

Submission  
No 109

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 19 July 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

Dear Inquiry Committee,

I would like to comment as a private citizen and pet owner.

**k) current barriers to accessing veterinary care for members of the public, particularly those with lower incomes or who live in regional, rural and remote locations**

We are in the very privileged position to be able to afford vet care and we live in the north shore of Sydney, in a suburb that is full of other pet- and dog-owners, and consequently, there is no shortage of vet services. We recently went through the process of caring for and seeking vet services for a dying dog and are aware that the costs *could* have been exorbitant. I am not sure how others with less money/savings and who undoubtedly love their pets as much as we do would have done in this situation.

While we can afford care, we would like to have more transparency around the cost of vet services. It would be helpful to create some NSW-based resources for approximate costs so that the public know about indicative costs, even if exact costs vary area-to-area. I note that in doing our online research and phoning around, we found that the cost of a mobile vet visit is \$400, the cost of an emergency vet consultation is \$350, and the cost of putting our dog to sleep was \$250 (in addition to the consultation cost). The cost of a regular vet consultation is \$120.

We would have been happy to pay for specialist treatment for our dog if it assisted with the training of junior specialists or provided researchers the opportunity to further understanding animal disease. However, to my knowledge, vet practices are privately owned and does not to my knowledge feed back into university training or animal research. I understand the costs of vet training to be high but I also believe that many pet owners would be happy to pay for such care, provided the overall system also gained something from their payments.

It would be helpful for vets to be provided more training to explain the costs of care to owners, in the same way that healthcare professionals should explain to human patients the costs of their care. The costs of medications prescribed for our dog were not clearly explained at the time of prescribing and for some reason a repeat prescription of exactly the same amount and type of medication cost twice as much. I can understand vets/vet practices charging for their time in answering our phone queries and providing prescriptions, but transparency and clear communication around this would go a long way.

More generally, it would be helpful if the Committee were able to examine potential conflicts of interest in the provision of vet care. Vet practices sell pet food, pet supplements, and other pet supplies and it is unclear to consumers if they are conflicted when they recommend the use of these. There is an information asymmetry - vets are the

experts and consumers are not, therefore consumers need to know that vets are not gaining financially from recommending products available to purchase at the vet practice.

As the owner of rescue dogs, I am very concerned when I see rescue listings for animals that have been surrendered because they are old or sick. Understandably, some owners are unable to provide for their pets, especially with rising costs of living, and have had to surrender them in the hope that rescue organisations are able to assist. This unfairly puts the burden on rescue organisations and on the vets who volunteer their time and/or provide heavily discounted services. Perhaps there is room for more government funding to rescue organisations or to reimburse vets for equipment and consumables involved in this type of care.

**(c) the burn-out and mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession**

Lastly, our experience of having to care for our sick dog and ultimately put him to sleep was a one-off stressor, but the emotional burden on vets of routinely seeing animals in distress and putting animals down must be immensely stressful. Add to this that the people who opt to enter vet practice are empathetic animal lovers and it is no wonder that the rates of burn-out and suicide are high. We know half a dozen friends/acquaintances who originally trained as vets but only one has persisted in their profession – this cohort is about 40-years old. We are sympathetic to challenges faced by the vet profession and would support efforts to support vets.

Thank you.