The Honourable John Horgan
Premier and President of the Executive Council
BY EMAIL: premier@gov.bc.ca

September 12, 2019

Dear Premier Horgan,

I have been directed by the Board of the CVMA-Society of British Columbia Veterinarians Chapter to urgently write to you to request your timely assistance with a deadline-driven situation we have been working on since last December with both your Ministry of Agriculture and your Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. The consequences of not acting will have far-reaching and harmful effects on companion pet owners, large animal owners, food animal producers, and public health protection for British Columbians.

We currently have the full support of the Hon. Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture, the Deputy Minister Mr. Wes Shoemaker, the province’s Chief Veterinary Officer Dr. Jane Pritchard, the veterinarians of BC, the veterinary employers of BC, and importantly, the Ministry of Agriculture veterinarians. We also have the support and recommendation of the analysts and staff involved at both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Advanced Education; all collectively supporting our request that the BC government immediately fund an additional 20 spaces for BC students at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, BC’s regional veterinary university. A funding commitment is required prior to September 30, 2019 (now) to secure the 2020 student intake.

What we do not have is the commitment of the Minister of Advanced Education as we understand we do not have the commitment of the Province of BC to make this investment a priority for your government.

We are asking, on behalf of BC veterinarians, companion animal owners, large animal owners, food animal producers, honey bee producers, the aquaculture (veterinary) industry, and citizens who care about animals receiving timely access to veterinary services, for the BC government to increase the funding for veterinary education for BC students by committing before the September 30, 2019 deadline to additional funding early in 2020 to fund the additional available 20 spaces for BC students at WCVM beginning with the current student intake (without unnecessarily lengthening this letter, funding also supports research and training of specialists including important specialties like pathology).

In short, BC currently funds 20 BC students to attend the WCVM each year. The cost per year for the 20 students is $2 million -- for a total investment of $8 million per year covering each of the BC students occupying seats in each of the four years of study. Although the need has existed for more seats, none were available until now.
With the exit of Alberta (those students will attend their own veterinary university), there are now 20 vacant seats, representing a tremendous opportunity for BC. The seats disappear at the end of September 2019 (for 2020) and disappear in January 2020 (for 2021). We need your very quick assistance to protect this opportunity for British Columbia.

Timeline with the two Ministries:

**September 2018:**
20 seats will be available for the WCVM 2020 intake. Cut-off for applications is the end of SEPTEMBER 2019 (now). If BC does not take these seats, they will be sold to international students. Further, if BC were to fail to commit to those same 20 seats until after January 2020, the 2021 intake seats would be sold to international students, and be lost to BC.

**October 2018:**
the Chapter Board met with Minister Popham and her team, and was granted her full support for pursuing those 20 seats for BC students.

**December 2018:**
the Chapter Board met with the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and her team (the Minister declined to meet with the Chapter Board), and they were sympathetic but required proof to support our assertion that BC was severely short of veterinarians, and needed to increase the veterinary students from the current 20 per year to 40 as these additional seats were suddenly available and would serve a vital function for British Columbians. The September 2019 deadline was always forefront in the conversation.

**January 2019:**
the Chapter engaged a consultant and was funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education’s SMLP program to conduct a labour market study. The timelines were incredibly tight, but the profession rose to the challenge. It is worth noting that every single government employee involved worked especially hard to ensure our report came in on time to meet the September 2019 deadline.

**January to April 2019:**
the Chapter conducted surveys, interviews with governance groups and employers, and the Ministry of Agriculture’s veterinarians, as well as those working in the industry including food producers and honeybee producers.

**May 2019:**
the Chapter presented the final report to about a dozen staff and analysts with the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Agriculture in Victoria. The report clearly and convincingly demonstrated that BC needs an additional 100 veterinarians each year to meet with demand and labour market requirements, including the new federal requirement for veterinary antimicrobial oversight. The report demonstrated that the first consideration to address this shortage of 100 veterinarians per year was to commit to funding the available 20 additional seats at WCVM. The Chapter will also need to continue its work exploring ways to address the
remaining shortfall of veterinarians, but the timeline for these additional 20 WCVM seats was the driver in 2019.

**June 2019:**
the analysts who we met with in Victoria contacted the Chapter to advise that they had reviewed the report and our presentation, and together both Ministries were supporting our request for the funding for the 20 seats – all of them.

**September 2019:**
there is no commitment to fund these 20 seats, despite the recommendation from the Ministries’ own staffs and veterinarians, the Chief Veterinarian of BC, and the veterinary clinics and employers of BC.

**September 12, 2019:**
the Chapter urgently and respectfully asks the Premier to bring the full weight of his office to provide the financial commitment to British Columbians to fund these additional 20 seats, beginning immediately. You may wish to know that for the current existing commitment of 20 seats, WCVM has more than 140 well qualified applicants, so there is zero fear that WCVM would be unable to find the best students for the additional 20 seats. We also have the commitment of WCVM to provide a voice for BC to guide the allocation of some seats to address geographic representation, practice interest, and improved access for Indigenous applicants.

The CVMA-Society of BC Veterinarians Chapter is the voice of veterinarians in BC, providing member service and continuing education. Among our other important responsibilities, we sit on the admissions committee of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine.

We are very aware that the shortage of veterinarians in BC is reaching crisis levels: we have clinics closing for lack of available veterinarians to relieve sole practitioners, we have a Lower Mainland clinic that had to fly in a veterinarian from another province to cover an after hours shift, we have veterinary clinics throughout the province that have two-week-plus waiting times to get a non-urgent appointment for care, we have rural and Northern clinics that have withdrawn on-call services due to staff shortages, and we have, since December 2018, a new onus imposed on Canadian veterinarians to personally prescribe any antibiotics for animal use.

We get calls weekly from the public, often in tears, as they cannot access veterinary services in at timely manner, especially in rural or remote areas. We get calls weekly from veterinary clinics who are angry that they have run classified ads for months without any interest. We get calls weekly from fatigued and frustrated veterinarians who want to know what is being done to attract more veterinarians into BC.
Mr. Premier, we are asking you to address this urgent situation by committing to making the availability of veterinarians a top priority of this government and by demonstrating that commitment by funding an additional 20 BC students at BC’s regional veterinary college now so the students can participate in the 2019 intake. This commitment will cost an additional $2 million in early 2020, an additional $4 million in 2021, an additional $6 million in 2022, and an additional $8 million in 2023 and each year thereafter.

Otherwise, beginning in October this year, those seats will be lost to foreign students, and BC will suffer with the loss of up to 20 additional new veterinarians each year.

Our final sector labour market program report is attached (awaiting BC government approval for public release).

We are committed to working with you to make this funding happen now. If you have any questions, please contact us directly by phone (cell: 604.889.5437 any time, any day) or email. Thank you for hearing us and for understanding the tremendous amount of work we have done and the pending deadline.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Corey Van’t Haaff, Executive Director
CVMA-SBCV Chapter Board of Directors