


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

**Organisation:** Animal Services Australasia

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A close-up photograph of a hedgehog's quills, showing their sharp, pointed tips and the lighter-colored skin between them. The image is partially obscured by a grey text box on the right.

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

NSW GOVERNMENT  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4  
REGIONAL NSW

ANIMAL SERVICES AUSTRALASIA  
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## **INQUIRY INTO THE VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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### **3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This submission examines the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales (NSW), focusing on the challenges faced by veterinarians in regional, rural, and remote areas, as well as the need for veterinary professionals to respond to emergencies. The submission addresses the shortage of veterinarians across various sectors, considers the impact of current legislative and regulatory frameworks, and explores related issues such as mortality and rehoming rates in the NSW impound network and veterinary services for Australian native animals. Recruitment and retention rates, burnout, mental health challenges, and the role of veterinary nurses and overseas trained veterinarians are also discussed. The submission explores the consequences of the veterinary shortage on animal welfare, the economy, and access to veterinary care for members of the public, particularly in underserved areas. Lastly, strategies to support the current veterinary workforce and improve access to veterinary care are presented.



#### **4. INTRODUCTION**

The veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales is a critical concern affecting animal welfare, community well-being, economic prosperity, and emergency response capabilities. Furthermore, providing adequate veterinary services for Australian native animals has been historically limited due to insufficient funding and specialized providers, which is further compounded by the workforce shortage. This report aims to identify the challenges faced by the veterinary profession and proposes strategies to effectively address these issues.

#### **5. VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE**

##### **I. Shortage Across Sectors**

The shortage of veterinarians is evident in various domains, including clinical practice (both small and large animal), government roles, academia, research, industry, and pathology. The lack of skilled professionals across these sectors significantly hampers the development of veterinary services and their overall accessibility.

##### **II. Sustainability Challenges**

Recruiting and retaining veterinarians have emerged as significant challenges, primarily due to long working hours, inadequate remuneration in comparison to the costs of university training, limited career growth opportunities, and a lack of interest in working in remote regions.

##### **III. Burn-out and Mental Health Challenges**

Veterinarians face considerable stress and burnout due to the emotionally demanding nature of their profession. Additionally, unrealistic expectations from the public regarding welfare outcomes at low costs contribute to mental health issues among veterinarians.



## **6. ROLE OF VETERINARY NURSES**

Veterinary nurses play a crucial role in supporting veterinarians, ensuring the smooth functioning of veterinary practices. They provide essential animal care, assist veterinarians during medical procedures, monitor patient conditions, educate and support pet owners, manage clinic administration, and are often first responders during emergencies.

### **I. Animal Care and Handling**

Veterinary nurses are extensively trained in handling and caring for animals during examinations, treatments, and procedures. Their expertise in animal handling helps reduce stress and anxiety, creating a positive experience for both the pets and their owners.

### **II. Assisting Veterinarians**

Vet nurses actively assist veterinarians during consultations, surgeries, and medical procedures. They prepare surgical equipment, monitor anaesthesia, administer medications, and provide support throughout the process, allowing veterinarians to focus on diagnosis and treatment.

### **III. Patient Monitoring**

Vet nurses diligently monitor the condition of hospitalized animals, post-surgery patients, and those receiving treatment. They observe vital signs, administer medications as prescribed, and promptly report any concerning changes to attending veterinarians. This vigilant care helps ensure early detection of complications and timely interventions.

### **IV. Client Education and Support**

Vet nurses play a vital role in educating pet owners about animal health, preventive care, and post-treatment care. They provide guidance on administering medications, managing chronic conditions, and promoting responsible pet ownership. Well-informed pet owners contribute to better overall pet health and reduce unnecessary clinic visits.

### **V. Veterinary Clinic Organization and Administration**

Vet nurses are responsible for handling various administrative tasks, such as scheduling appointments, managing medical records, and coordinating laboratory tests. Their contribution helps maintain the clinic's organization, ensuring a smooth workflow and overall efficiency.



## **VI. Emergency Response**

In critical situations, vet nurses often act as first responders, providing immediate care and stabilization to injured or ill animals before veterinarians take over. Their quick thinking and ability to handle emergencies can be lifesaving for animals in distress.

## **VII. Surgical Preparation and Sterilization**

Vet nurses are responsible for preparing the surgical suite, sterilizing instruments, and maintaining aseptic conditions during surgeries. Their attention to detail helps reduce the risk of surgical site infections and complications.

## **VIII. Radiology and Diagnostics**

Vet nurses assist with taking and developing X-rays, collecting samples for laboratory testing, and conducting various diagnostic procedures. Their proficiency in handling diagnostic equipment ensures accurate and reliable results.

## **IX. Supportive Care and Compassion**

Vet nurses provide compassionate care to both animals and their owners, offering emotional support during difficult times, such as dealing with a pet's illness, injury, or end-of-life care.

The invaluable contributions of veterinary nurses to the veterinary profession and the well-being of animals and their owners cannot be understated. Their expertise in animal care and handling, support to veterinarians, vigilant patient monitoring, client education, clinic organization, emergency response, surgical preparation, radiology, and diagnostics, as well as their compassionate care and support, collectively contribute to the success of veterinary practices and the overall welfare of animals.

## **7. OVERSEAS TRAINED VETERINARIANS**

### **Addressing Workforce Challenges and Maximizing Contributions to the New South Wales' Veterinary Profession.**

The inclusion of overseas trained veterinarians in the veterinary workforce can play a crucial role in alleviating shortages in New South Wales (NSW). These professionals can fill workforce gaps, bring diversity of experience and skills, and offer specialized expertise in high-demand areas.



However, certain challenges must be overcome to fully harness their potential and ensure seamless integration into the local veterinary industry.

### **I. Filling Workforce Gaps**

Overseas trained veterinarians can significantly contribute to bridging workforce gaps, particularly in regions facing shortages of locally trained professionals. By providing essential veterinary services, they extend access to quality care in both urban and rural areas of NSW.

### **II. Diversity of Experience and Skills**

The inclusion of overseas trained veterinarians enriches the veterinary profession in Australia through the introduction of diverse experiences, skills, and knowledge from their home

countries. This diversity fosters innovation in veterinary care approaches, benefiting animals, owners, and strengthening biosecurity management practices.

### **III. Specialisation and Expertise**

Some overseas veterinarians possess specialized training and expertise in areas highly demanded in NSW, such as exotic animal medicine, wildlife medicine, and specific livestock practices. Their unique skills prove invaluable in addressing local veterinary industry challenges.

## **7(a) Challenges Faced by Overseas Trained Veterinarians**

### **I. Accreditation and Licensing**

The accreditation and licensing requirements for overseas veterinarians can be complex, time-consuming, and costly. These barriers may delay the entry of qualified overseas veterinarians into the workforce. Streamlining the accreditation process and standardizing requirements would facilitate their timely integration.

### **II. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers**

Adjusting to a new culture and language can pose challenges for overseas vets, affecting effective communication with clients and colleagues. To foster successful collaboration within the veterinary team and provide optimal care to animals, supporting cultural integration and language proficiency is essential.





### **III. Professional Recognition**

Overseas veterinarians might encounter skepticism or hesitancy from local practitioners and clients unfamiliar with their home country's training standards and practices. Implementing highly visible exchange programs between Australian and overseas veterinarian practitioners' organizations can promote professional recognition and enhance cooperation.

### **IV. Migration and Visa Issues**

Immigration policies and visa restrictions impact the entry and retention of overseas vets in the workforce. Navigating the immigration process and obtaining necessary work visas can be time-consuming and cumbersome. Addressing these issues will facilitate a smoother transition for overseas veterinarians.

## **7(b) Recommendations for Effective Integration**

To capitalize on the contributions of overseas trained veterinarians and address challenges, a collaborative effort among regulatory bodies, veterinary associations, and legislation makers is crucial. Key strategies include:

### **I. Simplified Accreditation Processes**

Streamlining accreditation and licensing requirements would facilitate the timely entry of qualified overseas veterinarians into the workforce.

### **II. Cultural and Linguistic Support**

Providing support for cultural integration and language proficiency will enhance effective communication and teamwork within the veterinary industry.

### **III. Professional Development Opportunities**

Offering professional development opportunities will maximize the potential of overseas veterinarians and ensure they stay up-to-date with the latest practices and advancements.

### **IV. Rural and Regional Placements and Incentives**

Promoting placements in underserved areas will distribute the workforce evenly across the state, improving access to veterinary care in remote regions.





By implementing these recommendations, New South Wales can harness the full potential of overseas trained veterinarians, effectively addressing workforce shortages and bolstering the quality of veterinary care throughout the region.

## **8. AFTER HOURS VETERINARY SERVICES**

### **Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Work-Life Balance for Veterinarians.**

The provision of after-hour veterinary services presents significant challenges for veterinarians, particularly in regional areas. The following factors contribute to these challenges:

#### **I. Limited Availability of Veterinarians**

In regional areas, the smaller population and shortage of veterinarians exacerbate the difficulty of finding enough professionals to handle after-hour emergencies adequately.

#### **II. Increased Workload and Burnout**

Veterinarians working after-hours face higher workloads and unpredictable emergency cases, leading to irregular schedules and long hours. This situation increases the risk of burnout and negatively impacts veterinarians' physical and mental well-being.

#### **III. Impact on Work-Life Balance**

Providing after-hour services disrupts veterinarians' personal lives, making it challenging for them to spend time with family and friends or engage in leisure activities outside of work. This imbalance results in increased stress and lower job satisfaction.

#### **IV. Attracting and Retaining Veterinarians**

The scarcity of veterinarians willing to work after-hours in regional areas poses a challenge for veterinary clinics to attract and retain skilled professionals, perpetuating the workforce shortage.

#### **V. Financial Considerations**

Operating after-hour services may not always be financially sustainable, especially in areas with a smaller client base. The costs of providing services during these hours and compensating veterinarians can be significant financial challenges for clinics.



## **8(a) Recommendations**

To address these issues and enhance after-hour veterinary services, several strategies can be implemented:

### **I. Incentives and Support**

Offering financial incentives and other benefits to veterinarians willing to work after-hours can encourage more professionals to take on these shifts. This could include higher pay rates or additional time-off compensation, and government subsidies for primary producer services could be considered.

### **II. Regional Workforce Development**

Implementing programs and initiatives to attract and retain veterinarians in regional areas can help alleviate the workforce shortage. This might involve offering educational and career development opportunities or providing financial assistance for veterinarians committing to work in these regions, including tax breaks.

### **III. Collaborative Arrangements**

Encouraging veterinarians in regional areas to form cooperative arrangements for sharing after-hour duties can help distribute the workload more evenly. Collaborations with ambulance services can facilitate the safe transportation of animals between practices and impound facilities for rehoming purposes.

### **IV. Telemedicine and Remote Support**

Leveraging telemedicine technologies can provide remote support to veterinarians during after-hours, reducing the need for physical presence and allowing for timely consultations with experienced professionals. Additionally, developing a platform for identifying non-urgent animal medical issues could streamline services.

### **V. Workload Management**

Implementing efficient triage systems in veterinary clinics can prioritize emergencies during after-hours, ensuring critical cases receive immediate attention while less urgent cases are managed during regular hours.



## **VI. Community Awareness**

Raising awareness among pet owners about responsible pet ownership and when to seek emergency care can reduce the number of non-urgent after-hour visits. Collaborating with Local Government Authority impound facilities and subsidizing programs for microchipping and desexing of companion animals can encourage regular veterinary consultations.

Addressing the challenges associated with after-hour veterinary services necessitates a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration between veterinary associations, government bodies (state and local), and local communities. Creating a sustainable and balanced work environment for veterinarians is essential to ensure optimal care for animals and the ability to respond effectively to localised needs.

## **9. VETERINARIANS PIVOTAL ROLE IN EMERGENCIES**

Veterinarians play a crucial role in providing care to lost, stray, and homeless animals, injured wildlife, and during emergency situations. Their expertise and training enable them to offer specialized care and support in these challenging circumstances:

### **I. Lost, Stray, and Homeless Animals**

- i. Identification and Microchipping: Veterinarians can scan lost animals for microchips to identify their owners and facilitate reunification.
- ii. Health Assessments: They conduct thorough health examinations to assess the condition of these animals, addressing any medical issues or injuries they may have.
- iii. Vaccinations and Preventive Care: Veterinarians administer vaccinations and provide preventive treatments (e.g., deworming, flea control) to improve the overall health of these animals.
- iv. Desexing: To control the population of stray and homeless animals, veterinarians perform spaying and neutering procedures to prevent unwanted litters, thereby relieving pressure from the impound system of local government.

### **II. Injured Wildlife**

- i. Emergency Care: Veterinarians provide immediate medical attention to injured wildlife found in distress or brought to them by concerned members of the public.



- ii. Rehabilitation: They oversee the rehabilitation process for injured wildlife, working with wildlife rehabilitators and conservation organizations to nurse them back to health.
- iii. Release Decisions: Veterinarians determine when injured wildlife is ready to be released back into their natural habitat.

### **III. Emergency Situations**

- i. Disaster Response: In the event of natural disasters or emergencies, veterinarians play a vital role in providing medical care to affected animals through the newly launched pilot program in conjunction with the Federal government called "Rescue Australia," which focuses on native animals in emergencies.
- ii. First Aid: They offer first aid to animals injured in accidents or during other emergencies.

### **IV. Animal Rescue Operations**

- i. Trapping and Handling: Veterinarians assist in the safe trapping and handling of distressed or dangerous animals during rescue operations.
- ii. Medical Assessments: They evaluate the health condition of rescued animals and determine appropriate treatments.

### **V. Disease Control and Surveillance**

- i. Preventing Disease Spread: Veterinarians help prevent the spread of contagious diseases among animals in shelters and rescue facilities.
- ii. Disease Diagnosis: They conduct diagnostic tests to identify diseases, ensuring proper treatment and containment measures are implemented.

### **VI. Community Education**

- i. Responsible Pet Ownership: Veterinarians educate the public about responsible pet ownership, animal welfare, and the importance of reporting lost or injured animals.
- ii. Wildlife Conservation: They raise awareness about the significance of wildlife conservation and the importance of seeking professional help for injured or orphaned wildlife.

In all these scenarios, veterinarians work in collaboration with animal shelters, wildlife rehabilitators, rescue organizations, and local authorities to ensure the well-being of animals in distress or emergency situations. Their knowledge, skills, and dedication play a pivotal role in safeguarding the health and welfare of animals, both domestic and wild, during challenging times.



## **10. IMPACT OF THE VETERINARY SHORTAGE**

### **The Impact of the Current Veterinary Shortage on Animal Welfare, Economy, and Public Access to Veterinary Care.**

The current veterinary shortage in New South Wales (NSW) has significant implications for animal welfare, the economy, and public access to veterinary care. The shortage affects various sectors and poses challenges that need to be addressed. Below are some key implications.

#### **I. Animal Welfare**

- i. **Reduced Access to Veterinary Care:** With fewer veterinarians available, pet owners may find it challenging to access timely and appropriate veterinary services for their animals. This can lead to untreated illnesses or delayed medical attention, potentially compromising the health and well-being of animals.
- ii. **Increased Suffering and Neglect:** The lack of veterinary professionals may result in increased cases of animal suffering and neglect, particularly in cases where urgent medical attention is required but not available.
- iii. **Impact on Animal Populations:** The current NSW Veterinary shortage is impacting the management of stray and abandoned animals within NSW pounds, making it difficult for pounds and shelters to provide adequate care, including disease control and rehoming services, particularly in regional areas.

#### **II. Economy**

- i. **Reduced Revenue for Veterinary Clinics:** The shortage of veterinarians is leading to decreased revenue for veterinary clinics, especially those operating in regional areas. This is affecting the sustainability of these businesses and drastically limits their capacity to invest in equipment and services.
- ii. **Impact on Related Industries:** The veterinary industry is interconnected with various sectors, including pet supply businesses, pharmaceutical companies, and animal care product manufacturers. The current shortage of veterinarians has resulted in reduced access to working knowledge of these products and services.

#### **III. Public Seeking Veterinary Care**

- i. **Longer Wait Times:** The shortage of veterinarians may lead to longer waiting periods for appointments, making it difficult for pet owners to promptly seek medical attention for their animals.



- ii. **Increased Travel Distances:** In regions with limited veterinary services, members of the public may need to travel longer distances to access veterinary care, which can be inconvenient and costly.

#### **IV. Pounds, Shelters, and Rescue Groups**

- i. **Increased Burden on Shelters:** The shortage of veterinarians is placing a massive strain on pounds and animal shelters, as they may struggle to provide the necessary medical care for the animals they take in. This has led to animals remaining in care longer within these organizations, which can lead to longer-term behavioral issues as they become institutionalized.

#### **V. Animal Agribusiness Industry**

- i. **Disease Management Challenges:** The animal agribusiness industry relies on veterinarians to manage and prevent disease outbreaks among livestock. A shortage of veterinarians can hinder effective disease control measures, potentially impacting animal health and productivity. There is currently a real threat of foot and mouth disease coming to Australia.
- ii. **Compliance Issues:** Many aspects of the animal agribusiness industry, such as food safety and animal welfare standards, require veterinary oversight. The current shortage of veterinarians is making it difficult for businesses to meet these regulatory requirements.

#### **VI. Companion Animal Breeders**

- i. **Breeding Challenges:** Responsible companion animal breeders prioritize the health and well-being of their animals. The current veterinary shortage is making it challenging for breeders to access professional advice and support during the breeding and birthing process.

To address these challenges and mitigate the impact of the veterinary shortage, a comprehensive approach involving collaboration between government bodies, regulatory agencies, veterinary associations, educational institutions, and local communities is essential. By implementing targeted strategies and supporting workforce development, New South Wales can work towards ensuring the well-being of animals, sustaining the veterinary industry, and providing equitable access to veterinary care for all residents.



## **11. ACCESSING VETERINARY CARE**

### **Access to Veterinary Care for Underserved Communities in New South Wales.**

Accessing veterinary care can be challenging for members of the public, especially those with lower incomes or who live in regional, rural, and remote locations in New South Wales. Several barriers contribute to these difficulties.

#### **I. Cost of Veterinary Care**

Veterinary services can be expensive, particularly for complex treatments or emergency care. For individuals with lower incomes, the cost of routine veterinary visits and necessary treatments may be prohibitive, leading them to delay or forgo seeking care for their animals. This financial burden is exacerbated by the shortage of veterinarians in NSW.

#### **II. Limited Availability**

Regional, rural, and remote areas often have fewer veterinary clinics and specialists, making it challenging for residents to access timely and convenient veterinary services. Some remote areas may not have any veterinary practices nearby, requiring significant travel to reach the nearest clinic.

#### **III. Transportation**

Limited access to reliable transportation can be a significant barrier for pet owners in remote areas. If they cannot travel to a veterinary clinic, it becomes difficult to seek medical care for their animals.

#### **IV. Work Hours and Scheduling**

In areas with limited veterinary services, clinics may have restricted hours of operation. This can create scheduling conflicts for pet owners who may work during the clinic's open hours or have other responsibilities that prevent them from seeking care during those times.

#### **V. Lack of Financial Resources**

Even when lower-income individuals are willing to seek veterinary care, they may lack financial resources to cover the costs of treatments, medications, and procedures for their animals.





## **VI. Awareness and Education**

Some individuals may not be aware of the importance of regular veterinary check-ups or preventive care for their animals. Lack of education about responsible pet ownership and the benefits of early intervention can lead to delayed or inadequate care. The current shortage of vets in NSW places greater emotional pressure on vets when owners delay seeking care for their animals.

### **11(a) Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach.**

#### **I. Financial Assistance Programs**

Implementing government or non-profit financial assistance programs can help lower-income individuals access essential veterinary care for their animals.

#### **II. Mobile Veterinary Services**

Supporting mobile veterinary clinics or telemedicine initiatives can bring veterinary care directly to remote areas and address transportation challenges.

#### **III. Outreach and Education**

Conducting community outreach programs to raise awareness about responsible pet ownership, preventive care, and available veterinary services can help improve animal health outcomes.

#### **IV. Workforce Development**

Investing in veterinary education and providing incentives for veterinarians to practice in regional areas will help alleviate workforce shortages.

#### **V. Collaboration and Partnerships**

Building partnerships between veterinary clinics, animal welfare organizations, and government agencies can create a network of support to improve access to care in underserved areas.

#### **VI. Legislative Support**

Enacting policies that promote veterinary practice in regional and rural areas can help encourage more veterinarians to establish clinics in these locations.



By addressing these barriers through collaborative efforts, stakeholders can work towards ensuring that all members of the public, regardless of income or location, have equitable access to veterinary care for their animals. This will not only improve animal welfare but also contribute to healthier and happier communities throughout New South Wales.

## **12. STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE VETERINARY WORKFORCE**

### **Strategies to Support and Expand the Veterinary Workforce in New South Wales.**

To address the current veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales and increase the number of practicing veterinarians, especially in regional, rural, and remote areas, multiple strategies can be implemented.

#### **I. Financial Incentives**

Offer financial incentives for veterinarians to work in underserved areas, such as student loan forgiveness, relocation assistance, or tax benefits. Providing higher pay rates or bonuses for veterinarians in regional locations could also attract and retain professionals.

#### **II. Education and Training**

Establish or expand veterinary education programs in regional areas to produce more locally trained veterinarians who are likely to stay and practice in those areas. Collaborate with educational institutions to ensure comprehensive and relevant training.

#### **III. Rural Placements**

Encourage universities offering veterinary training to incorporate mandatory rural placements as part of their curriculum to expose students to the unique challenges and opportunities of working in rural settings. These placements can provide valuable experiences and insights.

#### **IV. Continuing Education Opportunities**

Provide ongoing professional development and training opportunities for veterinarians in regional areas to enhance their skills and knowledge, making their work experience more fulfilling. Support workshops, seminars, and online courses.



**V. Telemedicine and Virtual Support**

Implement telemedicine platforms to connect veterinarians in rural areas with specialists and mentors from urban centers. This can facilitate remote consultations and support, enhancing the quality of care provided in remote locations.

**VI. Work-Life Balance**

Support work-life balance initiatives to improve job satisfaction and reduce burnout among practicing veterinarians. This could include flexible working hours, job-sharing options, and support for parental leave.

**VII. Collaboration and Networking**

Facilitate networking opportunities for veterinarians in remote areas to connect with peers and share experiences, fostering a sense of community and support. This can be achieved through conferences and online forums.

**VIII. Marketing and Public Awareness**

Launch targeted marketing campaigns to promote veterinary careers in rural areas, highlighting the benefits and unique experiences of practicing in those locations. This can help attract more veterinarians to underserved areas.

**IX. Infrastructure Development**

Invest in veterinary infrastructure in regional areas, including the establishment of modern clinics and facilities, to create a more attractive environment for veterinarians. This could involve public-private partnerships.

**X. Government Involvement**

Collaborate with government agencies to develop policies and initiatives that address the veterinary workforce shortage, such as offering grants or subsidies for veterinarians willing to work in underserved areas.

**XI. Research and Data Collection**

Conduct research and gather data on the current veterinary workforce and needs in regional areas to inform targeted strategies and initiatives. This data-driven approach can ensure effective resource allocation.



## **XII. Mentorship Programs**

Implement mentorship programs where experienced veterinarians can guide and support new graduates or those relocating to rural areas. Mentorship can enhance professional development and retention.

By combining these strategies, New South Wales can take significant steps toward supporting its current veterinary workforce and attracting more veterinarians to practice in regional, rural, and remote areas. A multi-faceted approach involving collaboration between government, educational institutions, professional associations, and local communities is essential to address the veterinary workforce shortage effectively.

## **12. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO VETERINARY CARE**

### **Strategies to Improve Access to Veterinary Care in New South Wales**

Improving access to veterinary care in New South Wales, while considering the current veterinary workforce shortage, requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both short-term and long-term challenges. By implementing a range of strategies and engaging stakeholders across multiple sectors, New South Wales can take significant steps toward improving access to essential veterinary services for all residents, including those in rural and remote areas.

### **Strategies to Achieve Improved Access to Veterinary Care.**

#### **I. Incentives for Rural Practice**

Offer financial incentives, such as student loan forgiveness, grants, or subsidies, to veterinarians who commit to practicing in rural and remote areas for a specified period. These incentives would help attract and retain veterinarians in underserved regions, increasing access to veterinary care.

#### **II. Telemedicine and Virtual Consultations**

Promote and support the use of telemedicine and virtual consultations, allowing veterinarians in remote areas to seek advice and support from specialists in urban centers. This can improve the quality of care provided locally and reduce the need for physical presence in all cases, enhancing access to specialized expertise.



### **III. Mobile Veterinary Services**

Establish or expand mobile veterinary clinics that can travel to remote areas and provide essential veterinary care to communities that lack easy access to fixed clinics. This mobile approach would enable veterinarians to reach more patients in underserved regions and bridge the gap in veterinary services.

### **IV. Rural Internships and Externships**

Create opportunities for veterinary students to participate in internships or externships in rural areas. These experiences can expose them to the unique challenges and rewards of rural practice, potentially encouraging them to consider practicing in those locations. This will also help in nurturing a pipeline of veterinarians who are willing to serve in regional areas.

### **V. Continuing Education and Professional Development**

Offer continuing education programs and workshops in regional areas to support the ongoing professional development of local veterinarians. Access to training and learning opportunities would improve their skills and confidence in providing a wide range of services, leading to better care provision.

### **VI. Workforce Diversity and Collaboration**

Encourage a diverse workforce that includes veterinary technicians, nurses, and other paraprofessionals who can support veterinarians in rural areas, allowing for more efficient and effective service delivery. Collaboration among different veterinary professionals will ensure comprehensive and accessible care.

### **VII. Government Support and Policy**

Advocate for government support and policies that address the veterinary workforce shortage and promote equitable access to veterinary care in underserved areas. This could be supported by international exchange programs of veterinarians to enhance expertise and service coverage.

### **VIII. Public Awareness and Education**

Launch public awareness campaigns to educate about the importance of responsible pet ownership, preventive care, and the availability of veterinary services in their local areas. Raising awareness will encourage timely veterinary visits and responsible pet care.



#### **IX. Partnerships and Collaboration**

Foster collaboration between veterinary associations, educational institutions, government agencies, and animal welfare organizations to address workforce shortages collectively. Collaborative efforts will optimize resource allocation and overcome challenges more effectively.

#### **X. Infrastructure Development**

Invest in veterinary infrastructure in regional areas, including the establishment of modern clinics and facilities, to create a more attractive environment for veterinarians. There could also be consideration of community veterinary clinics overseen by universities that would provide veterinary students the opportunity to gain valuable experience while offering subsidized services, which would in turn alleviate some pressure from existing veterinary clinics.

#### **XI. Data Collection and Research**

Gather data on the specific needs and challenges of accessing veterinary care in different regions of New South Wales. This information can inform targeted initiatives and policy decisions, ensuring that resources are directed where they are most needed.

By implementing these strategies and adopting a collaborative and data-driven approach, New South Wales can work towards improving access to veterinary care despite the current veterinary workforce shortage. This will enhance the health and well-being of animals across the state and ensure that all residents have equitable access to essential veterinary services for their animals.

### **13. CONCLUSION**

Addressing the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing support for the existing workforce, attracting more veterinarians to regional areas, and improving access to veterinary care for all communities. By implementing the strategies proposed in this submission, the New South Wales government can work towards alleviating the challenges posed by the shortage and ensuring the well-being of both animals and people. This becomes especially crucial during times of crisis, emergencies, or disasters, when the demand for veterinary services is heightened. A proactive approach to strengthen the veterinary workforce will have long-lasting positive effects on animal health and the overall welfare of the community.