

Submission
No 163

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Not sure how long there has been a discussion regarding shortage of vets in Australia. Ten years, fifteen years, more?

Usually it is those in high positions trying to figure it all out. Explanations and reasons given:

- majority of vet students/vets are female these days - they take time out to have babies and bring up families.
- no one wants to go to rural areas because they don't want to work too hard
- young people want it easy these days
- and on, and on...

A couple of facts:

- suicide rates in the veterinary profession are amongst the highest if not the highest in the country. People don't kill themselves just because the means are available. There are lots of things out there that are in easy reach if someone wants to end their life.

- Pay is abysmal, just abysmal. When, in 2023, vets with 10 plus years of experience have to ask their fellow vets if they should accept a salary of \$50/hr because it is a full time job or, even, a locum position, something is seriously broken.

(One of the answers to the above question was that 'the corporates pay less'. Obviously, the Corporates moved into veterinary practice ownership for purely the love of animals. Or not.)

The pay for vets was laughable even when there were more males in the profession. It appears that males have come to realise, a bit sooner than females, that as much as they like or love animals, love alone does not put a roof over one's head nor pays one's bills or puts food on the table. For women, add to that the gender pay gap and having to negotiate for a pay rise...

- Whenever I asked for a pay rise (not often) I was literally laughed at and told I was not making 5x my salary. Four years in one practice and 10 years in another without a pay increase.

When I resigned after 4 years, I was told it was a great shame and they were disappointed I was leaving because I was a good vet and I was 'bringing in the money'. Yet, no pay rise in four years and with 21 years of experience at that time.

- I absolutely loathe it when my profession is referred to as an 'industry' - no one ever refers to human doctors or lawyers as working within the medical or legal 'industry'. But this is just another symptom of how lowly vets are generally regarded out there by the majority.

- A profession where the demands and expectations placed on the vets (and other veterinary staff) by the public and at times by those in charge are just over the top, and the financial rewards are laughable. The 'award' set by those high up and in full control, are a joke.

- A profession where a vet working on the weekends makes less than the vet nurses.

- A profession where basic working conditions, such as appropriate breaks, in many instances are probably still non-existent.

- A profession where you are meant to finish at whatever the time might be but instead, as a rule and not as an exception, you walk out three hours later and come back the next day to do it all again.

- And if the shortage of vets is exacerbated these last couple of years... has anyone actually stopped to think that there is a pandemic still going on? (At this point I can imagine a lot of eye-rolling by those reading this submission).

For a profession that stakes its reputation on 'evidence-based', it is doing a great job turning a blind eye to a level 3, highly infectious bio-hazard, whilst heartily being supported by Australian governments at all levels and Australian health officials. Deciding that the vulnerable and anyone over a certain age are expendable is not only abhorrent but also a very dark joke.

With every infection, those who think are invincible move one step up along the vulnerability ladder.

For the last 12 months I have stayed away from general practice. Reason? I am not willing to jeopardise my family's health or mine, just because PPE (a mask of all things!) and clean air have become four-letter, dirty words.

Put HEPA filters in consult rooms and every other room in vet practices.

Have staff and clients wear appropriate masks. It is called Occupational Health and Safety. It's gone. Governments of all flavours could not care less.

So, while that continues, some of us are willing to stay away whilst others will be repeatedly getting sick, with the flow-on effect of more stress on those remaining behind to shoulder the burden.

One suspects 'import' labour' will be high on some people's lists. Import from where? Other countries will have similar or worse numbers of unwell and sick. And, those that may arrive will be just as susceptible to sickness here, as the rest.

My submission is neither lengthy nor polished and is pretty bland and straight forward. Pay. Conditions. Hours worked. OHS. Improve them. Watch things change. It's up to those in charge. Meantime, I will not be holding my breath.