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REGULATORY STRATEGY 2022-2025

VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS REGISTRATION BOARD OF
VICTORIA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land, and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.



STRATEGY ON A PAGE

Mission: To protect the public and the health and welfare of animals			
Vision: The sustainable regulation of reliably high-quality veterinary care across Victoria.			
Regulatory priorities	Proactive and preventative regulation	Responsive and outcomes-driven regulation	Intelligence-led and accountable regulation
Strategic risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Standards Practitioner Health Ethical Practice Management Legislative and Regulatory Overlapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Standards Practitioner Health Ethical Practice Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Standards Practitioner Health Ethical Practice Management Legislative and Regulatory Overlapping
Strategic Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop targeted education and guidance materials to better enable practitioners and the public to positively contribute to the sector Drive appropriate standards of training, qualification and continuing education of veterinary practitioners Strengthen stakeholder engagement to promote knowledge and understanding of regulatory requirements, professional standards, and the processes and implications associated with non-compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen our capacity to take firm action when needed to keep the public and animals safe and hold veterinary practitioners to account Embed a consistent, efficient, proportionate and effective risk-based approach to professional conduct and fitness to practice complaints about veterinary practitioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop data collection and insights capabilities to drive proactive investigations and create awareness of trends, risks and opportunities in the sector Transform how we measure and report on efficiency and efficacy of regulation effort
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAQs to accompany Guidelines Quarterly stakeholder roundtables for discussion of trends, issues and opportunities Annual awareness and support campaign Collaborate with universities and CPD service providers on course content Continue AVBC involvement to build awareness of effective practices in other jurisdictions Stakeholder Plan Communication Strategy Create regulatory news and case studies periodical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and revise our investigation and compliance policy suite Trial delegating investigations based on risk assessment Reduce backlog of matters for investigation Enhance our prioritisation and risk assessment tool Implement the Regulatory Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design data collection plans for key areas of regulatory interest Implement Information Sharing Agreements with key stakeholders Share data insights in communications, education and awareness materials Design framework to monitor, measure and evaluate key priorities, strategic initiatives and outcomes Implement performance and development plans that align with the new Strategic and Regulatory Plans
Values: Responsiveness, Integrity, Impartiality, Accountability, Respect, Leadership, Human rights.			

OUR PURPOSE

The Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria ("Vet Board") is established under the *Veterinary Practice Act 1997* ("VPA"). The VPA's purpose is to protect the public by providing for the registration of veterinary practitioners and investigations into practitioners' professional conduct and fitness to practise.

This Regulatory Strategy has been developed to provide the public, veterinary practitioners and other stakeholders in the veterinary sector with a clear picture of the Vet Board's approach to ensuring a safe, successful and sustainable sector.

The Vet Board has the following regulatory functions under the VPA:

- to register people as veterinary practitioners and veterinary specialists if they have complied with the VPA's requirements for registration
- to recognise qualifications and accredit training courses for registration as veterinary practitioners and specialists
- to establish competency in veterinary practice, by conducting or arranging examinations or by other means
- to investigate the professional conduct or fitness to practise of registered practitioners and impose sanctions where necessary
- to issue guidelines about appropriate standards of veterinary practice and veterinary facilities
- to advise the Minister on matters relating to its functions and provide information reasonably required by the Minister.

Under the VPA, the Vet Board is empowered to issue guidelines about appropriate standards of veterinary practice and veterinary facilities. The Vet Board's Guidelines establish principles or practice of general applicability that seek to assist and support veterinary practitioners to deliver appropriate, effective services Within an ethical framework. Veterinary practitioners have a professional responsibility to be familiar with the Guidelines and to apply the guidance they contain.

OUR COMMITMENT

The Vet Board is committed to becoming a leading regulator through:

- being outcomes-driven – this means we focus on the impact of what we, veterinary practitioners and the community do, rather than on rules for rules sake. Focusing on impact is essential to making sure we are delivering public value by improving the health and welfare of animals and protecting the public
- a focus on service – communicating clearly, promptly and respectfully, improving systems and processes for the advancement of the sector, and partnering with practitioners and stakeholders to solve problems
- a commitment to learning – continuously developing and building capability to improve how we regulate and tackle challenges within the sector
- being responsive and adaptive – listening, identifying and responding to risks and opportunities to reduce or prevent harm using contemporary tools, technology and data
- being values-driven – our values underpin everything we do
- influencing systemic improvements - we will work with our regulatory partners to address complex problems through the improvement of policy, legislation and practice.

We are committed to continual improvement of our regulatory approach.



SCOPE OF THIS REGULATORY STRATEGY

This Regulatory Strategy sets out:

- our purpose and commitment
- our regulatory approach
- key risks of harm
- our regulatory priorities
- strategic initiatives
- evaluating our performance
- who we work with.

Informed and directed by the Vet Board’s Strategic Plan 2022-2025, this strategy sets out the Vet Board’s vision for the delivery of our regulatory functions and activities.

This regulatory policy, the Vet Board’s manuals and protocols, and the Vet Board’s Guidelines sit under this strategy and explain how we identify appropriate regulatory actions and apply outcomes-focused and proportionate regulatory responses to non-compliance and risks within the sector.



OUR REGULATORY APPROACH

The VPA, VPA regulations and the Vet Board's Guidelines provide a framework for protecting the public and the health and welfare of animals.

The Vet Board uses a range of activities to promote, ensure and enforce veterinary practitioners' compliance with their responsibilities and obligations under the VPA and the Vet Board's Guidelines.

Through this strategy, the Vet Board commits to strengthening and improving our regulatory approach in the 2022-2025 period, so that when we use our regulatory tools we ensure that they are focused on risk and desired outcomes.

Risk-based

The VPA is prescriptive when it comes to the delegation of complaints: the Vet Board must investigate a complaint about a veterinary practitioner's professional conduct unless the complaint is "lacking in substance or vexatious"¹.

However, the Vet Board does have discretion as to how it exercises its regulatory functions. We must prioritise our efforts and resources towards preventing and responding to the greatest risks, as well as to areas where we can have the biggest impact on the protection of the public and the health and welfare of animals.

Through this strategy, the Vet Board seeks to enhance its risk-based approach. In the 2022-2025 period, we will increase our use of data and intelligence to assess risks in terms of the likelihood of the risk occurring and its impact. In assessing risk, we will also consider the practices and behaviours of veterinary practitioners that:

- represent non-compliance with the VPA and the Vet Board's Guidelines
- present real or potential harm to the public and the health and welfare of animals
- impact our ability to be an effective regulator
- require a regulatory response due to public concern.

We will strive over the next period to enhance our monitoring of the sector and use evidence to shape a targeted regulatory program, focusing on those issues that pose the highest risk to the public and the health and welfare of animals.

Outcomes-focused

The Vet Board's use of a range of compliance tools is underpinned by a regulatory policy that ultimately seeks to effect outcomes. We make decisions on compliance and enforcement actions to achieve outcomes that deter unprofessional conduct and promote voluntary compliance.

We take enforcement action to protect the public and animals. We exercise discretion to focus on those actions that can bring beneficial outcomes to the public, the sector and, of course, animals. We do not take action on behalf of individuals to obtain redress.

In the 2022-2025 period, we will work to enhance our outcomes focus so that the nature of the risk or issue and the desired outcome drive decisions about which of our broad range of compliance and enforcement tools is appropriate to use. We recognise that the vast majority of veterinary practitioners do the right thing and work hard to protect and promote the health and welfare of animals; therefore, our primary objective is to help practitioners comply with obligations and expectations of the veterinary profession. It follows that the vast majority of engagements with veterinary practitioners and the sector will be for the purposes of compliance assistance and education.

However, where the issue is of high risk, has the potential to create or creates great harm, or requires urgent action to stop the conduct, we may move straight to immediate action.

¹ Section 21(1), VPA.

KEY RISKS OF HARM

As Victoria's regulator of veterinary practitioners, tasked with protecting the public and the State's animals, the Vet Board is faced with complex risks and challenges spanning scientific, technological, health and geographical boundaries. We will continually adapt our approach to these challenges to achieve the best possible outcomes for the public and animals.

Over the next three years we will enhance our use of insights from veterinary practitioners, sector stakeholders and the community, and intelligence from partner agencies and our operational activities.

Levels of risk are determined according to evidence or likelihood of public and animal harm. In the 2022-2025 period, we will focus on the following key risks within the veterinary sector:

- professional standards risk - the risk to the health and safety of the public and to animal welfare that results from a breach of veterinary professional standards of care
- practitioner health risk - challenges of practice result in high rates of stress, mental health problems and suicide and suboptimal standards of professional practice
- ethical risk – risk that arises from conflict-of-interest situations
- practice management risk - the risk of unprofessional conduct occurring as a result of poor veterinary practice management
- inadequate and outdated legislation, regulations and guidelines impacting standards of professional competence
- where responsibility for a regulatory issue overlaps with another agency's responsibilities, resulting in the risk of double-handling, contradictory actions, misunderstandings, and unintended gaps in regulatory activity.

OUR REGULATORY PRIORITIES

The Vet Board's focus over the next three years is on establishing this enhanced Regulatory Strategy and supporting veterinary practitioners to understand and comply with the VPA and Guidelines, while also maintaining our work on existing priorities and improving our ability to address key risks and emerging threats.

Specifically, the Vet Board will direct its efforts to:

- creating a prevention and protection culture – the Vet Board will equip veterinary practitioners and the public to understand what good veterinary practice looks like and how to comply with the VPA and the Vet Board's Guidelines
- proactive regulation - the Vet Board will build its regulatory capabilities to more effectively prevent harm based on risks and trends
- focusing on deliberate non-compliance – the Vet Board will use its powers against those who deliberately or recklessly expose the community and animals to harm
- enhancing our regulatory capabilities – the Vet Board will build its data and intelligence capabilities to focus our regulatory efforts and share insights across the sector
- equipping and working with our partners – the Vet Board will partner with other regulators and government agencies to increase our reach and presence.

Our priorities are adaptive, and we will review the veterinary environment, trends and risks to ensure they continue to be relevant and the most appropriate focus of our regulatory resources.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Proactive and preventative regulation

The Vet Board is a risk-based, proactive regulator of veterinary practitioners in Victoria. We know that the vast majority of veterinary practitioners are conscientious and strive to uphold the values, standards and professionalism of veterinary practice across the State. As a regulator, we share the responsibility to ensure that practitioners know what to do to be compliant, are aware of risks and developments within their environment and understand what to do to meet those challenges, and are supported in playing their role to make the sector safe, successful and sustainable.

Strategic Initiative	Outcome Year 1	Outcome Year 2
Develop targeted education and guidance materials to better enable practitioners and the public to positively contribute to the sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. FAQs to accompany the Vet Board's Guidelines 2. Quarterly stakeholder roundtables for discussion of trends, issues and opportunities 3. Further develop content specifically directed towards pet owners 	Annual awareness and compliance support campaign
Drive appropriate standards of training, qualification and continuing education of veterinary practitioners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proactive membership of AVBC enables the Vet Board to contribute to the training of veterinarians, recognition of foreign trained veterinarians and accreditation of Australian and international university qualification standards. 2. Maintaining requirements of continuing professional development and education for registered veterinarians 	Create digital content
Strengthen stakeholder engagement to promote knowledge and understanding of regulatory requirements, professional standards, and the processes and implications associated with non-compliance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement a Stakeholder Plan 2. Develop and implement a Communication Strategy 3. Create regulatory news and case studies periodical 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Website/stakeholder portal update 2. Collaborate with State and Territory and national co-regulators to build national knowledge base 3. Advocate legislative reform to modernise rules in line with modern veterinary practice



Responsive and outcomes-driven regulation

The Vet Board is transparent, fair, proportionate and outcome-focused in response to concerns about compliance. Considerable resources are invested in providing diligent responses to complaints, which can provide significant value to practitioners through the peer and public review process. The Vet Board recognises that such processes provide multiple opportunities to reinforce good practice and guide continued improvement.

Rather than perceiving investigation processes as judgemental, shameful and ultimately punitive, the Vet Board strives to ensure practitioners view these processes as a valuable opportunity for reflection, feedback and, where beneficial, professional growth.

Strategic Initiative	Outcome Year 1	Outcome Year 2
Strengthen our capacity to take firm action when needed to keep the public and animals safe and hold veterinary practitioners to account	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and revise our investigation and compliance policy suite 2. Trial delegating investigations based on risk assessment 3. Reduce backlog of matters for investigation 	Collaborate with co-regulators to conduct multiagency reviews, investigations and audits
Embed a consistent, efficient, proportionate and effective risk-based approach to professional conduct and fitness to practise complaints about veterinary practitioners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance our prioritisation and risk assessment tool 2. Implement the Regulatory Strategy 	Publish compliance data and insights

Intelligence-driven and accountable regulation

The Vet Board will invest in our capabilities to better use intelligence-led regulation, where data and insights inform our Regulatory Strategy, policies and initiatives. This helps us focus our efforts on current and emerging risks and opportunities to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Vet Board is committed to transforming the way we measure and report on regulation within the sector to increase transparency, enable greater collaboration and partnership, and foster continuous improvement.

Strategic Initiative	Outcome Year 1	Outcome Year 2
Develop data collection and insight capabilities to drive proactive investigations and create awareness of trends, risks and opportunities in the sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design data collection plans for key areas of regulatory interest 2. Implement Information Sharing Agreements with key stakeholders 3. Share data insights in communications, education and awareness materials 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop business case for the development of data management and analysis tools and capabilities in the VetBoard 2. Proactive investigations based on intelligence



Strategic Initiative	Outcome Year 1	Outcome Year 2
Transform how we measure and report on the efficiency and efficacy of regulation effort	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Design framework to monitor, measure and evaluate key priorities, strategic initiatives and outcomes2. Implement performance and development plans that align with the new Strategic and Regulatory Plans	

EVALUATING OUR PERFORMANCE

The Vet Board is accountable to Victorians for protecting the public and the health and welfare of animals. We recognise the importance of the views of the community, veterinary practitioners, key industry bodies and government. In measuring the success of our regulatory outcomes and understanding our impact, we will seek out their views.

We will monitor our actions under this Regulatory Strategy and evaluate our performance to:

- understand the relationship between our activities and the outcomes we seek to achieve
- communicate with stakeholders about our effectiveness
- continuously improve the effectiveness of our approach over time and adjust our regulatory focus as needed.

We will set performance targets and report our progress against these and Ministerial Statements of Expectations in our Annual Reports.

WHO WE WORK WITH

1. Industry and practitioners

We work with industry and peak bodies to develop practical solutions to veterinary sector issues. We work with regulated practitioners to help deliver better outcomes.

2. Other regulators

We partner with other regulators to identify and solve problems, improve regulatory practice and reduce red tape.

3. The public

We work with and empower the public to understand their rights and obligations.

4. Education providers

We work with universities to ensure qualifications satisfy the requirements under the Act and students understand their rights and obligations. We monitor continuing education options as they relate to regulatory insights.

5. Government and research organisations

We partner with government, research organisations and universities to identify current and future problems and develop solutions.



PUBLICATION DETAILS

Document	Author	Revision number	Date
VPRBV Regulatory Strategy 2022-2025	Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria	1.0	March 2022