



Canadian Veterinary
Medical Association

Association canadienne
des médecins vétérinaires

**Written Submission to the House of Commons Standing
Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultations**

In Advance of the 2025 Federal Budget

August 1, 2025

Recommendation 1: That the federal government address workplace shortages and ensure there is a robust veterinary workforce through additional investments for projects and veterinary infrastructure. This can be achieved by recruiting and onboarding internationally trained veterinarians (ITVs), establishing a national testing centre for internationally educated veterinarians, and ensuring there are dedicated funds to support veterinary infrastructure.

Recommendation 2: That the federal government invest in ways to maintain and strengthen the availability of critical veterinary pharmaceuticals, health products and biologics in the interest of protecting public health and safety, animal health and welfare, and food safety and security. Canada should take the lead in collaborating with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and other international authorities to improve shared pathways for regulatory approval that are more efficient and economical.

Recommendation 3: That the federal government address workplace shortages by investing in the mental health and well-being of all veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals.

Background

Since 1948, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) has been the national and international voice for Canada's veterinarians, providing leadership and advocacy for veterinary medicine. The CVMA speaks for the veterinary professionals of Canada, including over 25,000 veterinarians, technologists, and technicians.

The CVMA is actively involved in numerous projects alongside partners in government. As Canada's national veterinary organization, the CVMA has the experience and long-established reputation to credibly and efficiently engage with a wide array of groups (e.g., governments, the Canadian animal health industry, other health professions, international organizations, the public, and livestock producers).

Veterinarians in private practice, industry, and government play integral roles in early detection, response, and recovery from foreign animal and zoonotic diseases. They also contribute to food safety and security, protect species diversity, contribute to climate change resilience and consequence management.

In addition, veterinarians provide diagnostic services in laboratories, support vaccine production and licensing, conduct research into emerging pathogens that affect both animal and human health, and serve as faculty at Canada's teaching institutions that are a fundamental pillar of sustaining and enhancing the capacity of Canada's healthcare system.

Across Canada, veterinarians are instrumental in safeguarding animal and public health. Veterinary oversight underpins the ability of Canada to trade in animals and animal products and thereby supports the well-being of the Canadian agricultural and aquaculture sectors, areas that are critical to Canada's economy. Veterinary practices in Canada annually generate \$16.9 billion in total economic output. Without enhanced federal support, this contribution is being stifled.

A Robust Veterinary Workforce

Recommendation 1: That the federal government address workplace shortages and ensure there is a robust veterinary workforce through additional investments for projects and veterinary infrastructure. This can be achieved by recruiting and onboarding internationally trained veterinarians (ITVs), establishing a national testing centre for internationally educated veterinarians, and ensuring there are dedicated funds to support veterinary infrastructure.

The veterinary profession in Canada faces pressing challenges that demand immediate attention from the federal government. According to the ESDC's Canadian Occupation Project System (COPS), the labour market is experiencing a structural deficit both in the short term and

through projections until 2031.¹ This shortage has significant implications for animal health and welfare, public health, the Canadian economy, the well-being of veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals, as well as the mental health of animal owners who cannot get access to the care they need.

To work to alleviate Canada's veterinary workforce shortage, we recommend the following:

I) Recruiting and Onboarding Internationally Trained Veterinarians:

- a. A pilot to waive the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) for one year that would include the employers providing assurances that the candidate's wages and working conditions would follow Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada requirements.
- b. Streamline LMIA Submission Requirements for qualified newcomers to Canada wanting to practice veterinary medicine.
- c. List veterinarians under the human health categories where the Labour Market Impact Assessment is waived.

II) Establish a national testing centre for internationally educated veterinarians

To address the critical shortage in Canada's veterinary workforce, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) recommends establishing a national testing centre for internationally educated veterinarians at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM). Currently, international candidates face prolonged waiting times to perform their licensure examinations which limits the number of veterinarians entering the workforce. The WCVM currently offers 100 testing spots per year for ITVs but has reached its full capacity. This has resulted in a significant bottleneck and long waiting times for candidates. A national centre would streamline the process, increase licensure opportunities, and expand veterinary service capacity across the country.

While three of Canada's five veterinary schools are planning to expand their class sizes, these efforts alone will not fully resolve the workforce gap.

A proposed one-time \$50 million federal capital investment, as part of a broader \$100 million development at WCVM, would triple the number of internationally trained veterinarians entering the workforce annually—from 55 to 165. This would substantially address the shortage and support long-term sustainability.

The project has broad support from the veterinary and agricultural sectors, including Agriculture Ministers from Alberta, B.C., Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan.

¹ Employment and Social Development (ESDC). "Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS)." COPS Home - Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) - Canada.ca, November 16, 2021. <https://occupations.esdc.gc.ca/sppc-cops/w.2lc.4m.2@-eng.jsp>

This investment is essential to ensure animal welfare, manage emerging biothreats, protect food safety, and support Canada's \$37.3 billion animal production sector.

III) Ensure dedicated funds to support a robust veterinary workforce and veterinary infrastructure.

- a) A commitment to earmark funding to the provinces to support rural practices by forgiving student debt for a minimum number of years commitment from veterinarians to practice in rural areas. This would boost the veterinary workforce in critically important regions where the shortage is acute.
- b) Ensure that veterinarians and veterinary practices are formally included in existing rural support schemes, including existing rural and regional support for business infrastructure development, essential service business tax concessions, accommodation stimulus packages, and preferential access to community services.
- c) Invest to develop a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy.
- d) Work with the provinces to increase the number of seats in Veterinary Colleges for young Canadians.

Streamlined immigration pathways for internationally trained veterinarians, a national testing centre to address severe shortages, and dedicated veterinary infrastructure funding would prove instrumental in supporting the expansion and innovation of clinical teaching, training, and research for the next generation of veterinarians.

Maintaining and Strengthening Availability of Critical Veterinary Drugs in the Interest of Protecting Public Health and Safety, Animal Health and Welfare, and Food Safety and Security

Recommendation 2: That the federal government invest in ways to maintain and strengthen the availability of critical veterinary pharmaceuticals, health products, and biologics in the interest of protecting public health and safety, animal health and welfare, and food safety and security. Canada should take the lead in collaborating with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and other international authorities to improve shared pathways for regulatory approval that are more efficient and economical.

Veterinarians in Canada face major challenges accessing essential animal health products, including pharmaceuticals (e.g., antimicrobials, sedatives), health products (e.g., probiotics), biologics (e.g., vaccines), and other critical medications. Many of these products are unavailable due to supply chain issues and manufacturers' reluctance to navigate Health Canada's costly registration process. For example, there is a shortage of approved antimicrobial drugs for livestock such as dairy cattle, swine, and poultry.

Recent changes to Health Canada's Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) regulations have led to the removal of older products from the market, often without replacement. Some Health Canada-approved products have never been marketed, further limiting availability. This instability increases risks to animal welfare and puts Canadian livestock producers at a disadvantage compared to those in countries where these products remain accessible.

The shortage of effective treatments raises food safety and security concerns and can contribute to antimicrobial resistance due to the use of less effective alternatives. These challenges threaten not only public health and animal welfare but also Canada's international trade competitiveness.

To address these issues, the CVMA advocates for the following:

- I) **Re-evaluating Canada's Approval Pathways for Veterinary Pharmaceuticals, Health Products, and Biologics:** Collaborate with the FDA, EMA, and other international regulatory authorities to streamline and enhance product approval processes, making approvals more efficient and affordable. At the same time, Canada should investigate what steps other countries that have a similar market size as Canada have taken to get products brought to their market. To help achieve these goals, the Government will need to increase the size and resources available to the Veterinary Drug Directorate division of Health Canada.

- II) **Ensuring Availability of Veterinary Pharmaceuticals, Health Products and Biologics:** Support initiatives to maintain a stable supply of essential veterinary pharmaceuticals, health products and biologics and address the challenges caused by regulatory changes and market withdrawals.

The CVMA remains committed to working with regulators, the animal health industry and others to support processes to expedite the introduction of veterinary pharmaceuticals, biologics, and health products. The CVMA will continue to advocate for a more effective veterinary drug regulatory system, with the aim of enhancing the health and well-being of Canadians and their animals. By carefully balancing regulation and availability of animal health products, the federal government can safeguard public health while supporting the critical needs of the veterinary profession in Canada.

Mental Health of Veterinary Professionals

Recommendation 3: That the federal government address workplace shortages by investing in the mental health and well-being of all veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals.

A concerning proportion of veterinarians' experience burnout and mental health challenges, with 98% reporting moderate to high levels of traumatic stress and 77% experiencing burnout—especially early in their careers. Nearly half report symptoms of depression, and over one in five veterinarians have had suicidal thoughts during their career. Burnout is a leading reason why 50% reduce or leave clinical practice. These numbers highlight the urgent need to prioritize the mental health and well-being of veterinary professionals.

To prioritize the mental health, well-being, and retention of veterinary professionals, we recommend the following actions.

- I) **Increase Mental Health Access and Profession-sensitive Support:** The federal government should advocate for and invest in enhanced mental health services specifically for veterinarians. This includes direct and accountable funding to reduce stigma, support early intervention, and encourage more professionals to seek help. To ensure effectiveness, mental health providers need to be upskilled in veterinary-specific stressors—such as moral distress, trauma exposure, and high emotional demands—so they can offer relevant and relatable care. Expedited access to psychiatric services is also critical, particularly given the high rates of trauma and suicidality intensified by events like mass livestock depopulation and disease outbreaks.
- II) **Address Workforce Shortages:** Tackling the shortage of veterinary professionals would significantly improve their well-being. The current shortage places immense pressure on veterinary teams, leading to extended work hours without adequate rest. This increased workload, combined with existing stressors, has a profound impact on the mental health and overall wellbeing of the veterinary staff.
- III) **Support CVMA's Resilience, Inclusion, Support, Empowerment (RISE) Program:** \$450,000 in annual funding over four years from the Federal Government to help fund the CVMA's RISE program, a national program focused on mental health, well-being, inclusivity, diversity, equity, accessibility and retention for everyone in the veterinary profession across Canada, supporting veterinarians and veterinary professionals to achieve healthy, sustainable and meaningful careers. Further to this, the federal government should provide provinces and territories with targeted funding to expand access to mental wellness supports for veterinarians—including mental health providers who are upskilled in veterinary-specific stressors. By prioritizing these actions, we can help alleviate the emotional strain on veterinary professionals and improve their capacity to deliver high-quality care.