

**Submission  
No 129**

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

**Name:** Professor Kate Le Bars

**Date Received:** 21 July 2023

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I have worked as a veterinary surgeon in first opinion practice for thirty-five years and owned a veterinary hospital for nine years. During that time, I have seen a disturbing decrease in resources, coupled with rising (and at times, unrealistic) public expectations.

The past three years have been particularly challenging. At a time when pet-ownership is at its highest, we have faced sustained shortages of veterinary professionals (both vets and nurses). As a regional practice in a lower-income area, we have been unable to recruit permanent or casual veterinarians for the past four years. There are many reasons for this, the primary one being that we cannot compete with the wages and hours being offered by larger city practices to the few available vets looking for work.

The result of this ongoing shortage is an increased workload on our remaining staff and reduced holidays. Add to this the expectation that veterinary care should be available twenty-four hours a day seven days a week, and we have an unsustainable situation. We have put measures in place to protect our staff that have resulted in a small but unpleasant public backlash.

Companion animals are just that, providing companionship and comfort to their owners. Many are considered part of the family. Numerous studies have highlighted the relationship between pet-ownership and good mental health. As doctors to these family members, vets and nurses provide an essential service that must be sustainable.

The veterinary profession attracts intelligent, compassionate people. As such, we are highly dedicated to our patients and vulnerable to client abuse. For decades, many of us have been unable to achieve what most people would consider an acceptable work-life balance or even an appropriate salary. Unsurprisingly, the profession is now losing the recent graduates that should be the backbone of its future.

I have experienced burn-out twice in my career. It is a distressing and debilitating condition.

Sadly, it is a real and present threat to many of my colleagues.

The Australian Veterinary Association's submission has laid out many of the challenges faced by my colleagues and proposed changes that will help protect a profession we all need to thrive.

Please listen to them and help us.

Your Sincerely,  
Dr Kate Le Bars