

Report of the Working Group on the  
2020 CVMA Workforce Study

March 1, 2021

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## Background

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (“CVMA”) undertook a national workforce study. The mandate of the research was to examine the supply and demand balance for veterinary services across the Canadian companion animal, food animal and equine sectors now and into the future.

The framework for the assessment was developed by Kynetec in collaboration with Brakke Consulting and Agri-food Economic Systems. The methodology included review of secondary research sources, workshops with industry stakeholders and survey of Canadian veterinarians. The final report was released in May 2020. CVMA published an executive summary report in the Canadian Veterinary Journal in July 2020.

CVMA Council struck a Working Group in October of 2020, with a mandate to:

*‘Based on the CVMA Workforce Study 2020 results & recommendations and the knowledge and experience of the WG members, make viable recommendations on how CVMA could help address the forecasted shortage of veterinarians in the best interest of the profession, the clients and patients’.*

Members of the Working Group included Dr. Phil Buote (Chair), Mr. Jost Am Rhyn, Dr. Rob Ashburner, Dr. Melanie Hicks, Ms. Ivana Novosel, Dr. Sherri Christie, Dr. John Tait, Dr. Jeff Wichtel, and Dr. Jean Gauvin with Ms. Julie Lambert providing administrative support.

The Working Group met by videoconference starting October 29, 2020. Members provided written submissions which were circulated and discussed at a second meeting on November 18, 2020. Initiatives were summarized into a worksheet which was provided to members to prioritize. A third meeting on January 15, 2021 was held to further discuss the priority recommendations and inform the draft report. Draft reports were circulated to Working Group members for input as the report to Council was finalized.

Report was provided to CVMA Council on March 1, 2021.

## Executive Summary

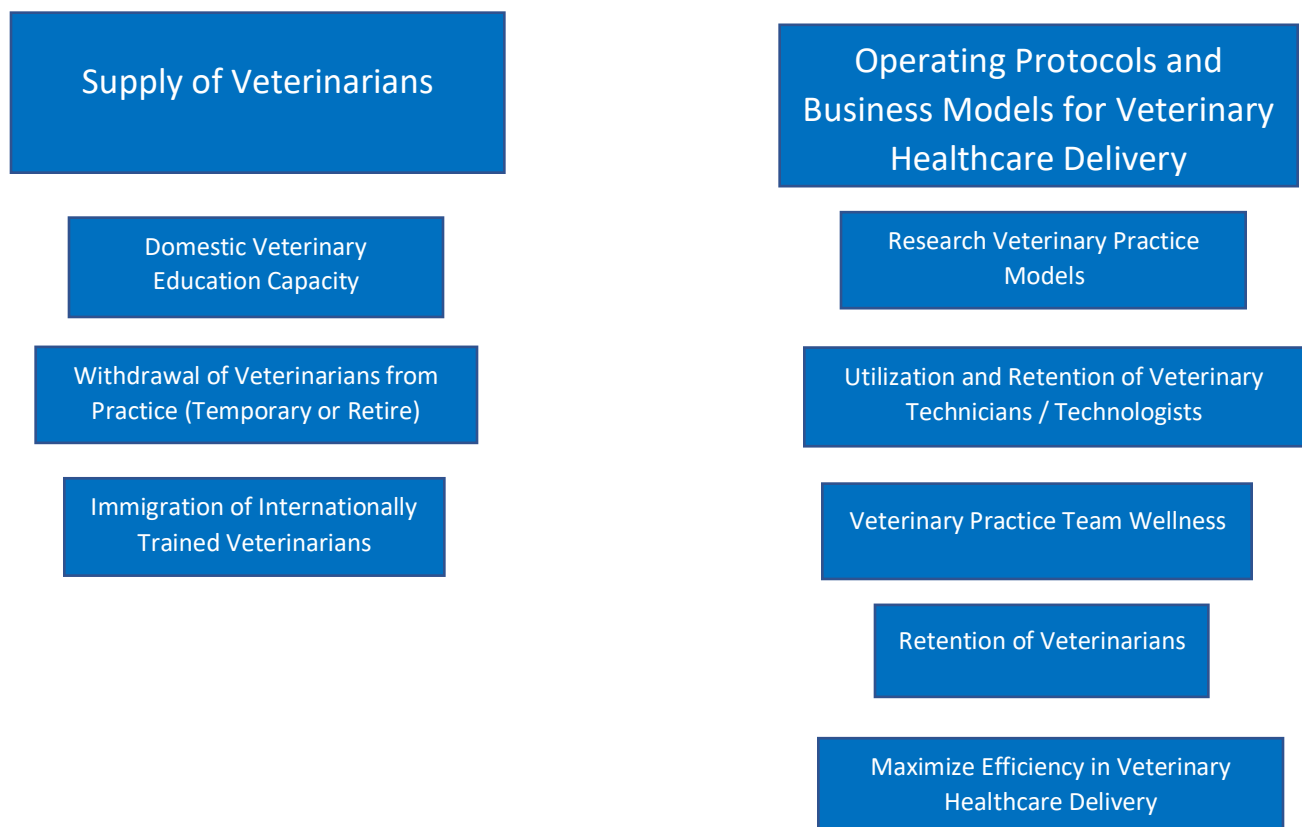
The CVMA Workforce Study Working Group agrees with the 2020 CVMA Workforce Study Report that addressing the forecasted shortage of veterinarians will require multiple initiatives. There is no single recommendation that will address this important issue facing the veterinary profession.

The workforce study forecasted the demand for services and supply of veterinarians out to the year 2040. The Working Group is making recommendations for initiatives that are expected to have impact in the short term as well as those that may take a longer time, up to 5 or 10 years to impact the shortage. Even though some of the recommendations will not immediately impact the shortage, which some describe as a crisis, progress must be made on the long-term initiatives to address underlying causes of the shortage. The Working Group agrees with the Workforce Study report that *“the Canadian veterinary profession must be planned with the “long view” in mind.*

The Working Group is making recommendations for initiatives that may be considered ‘out of scope’ of CVMA’s direct control or mandate. The Working Group is recommending that CVMA leverage its position as the national voice of the veterinary profession to facilitate discussion and champion for action to address the shortage. A collaborative approach to arrive at a national strategy will support provincial efforts.

Working Group recommendations to CVMA Council to address the shortage include initiatives that will impact ‘Supply of Veterinarians in Canada’ and ‘Operating Protocols and Business Models for Veterinary Healthcare Delivery’.

## Canadian Veterinary Workforce 2021 & Beyond Recommended Areas for Actions



## Supply of Veterinarians in Canada

### Domestic veterinary education capacity

The shortage of veterinarians is created by increasing demand for veterinary services outpacing the supply and the slow adaptation of more efficient utilization of veterinarians in practice due to current delivery models. Addressing the forecasted shortage of veterinarians must consider the supply of veterinarians in Canada. A priority initiative is to increase Canada's domestic veterinary education capacity.

### Immigration and Repatriation of internationally trained veterinarians

Immigration of internationally trained veterinarians must be supported and maintained as a relief valve to domestic veterinary education. Initiatives that address immigration of veterinarians includes recruitment of Canadian residents training abroad, immigration of veterinarians graduating from accredited and non-accredited programs of veterinary medicine and providing necessary supports through the credentialing process.

## Operating Protocols and Business Models for Veterinary Healthcare Delivery

The Workforce Study forecasts that the demand for veterinary services will outpace supply of veterinarians. Even as initiatives to address supply of veterinarians are implemented and potentially reduce the impact of the shortage, additional initiatives are required to make substantial and lasting impact in the long term. The focus cannot be singularly on supply of veterinarians; we also need to critically evaluate our current systems of veterinary healthcare delivery, acknowledging seismic shifts in the nature of our workforce and what is expected of it. These initiatives are about how we train, regulate, organize and utilize members of our veterinary health care delivery teams for the practice of the future.

### Utilization and retention of technologists

The Working Group agrees with the conclusion in the Workforce Study report that *"The shortage of veterinary technicians exacerbates the need for veterinarians and must also be addressed."*

### Research to Determine Optimal Operating Protocols and Business Models for Veterinary Healthcare Delivery

These initiatives are about veterinary health care delivery teams and how they function. The intent is to design practice models that support the well-being of practice staff while maintaining profitability, enhancing service and optimizing health outcomes

### Member wellness, stress and burnout

Working Group members agree that the issues relating to wellness are not entirely in scope for this Working Group even though they do directly impact recruitment, career choice and retention. Issues of wellness, stress and burnout are a priority for CVMA that are being addressed by the CVMA Wellness Advisory Group. Wellness issues of stress, burnout and retention may be in part addressed through initiatives related to increasing workforce capacity and promotion of innovative veterinary healthcare delivery models.

## Recommendations - Supply of Veterinarians in Canada

### Domestic Veterinary Education Capacity

Increasing the domestic veterinary education capacity in Canada must be undertaken as a priority to address the forecasted shortage of veterinarians. Domestic veterinarian graduate numbers have not kept pace with demand for services and the gap is forecasted to increase. The Workforce Study Report suggests that a long-term strategy to grow the Canadian veterinarian population at an annual growth rate of 3.5 – 4.0 % is needed. There have been only modest increases veterinary training capacity in recent years, principally because significant provincial government investment is required to grow the number of available seats at the five colleges. The ratio of qualified applicants to funded seats at Canadian veterinary colleges is as high as 6:1.

The Working Group members are of the opinion that the long-term strategy should not rely exclusively on immigration and repatriation of veterinarians trained off shore to make up the shortfall of veterinarians required to meet the forecasted demand. Training veterinary students domestically provides the opportunity to select a more diverse student population and curate their experiential learning opportunities to help direct them towards careers in the most underserved sectors.

The CVMA Workforce Study forecasted demand and current supply of veterinarians out to the year 2040 and a strategy should take the similar long view. Any initiative to increase domestic veterinary education capacity will take years to impact the supply of veterinarians. The goal is to arrive at a balanced supply of veterinarians educated in Canada to meet the forecasted demand with immigration as a relief. Addressing domestic veterinary education capacity is not a short-term initiative; it is eyes to the future.

Ultimately, decisions on funding for increased class sizes or a new school will be made by the provinces. The Working Group recognizes that CVMA is not a decision maker with regards to funding, but does have a role to play in facilitating a national conversation and strategy.

#### **Recommendation #1:**

**CVMA engages and collaborates with provincial veterinary medical associations, regulatory bodies and colleges to develop a shared vision and strategy on domestic veterinary education in Canada. This initiative is a two-part collaboration which includes drafting a ‘*Veterinary Workforce White Paper*’ and holding a ‘*Veterinary Workforce Summit*’.**

The Working Group suggests that much of the information for such a white paper is available and once drafted, will form the basis for facilitating the discussion of stakeholders at a summit. It is recommended that the summit engage stakeholder groups representing many sectors that touch the veterinary profession. This includes, but is not limited to veterinary colleges, veterinary technician / technologist programs, provincial associations, corporate veterinary practice consolidators, independent practice owners, CVMA members, regulators, and government funders.

Canadian veterinary colleges are receptive to increasing class sizes. The white paper, summit and a resulting national strategy will support conversations between veterinary colleges, provincial VMAs and provincial and federal governments. It is expected that the white paper and summit must address issues including, but not limited to:

- Supply of veterinarians for all sectors including emergency, specialty, rural and remote. The Working Group specifically addressed the Workforce Study Report recommendation around service to remote communities. There are many areas experiencing acute shortages that are equally pressing, including referral and emergency services in medium and large urban centers, animal agriculture and rural communities.

- Supply of veterinarians for employment in the public sector. Veterinarians serving in the public sector was out of scope of the Workforce Study and must be addressed in a national strategy. Many veterinarians are employed by federal and provincial governments and shortages of veterinarians in these sectors may impact food safety and public health.
- Explore regulatory barriers to provision of veterinary care in underserved communities.
- Explore opportunities to have graduate veterinarians locate and serve rural communities including changes to veterinary college admission process.
- Explore funding opportunities for veterinary education other than provincial governments. This includes funding from the private sector, corporate veterinary practice consolidators and municipalities.

#### **Recommendation #2:**

##### **CVMA supports provincial veterinary medical associations in efforts to increase funding of Canadian veterinary colleges**

Working Group members recognize that CVMA may not directly influence provincial government decisions on funding of veterinary education. CVMA is the national voice of the veterinary profession and has established relationships and channels to communicate with provincial veterinary medical associations.

CVMA can facilitate collaboration and promote a national strategy to support provinces in advocating for increased funding for veterinary education.

#### **Immigration and Repatriation of Internationally Trained Veterinarians**

Internationally trained veterinarians have been very important to mitigate the impact of the shortage of veterinarians in Canada. Without immigration and training of Canadians overseas, the shortage would be much worse.

In 2019, a total of 632 Certificates of Qualification (“C of Q”) were issued by the National Examining Board. Of those 632 C of Q’s, 355 (56%) were to graduates of Canadian veterinary schools, 187 (30%) to graduates of international accredited veterinary schools and 90 (14%) to graduates of international non-accredited veterinary schools.

Immigration and repatriation of internationally trained veterinarians and training of Canadians at off-shore schools, in both accredited and non-accredited programs, may be viewed as a short term solution with potential immediate impact.

Immigration must also be supported and maintained in the long term to supplement domestic training of veterinarians as a relief for variabilities in supply and demand.

The Workforce Study Report included a recommendation that *“CVMA should partner with stakeholder organizations to identify partnership opportunities in Francophone international schools...”* The Working Group identified immigration of veterinarians, particularly from France and Belgium and possibly from other parts of la Francophonie (Francophone countries) as a means to address the acute need in Quebec. The Quebec – France agreement may help facilitate immigration. The FMV is planning a campus in Rimouski to address the shortage of veterinarians in rural areas.

The Working Group members recognize that there are aggravating circumstances that will negatively impact immediate and short-term opportunities for immigration. These include the current COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions on international travel as well as the global shortage of veterinarians. There is not an identified surplus of graduate veterinarians available for immigration to Canada.

**Recommendation #3**

**CVMA investigates the number of Canadian students enrolled in veterinary education at international schools to project return to Canada.**

There are significant numbers of Canadian residents who move abroad to acquire a veterinary professional education, though the numbers and identities are not known. There is no current mechanism to identify or connect with these students. Veterinary education programs at international schools are actively recruiting Canadian students.

There is an opportunity to implement initiatives to ensure Canadian students acquiring a veterinary education abroad return to Canada upon completion of their professional degree. Understanding the number of Canadian students accessing a veterinary education abroad and the reason for doing so will provide useful information to make the case for increased funding for veterinary education domestically.

**Recommendation #4**

**CVMA maintains and expands CVMA student chapters at accredited colleges and identifies a network of champions at these schools.**

The Working Group identified an opportunity to connect with students of accredited programs with the intent of recruiting graduates to work in Canada. This includes students from Canada as well as international students. This initiative has the potential for immediate impact. The goal is to build awareness of opportunities in Canada, and leverage quality of life and working conditions as reasons to locate and practice in Canada.

**Recommendation #5**

**CVMA promotes, as one of the options to obtain a C of Q, the clinical year option to graduates of international non-accredited programs. Working with key stakeholders, CVMA investigates training opportunities/bridging programs for graduates of international non-accredited schools including funding.**

Immigration of international graduate veterinarians from non-accredited programs is a significant pool of veterinarians entering the workforce. Graduates of non-accredited programs must register with the National Examining Board (“NEB”) and pass a series of examinations to receive a Certificate of Qualification (“C of Q”), which is required for licensure. The recently approved alternative pathways to a C of Q including the ‘clinical year option’ provide a means for additional clinical training in an accredited program. This additional training and exposure to veterinary medicine in the Canadian context may better prepare these graduates for clinical practice compared to the NEB exam process alone.

Graduates of non-accredited programs are likely to require customized assessment and support to ensure adequate preparation to enter the fourth or fifth year of an accredited program and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. There are opportunities to support these candidates and ensure they are prepared to enter the final, clinical year of an accredited program.

CVMA will work with key stakeholders to identify what the level of interest is, identify what organizations or colleges are willing and able to provide the training and sources of funding. There is agreement that graduate veterinarians from non-accredited programs should be supported in the process to obtain a C of Q and become eligible for licensure. The opportunity to apply for limited licensure in certain Canadian jurisdictions supports NEB candidates in their development of day one competencies.



## Recommendations – Operating Protocols and Business Models for Veterinary Healthcare Delivery

The factors identified in the Workforce Study Report that impact demand for veterinary services including number of dogs and disposable income (projected to increase 45% by 2030) and number of households (projected to increase 17% by 2030) will outpace the supply of veterinarians (projected increase by 27% by 2030). A national strategy to address supply of veterinarians including domestic training capacity will take several years to impact forecasted shortages, even with short term opportunities afforded by immigration.

The Working Group recommends that the initiatives to address the forecasted shortage cannot rely singularly on supply of veterinarians. There must be initiatives to examine and change current systems of service delivery by veterinary professionals. A plan to address the shortage that continues to *'feed the beast'* of the current model of veterinary practice is not a rational approach. What are the opportunities to *'do more with less'*?

Research into these alternate systems for delivery of veterinary medical services may identify efficiencies to provide more service with existing numbers of professionals and non-professional support staff, but it is not limited to efficiency. There is broad recognition that veterinary professionals work in high stress environments, there is a high rate of burnout and veterinarians and veterinary technicians / technologist are leaving the profession.

These initiatives are about examining veterinary health care delivery teams, how they function to deliver services and their wellness. The outcome will be to provide resources, including coaching to practices to support healthy delivery of veterinary services.

### Research to Determine Optimal Operating Protocols and Business Models for Veterinary Healthcare Delivery

#### Recommendation #6

**CVMA supports an inter-disciplinary team of researchers (medical, business, technology, behavior) to conduct research, make recommendations and promote veterinary healthcare delivery models that are efficient and sustainable (financially, emotionally, and physically).**

Working Group members agree that this research would build on existing models that have been developed.

It is important that this research incorporate a mixed-methods approach to include human aspects of veterinary business models. The intent is to design practice models that support the well-being of practice staff while maintaining profitability, enhancing service and optimizing health outcomes.

This will also relate to research and benchmarking the utilization of technologists / technicians, which is highlighted in a separate recommendation.

The Working Group recommends that this research include both independent veterinary practices and corporate owned / consolidated practices.

#### Recommendation #7

**CVMA should support research that specifically addresses the utilization of unregistered practice staff in veterinary practice delivery.**

Research into alternative delivery systems must also consider how technicians/technologists and other practice staff such as assistants and receptionists engage in the delivery of veterinary services, freeing up veterinary professionals to do veterinary medical tasks.

## Utilization and Retention of Technicians / Technologists

Working Group members were in agreement that several opportunities related to technicians / technologists must be explored in order to properly address the forecasted shortage of veterinarians. This aligned with the Workforce Study Report *“The shortage of veterinary technicians exacerbates the need for veterinarians and must also be addressed.”*

### Recommendation # 8

**CVMA supports research that benchmarks how high functioning veterinary practices utilize registered veterinary technicians / technologists.**

Working Group members agree that there are practices that do not appropriately utilize technicians / technologists to their full potential. There is research needed to demonstrate the value to practices that delegate medical tasks to the full potential permitted under legislation. Demonstrating the value of technicians / technologists being fully utilized will support appropriate compensation and retention.

While there is anecdotal evidence of how some practices utilize technicians / technologists to the full extent permitted under legislation, the veterinary profession does not have research on how to design the best veterinary healthcare team. This research has not been conducted globally.

CVMA should support research into what constitutes a high functioning veterinary healthcare team and identify the top percentile and define the contributing characteristics. Working Group members are of the opinion that this type of information will be very motivational for practices to better utilize registered technicians/technologists.

### Recommendation # 9

**CVMA collaborates to promote optimal utilization of registered veterinary technologists / technicians in practice, recognizing the barrier to optimal utilization of technologists / technicians is mainly cultural and not regulatory.**

Working Group members discussed the matter of utilization of technician and technologists in veterinary practices as an important issue to be addressed. There is agreement that technicians / technologists are not universally being utilized to their full potential in practice. This means veterinarians are doing tasks in practice that could be delegated to technicians/ technologists. Less than optimal utilization of technicians / technologists may also impact job satisfaction and retention.

Members agree that the issue of technician / technologist utilization is rooted in the culture of veterinary practices. This issue does not necessarily require a regulatory change to expand the scope of what veterinary medical tasks may be delegated. While the Working Group recognizes that there could be regional requirements for regulatory change, for example to serve remote communities, it is not making a recommendation for expanding the scope of veterinary technicians / technologists.

The Working Group acknowledges the Workforce Study Report recommendation that CVMA investigate the degree to which a *‘nurse practitioner’* model of technician / technologist may suffice for veterinary care needs, particularly in remote areas. The Working Group recognizes there may be opportunities for additional categories of registered veterinary professionals in the future, however it is not making a recommendation for CVMA to take action on this.

The focus at present is that veterinary technicians / technologists are better utilized in practice within the current accredited training program and regulatory framework. Increased utilization is expected to enhance delivery of veterinary medical services and increase job satisfaction and retention.

### Member wellness, stress and burnout

Working Group members recognize that veterinary professionals experience high rates of stress and burnout which cause some to leave the profession. There are higher than average rates of suicide in the veterinary profession.

Veterinary professional wellness is impacted by workforce shortages and current service delivery systems.

Working Group members agree that initiatives relating to wellness are a priority for CVMA that are being addressed by the CVMA Wellness Advisory Group. Wellness issues of stress, burnout and retention may be in part addressed through initiatives related to increasing workforce capacity and promotion of innovative veterinary healthcare delivery models.

#### **Recommendation #10**

**CVMA supports research to understand the factors associated with current practice models that make veterinary professionals susceptible to mental ill health.**

This research to understand *'what is it about how veterinary practices function that negatively impacts wellness of veterinary professionals?'* is required or we cannot expect veterinary professionals to sustain their mental health. The profession cannot continue to expect that veterinary professionals entering the workforce will thrive and remain in the profession without addressing the root cause of mental ill health.

Working Group members are requesting that the CVMA Wellness Advisory Group consider workforce shortages as a risk factor for stress mental fatigue and burnout. The Working Group supports that the CVMA continues to promote wellness, conduct webinars and direct members to expert resources.

Working Group members recognize that the issue of member wellness will be addressed through this research as well as the initiative to examine alternative practice delivery models.

The high rate of suicide and reports that over 1/3 of veterinarians would not recommend the profession are an alarming call to action. Failing to address the current environment and ensure wellness of veterinary professionals will impede meaningful long-term impact on the shortage.

## List of Recommendations

1. CVMA engages and collaborates with provincial veterinary medical associations, regulatory bodies and colleges to develop shared vision and strategy on domestic veterinary education in Canada. This initiative is a two-part collaboration which includes drafting a *'Veterinary Workforce White Paper'* and holding a *'Veterinary Workforce Summit'*.
2. CVMA support provincial veterinary medical associations in efforts to increase funding of Canadian veterinary colleges.
3. CVMA investigates the number of Canadian students enrolled in veterinary education at international schools to project return to Canada.
4. CVMA maintains / expands / further develops CVMA student chapters at accredited colleges and identifies a network of champions at these schools.
5. CVMA promotes the new pathways to C of Q (clinical year option) to graduates of international non-accredited programs. Working with key stakeholders, CVMA investigates training opportunities/bridging programs for graduates of international non-accredited schools including funding.
6. CVMA supports an inter-disciplinary team of researchers (medical, business, technology, behavior) to conduct research, make recommendations and promote veterinary healthcare delivery models that are efficient and sustainable (financially, emotionally, and physically).
7. CVMA should support research that specifically addresses the utilization of unregistered practice staff in veterinary practice delivery.
8. CVMA supports research that benchmarks how high functioning veterinary practices utilize registered veterinary technologists / technicians.
9. CVMA collaborates to promote optimal utilization of registered veterinary technologists / technicians in practice, recognizing that the barrier to optimal utilization of technologists / technicians is mainly culture and not regulatory.
10. CVMA supports research to understand the factors associated with current practice models that make veterinary professionals susceptible to mental ill health.

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