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## WVA Position Statement on Veterinary Telehealth Services

### **BACKGROUND:**

Veterinary telehealth is the all-encompassing umbrella term used to describe any situation where technology is used in the remote exchange of veterinary health information.

Veterinary telemedicine is a subcategory of veterinary telehealth that involves the use of digital communication technology to undertake remote consultation to improve the clinical health status of the patient. In parallel with the advancement of digital communication technologies, veterinary telehealth continues to develop and expand.

Teletriage is the safe, appropriate, and timely assessment and management (immediate referral to a veterinarian or not) of animal patients via electronic consultation with their owners. A diagnosis is not rendered. Conversations may also include the exchange of other types of data, such as remote monitoring and artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted diagnostics). Data exchange may or may not involve a “consultation” and may or may not improve the animal’s clinical health status (although in most cases that would be the goal).

The increased demand for and implementation of veterinary telehealth services presents both opportunities and challenges for veterinary professionals, clients, and patients alike.

Telemedicine can provide benefits to animal welfare, in reduced costs and in ease of service where owners cannot travel, where there are shortages of veterinarians and in remote areas.

### **WVA POSITION:**

- The WVA acknowledges the advances in telecommunication technology and its impact on veterinary practice.
- The WVA recognizes that in some remote areas it is not always possible or economical for veterinary practitioners to visit animals on every occasion.
- The WVA also recognizes that extenuating circumstances may make it difficult or even impossible for veterinary practitioners to meet with clients and their animals or to visit farms.

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- Telemedicine should not replace traditional face-to-face consultation, but can be used to improve the delivery of animal healthcare and welfare and can be useful in epidemiological surveys

and for detecting emerging diseases in remote areas or when access to the patient is not possible or is limited.

- Clients should be made aware if prescribing medications is not possible through telemedicine in their jurisdictions.

- Veterinarians conducting telemedicine consultations must ensure that they are registered or licensed to practise in the country, state or territory in which the patient is located and that their current registration is recognised in that jurisdiction. It is also advisable that the veterinarian be registered to practise in the country, state or territory where the veterinarian is located.

- A recognisable *bona fide* veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) must be established, except when acting in a tele-triage capacity, or in an emergency health situation where waiting for human face-to-face contact is not advisable.

- The WVA encourages its Member Associations to develop telemedicine policies that are relevant to veterinary practice in their jurisdictions and/or constituencies