

Submission  
No 206

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
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Portfolio Committee Number 4 – Regional NSW  
NSW Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Subject: Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in New South Wales

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the difficulty faced by accredited veterinarians from abroad in obtaining visas to work in New South Wales (NSW). I would like to draw your attention to the fact that veterinary work does not qualify as regional work for the working holiday visa, despite the severe shortage of veterinarians, particularly in regional areas. This discrepancy creates a significant challenge in addressing the veterinary workforce shortage effectively.

The shortage of veterinarians in regional NSW is a pressing issue that demands immediate attention. These areas heavily rely on veterinary services to ensure the health and wellbeing of their animal populations, both domestic and agricultural. However, the current visa regulations do not align with the demand for skilled veterinarians in these regions, leading to unfavorable consequences.

One major hurdle is that veterinary work does not fall under the category of regional work for the working holiday visa program. This means that veterinarians who wish to contribute their expertise in regional areas are unable to access this visa pathway specifically designed for working in regional Australia. Instead, they are often deterred by the requirement to seek alternative visa options such as seeking sponsorship for one individual employer. This can be complex, time-consuming, costly and restricts the individual's employment and travel options. This deters many highly skilled veterinarians from pursuing opportunities in NSW.

Furthermore, the current situation forces veterinarians to engage in non-skilled labor to fulfil visa requirements for the working holidays visa, despite their valuable professional skills being desperately needed in the same regional areas. This discrepancy not only undermines the abilities and qualifications of these professionals but also fails to address the root cause of the shortage, perpetuating the cycle of insufficient veterinary services in regional NSW. The result is that vets who may have provided much needed services for a rural Australian practice for up to 3 years, only end up leaving Australia after 12 months (maximum) - as they would be required to do 3 months of unskilled regional labour to obtain a second year under the same visa programme, which would only be 6 months working as a vet and a further 6 months of unskilled labour to be eligible for a third year.

As a result of these visa limitations, veterinarians from abroad are more likely to return to their home countries rather than stay for a second or third year. This revolving door phenomenon exacerbates the shortage, as the region loses out on the expertise and experience these veterinarians could bring to the community. It also leads to a lack of continuity in veterinary care, hindering the establishment of long-term relationships among practices, practitioners and clients.

To address this issue, I strongly urge the committee to consider the following recommendations:

1. Campaign to include veterinary work in the list of occupations eligible for regional work under the working holiday visa program. This change would allow accredited veterinarians to access the visa pathway and contribute their skills to the areas experiencing a shortage.
2. Explore the creation of a specialized visa stream specifically tailored for veterinary professionals who wish to work in regional NSW. This visa could provide a streamlined application process, freedom to change employer without loss of visa, reduced costs, and longer visa durations, encouraging veterinarians to stay for an extended period and contribute to the community.
3. Collaborate with relevant government agencies, industry bodies, and veterinary associations to develop targeted initiatives that attract and retain veterinarians in regional areas. These initiatives could include incentives such as relocation assistance, professional development opportunities, and mentorship programs to create a supportive environment for veterinarians in these regions.

By implementing these recommendations, we can ensure that the veterinary workforce shortage in regional NSW is effectively addressed. Accessible visa pathways and targeted support will encourage accredited veterinarians from abroad to contribute their skills and expertise where they are needed the most, ultimately improving animal welfare and strengthening regional communities.

Thank you for considering my submission. I trust that the Portfolio Committee will take these recommendations into serious consideration during the inquiry. Should you require any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.