



Australian Veterinary Workforce Survey 2018

April 2019

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1. Introduction

The Australian Veterinary Association, in association with the state and territory veterinary boards and the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council conducted its 5th biennial workforce survey of veterinarians in 2018. The purpose of the survey was to collect data about the current profile of the veterinary profession and anticipate future trends and challenges. The information will help the profession, government, veterinary boards, and others to understand how the provision of veterinary services may be affected by various factors, including graduate numbers, changes in career, breaks in employment and those working part-time.

This report provides a summary of responses to the **2018 Veterinary Workforce Survey**.

2. Methods

The workforce survey was originally based on an adaptation from a similar survey administered each year by the Veterinary Council of New Zealand.¹ The survey has been refined based on feedback from the Australian Veterinary Workforce Modelling Report 2016.²

Veterinarians voluntarily completed the questionnaire. Each of the state and territory veterinary surgeons' boards distributed a link through either a separate email to each registered veterinarian or via their board's newsletter. The link directed veterinarians to a dedicated web page where they could enter survey responses.



The online survey was made available to veterinarians between 5 January 2018 and 31 December 2018. An electronic copy of the survey was provided for analysis.

The analyses of this report are based on responses to 36 questions that comprised the workforce survey. Alongside the data summaries, interpretive comments are provided.

3. Results

A total of 1236 rows of data were provided in the electronic copy of completed survey responses. The total number of registered veterinarians in Australia on 30 June 2018 was 12,769 (Australasian Veterinary Boards Council, 2018).³ The overall response rate to the survey (the number of veterinarians that provided valid responses to the survey divided by the total number of registered veterinarians) was 10%.

Response rates continue to vary by state-territory. They continue to be very dependent on the method that the associated state-territory use to disseminate the link to the survey to their registered veterinarians. ACT achieved an excellent 31% response rate by sending the link by email to all registered veterinarians for which they had email addresses. Better results could be obtained if the survey was sent out to all registered veterinarians at the time of registration renewal.

Table 1: State-territory of business address (or home address of those not currently working) of respondents at the time of answering the 2018 veterinary workforce survey, number of registered veterinarians on 30 June 2018³ (Australasian Veterinary Board Council 2018) and survey response rate.

State-Territory	Respondents <i>n</i>	Veterinarians	Response Rate
Queensland	125	3012	4%
New South Wales	459	3430	13%
ACT	115	370	31%
Victoria	339	3261	10%
Tasmania	11	301	4%
Northern Territory	10	145	7%
South Australia	95	769	12%
Western Australia	58	1481	4%
Not stated	21	0	
Total	1236	12739	10%

3.1 Age and gender

Of the respondents, 67% were female and 33% were male. Five respondents identified as 'Other'. This compares with the 2016 survey where 62% were female and 38% were male and the 2014 survey where 60% were female and 40% were male. The trends are consistent with increased feminisation of the veterinary workforce. Table 2 lists the number of veterinarians who responded to the survey by age group and gender. Figure 1 presents the same information as a population pyramid. Younger age groups are dominated by females, while age groups from 55-59 years upwards have more males than females.



Table 2: Age of respondents at the time of answering the 2018 veterinary workforce survey, by gender

Age group	Female	Male	Other	Total	Percentage
20-24 years	16	4	0	20	2%
25-29 years	166	22	1	189	15%
30-34 years	133	30	2	165	13%
35-39 years	125	27	1	153	12%
40-44 years	104	33	0	137	11%
45-49 years	84	42	1	127	10%
50-54 years	89	57	0	146	12%
55-59 years	50	57	0	107	9%
60-64 years	41	48	0	89	7%
65-69 years	12	39	0	51	4%
70-74 years	3	36	0	39	3%
75+ years	1	12	0	13	1%
Total	824	407	5	1236	

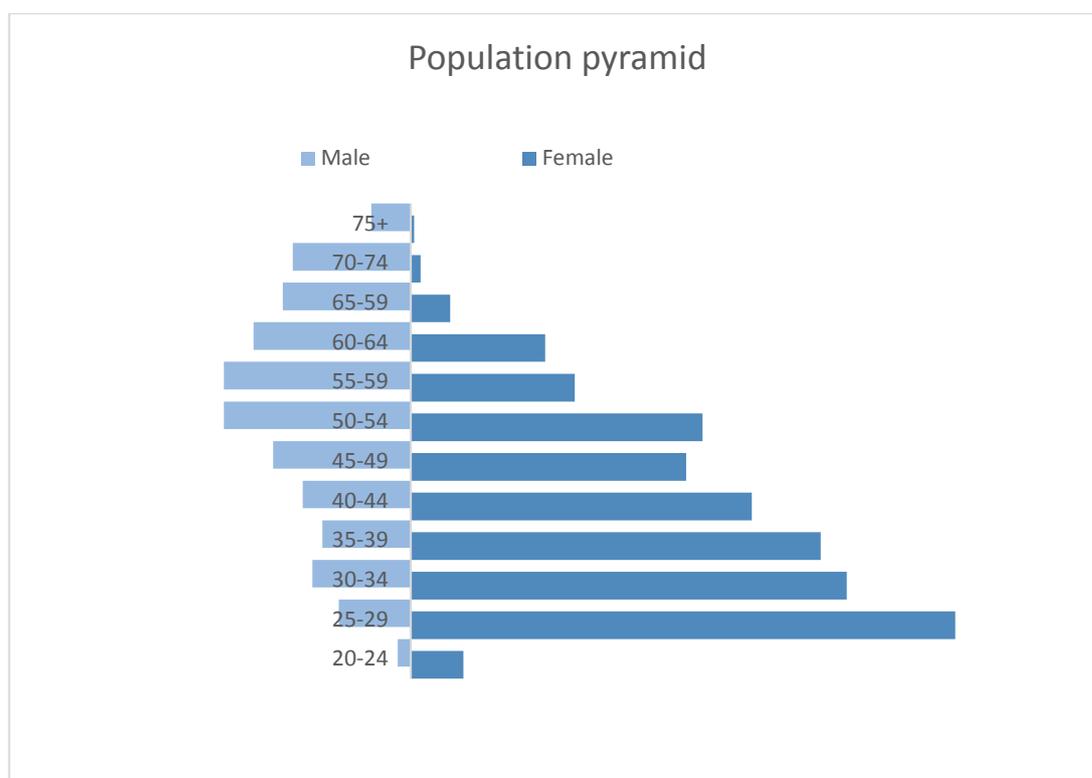


Figure 1: Population pyramid comparing the age distribution of female (right) to male (left) veterinarians that responded to the 2018 veterinary workforce survey.

3.2 Employment and work roles

Respondents were asked if they were engaged in veterinary work, including non-clinical veterinary work, in Australia in the year ending 31 December 2017. Of the respondents, 93% (n= 1148) were working in a veterinary role in 2017.

Respondents who engaged in veterinary work in 2017 were asked to provide details of their current employment using the categories listed in Table 3. Of the respondents who were working in a veterinary role, 78% were in a role in clinical practice. The largest group of respondents were employed in group private practice, 49% in total. There appears to be a continuing trend away from working in solo private practice, with 9% of those engaged in veterinary work in 2017 working in solo practices, compared with 10% in 2015, 20% in 2014, 20% in 2013 and 30% in 2012. There is an increase to 7% for those working in large corporate practices compared with 4% in 2015. The percentage of respondents working in corporate practice may be understated due to the low response rate from Queensland where a higher number of corporate practices are located.

Respondents who were engaged in veterinary work in 2017 were asked if they were specialists and 4% (n=41) responded that they were specialists.

Table 3: Employment type at the time of completing the 2018 veterinary workforce survey, by gender.

Employment	Female	Male	Other	Total	% of veterinarians working in veterinary roles
Solo private practice	60	41	1	102	9%
Group private practice	393	174	1	568	49%
Large corporate practice	59	24	0	83	7%
Referral/specialist practice	48	25	1	74	6%
Emergency practice	20	6	0	26	2%
Not for profit	5	4	0	9	1%
Locum	30	16	0	46	4%
Government	54	30	1	85	7%
Laboratory	5	2	0	7	1%
University/Research	36	23	0	59	5%
TAFE	1	2	0	3	0%
Industry	20	10	0	30	3%
AVA	3	0	0	3	0%
Other	22	17	0	39	3%
Not stated	11	2	1	14	1%
Total	767	376	5	1148	

There were 1079 veterinarians who responded to questions about the % of their working hours spent performing different working roles. The number of veterinarians (including by gender) who reported working in a particular work activity for some of their working time during 2017 is shown in Table 4 under the n column. Overall the 1079 respondents worked 42,088.8 hours between them (including attending cases while on call and excluding non-active on-call). Table 4 shows the distribution of



these hours over the working roles/activities (including by gender). There were 20 out of the 28 work roles where women were employed in more hours of work. The work categories where males were employed for more hours than female were beef cattle, dairy cattle practice, deer practice, meat inspection, pig practice and poultry practice.

Table 4: Counts of veterinarians involved in work type and number of hours of work type performed by 1079 veterinarian respondents completing the 2018 veterinary workforce survey, by gender.

Work type	Female		Male		Total	
	n	Hours	n	Hours	n	Hours
Aquaculture	6	53.2	6	53.2	12	106.4
Avian	184	266.0	57	182.4	241	448.4
Animal welfare	60	554.8	30	129.2	90	684
Beef	89	467.4	80	600.4	169	1067.8
Camelids	28	41.8	19	41.8	47	83.6
Companion animals	573	17191.2	246	8010.4	819	25201.6
Compliance	44	551.0	43	391.4	87	942.4
Dairy	46	323.0	35	406.6	81	729.6
Deer	1	0.0	2	3.8	3	3.8
Biosecurity	57	927.2	30	315.4	87	1242.6
Export certification	31	102.6	24	91.2	55	193.8
Epidemiology	22	269.8	7	26.6	29	296.4
Equine	126	1546.6	93	1394.6	219	2941.2
Goats	60	72.2	26	26.6	86	98.8
Meat inspection	3	15.2	8	167.2	11	182.4
Pathology	28	152.0	10	91.2	38	243.2
Pharmaceutical	16	174.8	6	110.2	22	285
Sheep	78	171.0	45	117.8	123	288.8
Pigs	29	174.8	14	186.2	43	361
Pocket pets	296	440.8	88	121.6	384	562.4
Practice Management	117	1026.0	88	642.2	205	1668.2
Poultry	107	114.0	39	171	146	285
Reptiles	58	45.6	13	22.8	71	68.4
Research	56	684.0	28	269.8	84	953.8
Industry	16	383.8	7	114	23	497.8
Teaching	66	668.8	42	285	108	953.8
Wildlife	268	353.4	81	163.4	349	516.8
Other	44	817.0	30	364.8	74	1181.8
Total		27588.0		14500.8		42088.8

Table 5 summarises the reasons given for why 7% (n=85) of responding registered veterinarians were not engaged in veterinary work in 2017.

Table 5: Reason given for not working in veterinary role in 2017

Reason	Number	Percentage
Parental care	1	1%
Family care	1	1%
Health	0	0%
Personal preference	4	5%
Difficulty finding work	2	2%
Retiring	16	19%
Study	2	2%
Work in a non-vet role	23	27%
Working overseas	11	13%
In last year of university	23	27%
Not stated	2	2%
Total	85	

Those working in non-veterinary roles were asked whether their veterinary degree was of value in the non-veterinary role that they were now employed in. 83% (n=19) said it was of value and 17% (n=4) said it was of no value.

Some of the non-veterinary roles veterinary practitioners were engaged in were:

- Teaching
- Business manager
- Computer programming
- Risk assessor for pesticides
- Executive Officer for an agricultural company
- Pharmacovigilance specialist
- Doctor
- Medical Affairs
- Statistician
- Public servant
- Research scientist
- Industry (non-veterinary)
- Policy officer
- Regulatory roles in pesticides and medicines
- Academic in medical research
- Toxicology
- University Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Retail staff

When those working in non-veterinary roles were asked if they would return to a veterinary role in the future, 17% said yes, 40% said no, and 43% said they were unsure.

Close to twenty percent (19%) of respondents currently engaged in veterinary work (n=230) said that they were considering not working as a veterinarian in the following year. This is 7% increase from the result in the 2016 survey. They were then asked to select the option that most closely describes the main reason for their answer, which is reported in Table 6.



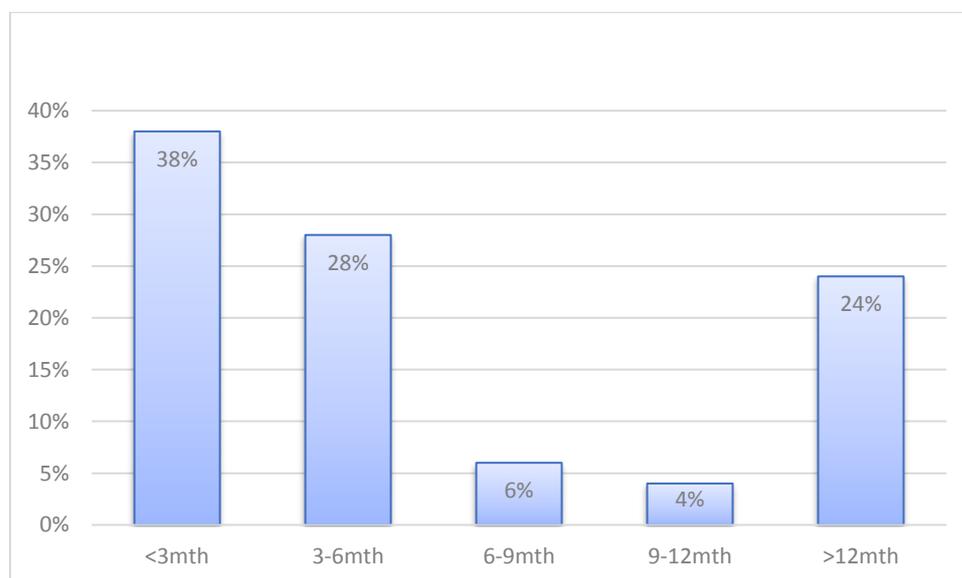
Table 6: Reason given for considering not working as veterinarian in the following year

Reason	Number	Percentage
Parental care	23	10%
Family care	9	4%
Health	16	7%
Personal preference	62	27%
Difficulty finding work	0	0%
Retiring	25	11%
Study	5	2%
Work in a non-vet role	29	13%
Working overseas	5	2%
Other	42	18%
Not stated	14	6%
Total	230	

Those who answered “other” were given an open response box. These answers are provided in Appendix 1 of this report.

Employers were asked if their practice had advertised for a veterinarian in the past 12 months. Sixty percent (n=178) of responding employer veterinarians indicated that they had, with 38% indicating it was a new position and 62% saying it was to replace a veterinarian who was leaving. Figure 2 shows the time taken to fill the advertised position.

Figure 2: Time taken to fill an advertised position for a veterinarian



3.3 Hours worked per week

Respondents were asked to record the number of routine hours they worked per week; the number of hours they were on-call per week and the average number of hours per week that they were called back to work while on call (active on-call) in 2017.



Descriptive statistics of the number of routine hours worked per week by work role (clinician, non-clinician) and gender are shown in Table 7. The median work hours worked per week for clinicians was 40 hours, (interquartile range [IQR] 30-45) and was similar to non-clinicians which was also 40 hours (IQR 30-45).

For women (across all work roles), the median routine hours worked per week was 38 (IQR 30-43) and for men it was 40 (IQR 30,45). Females worked on average two hours less than men.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of the number of hours worked per week (as a veterinarian by work role (clinician, non-clinician) and gender for the 2018 veterinary workforce survey.

Work role	n	Mean (SD)	Median (Q1, Q3)	Min.Max
Clinician				
Female	599	36(12)	38 (30,42)	1,75
Male	285	41 (15)	40 (35,50)	1,98
Total	884	38 (13)	40 (30,45)	1,98
Non-clinician				
Female	145	38 (14)	40 (30,45)	1,80
Male	84	34 (18)	40 (18,45)	1,70
Total	229	36 (16)	40 (30,45)	1,80
All veterinarians				
Female	744	36 (13)	38 (30,43)	1,80
Male	365	39 (16)	40 (32,50)	1,98
Total	1113	37 (14)	40 (30,45)	1,98
Not stated	123			

Figure 3 shows a box and whisker plot showing the distribution of cited combined routine working hours and hours the respondents worked when called back to work while on call (active on call) by age group and gender.

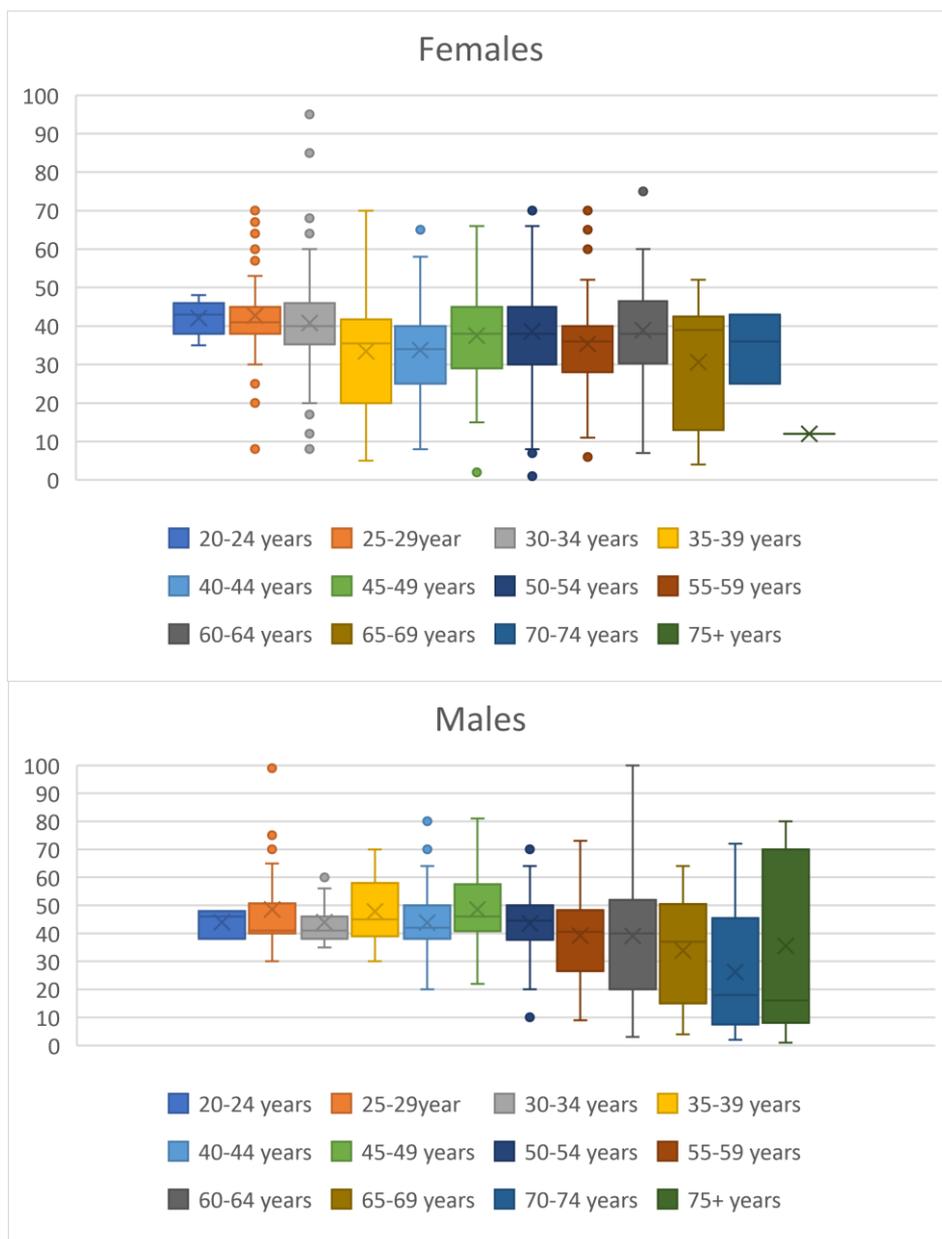


Figure 3: Box and whisker plot showing the distribution of hours worked per week by age group and gender for the 2018 veterinary workforce survey. In the plot the horizontal lines within each box represent the median number for each age group. The lower and upper bound of each box represent the 25th and 75th quartiles of distribution of work hours, respectively. The lower and upper whiskers represent the lower and upper bounds of the 95% confidence interval around the distribution of work hours. The closed circles represent outliers.

Clinician veterinarian respondents were asked how many hours on average per week they are on call. Forty-three percent of all clinicians (n=365) reported being on call, 38% of female clinicians compared with 48% of male clinicians reported being on call. Of those who are on call, the median number of hours on call per week was 24 hours with a median of 3 hours a week where they were required to attend cases. Tables 8 and 9 summarise this data.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics of number of hours on call worked per week those who are perform on-call duties

Work role	n	Mean (SD)	Median (Q1, Q3)	Min.Max
Female	228	30 (27)	24 (12,40)	1,168
Male	137	45 (36)	31 (15,70)	1,168
Total	365	36 (32)	24 (12,48)	1,168

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of number of hours attending to cases while on-call by gender

Work role	n	Mean (SD)	Median (Q1, Q3)	Min.Max
Female	228	4 (4)	2 (1,4)	<1,30
Male	137	4 (5)	3 (2,5)	<1,35
Total	365	4 (4)	3 (1,5)	<1,35

Table 10 uses the definition of working part-time as working less than 30 hours on average per week and restricts the respondents to those who had engaged in veterinary work during the year 2017.

Table10: Percent of respondents working part-time across gender and age groups

Age group	All				Female				Male			
	Number	Full-time#	Part-time*	% Part-time	Number	Full-time#	Part-time*	% Part-time	Number	Full-time*	Part-time*	% Part-time
20-24yr	11	11	0	0%	8	8	0	0%	3	3	0	0%
25-29yr	158	153	5	3%	139	135	4	3%	18	17	1	6%
30-34yr	152	126	26	17%	124	99	25	20%	27	27	0	0%
35-39yr	139	83	56	40%	113	59	54	48%	25	23	2	8%
40-44yr	128	82	46	36%	96	55	41	43%	32	27	5	16%
45-49yr	121	95	26	21%	82	57	25	30%	38	37	1	3%
50-54yr	136	105	31	23%	82	57	25	30%	54	46	8	15%
55-59yr	102	69	33	32%	48	31	17	35%	54	38	16	30%
60-64yr	83	49	34	41%	38	25	13	34%	45	24	21	47%
65-69yr	45	26	19	42%	10	6	4	40%	35	20	15	43%
70-74yr	29	12	17	59%	3	2	1	33%	26	10	16	62%
75+yr	9	3	6	67%	1	0	1	100%	8	3	5	63%
Total	1113	814	299	27%	744	534	210	28%	365	275	90	25%

Working 30 hours or more on average per week

* Working less than 30 hours on average per week

Table 10 shows that 27% of respondents are working in part-time roles, an increase of 4% from the previous survey 2 years ago. Amongst respondents the most significant increase in part time work



was in males, with 25% working part-time compared with 17% in the 2016 survey. Of the female respondents, 28% were working part-time compared with 26% in the 2016 survey.

Those working part-time were asked why they chose to work part-time. Table 11 gives a summary of the reasons given.

Table 11: Reasons given for working part-time or working only a part of the year

Reason given	Working part-time	Not working for part of the year
Working as locum	21	6
Difficulty finding work	4	4
Family Care	90	10
Health	7	9
Parental Care	4	11
Semi-retired/retired	45	22
Study	13	15
Personal preference	85	18
Also working in non-vet role	12	11
Other	23	32
Not stated	2	0
Total	306	138

3.5 Remuneration

Counts of survey respondents stratified by income category and gender are shown in Table 12. The same data restricted to those working full-time only, employment type, employment position, practice type and year of graduation are shown in Tables 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. Figure 4 gives a graphical representation of incomes across practice types.

Table 12: Counts of respondents by annual income and gender

Income Category	Female	Male	Other	Total	Percentage
<\$20k	43	22		65	6%
\$20-\$40k	61	10		71	6%
\$40-\$60k	126	25	2	153	13%
\$60-\$80k	171	41		212	18%
\$80-\$100k	139	52	1	192	17%
\$100-\$120k	84	64		148	13%
\$120-\$140k	51	38		89	8%
\$140-\$160k	17	24		41	4%
\$160-\$180k	9	10		19	2%
\$180-\$200k	3	18		21	2%
\$200-\$250k	9	18		27	2%
\$250-\$300k	2	9		11	1%
>\$300k	5	17		22	2%
Not stated	47	28	2	75	7%
Total	767	376	5	1148	



Table 13: Counts of respondents by annual income category and gender (restricted to respondents working full-time – greater than 30 hours worked per week)

Income Category	Female	% of Female	Male	% of Male	Others	Full-time	% of Total
<\$20k	12	2%	1	0%		13	2%
\$20-\$40k	22	4%	3	1%		25	3%
\$40-\$60k	85	15%	14	5%	2	101	12%
\$60-\$80k	140	24%	31	11%		171	20%
\$80-\$100k	130	23%	48	17%	1	179	21%
\$100-\$120k	76	13%	57	20%		133	15%
\$120-\$140k	48	8%	34	12%		82	9%
\$140-\$160k	17	3%	21	7%		38	4%
\$160-\$180k	9	2%	10	3%		19	2%
\$180-\$200k	3	1%	17	6%		20	2%
\$200-\$250k	7	1%	18	6%		25	3%
\$250-\$300k	2	0%	9	3%		11	1%
>\$300k	5	1%	13	5%		18	2%
Not stated	18	3%	12	4%	1	31	4%
Total	574		288		4	866	

Table 14: Counts of respondents by annual income category and employment type

Income Category	Practice ^a	Govt ^b	Industry	Laboratory	University ^c	Other
<\$20k	40	4	0	0	9	12
\$20-\$40k	62	1	0	0	7	1
\$40-\$60k	139	5	3	2	2	2
\$60-\$80k	189	4	4	0	11	4
\$80-\$100k	157	14	6	0	8	7
\$100-\$120k	103	30	2	3	4	6
\$120-\$140k	53	20	3	2	10	3
\$140-\$160k	30	2	4	0	1	2
\$160-\$180k	10	1	1	0	6	1
\$180-\$200k	20	0	1	0	0	0
\$200-\$250k	26	0	1	0	0	0
\$250-\$300k	7	2	2	0	0	0
>\$300k	19	0	0	0	1	2
Not stated	44	2	3			28
Total	899	85	30	7	59	68

^a Includes veterinarians working in corporates, private, emergency, specialist practice and locums

^b Includes veterinarians employed by commonwealth, state and local governments

^c Includes veterinarians employed by universities and research veterinarians



Table 15: Counts of respondents and employment position

Income Category	Employed	Practice owner	Locum/consultant
<\$20k	20	9	11
\$20-\$40k	43	11	8
\$40-\$60k	110	17	12
\$60-\$80k	142	32	15
\$80-\$100k	101	46	10
\$100-\$120k	49	48	6
\$120-\$140k	17	31	5
\$140-\$160k	11	17	2
\$160-\$180k	3	7	1
\$180-\$200k	4	15	0
\$200-\$250k	4	22	0
\$250-\$300k	1	6	0
>\$300k	0	19	0
Not stated	21	19	5
Total	526	299	75

Table 16: Counts of respondents by annual income and practice type

Income Category	Solo practice	Private multi vet practice	Large corporate	Emergency practice	Specialist practice	Locum
<\$20k	8	23	2	1	2	4
\$20-\$40k	9	37	5	3	2	6
\$40-\$60k	15	90	14	2	9	9
\$60-\$80k	19	114	28	7	9	12
\$80-\$100k	13	103	15	5	14	7
\$100-\$120k	9	70	7	4	10	3
\$120-\$140k	8	32	4	0	6	3
\$140-\$160k	5	17	4	0	3	1
\$160-\$180k	0	8	1	0	1	0
\$180-\$200k	1	13	1	1	4	0
\$200-\$250k	2	17	0	1	6	0
\$250-\$300k	1	6	0	0	0	0
>\$300k	3	13	0	0	3	0
Not stated	9	26	2	2	5	1
Total	102	569	83	26	74	46

Table 17: Income categories and year of graduation

Income Category	2018-2013	2012-2007	2006-2001	2000-1995	1994-1989	1988-1983	1982-1977	1976-1971	1970-1965	1964-1959
<\$20k	6	7	6	8	6	9	5	9	5	4
\$20-\$40k	15	12	12	11	4	4	4	4	5	
\$40-\$60k	74	10	23	11	8	10	9	3	4	
\$60-\$80k	82	37	17	21	13	21	10	9	2	
\$80-\$100k	30	42	33	26	20	19	13	5	3	
\$100-\$120k	12	23	29	18	32	19	12	3		
\$120-\$140k	5	5	17	15	19	10	10	7	1	
\$140-\$160k	1	1	5	7	14	6	3	3	1	
\$160-\$180k		2	2	2	6	4	2	1		
\$180-\$200k		1	2	4	7	1	4	2		
\$200-\$250k		1	3	2	8	5	6	2		
\$250-\$300k			1	1	3	3	2		1	
>\$300k			2	4	5	3	6	2		

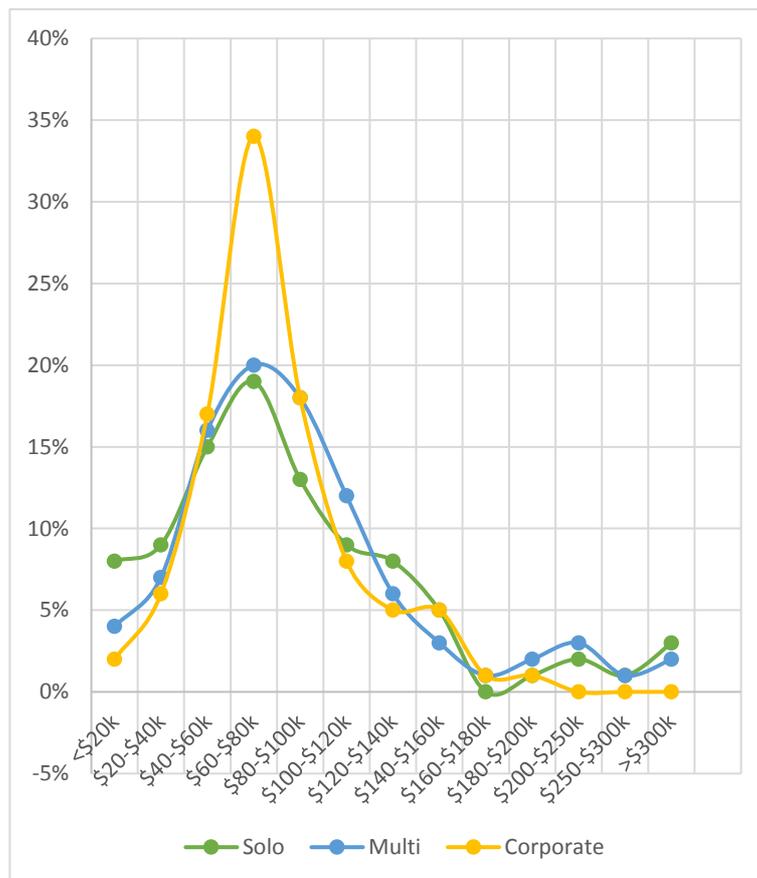


Figure 4: Graphical representation of income groups across practice types

Of the thirteen levels of income categories, the \$60,000 to \$80,000 per annum had the highest proportion of respondents. Fifty-three percent of males earned over \$100,000 per year compared with only 23% of females. The percentage of females earning over \$100,000 has increased from only 17% in the 2016 survey. These statistics are confounded by the age profile as seen in Table 2 with most of the males being older and therefore more likely to be in a higher income category, and women more likely to be working part-time.

To investigate this issue further, an estimate of hourly income rate was obtained for each respondent by taking the midpoint of their selected income category. For those in the >\$300k per year category, an annual income of \$350,000 was assigned. Annual income was converted into weekly earnings and the total number of hours worked per week was used to calculate the approximate amount earned per hour worked. Figure 5 is a box and whisker plot showing the distribution of remuneration per hour by age group and gender.

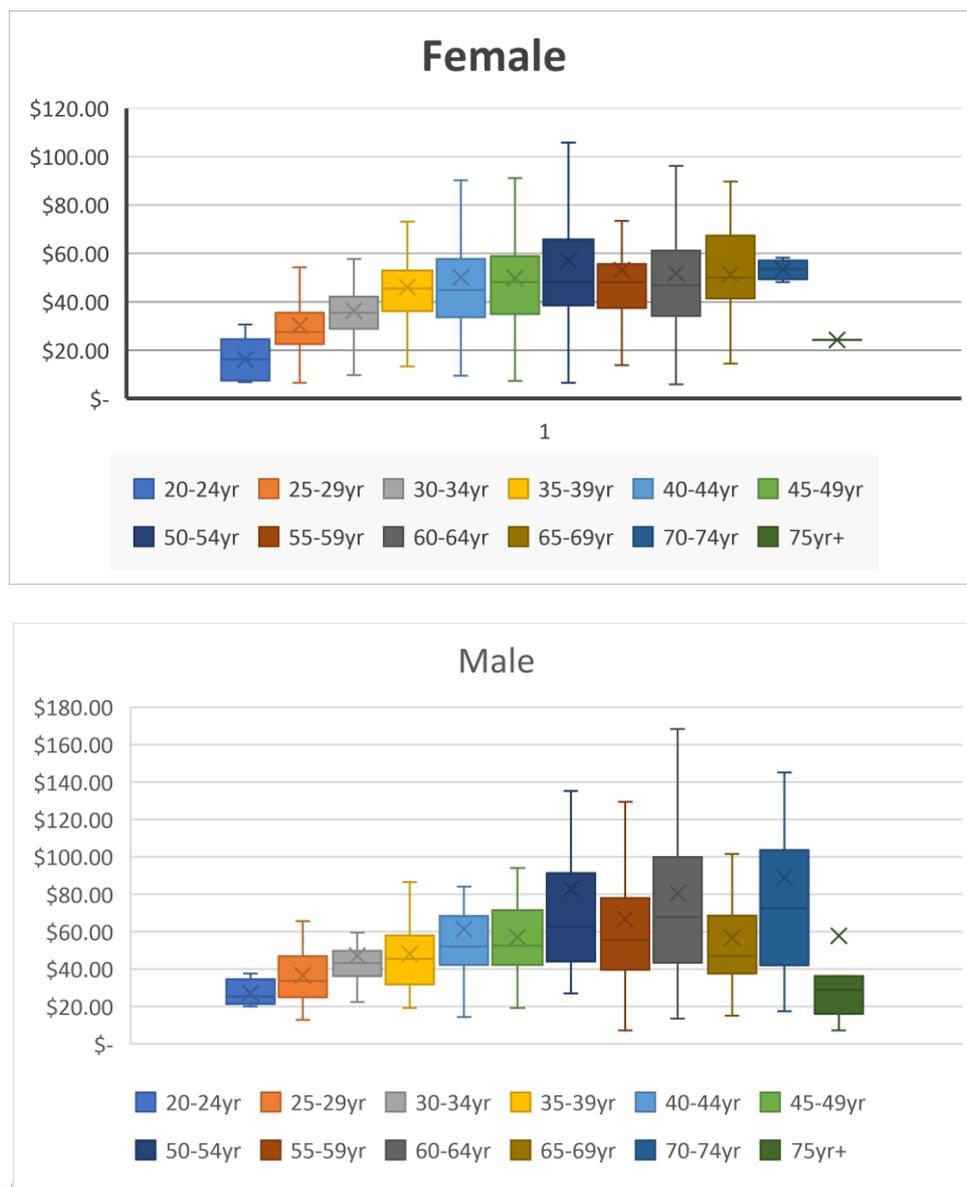


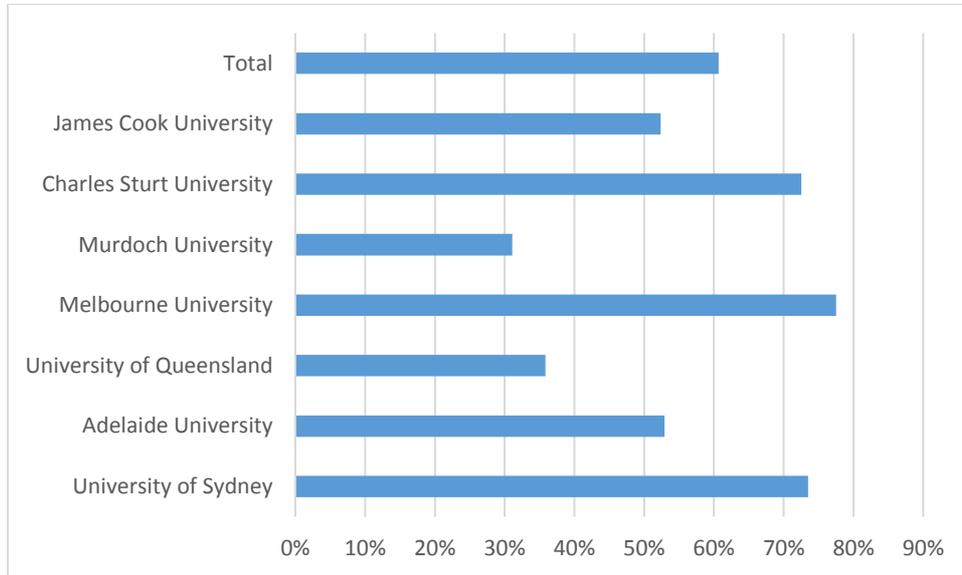
Figure 5: Box and whisker plot showing distribution of remuneration per age group and gender for the 2018 veterinary workforce survey. In the above plot the horizontal lines within the box represent the median amount earned per hour worked for each age group. The lower and upper bound of each box represents the upper and lower quartiles (25% and 75%) of the distribution of hourly remuneration.



3.6 Other demographics

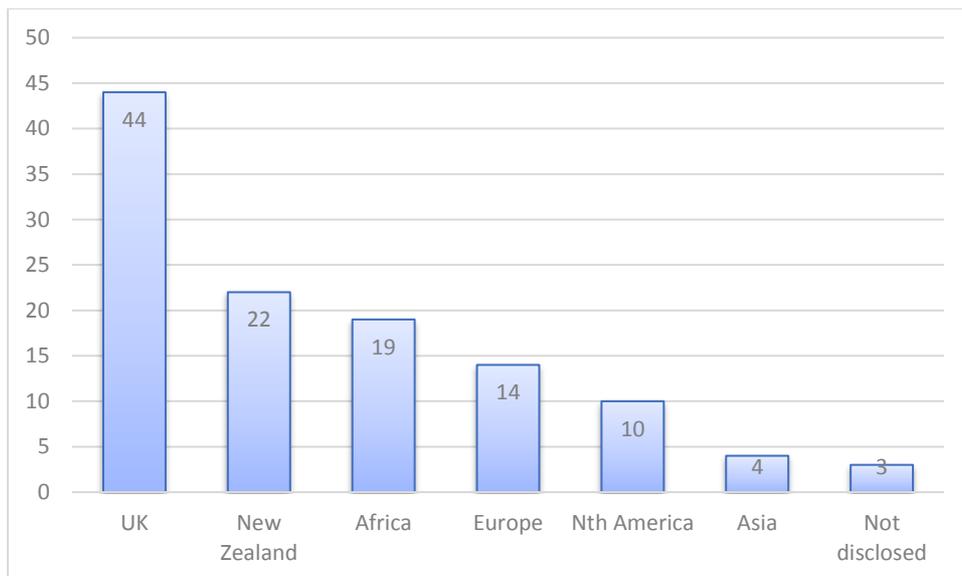
Sixty-one percent of respondents are currently practicing in the state in which they graduated from university. Figure 6 gives the percentage of each university's graduates who still work within the state of the university. For Charles Sturt University, NSW and the ACT were included as the state/territory location of the university.

Figure 6: Percent of students practicing in same state/territory where they graduated



Nine percent of graduates (n=117) obtained their primary veterinary degree overseas. Most overseas graduates are from the UK (n= 44), New Zealand (n=22), or Africa (n=18).

Figure 6: University where veterinary degree obtained if not in Australia



4. Acknowledgements

The Australian Veterinary Association thanks all veterinarians who took time to complete the 5th biennial workforce survey.

5. References

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Appendix 1: Open-ended comments

Open responses from respondents (n=42) who answered “other” as to the reason given for considering not working as veterinarian in the following year:

Financial

- Financial remuneration and health
- Poor pay, too many hours & disenchantment
- Job dissatisfaction and poor remuneration
- Poor pay
- Low income
- Poor remuneration
- Financial reasons

Stress / Mental Health

- Client bullying, sexism and preferential treatment amongst staff
- Expected period between jobs due to leaving current prior to finding new job (mental health reasons for leaving)
- Seeking change as Vet is too stressful & frustrating
- To work more hours in a less stressful occupation
- Fed up with the stress of dealing with people, difficult hours
- Burn out
- Emotional burn out drove me out of practice between 2017 to 2018
- Work stress
- Stress and mental health
- Stress and work life balance

Lack of Career Opportunities

- Leaving government and not having practical skills for veterinary practice now
- No career path for part timers in vet, and ongoing vet education is narrow, technical and not transferable outside vet: it doesn't develop me as a person but only as a vet. Can't fathom another 20 years doing the same thing as the last 20. Also traditional, narrow minded bosses and business models in my region of Australia
- Career development

Job Satisfaction

- Lost the passion
- Poor pay, too many hours & disenchantment
- Job dissatisfaction and poor remuneration
- I am only dreaming of winning lotto. If I didn't have to work, I wouldn't. I am over being a vet.
- Dislike of profession
- Getting tired of the industry
- The industry is racing itself to the bottom
- Loss of faith in the national animal health system

Travel

- Personal development and travel opportunities
- Gap year
- Moving to support spouse's career



Employment factors

- The toxic nature of the management for whom I worked
- Pressure to move into a full-time role with after-hours expected when I am a single parent.
- The deregulation of the profession to lay persons devalues the profession
- I have savage non competes from previous employer- 12 month with ok'd non practicing
- Frustrations associated with shortage of employable vets
- Poor working conditions
- I've had enough of working to cover holidays, weekends and job vacancies. Why should vets in private practice help train the next generation of vets when we can't get staff. We used to get 100+ Applicants for each position
- Long service leave
- Trouble with WA board and very unwell family so will be returning for their health

Study / Career Change

- Currently studying education and will be starting my own lab animal training business
- Seeking new life tack. Loss of interest in profession.
- I have sold my practice and want a break



Appendix 2: Discussion

Introduction

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) conducted its 5th biennial workforce survey of veterinarians in 2018. The purpose of the survey was to collect data about the current profile of the veterinary profession, and anticipate future workforce trends and challenges.

The results of the 2018 survey should be interpreted in light of the relatively low response rates achieved (about 10% of veterinarians). The survey was sent out through state and territory veterinary boards, with a request that they disseminate to all registered veterinarians. However, board responses to this request were variable. The survey was also promoted through the AVA communication channels throughout the year. Despite this, response rates were relatively low in 2018.

Comments from survey participants generally concurred with anecdotal feedback the AVA has received about workforce attrition, remuneration, and workplace stressors. It is not possible to know whether these responses are representative of the profession at large; it may be that veterinarians who are experiencing workplace or career problems are more likely to respond to this type of survey. Even so, these issues have the potential to impact the sustainability of the profession, and addressing them is a high priority for the AVA.

The AVA has been executing a multi-tiered approach that aims to help colleagues in all veterinary fields prosper and have rewarding and fulfilling careers. This discussion paper aims to provide context on: key findings from the survey, AVA activities to address related issues over the past decade, as well as current and future work.

Key survey findings: workforce attrition, financial stress, workplace stressors

Veterinary practice owners are reporting that they are struggling to fill vacancies in their hospitals despite advertising widely for veterinary practitioners. This is occurring not only in rural areas, but increasingly also in urban practice. Lack of staff and high caseloads can lead to burn-out and stress in short-staffed practices where veterinarians are required to do extra shifts and long hours to service their patients and clients, and responses to the survey reflect this.

Survey results showed that 61% of employers had advertised a position within the last 12 months, with 38% of these being new positions and 62% replacing a veterinarian leaving the practice. Results also showed that 34% of vacancies took over 6 months to fill.

Not only are employers facing difficulties attracting vets to fill clinical roles, some also have difficulties retaining them. Results from the survey show that 20% of those currently working as veterinarians were considering not working as a veterinarian in the following year. Reasons given were mainly to take up non-veterinary roles, move overseas, retire or undertake parental duties.

Feedback suggests that the problem of workforce attrition is likely multifactorial in origin, with contributors including:

- Financial stress, due to:
 - Relatively high graduate debt
 - Relatively low remuneration
- Relatively low remuneration influenced by:
 - Marginal practice profitability (high operational overheads)
 - Client inability to pay
- Mental stressors – client interactions, compassion fatigue, long hours
- Expectations of graduates inconsistent with workplace experience

Veterinary incomes are considerably lower than similar professionals such as doctors and dentists, while their university fees are the same or greater. This means vets graduate with significant debt which takes a long time to pay off on relatively low wages, and this financial stress may become a disincentive to remain in the veterinary workforce, especially when coupled with other workplace stressors.

Comments received in the survey (see Survey Report, Appendix 1) reflect that poor relative remuneration contributes to workforce attrition. Despite adequate numbers of veterinary graduates, vets are leaving the profession at a rate that has resulted in critical gaps in the veterinary workforce.

It is also clear from survey and direct feedback that veterinarians may struggle with the emotional toll of difficult client interactions and compassion fatigue, and that this is exacerbated where they perceive their superiors or employers are not providing adequate support. The responses would indicate that there is a moderate to high level of occupational stress in the veterinary profession at present that needs to be addressed.

Unmanaged occupational stress may lead to job dissatisfaction, low morale, depression and increased staff turnover. Occupational stress describes the physical, mental, and emotional reactions of workers who perceive that their work demands exceed their abilities and/or their resources (e.g. time, access to support) to do the work¹.

Graduates and early career vets report suffering disillusionment when their expectations of the role are not met, raising questions around the need for more appropriate workforce preparation as undergraduates. The VetSet2Go project² was established in 2015 to investigate and define the capabilities most important for employability and sustained success in the veterinary profession. Ongoing work of this sort is needed to help students better prepare for the challenges they may encounter in transition to practice.

AVA's veterinary workforce initiatives

Higher education fee support

Veterinary education is one of the most expensive courses to deliver, as identified in the [Deloitte's Access Economics' Cost of delivery of higher education report](#).³ As a result, student debt is high at graduation and this, coupled with relatively low wages, may become a barrier to staying in the veterinary workforce for some veterinarians.

In 2017 the AVA successfully lobbied the Government to include a veterinary student loading in their 2017-18 Higher Education Reform Package. It was designed to be equivalent to that of a medical student under the Commonwealth Grants Scheme, to give some relief to overall debt on graduation. Unfortunately the package did not pass through the Senate.

The AVA has included a call for this initiative to be re-visited in our [2019 federal election platform](#), and will continue to lobby the Minister for Education on this matter. Former submissions made by the AVA on higher education fee reform and related matters can be found [here](#).

Review of the Veterinary Award

The *Fair Work Act 2009* set in place a process of modernising Australia's awards into a more streamlined system of national awards. At the time this was implemented, the AVA was successful in convincing the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) that there should be a separate award specifically for private veterinary practices, and many of the AVA's views were reflected in the new award, which took effect on 1 January 2010.

In 2012, Fair Work Australia commenced a review of the modern award. The AVA made a submission to the review on key issues, including wages, on-call duty, professional development and public holidays. In February 2013, the AVA attended the review hearings to support its submission. The AVA



was successful negotiating in the award that public holidays for veterinarians need to be paid at double time, that 3 days off a fortnight includes not being on-call, and that part-time employees are entitled to pro-rata study leave.

In 2015 and 2016, the scheduled review of the *Animal Care and Veterinary Services Award 2010*, commenced. AVA raised a number of issues for consideration by the Fair Work Commission, including the need for an increase in minimum veterinary remuneration. This process is not yet complete and we await further opportunities to influence this process.

However, this must be balanced against what is affordable for the practice: veterinary clinical practice can be marginally profitable due to the high costs of providing services (high operational overheads). The solution is unlikely to be as simple as regulated increases in remuneration, if these are not sustainable for the practice. Initiatives to increase practice profitability need to be explored in parallel, so that wage increases do not negatively impact practice sustainability.

Former submissions made by the AVA on the award and related matters can be found [here](#).

Promoting uptake of pet insurance and other client payment plans

For the profession to be sustainable in the longer term, veterinary services need to be in demand and valued by clients, and available at an affordable price. In 2015 the AVA developed Pet Insurance Guidelines to help vets responsibly promote pet insurance and other payment and affordability options. By increasing client ability to pay and practice profitability, not only is there increased potential for wage rises, but also a reduction in stressful encounters with clients about fees, and a reduction in the compassion fatigue that comes about through avoidable euthanasias of pets with treatable conditions. These clear benefits of pet insurance can potentially reduce the financial and emotional stress that veterinarians face on a daily basis.

Rural program incentives

There are many incentive programs to attract and keep human health professionals in rural and remote areas, however there are no equivalent programs available to assist with sustaining vital veterinary services in the bush. The AVA has frequently raised this issue with the Commonwealth Government, suggesting the introduction of programs which would encourage rural veterinary placements. Examples include Commonwealth Scholarships or HECS forgiveness for veterinary students who are then bonded to work in a rural location for a period of time. Subsidised housing is offered by governments to rural doctors, and should be also considered for rural vets starting out in country-town positions.

Considering the value that veterinarians add to rural farming businesses, food security and surveillance for significant diseases, making sure we have sufficient veterinarians in our regional locations should be a high priority for the Australian Government, and the AVA will continue to lobby strongly for targeted financial incentives to ensure this occurs.

Reduced immigration barriers for international veterinarians recognised by AVBC

Reducing administrative barriers to immigration by suitably-qualified international veterinarians may help to temporarily address the short-fall in available veterinarians to fill roles, including in regional and remote locations. The AVA has sent our 2019 Federal election document to the Department of Home Affairs with a request that they address the current administrative delays in processing visa applications by internationally-trained veterinarians whose degrees are recognised by the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC); this would be mainly applicable to 482 visas.

This may provide some temporary relief for employers; however it will not address the underlying reasons for workforce attrition, i.e. financial and occupational stress. Finding solutions to these underlying problems is essential in the longer-term.



Mentoring and Mental Health Initiatives

The AVA graduate mentoring program connects experienced veterinarians with new graduates so that they can receive one-on-one advice and support as they transition into the profession. It is an important component for developing and sustaining a satisfying professional career for veterinarians. Participants in mentor programs report a number of benefits from their participation, including improved confidence and clearer career direction.

The AVA also provides a large range of [mental health resources](#), [Mental Health First Aid training](#), and free telephone counselling services for members.

The AVA has a Wellness program which includes assessments of physical and mental health parameters at the annual conference, and guidance on how to get help if needed. The AVA also has a Benevolent Fund, which aims to help veterinarians in the short term who may find themselves in difficult circumstances, due to accident or illness for example.

The AVA continues to work on development of further veterinary resources tailored to the unique stressors reported by our members.

Best Practice Employment Guidelines

The AVA has a [policy](#) and practice management induction resources which specify responsibilities for employers of new graduates, to ensure appropriate support, career development and engagement with the profession.

The AVA has also developed best practice guidelines for veterinary [internships](#) to assist employers of interns to meet their training and mentoring responsibilities. These could be expanded to form resources for employers of early/mid-career veterinarians.

Organisational research has shown that the team environment heavily influences employees' wellbeing, motivation, and job satisfaction. Ineffective team environments are linked to job dissatisfaction, stress, burnout and high staff turnover.⁴ Research should be conducted into veterinary practices which already report high level of veterinary retention and job satisfaction, to establish best practice guidelines to attract and retain veterinary employees.

Motivation, satisfaction and retention

In 2018 the British Veterinary Association, in collaboration with the University of Exeter and European Research Council, released their report on motivation, satisfaction and retention in the veterinary profession⁵. This was based on a survey of British veterinarians to better understand the veterinary workplace experience, and reasons for attrition. They also conducted an Employers' Study and released a report on gender discrimination in the veterinary profession.⁶

The AVA is now collaborating with the University of Exeter to run a similar study that examines how male and female junior veterinarians are evaluated, advised, and rewarded by managers. The experimental study attempts to replicate the original study conducted by BVA, but in the Australian context. Veterinary managers or employers of veterinarians have been widely canvassed and encouraged to provide their insights, to help AVA better understand individual perceptions of these issues within Australia.

Return to work CPD program

The AVA is soon to launch a dedicated return to work Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program, to assist veterinarians who have been out of clinical practice to refresh their skills and knowledge, and improve their confidence to re-enter the workforce. This initiative has been specifically curated with those vets who have taken a career break in mind. It will be launched in the second half of 2019.



AVA HR Advisory Service

The AVA HR Advisory Service comprises a team of experienced, degree-qualified HR, WHS and workplace relations specialists who have been providing workplace advice and support to AVA members for the past 19 years. As an employer member, the service helps to protect your veterinary practice. As an employee member, the service ensures you are receiving your workplace rights and entitlements. Members can contact the service to tap into the most comprehensive, veterinary-specific, workplace relations service in the country comprised of the following five integrated components:

1. Workplace relations
2. Accidents & Safety
3. Training & development – Essential Management TV
4. Employee wellbeing
5. Reconciliation & mediation

To help members address many of the workforce issues identified in this Workforce Survey Report, the following resources have been developed by the AVA HR Advisory Service and made available to members:

HR Health Check-ups: AVA members can ensure their practice is compliant with the myriad of workplace relations laws by completing these straight-forward self-assessments: Fair Work Health Check-up (Checking for compliance with the Fair Work Act, Awards and related legislative obligations); WHS Health Check-up (Checking for compliance with safety legislation around the country)

Gold Star Employer of Choice Certification: This is a new member initiative for AVA Members who wish to implement best-practice workplace initiatives that will help to attract the best veterinary talent in the market and, importantly, ensure that they retain these employees for the long-term. It is a means to publicly demonstrate your commitment as an employer to creating a compliant, productive and inclusive workplace.

For more information on these resources, or if you have any workplace issues, you can contact the team at the AVA HR Advisory Service on 1300 788 977 or email: hrhotline@ava.com.au. A new Online chat service is also available. Tap into the 700+ online HR resources at www.ava.com.au.

AVA Veterinary Workforce Task Group

In May 2019, the AVA held a Group Summit workforce session in Perth before the annual conference, to hear from experts and brainstorm the issue. A working group of members with a range of expertise has been formed to actively seek solutions to workforce attrition.

The AVA is committed to supporting veterinarians throughout their careers - addressing employment and workplace challenges to ensure success of the veterinary profession remains a key priority for the AVA.

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