

Submission  
No 96

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I am a veterinarian that has worked on a rural mixed practice, a small animal veterinarian in a regional center and a large city, an emergency veterinarian at a 24/7 hospital.

There are many reasons for the veterinary shortage. The main problems tend to be poor remuneration, long hours, excessive workload due to understaffing, unrealistic client expectations, client abuse, lack of respect by the general public and poor access to support services.

When I graduated 4 years ago, I took a job in a rural mixed practice clinic. This practice promised support, yet due to staffing shortages this support was very poor or not available. The strain of practicing veterinary medicine as a new graduate, when clients have high expectations of gold-standard medicine for very little cost is extremely stressful. Additionally, many clients are quick to vilify you if mistakes are made, or if a cheaper treatment option is unsuccessful despite discussions of the risks and chances of success. Afterhours work was also part of the job, and one that I was nervous about but happy to do. However, I quickly realized that work-life balance is next to impossible when working afterhours on top of your 40-50 hr week. Being rostered from 8am-6pm where you are often too busy for a sit down lunch break then being immediately on call from 6pm-8am the next day but being rostered to again work 8am-6pm is not only ridiculous but dangerous. If you have multiple calls during the night, you are rarely fit to be performing surgery on pets at 9am. Then weekends can be even worse. I meant had a car accident driving 15 minutes home after a particularly busy weekend on call with very few hours of uninterrupted sleep. These unsociable hours often make it difficult to build a super network of friends in a new town. It is hard to join sport teams when you are often called out during practice or game times. It is hard to find time to make friends when you are exhausted to the bone. It is hard to even find the energy to cook meals and eat. I went from being keen to become part of a rural community and stay in a job for 3+ years to leaving for any job where I wouldn't have to do afterhours. Experiences like these aren't uncommon with new graduates, particularly as support is hard to come by when nearly every practice is significantly short staffed

Now working in the city, work life balance is easier to achieve but still not easy. It is rare for staff to leave on time, because the workload is too heavy for again another short staffed team. Clients often come in the door combative because they had to wait days for their pet to be seen. Then to have to have important discussions regarding treatment plans and the cost of care is difficult when clients guilt or blame you for their financial struggles or inability to afford care. These situations were very common in emergency work in particular, where you didn't have an established client-vet relationship to build on.

I really considered leaving the industry a year ago. I was feeling very burnt out, underappreciated and my mental health was very poor. Living in the city removes the stress of afterhours but comes with unaffordable housing. Most of my paycheck goes towards rent, and I am unable to borrow enough money on my salary to get a mortgage for a 1 bedroom apartment so that is unlikely to change. This also means money for things like sport, hobbies and psychology services are in short supply contributing to my mental health struggles.

In terms of solutions, there aren't any great solutions. In order to increase salaries, we need to charge more money for our services. I think pet insurance needs to be better regulated so they have to provide a good product. So many clients do not have pet insurance because it is expensive and doesn't cover a lot that it probably should. Potentially, a discount on council registration fees could apply to insured pets. Additionally, the breeding of certain breeds needs to be regulated. So many popular breeds are poorly bred even by registered breeders, which leads to numerous health issues that affects the pets welfare and makes care of that pet very expensive, often unaffordable.

There needs to be safe limits placed on afterhours and over time work in the award similar to those in the human health care sector. The award also needs to reflect the amount of study and skill involved with being a vet.

Government incentives to work rurally should also be considered - wiping HECS debt, monetary incentives, childcare subsidies etc.

Access to psychological services should also be more widely available and subsidised. 10 cheaper sessions under Medicare does very little in the grand scheme of things.

The housing crisis in cities desperately needs to be addressed. Get rid of negative gearing and give younger generations a chance.

The vet board also needs to be re-assessed. There should be a system where you have to pay to submit a complaint, to eliminate petty complaints. The threat of board investigations is very stressful, and can have a huge impact on a vets mental health. Many vets now have to waste time writing extensive notes in an attempt to protect themselves. The vet board should also protect the interests of vets and investigate lay-people who overstep into our field. We need someone in our corner for once.