



## Media Release

Monday 17 July 2023

### **New report recommends changes to avoid veterinary education crisis in Australia and New Zealand**

The [‘Rethinking Veterinary Education’](#) report released today finds that veterinary education is at a crisis point in Australasia and is directly contributing to vet shortages.

The report outlines the findings and recommendations of a review into veterinary education, commissioned by Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ). The review was undertaken by an expert panel comprising Dr Helen Scott-Orr AM PSM (Chair), Professor Grant Guilford (NZ) and Professor Susan Rhind (UK).

The panel found several factors are contributing to the crisis.

“Issues include growing demand for veterinary services; inadequate funding to meet the cost of the teaching program and the university operating model; deteriorating wellbeing amongst students, staff and graduates; and salaries that are becoming uncompetitive with other professions,” explained VSANZ Chair, Professor Nigel Perkins.

The report makes 25 recommendations directed variously at veterinary schools, their universities, accrediting bodies, veterinary professional associations and governments.

Key recommendations include:

- Establishment of a strategic change fund among the universities to unlock effective veterinary school resource-sharing models
- Accelerated efforts to reduce the cost burden of school accreditation, and to move from assessing inputs to outcomes
- An increase in government funding for veterinary students, and a clinical training loading for priority areas
- The Australian Government extend to veterinarians the student debt relief available to doctors and nurses who practice in rural and remote areas.

There are also several recommendations that seek to improve student wellbeing and transition to practice, and as well as those concerning the capacity of the profession to service rural needs, including emergency animal disease preparedness.

Both the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) the New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) welcome the report.

“The system of educating veterinarians has been adversely affected over decades by various changes in education, fiscal and social policy. It is encouraging to have a set of clear recommendations to help address the issues and pave the way forward,” said AVA President, Dr Alistair Webb said.

“The challenges facing the veterinary sectors in Australasia reflect failures of the overall education systems and can only be solved if all stakeholders contribute to positive change. We hope this report helps facilitate that,” NZVA President Kate Hill said.

Detailed responses to the report’s recommendation can be viewed on the [AVA](#) and [NZVA](#) websites.

To arrange interviews contact:

- VSANZ – call +61 413 059190 or email [eo@vsanz.org](mailto:eo@vsanz.org)
- AVA – call +61 439 628 898 or email [media@ava.com.au](mailto:media@ava.com.au)
- NZVA – email [media@vets.org.nz](mailto:media@vets.org.nz)

## ‘Rethinking Veterinary Education’ report – Key points

1. Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ) is the peak body for Australasia’s eight veterinary schools, hosted by James Cook University, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, Charles Sturt University, University of Melbourne, University of Adelaide, Murdoch University, and Massey University. More information about VSANZ can be found at <https://vsanz.org/>.
2. In 2022, VSANZ commissioned an expert panel to undertake a review of veterinary education in Australia and New Zealand. More information on the review, including the terms of reference, can be found at <https://vsanz.org/review-of-veterinary-education/>. The review itself will be available on the website from 9am AEST on Monday 17 July 2023.
3. The panel comprised:
  - Dr Helen Scott-Orr AM PSM (Chair)
  - Professor Grant Guilford (NZ)
  - Professor Susan Rhind (UK).Brief biographies of the panel are available at the above link.
4. The panel distributed a discussion paper to stakeholders. The paper provided background and data on some key issues in relation to veterinary education. It raised a series of questions and invited submissions responding to these. There were 69 written submissions to the review. In addition, the panel held 19 meetings with key stakeholders. The opinions of veterinary practitioners, practice owners, professional associations, university senior executives, academics, students, regulators, and users of veterinary services all contributed to the panel’s deliberations.
5. The panel encountered a very wide range of views on the future of veterinary education and on related issues of the demand-driven veterinary shortage and problems of poor mental health and burnout among vets and vet students. These views were sometimes oppositional. One such example was on the fundamental question of whether veterinary students should continue to be taught about all common species – the ‘omnicompetent vet’ – or given the option to focus only on species of interest (for example, cats and dogs). The panel respected all opinions as having been genuinely contributed, but in some cases came down on one side or the other based on their assessment of the evidence.
6. Key findings of the review report are that:
  - There is an increasingly important role for veterinarians in the economic and social future of Australia and New Zealand. Vets are critical to support animal health and welfare, biosecurity and food safety in the livestock industries, to keep pets and other companion animals healthy and happy, and to work with other professionals in tackling One Health and Eco Health challenges such as biodiversity loss and climate change.
  - However, the Australasian veterinary profession and its education system are approaching a crisis. Current approaches to veterinary science education, research and service delivery will not be sustainable nor allow long-term needs for veterinary workforce renewal and enhanced research capability to be met. This is a systemic problem requiring the efforts of multiple organisations and government.
  - Veterinary courses are the most expensive professional courses for universities to deliver. The funding per veterinary student to universities from government grants and domestic student fees covers only around two-thirds of the average estimated total

delivery cost per student. Incremental opportunities to reduce costs have largely been exhausted and more strategic, structural reforms are now needed, and these have been recommended by the panel.

- There also needs to be a continuation of efforts to improve the admissions processes of veterinary schools and the transition of graduates into practice, to enhance the wellbeing of vets and help address the problem of workforce retention. Opportunities also exist to increase recruitment and retention by rural practices where vet shortages are most pronounced.
7. The panel made twenty-five recommendations. These recommendations are variously addressed to the schools themselves, their universities, professional associations, regulators, and governments.
  8. VSANZ has accepted the report and its recommendations. It will work with its partners within and outside the profession to implement the recommendations.