

**Submission
No 89**

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

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Veterinarian Shortage

- Overview of Current Challenges:

- o Demand for vets and vet nurses is greatly outstripping supply currently.
- o Responses to advertisements result in unqualified applicants only.
- o Wages demanded (by new-grad locums) are not commensurate with experience, so private business can't recoup expense of wage.
- o Overheads of Private Veterinary Clinic set up are significantly higher than other small businesses, needing all elements of hospital, dentistry, radiography, surgical suite, stocked pharmacy plus normal business operating expenses – then the largest expense, wages, which should be high given the level of expertise. Costs to public must incorporate this, but there is a perception that vets are just out there making money, when very few are actually thriving, and owners can rarely afford to pay their staff what they are worth.
- o Public have an expectation that their pet will be seen by a vet when they need it, and an equal expectation that because we love pets, we won't charge them.
- o The profession attracts empathetic people who will put the animal's welfare before their own, so staff are very susceptible to emotional abuse by pet owners.
- o There is no Medicare for pets – so people have no appreciation for the true cost of medical care.
- o Long term retention in the profession is difficult, most vets and nurses decide that it is not worth being abused by the public, and there are easier jobs that pay more money. They leave because they value their mental health.
- o The public do not realise that there is no financial reimbursement for private clinics to take care of injured strays and wildlife. They often expect after hours help at no cost. This is an unfair and unreasonable expectation that society places on private businesses. We are expected to act under our legislation to relieve animal suffering, and that is at our own expense (time of reception, nursing and veterinary staff, equipment, pharmaceuticals, transport to rehab facility, body disposal fees)

- Personal Stories:

- o I set up my own clinic on the NSW/VIC border because I wanted to treat my staff well, pay them properly and look after their mental health. It is near impossible to make a profit with these aims, and we are an expensive and successful clinic.
- o Every staff member I employ knows someone personally who committed suicide while working in the veterinary profession.
- o Attracting both vets and vet nurses back to the profession has been my aim, and while I have had some success, others have been too traumatised by past experiences to stay.
- o When I started there was an after hours emergency clinic in our region. Their inability to retain a consistent work force after hours resulted in the closure of the business.
- o We now utilise a phone triage service and attend after hours emergencies until 10pm, and refer emergencies to a facility 90 minutes away after that time. This is our compromise for the best possible staff and animal welfare.

- Impact on Animal Health and Welfare:

- o We need another full time vet, and would love to be able to run a 24 hour facility. Without this staff availability we need to make decisions about animal treatment that factors in staff and facility availability, rather than the best option for the animal. This certainly compromises the pet's welfare.
- o The local shortage of vets means that clients are often turned away from their regular vet with urgent problems. Our clinic chooses to see any urgent cases while we are open and available, so we are often kept back late. Clients and pets are very stressed in the process of finding care after being turned away from their expected care giver.

- Suggestions for Improvement:

- o Financial help so that the disparity between the costs required to make a veterinary business financially viable, and the out of pocket expense to the client was smaller.
- o Ability to recoup costs of caring for injured wildlife and stray animals.
- o Mental health support for all workers in veterinary fields.
- o Advertising campaign to show the emotional abuse that our profession suffers frequently and that it is not okay.