

**Submission  
No 115**

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

**Organisation:** Melbourne Polytechnic

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NSW Parliament Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No.4 – Regional NSW

**Subject: Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in New South Wales**

Dear Portfolio Committee 4 members,

I am writing to submit the views and recommendations of Melbourne Polytechnic regarding the ongoing veterinary workforce shortage in our country. Melbourne Polytechnic is a leading Higher Education institution for veterinary nursing in Victoria and developed the first Bachelor of Veterinary Nursing in Australia. As an organisation we believe that addressing this critical issue is of utmost importance to safeguard the health and well-being of animals and the future of the veterinary workforce.

1. Contributing factors

The veterinary workforce shortage is an escalating crisis that affects both veterinarians and veterinary nurses and demands immediate attention. Several interconnecting factors contribute to this problem, including:

a) *Increasing demand:* As the pet ownership rate continues to rise and the human-animal bond strengthens, there has been a significant increase in the demand for veterinary services (IVA, 2023). This surge in demand has surpassed the capacity of the existing veterinary workforce, leading to long waiting times and limited access to care.

b) *Rural disparities:* Rural areas face unique challenges in attracting and retaining veterinary professionals. Limited access to veterinary schools, isolation, and inadequate resources make it difficult to provide quality veterinary services in rural communities. This disparity must be addressed to ensure equitable access to veterinary care across the country.

c) *Mental health and burnout:* Mental ill health affects all members of the veterinary workforce and is increasing. Suicide in veterinarians and veterinary nurses is higher than that of the general population (Witte et al, 2019), and depression, anxiety and burnout are increasing across all members of the veterinary workforce (Hilton et al, 2023; Solutions, 2023). The resulting decline in workforce retention rates, and loss of experience and mentorship will increase burnout rates in the remainder of the workforce.

d) *Underutilisation of veterinary nurses:* Veterinary nurses undergo 2-3 years of training and hold qualifications ranging from AQF level 4 (Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing) to AQF level 7 (Bachelor of Veterinary Nursing/Technology). Veterinary nurses are not being utilised to the full extent of their skills

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and knowledge resulting in low veterinary nurse job satisfaction and high veterinarian workload (Murray & Lambert, 2019).

## 2. Recommendations:

To address the veterinary workforce shortage and ensure adequate access to veterinary care for all, we propose the following recommendations:

1. *Advocacy and recognition*: Promote the value and capabilities of both Bachelor and Certificate IV qualified veterinary nurses through advocacy efforts. Raise awareness among veterinary professionals, employers, and the public about the contributions these nurses can make to veterinary healthcare. Recognise their qualifications, skills, and knowledge, and encourage their integration into veterinary teams to reduce the workload burden on veterinarians.
2. *Expanded scope of practice*: Evaluate the current scope of practice for Bachelor qualified veterinary nurses in consultation with relevant representative bodies and identify areas where they can take on additional responsibilities. This could include performing routine examinations, administering vaccinations, providing basic medical treatments, or assisting with minor surgeries under the supervision of a veterinarian. Expanding their scope of practice can free up veterinarians to focus on more complex cases and improve nurse retention by providing more meaningful work.
3. *Mobile clinics and outreach programs*: Utilise Bachelor qualified veterinary nurses in mobile clinics and outreach programs to reach underserved areas or communities with limited access to veterinary care. Under the guidance of a veterinarian, these nurses can provide preventive care, basic treatments, and educational resources, thus helping to alleviate the burden on veterinary clinics and address the shortage in remote regions.
4. *Telemedicine and remote support*: Leverage technology to enable Bachelor qualified veterinary nurses to provide telemedicine consultations and remote support under the guidance of a veterinarian. They can assist with client inquiries, triage cases, and offer preliminary advice. This approach can enhance access to veterinary expertise, particularly in areas with limited veterinary resources.

In conclusion, the veterinary shortage poses a significant threat to animal health and welfare in our country. By implementing these recommendations and actively addressing the underlying factors contributing to the shortage, we can work towards a sustainable solution that ensures access to quality veterinary care for all animals, regardless of their owner's location or economic circumstances.

Thank you for considering our submission. Angela Chapman is available to provide any additional information or participate in discussions related to this inquiry. I trust that your committee will diligently address this issue and take appropriate actions to resolve the veterinary shortage crisis.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Chapman, on behalf of Melbourne Polytechnic

## References:

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