



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to this edition of your newsletter.

As we approach the end of 2025, I've been reflecting on what has been a year of genuine progress for our profession and for the Board.

We've worked hard to restore the organisation's financial health and improve the way we manage and resolve complaints, while improving quality and supporting a steady increase in the number of veterinarians registered in Victoria. These achievements are the result of the collective effort and commitment of so many in our community – thank you.

The pace of change in veterinary practice continues to accelerate. Shifting client expectations, advances in veterinary science and emerging technologies – especially artificial intelligence (AI) – are all reshaping the way we work. At our October meeting, the new Board agreed to develop a guideline on the use of AI, and while that's underway, we've included some practical advice on AI risks on page 4. It's also clear that our legislation needs modernising, and we'll continue to advocate strongly for reform of the Veterinary Practice Act so that it better supports contemporary veterinary practice.

The Board has resolved to publish the outcomes of formal hearings held from 14 October 2025. Other regulators do this, and it reflects our commitment to transparency and public confidence in the regulation of our profession.

You'll find complaints data on page 2, and we remind vets of the importance of clearly communicating fees as cost-of-living pressures affect many clients. We have also included information on prescribing and supplying medicines (page 9), and details of new health and safety regulations on psychological health which take effect on 1 December 2025 (page 4).

Updates from Agriculture Victoria cover the Domestic Animal Regulations 2025, upcoming poultry welfare standards,



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President's message continued

microchipping authorisation processes, and the EAD Preparedness Program.

Finally, I invite you to join a webinar at 7pm on Monday, 17 November, where Board members will discuss key issues raised by the profession this year. We will be joined by the Conservation Regulator, who will give a short presentation and remain to answer questions. Please register via the details on page 3 and send through any questions in advance.

Thank you once again for your continued professionalism and care for the animals and communities you serve.

Warm regards

Dr John Harte

President

COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2025

In the first quarter of 2025-26, in relation to the conduct of veterinary practitioners, the Board:

- received 58 preliminary enquiries
- received 50 written complaints
- considered 51 complaints (including some complaints from the previous quarter).

Noting that a single complaint may involve multiple issues, the main issues raised in complaints received during the period were clinical management and treatment of animals (80%), communication with clients (80%), veterinary medical records (10%) and informed consent (4%). Other issues included animal welfare concerns, unprofessional behaviour, conflict of interest and integrity, and the thoroughness of a pre-purchase examination (2% each).

Of the 51 complaints considered, the Board determined that:

- 33 were lacking in substance and should not proceed further
- 18 were to be investigated (and an additional 2 vets involved in a complaint were to be investigated).

In this quarter, 4 matters were referred to informal hearing and 13 investigations were finalised.

Of the matters that were finalised:

- 2 were finalised with no further action (NFA)
- 1 was finalised NFA with the requirement that the clinic director implement changes to the clinic's records management system
- 6 were finalised with an educative letter
- 1 was finalised with an educative letter requiring the vet to submit a reflective piece
- 1 was finalised with an educative letter and a requirement to complete education
- 1 was finalised with a warning letter
- 1 was finalised with an undertaking

During the quarter, 3 veterinarians whose compliance with Board requirements following an investigation was being monitored completed their obligations, and their matters were closed.

PUBLICATION OF FORMAL HEARING OUTCOMES

The Board has resolved to publish the outcomes of formal hearings into professional conduct.

Formal hearings are held in public. Under section 52(1) of the *Veterinary Practice Act 1997* (Vic), the Board has always been required to publish formal hearing determinations in the Victorian Government Gazette if the decision included imposing conditions on a practitioner's registration or suspending, cancelling or revoking their registration.

Effective 14 October 2025, in addition to publishing gazette notices, we will also publish summaries of professional conduct formal hearings on our website. This reflects the Board's ongoing commitment to transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the regulation of veterinary practice in Victoria. Board President Dr John Harte says, 'This change will ensure the public and the veterinary profession have access to accurate and balanced information about disciplinary outcomes, while balancing transparency and fairness to individual practitioners'.

A publication policy will be available on our website soon. Key features of the new approach are:

1. Outcomes of formal hearings held from 14 October 2025 will be published on the website. [For the historical record, gazette items published before that date will also be referenced on the website.]
2. Only professional conduct matters will be published; not health-related hearings.
3. Each published outcome will include the date of the decision, the practitioner's name, and a short summary of the allegations, findings, determinations and reasons for the decision.
4. In exceptional circumstances, a practitioner may apply to have their name withheld. Such applications will be considered by the Board on a case-by-case basis with reference to its policy on such requests.
5. If a practitioner has fulfilled all obligations arising from a matter, this will also be noted against the website entry on completion.

SUPPORT FOR VETS

- [Links to support for veterinary practitioners](#)
- **Australian Veterinary Association:** [telephone counselling service](#) 1300 687 327 **both** for AVA members **and** the vet professionals who work for them.

VETBOARD VICTORIA WEBINAR

Join Board members and staff and Wayne Robins from the Conservation Regulator at a webinar update:

Date: Monday, 17 November 2025

Time: 7-8pm

Zoom registration: [Vetboard Victoria Update](#)

NOTE if you do not receive a confirmation email, please check your email Spam or Deleted items.

If you have any questions before the webinar, please email us at communications@vetboard.vic.gov.au

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

On 30 October 2025, Minister for Agriculture the Hon. Ros Spence MP reported receipt of the Board's 2024-25 annual report to the Victorian Parliament.

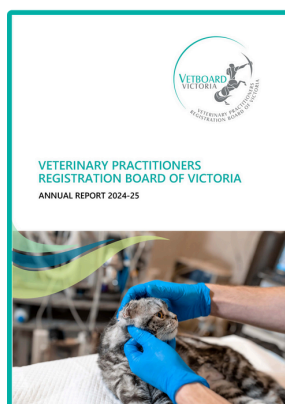
The report provides an overview of the Board's operations and finances for the 2024-25 financial year.

At 30 June 2025, there were 4,223 veterinary practitioners on the Register of Veterinary Practitioners, a 3.2% increase from last year. During the year, the Board granted general, specific or specialist registration to 306 veterinary practitioners.

The 9-member Board managed 53 investigation matters and held 9 disciplinary hearings.

Initiatives during the reporting year included:

- continued digitisation of investigation and registration processes
- adoption of a policy to provide registration options to persons with specialist-equivalent qualifications whose primary veterinary qualification would not otherwise be recognised in Victoria
- participation in a Veterinary Workforce Data Taskforce whose goal is to use and collate data to provide a clear view of the veterinary workforce across Australia.



We also rebuilt our reserves through delivery of a surplus.

 [DOWNLOAD VRPBV 2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT](#)

RENEWAL OVERVIEW & SURVEY

The registration renewal period for veterinary practitioners holding general and non-practising registration began in late May and ended on 31 July 2025. At 30 June 2025, 4,246 veterinary practitioners were eligible to renew their registration. Of those vets, 96% (4,094) renewed their registration in Victoria for the 2025-26 registration year.

Responses to optional survey questions

Emergency participation

Of the 4,094 vets who renewed their registration, 52% consented to participating in veterinary emergencies, the same percentage as last year.

Hours worked in a clinical capacity

3,048 of the 4,054 veterinary practitioners who renewed their general registration responded to a question about hours worked in a clinical capacity. 40% of that group said they were practising 31-40 hours per week, the same percentage as last year. 16% said they were practising either between 40 and 50 hours a week or more than 50 hours a week. This was a slight drop from last year (17%).

Satisfaction with the Board's activities

There was a 2% increase in satisfaction with the Board's activities, with 40% of respondents to the Board's satisfaction survey being either very satisfied or satisfied compared with 38% last year. The percentage of respondents who were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied dropped by 1% to 6% from 7% last year.

The Board thanks those who answered our optional survey questions and provided written feedback. The Board values this feedback and refers to it to help review and drive our functions and activities.

WHEN TO REGISTER IN VICTORIA

Vets cannot renew their registration in another State or Territory if they have moved here and their permanent place of residence is now Victoria (section 4(1A) *Veterinary Practice Act 1997* (VPA)).

Vets from:

- SA and the ACT must apply immediately after moving to Victoria.
- NT and Queensland must apply in early December.
- NSW, Tasmania and WA must apply in early June.

Employers: please verify staff registration status.

Apply: [General registration](#) | [Re-registration](#)

MINIMISING RISKS IN VETERINARY PRACTICE

NEW HEALTH AND SAFETY RULES RE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

The Board acknowledges that veterinary practitioners face both physical and psychological challenges every day, and a safe workplace is an essential foundation for the effective delivery of veterinary services and sustainability of the veterinary profession.

We welcome new psychosocial hazard rules for Victorian workplaces under the Victorian *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the OHS Act) which take effect on 1 December 2025.

The OHS Act requires employers to provide and maintain a working environment for their employees, including contractors, that is safe and without risks to health, so far as reasonably practicable.

The new rules put mental health on an equal footing with physical safety in the workplace – requiring employers to proactively identify, assess and control psychosocial hazards. WorkSafe Victoria has developed a compliance code which provides practical guidance in relation to managing psychological health and psychosocial hazards.

The new rules and resources:

- [Psychological health](#) (WorkSafe Victoria) includes links to the OHS Act and the Regulations plus compliance resources for employers and general information for employees.

CYBERSECURITY ACTION

This year's Government Cyber Threat report says Australian residents and businesses continued to experience high levels of data breaches, ransomware attacks and identity theft in 2024-25:

- ReportCyber received 84,700 cybercrime reports - one every 6 minutes, 26% from Victoria.
- The average cost to business of cybercrime was up 50% overall - small business up 14% (\$56,600 average loss) and medium business up 55% (\$97,200 average loss).

What we can all do

The report says the following basic actions we can all take have never been more important:

- use strong Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) wherever possible
- use strong and unique passwords or passphrases
- keep software on devices updated
- regularly back up important data
- be alert for phishing messages and scams.

CYBERSECURITY ACTION CONTINUED...

The Board also reminds vets to reduce the impact of any cyber breach by only collecting and storing necessary information from clients, e.g. do not store credit card details.

More information:

- [Annual Cyber Threat Report for 2024-25](#) - Australian Defence Signals Directorate
- [cyber.gov.au resources library for individuals, families and small businesses](#)
- [cyber.gov.au resources for business and government](#)
- [Tips for good privacy practice](#) - Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

USING AI TOOLS

The Board has been asked for guidance about using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and we will be developing a guideline on use of AI for veterinary practitioners.

Pending publication of the guideline, the Board acknowledges that generative AI is being used by veterinary practitioners and businesses to reduce the time required to undertake tasks. An example is AI voice-to-text tools which transcribe and summarise conversations with animal owners and incorporate information into a patient's medical record.

In all cases, veterinary practitioners are responsible for any medical record or diagnosis or other procedure made with the assistance of AI. Vets should review all medical records, diagnoses or other outputs. Errors, omissions or additions cannot be blamed on AI. Vets also need to be transparent with clients and staff about using AI.

Vets should also consider the following before adopting AI tools (or to review tools already being used):

- the limitations, reliability and accuracy of AI tools
- cybersecurity, data privacy (e.g. personal information of clients and staff) and legal requirements, including client consent to recordings being made, etc.
- staff training and knowledge about using AI tools.

Resources:

- [Navigating responsible AI in small and medium businesses](#) - National AI Centre (NAIC)
- [Voluntary AI Safety Standard](#) - (NAIC)
- [Guidance on privacy and the use of commercially available AI products](#) - Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

MEET THE CONSERVATION REGULATOR

The Conservation Regulator is responsible for the regulation of fire prevention, use of public land, wildlife and biodiversity.



The Conservation Regulator is committed to the protection of wildlife and improving wildlife welfare, and works under legislation such as the *Wildlife Act 1975* and the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.

The conservation and management of wildlife is a shared responsibility of all members of the Victorian community, including government, co-regulators, businesses, Traditional Owners, stakeholder organisations and of course, vets. For more information about the Conservation Regulator and about veterinary care for wildlife, visit: <https://www.vic.gov.au/veterinary-care-wildlife>.

Wildlife require specialised care, treatment and rehabilitation, and the laws are quite specific about who can do what:

- Any person can transport sick, injured, orphaned or abandoned wildlife to a registered veterinarian or authorised wildlife rehabilitator.
- Wildlife rehabilitators can care for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife for release back into the wild. A wildlife rehabilitator is a wildlife foster carer (person) or wildlife shelter authorised under the *Wildlife Act 1975* to rehabilitate sick, injured or orphaned wildlife. They are sometimes referred to as wildlife carers and foster carers. The authorisations are issued by the Conservation Regulator to ensure sick, injured or orphaned wildlife receive appropriate care before being released back to their home range in the wild.
- Vets can lawfully treat sick, injured or abandoned wildlife. The *Wildlife Regulations 2024* and *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* provide exemptions that allow a registered veterinarian to

lawfully treat sick, injured or abandoned wildlife without any further permissions. The relevant exemptions also apply to vet nurses and other clinic staff, provided they are operating in accordance with the instructions of a registered veterinarian.

The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* is the primary legislation for the welfare of all animals, including wildlife. Under section 9(1)(c), any person must not do or omit to do anything that results in unreasonable pain or suffering to animals. In the context of a veterinary practitioner being presented with wildlife, this may mean providing pain relief and first aid. Note that humane destruction is an option where pain and distress are significant and the veterinarian is unwilling or unable to provide care beyond pain relief/first aid.

For more information on the Conservation Regulator generally visit: [Conservation Regulator publications](#).

Wayne Robins from the Conservation Regulator will be presenting at our webinar on 17 November 2025 and will be available to take questions as part of the event.

If you have any questions or would like to report any concerns, please email conservationregulator@deeca.vic.gov.au.

ANIMAL WELFARE GRANTS

The Victorian Minister for Agriculture and Victorian Government are offering grant funding to not-for-profit and community organisations who provide for the welfare of companion animals or provide low-cost veterinary services.

Under Animal Welfare Victoria's *Animal Welfare Fund Grants Program*, low-cost vet clinic grants of up to \$50,000 are available to put towards equipment, upgrades and expansions for not-for-profit and community vet clinics and up to \$200,000 to establish new low-cost vet clinics.

Round 13 Grants are open until 27 November 2025. Interested vets and clinics are encouraged to read the program guidelines before applying. Guidelines and application information are available at: [Animal Welfare Fund Grants Program](#)

NEW DOMESTIC ANIMAL REGULATIONS 2025

New Domestic Animal Regulations 2025 will come into effect on 23 November 2025, replacing the previous Domestic Animal Regulations 2015.

Microchipping requirements for dogs and cats will broadly remain the same for authorised implanters. However, authorised implanters will now be required to capture an animal owner's email address (where available) and ensure that all required data is provided by the owner prior to any declaration being signed. This change will ensure that required microchip details are completed in full before the animal is implanted, reducing the risk of incomplete records.

The Regulations will also incorporate the updated microchipping Australian Standards [5018:2025](#) and [5019:2025](#) to replace the previous microchipping Australian Standards 5018:2001 and 5019:2001. Copies of the new standards may be purchased from the Standards Australia store.

NEW PROCESS FOR MICROCHIP IMPLANTER APPLICATIONS

Starting in late December 2025, veterinary practitioners who implant microchips in Victoria will need to be registered on the Agriculture Victoria Connect (AVC) portal.

If you already have an Authorised Implanter Number (AIN), your details will be migrated to the AVC portal - you won't need to re-apply for an AIN or create a profile on the portal. However, to ensure you receive communications about the new process from Agriculture Victoria, please make sure your email address is correct in the current authorised implanter database. If not, please advise any change as soon as possible to pet.welfare@agriculture.vic.gov.au. After the new process is activated, you will be able to sign into your AVC profile to manage and update your personal and professional information and ensure records remain accurate.

Vets who do not yet have an AIN will need to create a profile in the AVC portal (from late December). Please share this with any colleagues practising under interstate registration, e.g. locums who wish to implant microchips.

NEW POULTRY WELFARE REGULATIONS IN 2026

In early 2026, Victoria will introduce new poultry welfare regulations. They will align with the nationally agreed [Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry](#) to improve poultry welfare. The changes will apply to all poultry species and to anyone who manages or cares for poultry. The new regulations will also have measures to improve biosecurity.

Producers will still have the flexibility to choose from systems such as furnished cages, barn, or free range.

Key changes

- **Furnishings:** most poultry will need access to perches, nest areas, and scratch areas or claw-shortening devices.
- **Substrate:** most poultry will need substrate, like litter.
- **Space and lighting:** new space allowances and lighting requirements, including a minimum of 6 hours of darkness daily in most cases.
- **Air quality:** ammonia levels in sheds must be recorded and managed.
- **Husbandry practices:** restrictions on certain practices like induced moulting and hot blade beak trimming.
- **Duck welfare:** ducks will need access to water facilities.
- **Biosecurity:** producers must minimise wild bird access to poultry feed and drinking water. Reasonable actions must also be taken to protect poultry from threats, including diseases. This could include developing biosecurity programs and plans.
- **Conventional cage phase out:** new cage infrastructure for layer hens must include furnishings and meet new space requirements. By 2036, all cages must comply (as proposed in the national standards). Conventional cages will no longer be permitted.

More information

- Visit [New requirements for poultry producers and owners](#)
- If you have a specific query, please email poultry_standards@agriculture.vic.gov.au

EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE (EAD) PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM UPDATE

Agriculture Victoria is continuing to progress Whole-of-Government EAD preparedness activities with an augmented focus on high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 preparedness, given the heightened risk of a H5N1 incursion into Australia.

Some of the key activities delivered through the program since the last update are outlined below.

National cost sharing agreement for H5N1: A national cost sharing agreement for a HPAI H5N1 outbreak in wildlife has been agreed to by all Commonwealth, state and territory agencies. This agreement sits alongside the existing Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) that provides for cost-sharing of eradication responses in commercial livestock.

Guidelines for land managers on managing dead wildlife on public lands: DEECA has developed guidelines for public land managers on managing dead wildlife on public land during an H5 bird flu outbreak. These guidelines have been published on Agriculture Victoria's website and can be accessed via this link: [Guidelines for managing dead birds and wildlife on public land in an H5 bird flu outbreak](#).

Investigation of alternative methods of EAD waste disposal: Agriculture Victoria has commenced a cattle composting trial as part of its efforts to find alternative methods for EAD waste disposal during a biosecurity emergency. 70 carcasses were sourced and placed into multiple windrows at a disposal site in Rutherglen. This trial is continuing, and the report is expected to be finalised by December 2025.

Procurement of equipment needed for biosecurity response activities: Agriculture Victoria is continuing to progress the procurement of equipment to boost detection, diagnosis and disposal capacity during a high pathogenicity avian influenza response utilising the funds (\$1.7 million) provided by the Commonwealth as part of its \$95 million commitment under national H5 preparedness program.

Exercising program: Agriculture Victoria is continuing to deliver its exercise program to test biosecurity response arrangements. Some of the exercises which were led by DEECA recently include Exercise Verum II, delivered for the members of the EAD (*continued...*)

Interdepartmental Committee, representing all government agencies that have a role in a biosecurity response, *Exercise Cogere* to test operational response arrangements to ensure wildlife response arrangements are integrated with Agriculture Victoria response procedures, targeting operational staff from the DEECA biodiversity/wildlife division and Agriculture Victoria response staff, and *Exercise Fiducia*, to test and strengthen DEECA's strategic leadership response to an emerging H5 Avian Influenza event, ensuring clarity of roles, confidence in plans, and effective coordination across departments and stakeholders targeting DEECA Senior Leadership.

In addition, Agriculture Victoria also contributed to an exercise on H5 bird flu response organised by the Water and Catchments Group for the Water Authorities (*Exercise Adriana*) on 28 May 2025.

How you can become involved

With the ever-increasing threat of natural disasters and EADs such as H5N1, the need to boost workforce capability cannot be underestimated. Practitioners are encouraged to consider their role in the event of an EAD.

To express your interest, visit: [Private veterinarians in an EAD response](#). Alternatively, you can express interest through your annual registration with the Board or by emailing ead.workforce@agriculture.vic.gov.au.

The Agriculture Victoria website continues to be regularly updated with the latest information. For current developments in HPAI, visit: [Avian influenza information for veterinarians](#).

EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE (EAD) CONTACTS, UPDATES & TRAINING

- Notify all suspected EAD cases to the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888**
- Report sick or dead *wild* birds and other wildlife species by [using this form](#) or calling 131 186
- [Training opportunities for vets](#) in emergency animal disease, poultry diseases, anthrax - Agriculture Victoria
- [National biosecurity training hub](#)
- Subscribe to EAD updates [VetWatch newsletter](#) (Victorian CVO) and [Biosecurity Matters](#) (DAFF).

VETWATCH NEWSLETTER



Dr Graeme Cooke, Victorian Chief Veterinary Officer

The October edition of VetWatch newsletter from the Office of the Victorian Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) contains:

- a message from the CVO
- a summary of the H7N8 response in Euroa
- the wrap-up of Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) surveillance for the 2024–25 season
- an incident report where drought-driven grazing changes led to a case of plant toxicity
- a rare case of lissencephaly identified in the investigation of ‘shaker’ piglets
- recent study findings about the impact of Neopora caninum in Victorian dairy farms
- an update on Buruli ulcer
- Victoria’s annual animal health surveillance report.

[READ LATEST VETWATCH ISSUE](#)

NEW VETERINARY SPECIALISTS

Congratulations to the veterinary practitioners newly endorsed as specialists since August 2025

- Dr Eduardo Arroyo [V11443], Specialist in Veterinary Reproduction
- Dr Juan Cuervo-Arango Lecina [V11397], Specialist in Veterinary Reproduction (Equine)
- Dr Alexander Fowler [V11529], Specialist in Equine Surgery
- Dr Kun Li [V8729], Specialist in Veterinary Emergency Medicine and Critical Care
- Dr Helen Mather [V9940], Specialist in Veterinary Ophthalmology
- Dr Valentine Pollet [V11424], Specialist in Small Animal Surgery.
- Dr Kiara Simonis [V9293], Specialist in Avian Medicine & Surgery

DAFF NOTICE RE PREPARING COMPANION ANIMALS FOR EXPORT

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) works towards a more sustainable Australia through biosecurity, agricultural production and trade.

As part of this work, DAFF regulates the import and export of live animals in Australia. These functions were historically exercised by the former Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS).

All registered veterinarians can prepare animals (excluding livestock*) for export. This includes dogs, cats, mice, poultry and horses.

As a registered veterinarian, you may prepare animals for export. This includes the testing, treatment and examinations required by the importing country and under DAFF’s [regulatory framework](#).

You must understand and meet your obligations under Australia’s export laws and certification system. DAFF’s export certification system assures:

- compliance with importing country requirements
- Australia’s reputation as a trading nation
- the health and welfare of exported animals.

Please be aware that the export preparation process can be complex. A consignment may be detained, delayed or rejected on arrival if not compliant with the regulatory framework and importing country requirements.

Rejected consignments may not be able to be returned to Australia and euthanasia may be the only option.

Information for veterinarians about preparing animals for export is available at: [Veterinarians preparing companion animals for export > Importing country requirements](#)

Forms for veterinarians preparing animals for export are available at: [Veterinarians preparing companion animals for export > Forms for registered veterinarians](#)

We also draw your attention to the Board’s [Guideline 19 on veterinary certificates](#).

If you are a registered veterinary practitioner in Victoria and have questions on the live animal export process, please contact the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry at seanimal@aff.gov.au

*Only *accredited veterinarians* can prepare livestock for export. Livestock animals include cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, deer and camels. If you want to prepare livestock for export, find out how to become an [accredited veterinarian](#).

CLARIFICATION OF PRESCRIPTION AND SUPPLY OBLIGATIONS

In recent months, the Board has received queries about prescribing medicines following a telehealth consultation, vets supplying medicines to third parties such as wildlife carers, and vets supplying medicines on the basis of a prescription issued by another vet. These queries indicate that there may be some confusion about veterinary practitioners' obligations around the prescribing and supply of medicine in Victoria.

This article provides clarification on prescription and supply obligations in relation to individual animals and groups of animals, i.e. herds.

Terminology and background

Prescribing is a complex clinical skill and occurs when a vet establishes a therapeutic need to treat an animal or group of animals under their care with a scheduled medicine. Once this decision has been made, a vet may administer the medicine to the animal or herd, supply the medicine to the owner/agent of the animal or herd, or may issue a prescription so a pharmacist can supply the medicine for the animal or herd.

Dispensing is a step that occurs before a medicine is supplied and involves placing a dispensing label on a medicine.

Due to vets' extensive education and professional standing, they hold a unique position in society as the only persons who can lawfully prescribe a scheduled medicine for the treatment of animals.

Only a pharmacist may supply a medicine on a prescription that has been issued by a vet.

Law on issuing a prescription and supply of scheduled medicines

The requirements a veterinary practitioner must meet before they prescribe, sell or supply a scheduled medicine have not changed in recent years.

Under sections 19 and 38 of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Regulations 2017, a veterinary practitioner must not issue a prescription, sell or supply Schedule 4, 8 or 9 poisons ("medicine") unless:

- the prescription, sale or supply is for treatment of an animal under the veterinary practitioner's care (and the animal is described in any prescription)

- the vet has taken all reasonable steps to ensure a therapeutic need exists for the medicine
- the animal is owned by, or is in the custody or care of, the person to whom the medicine is sold or supplied
- before prescribing:
 - if the poison is a drug of dependence, a Schedule 8 poison or a Schedule 9 poison, the vet must take all reasonable steps to ascertain the identity of the person who owns or has custody or care of the animal for whose treatment the prescription is issued
 - for Schedule 9 poisons, the vet must hold a general Schedule 9 permit that authorises the issuing of the prescription.

There are also other regulations relating to stock foods containing Schedule 4 poisons.

When are animals under a vet's care?

For an animal or herd to be under a vet's care, a veterinary practitioner-owner-animal relationship (VOA) must have been established and care must be real and ongoing after that.

Establishing a VOA relationship

A VOA relationship is established in an in-person consultation, during which a vet examines the animal.

For herds and production facilities, the vet must visit the property, be fully aware of husbandry and management conditions and physically examine enough animals to determine treatment requirements.

The vet or practice staff will also create an official record for the client and the animal or herd in their customer records management system and make notes about the initial consultation or site visit.

Care after VOA relationship established

After the VOA relationship commences, care should be real and not merely nominal. A therapeutic need for a medicine cannot be established if care is not real. The vet must personally have had contact with the animal or herd for the purposes of diagnosis and treatment/management, and must have assumed responsibility for diagnosis, treatment and outcome. The vet should directly observe the animal or herd at least once a year and when necessary (see reasonable steps below).

(Continued next page...)

PRESCRIPTION AND SUPPLY OBLIGATIONS CONTINUED

Telehealth

Consultation via telehealth can only be undertaken after a VOA is established and if the vet is familiar with the current management and health status of the animal or herd.

Based on the animal or herd's location and access to veterinary services, the vet should also make necessary arrangements/provide information to the owner or agent to ensure continuing care for the animal or herd after the consultation.

Deciding whether there is a therapeutic need to prescribe or supply a medicine

Reasonable steps in every situation

In all instances, a vet must consider the factors listed below when deciding if there is a therapeutic need to prescribe or supply a medicine.

Factors to consider:

- in relation to the animal or herd:
 - the medical history of the patient or husbandry and management history of a herd
 - the prescribing history of the patient or herd
 - the presenting symptoms or described condition (and the stability of the condition).
- in relation to the medicine:
 - its suitability for the treatment of the presenting symptoms or described condition (e.g. refer to prescribing guidelines for antibiotics), or for the husbandry and management of a herd
 - the quantity to be prescribed or supplied. For example, the steps that could be considered reasonable to justify prescribing a minimal quantity of a drug of dependence may not be sufficient to justify prescribing a larger quantity or repeat supplies.
- in relation to the client, signs or knowledge of misuse or abuse of medicines or illicit drugs.

When an animal has been examined by a veterinary specialist, the veterinary specialist may issue a letter outlining the outcome of the examination and including recommended treatment with a scheduled medicine. While such a letter may assist a vet to establish a therapeutic need to supply a scheduled medicine, the animal would still need to be under the vet's care.

Known patients vs new conditions or new patients

Vets must exercise their discretion in relation to an animal or herd and its health status when deciding which steps to take to establish therapeutic need for a medicine.

If a patient/herd and client are well known to a vet, a therapeutic need to prescribe was previously established for the same condition, and there has been no change in health status, it may not take a lot of time or effort to consider the factors listed above. A few questions to establish that nothing has changed may be all that is needed, and medicine may be supplied or a prescription may be issued without a consultation or site visit if the animal or herd was last observed less than 12 months ago.

However, more thorough steps will be required to establish a therapeutic need for a medicine in existing patients with conditions that require more frequent monitoring, existing patients with new conditions, or completely new patients, including:

- examining the patient or herd
- [where applicable] arranging diagnostic tests to justify initial or ongoing treatment
- confirming information provided by the owner, e.g. referral letters, medical/herd management records, results of tests and other diagnostics.

Practical application of obligations

Based on current regulations, if you have NOT, *following the information outlined above,*

- a) established a VOA relationship via examination
- b) demonstrated that the animal or herd is under your care, and
- c) taken reasonable steps to establish a therapeutic need for the medicine requested, you CANNOT issue a prescription, sell or supply medicines.

This applies to the following examples and queries the Board has received:

- to a person who presents a prescription issued by another vet
- by telehealth to an animal owner who lives interstate and says their animal has a pre-existing condition
- for a litter of puppies bred by a breeder you know
- to an owner who says their horse has a condition they've seen before and which they know can be treated with a particular medicine
- to wildlife carers to stock in quantity to treat injured wildlife in the future

(continued...)

PRESCRIPTION AND SUPPLY OBLIGATIONS CONTINUED

- to a person with a darting licence so they can tranquillise animals. Even if they were authorised to undertake this activity under wildlife law, you would need to be physically present when the darting occurred and the darting would have to be undertaken on your behalf under your supervision.

Explaining these obligations to animal owners

The Board understands that owners can be unhappy about the extra consultation costs and time involved in obtaining veterinary medicines in examples such as those described above. However, the regulations are designed to provide for public health and safety, prevent misuse and abuse, and ensure medicines are used safely and appropriately.

In addition to complying with the regulations, there are many good reasons why vets may need to examine an animal or visit a herd, arrange tests and consider patient histories before prescribing or supplying medicines.

Primarily, vets' reasons are for the wellbeing of the animal or herd. Medicines are classified as poisons and they can:

- harm an animal or herd if administered inappropriately or incorrectly
- stop being effective when overused or used incorrectly, e.g. antimicrobial resistance
- be misused by humans.

Vets are highly skilled professionals who are in the best position to examine an animal or herd, consider its history and decide if any medicine is required in a particular situation. They have the knowledge and experience to determine which medicine may be required for an animal or herd and how much of that medicine may be needed. They can explain to the owner or agent how the medicine should be administered and what side effects to look out for. They can also provide instructions about the safe storage of medicines.

In exercising their obligations, vets must also be alert to the potential that a client is seeking a drug of dependence.

Animal owners should be encouraged to plan and prepare for their animal or herd's treatment needs. They should be advised when their animal or herd will need to be examined again, and that this may change depending on its health status.

Animal owners should understand that it may take time to issue a prescription or dispense a medicine (even where a consultation is not required).

This information can be provided at a consultation or site visit and repeated in writing on a prescription or other materials given to the owner or agent.

Board review of Guidelines 1, 13 and 14

The Board is reviewing and updating Guidelines 1, 13 and 14 on the veterinary practitioner-owner-animal relationship, telemedicine and supply and use of medications. A targeted consultation on proposed changes to these guidelines will take place in 2026.

More information re medicines obligations:

Legislative obligations:

- [Drugs Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981](#)
- [Drugs Poisons and Controlled Substances Regulations 2017](#)
- [Veterinary practitioners – key legislative requirements in Victoria - Department of Health Factsheet](#)
- [Other Department of Health factsheets including on therapeutic need and prescription formats](#)

Board guidelines:

- [Guideline 1: Veterinary practitioner-owner-animal relationship](#)
- [Guideline 13: Telemedicine in the provision of veterinary services](#)
- [Guideline 14: Supply and use of veterinary medications](#)

If you have questions about the regulation of scheduled medicines:

- Lodge an enquiry form with the Department of Health's Regulated Substances team (formerly known as the Medicines & Poisons Regulation Branch):
<https://forms.business.gov.au/smartforms/landing.htm?formCode=mpr-enquiry>

NATIONAL VETERINARY WORKFORCE

As reported in the August newsletter, Board CEO Chelsea McIntosh is part of a taskforce set up by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry which is looking at establishing a national database of veterinarians.

The taskforce will be meeting in December to discuss an options paper covering proposed models for a database and its resourcing and governance.

SUPPORT AND INFORMATION FOR VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS

VETBOARD VICTORIA RESOURCES

- [Videos and factsheets about veterinary boards, how they handle complaints and how you can respond to or prevent complaints](#)
- [Download proof of registration or update your contact details via My Account](#)
- [Registration](#)
- [Complaints](#)
- [Guidelines for appropriate standards of veterinary practice and veterinary facilities](#)
- [Veterinary Practice Act 1997](#)
- [Other laws relating to veterinary practice including Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981](#)
- [About the Board and Board members](#)
- [Annual reports](#)

MEDICINES, MICROCHIPPING, RADIATION

Medicines & Poisons Regulation (MPR)

Branch, Victorian Department of Health

- [Medicines and Poisons Regulation](#)
- [Legislative requirements for vets](#)
- [Factsheet – Key requirements for vets](#)
- [MPR Enquiry form](#)

Prescribing guidelines and resources:

- [AMR Vet Collective antimicrobial guidelines](#)

Microchipping

- [Authorised implanter course for veterinarians](#) - Victorian Division AVA
- Greyhound Microchip Registry 8329 1139

Radiation Safety Unit, Vic Health:

- [Individual use licences](#)
- [Management licences](#)

Disclaimer

Some links in this newsletter direct you to the websites of third-party organisations which are responsible for and/or may be able to assist you with the item's subject matter.

The Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria has no control over and is not responsible or liable for the content of any third-party website.

SUPPORT FOR VETS

- **Australian Veterinary Association:** [telephone counselling service](#) 1300 687 327 **both** for AVA members **and** the vet professionals who work for them
- **AVA THRIVE** [veterinary wellness portal](#)
- **Lifeline** 13 1114 & [Get help](#)
- **Beyond Blue:** 1800 512 348 & [Get mental health support](#)
- **SANE** 1800 187 263 & [SANE services](#)
- **1800RESPECT** 1800 737 732 & [website](#)
- **Mensline Australia** 1300 789 978 & [website](#) (delivered by Lifeline)
- **Head to Health** [Australian Gov resources](#)
- **Mental health support** [Victorian Gov resources](#)

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA INFORMATION Emergency Disease Hotline

- 1800 675 888 to report suspected emergency diseases - staffed by vets 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Local animal health staff

- Call 136 186 to get in touch with Agriculture Victoria District Veterinary Officers and Animal Health Officers located throughout Victoria.

Avian flu

- EAD hotline 1800 675 888

General contacts

- Customer service line 136 186
- Email biosecurity queries or feedback to animal.biosecurity@agriculture.vic.gov.au
- Email animal welfare queries to pet.welfare@agriculture.vic.gov.au

General information

- www.agriculture.vic.gov.au
- [Biosecurity and animal diseases](#)
- [National biosecurity training hub](#)
- [VetWatch newsletter](#) – information about animal disease surveillance
- [Antibiotic resistant infections and information for veterinarians and veterinary staff](#)
- [Animal Welfare Victoria](#)
- [Livestock and animals](#)
- [Pet care](#)