

Submission
No 82

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Shortages of Veterinary Staff and the Impact of Low Pay, Poor Treatment, High Stress, and Suicidal Rates

Dear Mark Banasiak,

I am writing as a qualified Veterinary Nurse that worked in the industry for seven years. I submit my concerns regarding the shortages of veterinary staff in our state and draw attention to the issues of low pay, poor treatment of staff, high stress, and alarming suicide rates within the veterinary profession. As a concerned ex Veterinary Nurse with a deep appreciation for animal welfare and the veterinary profession, I believe it is crucial to address these pressing matters that are detrimentally affecting the veterinary workforce and the quality of care provided to animals.

1. Low Pay:

One of the primary reasons for the shortage of veterinary staff is the issue of low pay. Veterinary professionals invest years of rigorous education and training to acquire the necessary skills to provide essential healthcare services for animals. However, the remuneration offered to them often fails to reflect the level of expertise, dedication, and responsibility involved in their work. This has led to many veterinary professionals seeking higher-paying alternatives outside the field (including myself – now earning more than double I would have as a Veterinary Nurse), exacerbating the shortage crisis.

The cost of education, along with the burden of student loans, further compounds the financial challenges faced by veterinary professionals. As a result, many talented individuals are discouraged from entering the profession, leading to a scarcity of skilled veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and support staff.

2. Poor Treatment of Staff:

In addition to low pay, the poor treatment of veterinary staff by practices and the public has contributed to the shortages. Veterinary professionals often face long working hours, high levels of stress, and limited work-life balance, all of which can lead to burnout and mental health issues. The demanding nature of the profession, coupled with inadequate support systems and resources, negatively impacts the overall well-being of veterinary staff.

Moreover, veterinary professionals frequently encounter disrespectful behaviour and verbal abuse from some clients, which can be more profound in low socioeconomic areas. This not only affects the mental health of staff but also undermines their professional confidence and hinders their ability to provide optimal care to animals. Such hostile work environments discourage talented individuals from joining or remaining in the profession, and was a significant contributor as to why I also left the profession.

3. High Stress and Suicidal Rates:

The veterinary profession is known for its high levels of stress, which can have severe consequences on the mental health and well-being of veterinary professionals. The demanding nature of the work, emotional challenges, euthanasia decisions, and witnessing animal suffering take a toll on the mental resilience of veterinary staff.

The stress, compassion fatigue, and limited mental health support contribute to the vulnerability of veterinary professionals. This distressing reality not only highlights the urgent need for improved mental health services within the profession but also calls for proactive measures to address the underlying causes of stress and promote a supportive work environment.

The consequences of the shortages of veterinary staff are far-reaching and include delayed or inadequate care for animals as clients may have difficulty paying fees due to high costs of medications from pharmaceutical suppliers forcing price increases, resulting in compromised animal welfare, increased workloads for the remaining staff, and tragically, the loss of valuable veterinary professionals to suicide.

To address these challenges and ensure the availability of quality veterinary care, I propose the following recommendations:

4. Increased award: improving salaries and benefits for veterinary professionals, making the profession more financially attractive and competitive.
5. Education and Awareness Campaigns: launch public campaigns to promote awareness and respect for veterinary professionals, highlighting the importance of their work and the need for compassionate treatment towards them. Additionally, conduct awareness programs regarding mental health issues, stress management, and suicide prevention within the veterinary profession.
6. Improved Work Conditions: encourage veterinary practices to implement measures that promote a healthy work-life balance, provide adequate support and mentorship programs, and prioritise the mental well-being of their staff. Develop policies and guidelines to address disrespectful behaviour and abuse towards veterinary professionals from clients.
7. Enhanced Professional Development: support continuing education programs and professional development opportunities for veterinary professionals to enhance their skills and stay updated with the latest advancements in veterinary medicine. Include mental health training as an integral part of professional development.
8. Mental Health Support: establish comprehensive mental health support services specifically tailored for veterinary professionals, including counselling services, access to mental health professionals, and support hotlines.
9. Research and Data Collection: encourage research on the causes and impacts of stress and mental health issues within the veterinary profession. Collect data on suicide rates and work-related stress to inform evidence-based interventions.
10. Legislation for Medication Pricing: implement legislation to limit the extent to which pharmaceutical companies can increase medication prices for veterinary practices, ensuring the affordability of treatments for pet owners and reducing financial strain on veterinary practices.

By implementing these recommendations, we can alleviate the shortages of veterinary staff, improve the working conditions within the profession, and prioritise the mental health and well-being of veterinary professionals, thereby enhancing the quality of care provided to animals.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.