

Submission
No 176

INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Local Government NSW

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Inquiry into Veterinary Workforce Shortage in NSW
Portfolio Committee No.4
NSW Parliament

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Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for local government in NSW, representing NSW general purpose councils and related entities. LGNSW facilitates the development of an effective community-based system of local government in the State.

LGNSW welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Portfolio Committee's Inquiry into veterinary workforce shortages. Our input is in relation to the role veterinarians play in supporting councils' roles in companion animal management, and is most relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference (g) to (j).

This is a draft submission and is subject to review and approval of the LGNSW Board. Any changes will be advised at the earliest opportunity.

Councils have regulatory responsibilities under the *Companion Animals Act 1998* and have a significant role in promoting and overseeing responsible ownership of dogs and cats in their local area. Councils discharge these functions while having regard to the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*.

Access to vets is necessary to support animal welfare and veterinary advice is a requirement in certain circumstances under the Companion Animals Act. Councils are also reliant on access to veterinary expertise to provide health checks and desexing (where the latter is undertaken) of surrendered and impounded animals before they are offered for adoption.

The 2022 rehoming amendments to the Companion Animals Act have increased councils' need for veterinary assistance, for example to provide ongoing vet care over extended periods in addition to and often resulting in, assessments under section 64B(8) of the Act. Section 64B(8) specifically requires a vet to assess whether it would be cruel to keep an injured, diseased or sick animal alive or rehomed. Councils have noted that the availability of veterinary services in rural and regional areas is much more limited than in metropolitan areas. This may result in longer wait times for assessment or treatment of animals, or longer timeframes in holding facilities (which may include vet practices) before rehoming.

There have also been circumstances where a council has engaged or collaborated with the local vet practice to provide cat containment facilities where either the council does not have a facility or there is insufficient capacity to keep the significantly increased number of cats being collected, surrendered and held before rehoming. By working together, councils and vets have provided for good animal welfare outcomes but this is at risk if there are further declines in the number of vet practices in rural and regional NSW and/or the existing practices step away from these arrangements because of increased animal numbers or damage caused by feral cats/dangerous dogs while awaiting assessment and rehoming.

Increasing vet numbers and improving retention rates is the obvious solution, however legislative changes could also support vets joining and remaining in the industry. LGNSW's submission on the 2022 Rehoming Practice Review Draft Report supported a number of recommendations that could assist with freeing up vet capacity to deal with more significant matters. For example, LGNSW supported the Draft Report's proposal to revise companion animal behaviour assessment arrangements so that:

- a) councils are able to undertake assessments of whether an animal is suitable for rehoming, regardless of whether it will rehome the animal or advertise it to rehoming organisations.
- b) councils are able to euthanise animals where there are work health and safety concerns for keeping the animal.

As noted in the 2022 Rehoming Practice Review's Draft Report, euthanasia is a necessary procedure when it is inhumane to keep an animal alive due to pain and suffering associated with its condition, or there is no prospect of suitable rehoming based on its behaviour or past violent behaviour.

Councils also strongly support legislative amendments to enable councils to implement cat containment or curfew policies, which could also help to reduce vet workload in assessing, treating and housing cats picked up outside of curfew.

For further information, please contact .