

**Submission
No 65**

**INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Submission to the inquiry on the veterinary workforce shortage in NSW

Dear Sirs,

I am a vet with over 30 years experience, primarily in clinical practice.

I am interested to see that there is an inquiry into the workforce 'shortage' as I do not perceive this to be due to lack of veterinary surgeons. The main issue, from my perspective, is **failure of veterinarians to remain in practice**, and there are a number of reasons for this.

The inquiry has three main areas of focus: burnout, training and education, and legislation and regulation.

Let me say from the start that training and education requirements do NOT contribute to the workforce shortage.

In addition, legislation and regulatory barriers in the industry are MINOR. This is a profession, whereby vets: have special training and knowledge, use that to benefit others (patients and clients) and are bound by a strict ethical code.

Instead there is that multi-faceted term "burn out" which represents a real problem for veterinarians in clinical practice. This can be due to any number of factors but the main drivers for veterinary burnout (in my opinion) are:

Insufficient salary: both base salary and emergency work. The overall profitability of traditional veterinary practices is low, and though a corporate model helps in metropolitan areas, these are generally not available in regional areas. Many traditional practice owners made money by a huge increase in land and building value, rather than profitable clinics. Many veterinary clients are cost-constrained. See below:

Frustration at the inability to treat animals due to clients cost constraints; many clients do not have the funding to treat severe injury or complex medical conditions. Nothing more frustrating than euthanasing a dog with parvovirus because the client can't afford treatment and didn't get the dog vaccinated. In addition this results in;

Poor (appalling) behaviour from clients. Animal owners have absolutely no idea of the cost of providing a veterinary service. They are shielded from medical costs by Medicare (thank goodness for Medicare!) This leads to bad debts in vet clinics, or emotional blackmail by clients. The 'discussion' over fees is a daily reality for most vets, and something they generally did not sign up for.

Overwork: the poor distribution of vets in general practice means that those in regional areas often carry an excessive burden of on-call and afterhours work.

Lack of employer support for recent graduates: The term “work ready graduate” is absolutely ridiculous. All new employees in ANY field need mentoring and support. This may be absent in regional clinics, or if clinics are very busy.

Personally, having qualified over 30 years ago, I am happy to say that my graduation year at university has all stayed in the profession until recent retirement.

While some decry the lack of preparedness of new graduates for the “tough” aspects of the profession, with most universities involving extensive distributed teaching (students are learning while on placement in veterinary practices) the exposure of students to the profession is, in my opinion, adequate.

What can the NSW government do to address the veterinary workforce issues? A couple of suggestions:

Ensure that all local councils have properly trained (Cert IV companion animal services) employees dealing with local animal control. Local Councils should actually do their job of picking up stray and injured animals.

Assist with funding mass parvovirus vaccination clinics, rather than leaving it to charities such as Vets Beyond Borders or Paws with a Purpose.

Properly fund veterinary services dealing with animal health. There have been extensive cuts to State Veterinary Services. Surely the arrival of Covid 19 has demonstrated the need for a prepared workforce to deal with emerging and exotic diseases, as well as help maintain disease-free status of production animals. This also applies to fire and flood situations. Federal input may be needed, as below:

Appropriate funding of teaching universities: Currently most veterinary teaching facilities are under-staffed and several key large animal teaching facilities have had to close. The Melbourne University hospital recently was taken over by a corporate veterinary business. This may be a Federal issue at its basis, but NSW does have two universities teaching veterinary science in Charles Sturt and Sydney universities.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Pollard Williams

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