering, but the community also pays a high personal cost to those who willingly and voluntarily feed and neuter animals daily. Stray animals can also be a human health problem as far as being visually distressing to see, a hazard on the roads and problematic for urban animals. WIRES is extremely understaffed and native animals need all the help they can get at any moment of the day. Mental health is a key issue for not only veterinarian professionals for the volunteers that work for charities. These organisations need financial help and support to be able to continue in rescuing animals and providing services that assist veterinarians.

Recommendation 11: The NSW Government through funding encourages industry and the veterinary profession to collaborate and develop a framework or solution that will improve integration of veterinary services into animal production systems that is workable for all parties. **DISAGREE & AGREE** - I do not understand what is meant by “animal production systems”. I do not believe there should be “animal production systems” in the first place. If these “animal production systems” must exist, then the veterinary profession must be totally involved.

Recommendation 12: The NSW Government support extending access to the national Translating and Interpreting Service for veterinarians. **AGREE** - people from non-English speaking backgrounds are just as entitled to be able to communicate regarding their pet.

Recommendation 13: The NSW Government provide funding to resource the development of prioritisation and planning of the longer-term strategies that will have the most effective workforce outcomes for all stakeholders the veterinary profession serves and the profession itself. **AGREE** - to have robust and effective veterinarian services, training and strategies need to begin at the grassroots level.

Recommendation 14: The NSW Government commit to legislative and regulatory reform to safeguard the role of the veterinary profession in the delivery of animal health and welfare, whilst making it adaptable to a constantly changing environment. This could be achieved by a review of the veterinary practice act and consider the interactions with other legislation including the prevention of cruelty to animals act. **AGREE** - the prevention of cruelty to animals act needs as much involvement from veterinarians as possible.

Recommendation 15: The NSW Government considers funding around educational fee relief to encourage early career veterinarians to work in rural NSW. **AGREE** - this would allow students to begin a career they might not have otherwise been able to undertake and this would also relieve the pressure of veterinarian shortages in rural areas.

Recommendation 16: The NSW Government includes veterinarians in existing mechanisms to sustain medical and paramedical workers in rural areas of NSW. **AGREE** - not sure exactly what this means, but it sounds positive!

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO.4 – REGIONAL NSW

INQUIRY INTO THE VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Supplementary questions: Mrs Ellie Robertson, individual

Answers are to be returned to the Committee secretariat by Tuesday, 26 September 2023.

1. Do you think there should be an easy and fair process for members of the public to make complaints if there are genuine issues with the conduct of a vet or a veterinary practice? What would that process ideally look like for you, as a member of the public who accesses vet services?

Yes of course I believe that there should be an easy and fair process for members of the public to make complaints re: a vet or a veterinary practice.

There are avenues and processes for lodging complaints for most services and products and I don't see this as any different. We pay exorbitant fees to care for our animals and we are entitled, and within our rights, to be able to lodge a complaint where necessary

I think a Veterinarian Ombudsman would be a good idea. Or perhaps once an Independent Office Of Animal Protection has been established, a department within this office could be responsible for processing, investigating and actioning complaints.

2. Some witnesses to this inquiry have argued that members of the public should be required, or strongly educated and encouraged, to get pet insurance. What are your thoughts on this - can everyone afford pet-insurance, and should people who cannot afford pet-insurance be denied the ability to have a companion animal?

I think it is ill informed and arrogant to assume that everyone can afford pet insurance any more than assuming that everyone can afford private health insurance.

Yes, people should be strongly educated and encouraged to get pet insurance, however, for the low income pet owners, there should be heavy subsidies to assist them in caring for their pets, who for most people, are considered members of the family.

To deny someone from owning a pet because I cannot afford pet insurance, is like denying someone from having children because they cannot afford health insurance. If someone is capable of providing love and proper care to an animal, they should be assisted in the medical costs that might be incurred.

The cost of assisting low income earners would be counteracted by the savings on running overflowing shelters and pounds.

Perhaps the system could look something like this:

Just like we can visit our doctor with a Medicare card, Veticare allows for free or low-cost appointments.

It could also include:

- Improving access, cost, and availability of proper health care for all pets and wildlife
- establishing government-funded public veterinary hospitals
- Implementing a bulk-billing model for veterinary care across Australia (with a priority on concession card holders, pensioners and animal rescuers and carers) through the implementation of a Veticare Card
- Establishing dedicated wildlife hospitals in regional areas with wildlife-skilled vets
- Upskilling vet nurses into nurse practitioners
- Ensuring the retention of vets and nurses in the sector
- Implementing better mental health support across the veterinary sector to address compassion fatigue and high rates of suicide
- Establishing a veterinary hotline similiar to 13SICK in human healthcare