To: Veterinary Practitioners

Subject: Clarification on reporting of rabies: a federally reportable disease

Date: April 2014

Section 5.(1) of the Health of Animals Act states: “a person who owns or has the possession, care or control of an animal shall notify the nearest veterinary inspector of the presence of a reportable disease or any fact indicating its presence, in or around the animal, immediately after the person becomes aware of the presence or fact.”

For the purposes of the rabies program in Canada, the Canadian Food inspection Agency (CFIA) policy is that it will be the various laboratories (both CFIA and some provincial and private labs) that will become aware of the presence of rabies. The CFIA will consider the submission of suspect samples that test positive at CFIA laboratories and the forwarding of presumptive positive samples from provincial or private labs as fulfilling the duty to notify the presence of rabies.

Section 5.(2) of the Health of Animals Act states: “Immediately after a person who is a veterinarian or who analyses animal specimens suspects that an animal is affected or contaminated by a reportable disease or toxic substance, the person shall so notify a veterinary inspector.”

Veterinary practitioners who are involved with live animal cases for which rabies is a disease on their differential diagnostic list should continue to manage the case appropriately in accordance with their professional expertise and any provincial guidelines. If the animal either dies or is euthanized, then the subsequent submission of the sample to one of the CFIA rabies laboratories, either directly or via a non-CFIA laboratory with or without preliminary testing, will serve as notification to “a veterinary inspector” of the suspicion of rabies. The diagnostic result will confirm the presence or absence of rabies.

Any CFIA district inspection staff who receives calls from any member of the public or a veterinarian regarding notification of suspicion of rabies will not act upon them other than to refer the person to the appropriate provincial contacts provided to the CFIA or the appropriate public health authority if no provincial contacts have been provided.