

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I am providing a submission for the NSW inquiry Veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales, please consider my points on issues and recommendations.

## **MY BACKGROUND & EXPERIENCE**

I have been helping with animal welfare organisations and rescue groups for near two decades. Over that time trusted veterinary services have been an intrinsic part of delivery of services to take in, treat, desex, vaccinate, etc for rehoming of companion animals and other small animals.

However, only some vets provide discounted services which are affordable for rescue and rehoming groups. I have experienced this in the greater Sydney metropolitan area, from some of the “elite” suburbs through to low socio economic areas, and from experiences with transferring companion animals from regional areas (council pounds and rescue groups) to Sydney for care and rehoming.

I know that many of these vets are incurring a financial loss as they are not charging “standard” vet service charges to the public. This is a fine balance these essential veterinary practices are performing.

## **ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO THE INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)**

### **RE “(A) THE SHORTAGE OF VETERINARIANS ACROSS THE PROFESSION, INCLUDING CLINICAL (SMALL AND LARGE ANIMAL PRACTICE)...”**

#### **Shortage of vet services in regional areas has an impact across the state and the metropolitan areas**

Having helped in Sydney based shelters and rescue groups over two decades, I am very aware that there were often animals transferred from regional areas to our location with the prospect of rehoming. This involved seeing many animals who were likely surrendered or abandoned due to expensive health issues, and if the animals remained in a regional pound then they were usually listed to be euthanased within minimum time.

I am also aware that regional pounds and residents complain about the low number of vets, or accessibility to vets (hundreds of KMs away). It has often been left to Sydney based or other rescue groups to arrange transport from remote locations to shelters and rescue groups with local vet services.

My personal opinion includes that regional areas where livestock and agriculture are entrenched, indicates a culture that all animals are considered a \$ product, and companion animals or even horses may not be provided with veterinary services as the charges exceed the \$ value of an animal. I am also aware the many regional councils perceive themselves as “poor” in regard to rate payer funds etc, however there are some very large property owners running very large businesses in their areas.

It is recommended that these animal welfare issues need resolving at the location rather than depending on rescues and vets in other locations to pick up the responsibility. This is exacerbating the issues in the metropolitan areas with the increase in abandoned animals this last year, and the cost of living pressures etc.

## **RE “(I) THE ROLE PLAYED BY VETERINARIANS IN PROVIDING CARE TO LOST, STRAY AND HOMELESS ANIMALS, INJURED WILDLIFE AND DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS”**

Some of our vets directly take in, care and rehome abandoned or lost cats and dogs, and even rabbits “bunnies”.

Some vets help with reuniting lost pets with their owners, and checking for microchips and identifying owners on the NSW Pet Registry (Companion Animal Register), contacting owners if possible. Not all vets are willing to provide this service as there are usually no fees charged to owners, or the people who find a lost pet.

Some of our vets assist small rescue groups and rehoming organisations with reduced rates for the vet services, especially desexing charges.

Not all vets help with the above. Most likely due to the costs involved while maintaining a viable practice.

Our vets should be recognised as part of our animal welfare systems. Our vets should be offered grants as are the large animal welfare organisations to assist the public / communities with the range of pet services.

Last year, the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) raised their concerns that vets were not consulted during the NSW council pound review for improvements in rehoming rates and reducing euthanasia rates. AVA’s recommendation #1 included:

“The establishment of a community cat program with ongoing funding arrangements needs to include formal provisions for veterinary practices reimbursement when receiving stray cats.”

<https://www.ava.com.au/member-updates/nsw/ava-submission-to-nsw-rehoming-practices-review/>

This AVA recommendation is fully supported.

The cat desexing programs run by the large animal welfare organisations RSPCA and Cat Protection Society, have been limited by the location of their vet services in Yagoona, and Newtown respectively. These are not easily accessible to many, especially low income earners who may not own a car, or workers who are not able to spend hours delivering and picking up their pets across a metropolitan area heavy with traffic.

It is recommended that as it is only fair and reasonable that our vets are provided a similar level of

support for essential animal services as is provided to the large animal welfare organisations eg grants for high intensity desexing. Further, there are vets in each local government areas who are much more easily accessible than the large animal welfare organisations, especially in regional areas or even in the large metropolitan areas such as Sydney, where getting to a large animal welfare organisation may mean an hour or hours of travel each way in a car to the main shelters and vets.

## **RE “(G) THE IMPACT OF THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ON VETERINARIANS”**

### **NSW Obligations for Microchipping & Pet Identification on the NSW Pet Registry**

The requirements and charges for microchipping and identification are onerous for semi owned cats, ie cats being shown care but who are not directly owned by a single person.

Some vets will offer desexing services without microchipping, some vets will not. This appears to be directed by each council. I do not understand how each council can pressure vets in this way, as it is up to each individual owner to register their pets.

It is recommended that the NSW government clarifies the legal obligations belong to the owners of the animals and not the vets. This will enable more desexing in more LGAs, and relieve the council and ratepayers from higher intakes etc in pounds.

### **Pet Registration Administration**

In NSW, with the microchipping procedure, our vets are expected to complete the online pet identification steps on the NSW Pet Registry (Companion Animals Register). This takes time, and often as rescuers we see problems/ mistakes in the information e.g. wrong information placed in fields that we cannot easily change as pet owners. We understand our vets are busy with the actual veterinary services rather than the “admin”. However, it can take weeks or longer to correct information on the Pet Registry and our vets are not receiving any funds for this work.

It is recommended that a simpler approach is created for pet owners to be able to update information entered by veterinary practices.

## **RE “(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”**

### Costs of vet services are becoming unaffordable by many across all Local Government Areas

I live in the northern beaches of Sydney. This is generally considered an area of average or above average income, with many families with companion animals. My guess is there is 20 or more veterinary practices in our local government area. This area also includes social housing and areas of low income earners.

This month is National Desexing Month, and we have just three providers of discounted desexing voucher based services. The fee for desexing has been reduced around \$50, however the other costs for microchipping and vaccinations have not. If a young kitten is involved, then there are three vaccinations to be paid for. While the desexing is slightly cheaper, all the basic services still cost around \$450 or more. Where in other months these combined fees are between \$500 - \$600.

While these charges are reasonable from a veterinary practice view, these fees are beyond those on low incomes or social welfare and are considered not affordable. Yet in the LGA there are no free desexing programs for the low income/ social welfare recipients, which are provided by other council areas.

It is recommended that our state government should recognise that every LGA includes residents on low incomes/ social welfare, and that our vets are the most accessible for those who do not own nor can afford a car. All veterinary practices should be able to offer substantially reduced charges for those in financial need for their loved pets through grants from our state government, just as has been offered to the large animal welfare organisation (e.g. RSPCA, Cat Protection Society)

### Different cultural views on caring for animals

Immigrants with different country cultural based views on animals and the care that should be provided are having an impact on the perceived value of vets and their services, and this is also evident in the number of dogs and cats left intact and not desexed. In some LGAs and suburbs within these, it is seen that dogs and cats are not valued (in my opinion) and therefore vet services will not be coordinated when animals are in need.

It is recommended that our state government develop programs for cultural change for valuing pet animals and the value of vet services. Our veterinary services are not able to take on this role, which is required in many locations, and addressing different historical country cultures. These programs will be applicable to many LGAs, and most likely other states/ territories, and therefore our federal government and other state/territory governments should also see value in investing in these programs.

Without addressing historical country cultural differences and improving conditions for animals, then animals will suffer, and the ongoing problems of abandoned animals will fall on our councils, large animal welfare organisations, volunteer / charity based rescue organisations, and local vets.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS, RE**

**“(L) STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE CURRENT VETERINARY WORKFORCE, AS WELL AS WAYS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PRACTISING VETERINARIANS PARTICULARLY IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES”**

**“(M) STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO VETERINARY CARE”**

**“(N) ANY OTHER RELATED MATTER”**

- AVA should always be included in any NSW OLG reference groups pr taskforces.
- Small rescue group representatives should always be included in any NSW OLG reference groups pr taskforces.
- Grants to be provided to veterinary practices to address high intensity desexing, as is provided to the large animal welfare organisations.