

26th September 2023

To the Members of the Upper House Portfolios Committee No.4. – Regional NSW,

Following the Inquiry established on 9 June 2023 into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in New South Wales, PetSure was asked to comment on the 16 recommendations that the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) set out in their submission to the Inquiry.

Overall, PetSure is supportive of these recommendations and is pleased to provide additional comments, in the table below.

AVA Recommendation	PetSure's Additional Comments
Recommendation 1: ,2, 5 and 6	PetSure supports the AVA's recommendations
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>PetSure understands the mental health challenges experienced by veterinarians, caused by a range of systemic factors that have been widely reported. We support the proposal that resources be allocated to improving mental health and wellbeing of veterinarians, whether those services be arranged by the AVA or directly by other reputable organisations. We also support the AVA's recommendation for a public awareness campaign, and we reiterate our offer to complement this by co-designing and assisting with delivery of a public education program to have a more sustainable positive impact on customer behaviour.</p> <p>Mental health and wellbeing challenges of the profession are exacerbated by difficult conversations with customers about the cost of services. Beyond supporting vets, systemic changes are required to address underlying customer concerns, driven in part by financial hardship but also by low levels of understanding of the total costs of pet ownership (including veterinary services) and low levels of financial protection such as insurance.</p> <p>In addition to mental health and wellbeing initiatives and public awareness campaigns, PetSure is supportive of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data collection and analysis of animal euthanasia trends and primary reasons for these to inform more sustainable strategies;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public education on the benefits and total costs of pet ownership including veterinary care, to prevent 'bill shock' and associated poor customer behaviour; and • early health programs about safety and preventative care for animals to drive improved animal welfare and human health outcomes, reduced treatment costs and ultimately improved vet mental health and wellbeing.
<p>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.</p>	<p>PetSure would welcome an opportunity to participate in a government led 'Think Tank' if it were instigated quickly, with a well-defined scope and appropriate representation across the veterinary industry and community of animal owners. Ideally participants would include those with experience of afterhours human health solutions and digital health capabilities, in addition to rural and urban veterinary practice owners.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>PetSure supports the AVA's recommendation to provide encouragement to veterinary professions to work in regional, rural, and remote areas and this would be more sustainable if complemented by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective triaging via tele-health to avoid unnecessary travel over long distances, reduce expenses and time away from the vet's hometown and customers, drive more efficient planning of visits and outreach services, improve timeliness of service especially in emergencies resulting in improved patient outcomes; • enabling inexperienced or limited registered veterinarians to access real-time online support to help them when on site managing complex or emergency cases; and • removal of some prescription restrictions to improve access and speed of supply of essential pharmaceuticals for treatment of animals in regional, rural, and remote areas, freeing up veterinarians to add increased value to NSW residents with animals in these areas.
<p>Recommendations 9,10 and 11:</p>	<p>It appears that the AVA's recommendations 9, 10 and 11 are linked by the issues associated with veterinary professionals performing essential work to drive positive social and economic impact, for which they are unpaid or funded by charities or</p>

	<p>the private sector. This long accepted but unnecessary situation is facilitated by the strong ethics of the profession itself, unreasonable legislative requirements, lack of public funding and unrealistic expectations in our communities.</p> <p>We reiterate PetSure's offer to leverage our unique set of assets including digitalised claims processing capability, significant pet health database and considerable veterinarian capability, to co-design with Government, and other stakeholders, a model that provides a safety net by facilitating payment of veterinarians for services that deliver shared social value across NSW.</p> <p>We propose that Government adopt a One Health approach to better understand how to fund veterinarian services for other kinds of public good such as those described by the AVA, leveraging interdisciplinary collaboration to keep animals and humans healthy and improve environmental impact.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12: The NSW Government support extending access to the national Translating and Interpretation Service for veterinarians.</p>	<p>PetSure notes that the Translating and Interpretation Service (TIS) supports the principle that all Australians should be able to access government programs and services equitably, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, or religious backgrounds. We support the AVA's recommendation 12 and would propose that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the TIS be invited to participate in the co-design and support delivery of the model that PetSure proposes as a safety net enabling equitable access to pet healthcare especially to those in NSW who need it most; and • pets be allowed, even partially, on all forms of government funded transport and other public infrastructure to enable equal access to all NSW residents, leading to greater social and economic participation and access to services including veterinary care.
<p>Recommendation 13, 14, 15 and 16</p>	<p>It appears that the AVA's recommendations 13, 14, 15 and 16 are linked by the need for workforce planning, legislative change, and policy development to address the veterinarian shortage in NSW. PetSure proposes that core to the sustainability of such initiatives is a</p>



	commitment to rapid digital transformation of the sector. We reiterate our preparedness to leverage our unique set of assets in a genuinely collaborative way as a catalyst to deliver shared value that benefits veterinarians, animals, and residents of NSW.
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Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry.

PetSure looks forward to working with the Committee and the NSW Government on any initiatives that help to further the improvement of the pet health sector and veterinary profession.

Alex Thomas
CEO & Managing Director
PetSure Australia



Supplementary question:

In your submission, you reference the need for better data collection around animal euthanasia trends, particularly in relation to client financial hardship. What data is currently collected, and are there any legal reporting requirements for vets?

At present, there is no mandated requirement to report on animal euthanasia. Animal euthanasia is performed for a variety of reasons ranging from animal illness through to financial hardship and other social issues faced by animal owners. The actual procedure is inconsistently recorded within VPMS (Vet Practice Management Software) and the contributing factors to the decision are rarely captured. What is known, is that difficult conversations and economic euthanasia of animals negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of veterinarians.

PetSure is supportive of more systematic data collection on animal euthanasia and the contributors, to provide insights that could better inform sustainable strategies to address the factors that lead to such poor outcomes – for animals, owners, and veterinarians.