

**Submission
No 153**

INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board

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VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

21 July 2023

Mr Mark Banasiak MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No 4 – Regional NSW
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Banasiak,

Inquiry into Veterinary Workforce Shortage in New South Wales

The ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board (the ACT Board) is the body who regulates the provision of veterinary services in the ACT to ensure the following:

- the provision of veterinary services is focussed on the welfare and protection of animals;
- veterinary practitioners provide veterinary services professionally and competently;
- premises at which veterinary services are provided are of an acceptable standard;
- veterinary services provided in the ACT comply with standards that are acceptable to the community and meet national and international trade requirements;
- consumers of veterinary services are well informed about the competencies required of veterinary practitioners; and
- public health is protected.

The ACT Board is submitting this information to inform the inquiry of the current situation in the ACT.

The ACT Board is aware of national workforce shortages the veterinary profession is currently facing. This is an issue being faced not just in NSW, but across all jurisdictions and globally. In April 2022, the ACT Board became aware that one of the two main after hours emergency practices in the ACT would be closing their emergency service to walk-in consultations due to staff shortages and high internal caseloads. This included non-emergency cases turning up afterhours as they had not been able to get a consult with their general practice veterinary premises within a reasonable time due to their high caseload. As a result of this, there was only one practice offering after hours emergency services for the ACT and surrounding regions. There was at the time and remains a high risk that owners with animals requiring emergency treatment not being able to access veterinary care for their animals.

The ACT Board has been working closely with the profession to understand the issues it is facing and have taken several actions including:

- The Board facilitating several forums with the local ACT veterinary community around the workforce issues the industry is facing, particularly the provision of emergency after-hours veterinary services. The forums allowed practices to propose ideas and solutions that they could apply in their practices, or they could collaborate on. The Board invited the ACT Division of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) to co-host these meetings to ensure that relevant issues were taken back to the greater AVA community to progress.

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- Reviewing Board policies to provide clarity and assistance to the veterinary profession, for example around telehealth and what veterinary nurses are permitted to do.
- Advocating to the ACT Chief Health Officer to update the Standing Exemption for Essential Workers to incorporate veterinary workers.
- Advocated to have veterinarians added to the ACT Critical Skills List, a list of skills migrants can have if they apply to come to Canberra under the ACT skilled migration scheme.
- Consideration of legislative changes that might assist the profession, for example empowering veterinary nurses to reduce workload pressures on veterinarians through registration.

Over the next three years, the Board has committed to reviewing the *Veterinary Practice Act 2018* (in line with the legislative requirement) and will make recommendations to the ACT Government on relevant amendments. One of the key issues being considered by the Board is registration and regulation of veterinary nurses in the ACT. This is also a national discussion occurring with the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC), of which the Board is a member, and the Australian Veterinary Association. Veterinary nurse regulation would be aimed at promoting better animal welfare by raising the standard and capability of care provided to animals and empower veterinary nurses who could assist in alleviating workforce pressures on veterinarians. The introduction of veterinary nurse registration and regulation would benefit the profession by expanding the duties that appropriately qualified and registered veterinary nurses could perform, freeing up veterinary practitioners to focus on serious issues. In 2019, the ACT Board surveyed veterinary practitioners and veterinary nurses who were supportive of the regulation of veterinary nurses.