



**The Minister of Advanced Education Has Failed to Meet  
With the Society of BC Veterinarians About the Shortage of Veterinarians in BC  
Despite Continued Suffering and Preventable Deaths of Animals**

*Right now, the shortage of veterinarians in BC -- the worst in Canada -- is responsible for animals suffering and dying. Food security is under threat, public health is at risk, animal rescue groups are limited in which animals they can rescue, equine owners have euthanized their horses for preventable maladies, companion animal owners face delays that contribute to their animals suffering and dying, and puppy and kitten owners face lengthy waits for preventative and urgent veterinary care.*

*The Minister of Advanced Education refuses to fund 20 additional seats at BC's regional veterinary school which would help to address the horrors caused by this shortage of veterinarians, and won't even sit down with veterinarians to discuss the problem.*

Dear BC MLAs,

We are the Society of BC Veterinarians Chapter (CVMA-SBCV Chapter), the voice of BC veterinarians. The veterinary profession is regulated by the College of Veterinarians of BC; the Chapter is the member service organization. On behalf of a beleaguered profession, exasperated animal owners and farmers, and suffering animals who cannot speak for themselves, we are asking for your help.

Despite our best efforts beginning in 2018, we have been unable to secure a meeting with the Minister of Advanced Education (neither the then-Minister nor the current Minister) where we intend to impress upon her the urgent need for her to increase the number of BC seats at our regional veterinary college (WCVN) from 20 to 40.

Both the Minister of Agriculture and the Chief Veterinary Officer for BC support our request for securing the funding for the additional 20 seats at WCVN for BC, however funding comes from Advanced Education which has said **veterinarians are not a funding priority**.

**A LANDSCAPE SCAN**

BC students wishing to become veterinarians in Canada attend the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon (WCVN) - BC's regional vet school. Only 20 BC students are admitted each year to this four-year program. Each student pays approximately \$11,000 of their own money for tuition annually; BC's Ministry of Advanced Education funds WCVN through the interprovincial agreement. Students graduate with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree (DVM).

We learned that Alberta, which has its own veterinary school for Alberta residents, was no longer going to send any of its Alberta students to WCVM after 2019, thus those 20 “Alberta” seats were no longer reserved for Alberta students and became "available."

Of note, BC currently educates 20 veterinarians each year of the four-year program. Alberta educates 52, Saskatchewan educates 20, and Manitoba educates 15. Thus, there are 80 BC-funded students at WCVM at any given time.

We asked WCVM if those 20 available (Alberta) seats could be available to BC and they said yes. BC needs them all.

We went to the Minister of Agriculture in October 2018 and asked for her support in BC securing an additional 20 seats and she fully supported our request.

We went to the Province of BC's Chief Veterinary Officer and she supported that same request.

#### MINISTER OF ADVANCED EDUCATION WON'T MEET WITH US

In December 2018, we went to the Ministry of Advanced Education which provides the budget for veterinary seats. They funded the Chapter in 2019 to do a labour market study to demonstrate need, which was completed (<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/sbcv/news/labour-market-study-may-2019>) and which demonstrated that **BC would be short 100 veterinarians per year for each of the subsequent five years, culminating in a shortage of 500 veterinarians by 2024.**

We are already seeing the tremendous challenges presented from this shortage of veterinarians already. There is no doubt that animals are suffering and dying. Securing these additional 20 available seats for BC students is the best and fastest way of addressing the problem long-term starting in 2026 when the first group would graduate.

Our time at the Chapter has been focused on this particular resolution as it will best address the needs of those in BC; especially rural, suburban, remote, and Indigenous communities. By securing these available additional 20 seats, we can then turn our attention to addressing the remaining shortages through alternate federal channels which would still not provide us with the number of veterinarians we need but would offer some small assistance.

#### **Educating BC students is the superior resolution to address this crisis.**

Despite the labour market study results and our evidence from BC veterinarians of the shortage and how it affects them, the Ministry of Advanced Education said that funding of BC veterinarians is not a funding priority. The previous and the current Ministers of Advanced Education have declined to meet with the Chapter. Our repeated requests to meet with Minister Anne Kang have been avoided, cancelled and not re-booked, and now just not responded to.

## WHAT BC VETERINARIANS ARE EXPERIENCING

Daily, our veterinarians hear about situations where animals are dying and suffering as a result of an inability to obtain a timely appointment with their veterinarians, specifically due to a desperate shortage of veterinarians.

Urban veterinarians are reporting two weeks or longer wait times to get appointments for veterinary care. Rural veterinarians report eight weeks or longer and, in some cases, the animals die before getting the help they need.

Mobile veterinarians are in short supply and these veterinarians are the ones typically providing end-of-life care for animals belonging, in many cases, to the elderly or infirm who cannot pick up a large immobile animal and take it to a veterinary clinic, if an appointment was available. These animals, then, die painfully in front of their owners.

Equine veterinarians are telling us that horses have died because a veterinarian was not available despite the horse having a treatable condition. In some cases, euthanasia is performed solely due to lack of an available veterinarian. We heard of one instance of a horse dying in a BC Ferries parking lot on its way to see a veterinarian who could not take the time to travel as it would leave other horses without veterinary care.

Large and small animal rescue and welfare groups are calling us to ask what they can do to force the government to step in and help. Rescue animals cannot be rescued if there are no veterinarians to provide veterinary care.

Cattle ranchers tell us that the shortage of veterinarians has caused a considerable problem, as there are fewer opportunities to secure a “family veterinarian” which means there is no longer the relationship between veterinarian, rancher, and herd. Prescription medications are therefore harder to obtain so cattle are denied timely access to medications and treatment. What few food animal veterinarians there are, then, are over-subscribed and can only focus on current, not new clients. The remote locations of cattle ranches place tremendous burdens on ranchers in Chilcotin, Cariboo, Smithers, Nechako, Skeena, and Vanderhoof.

Hobby farmers say that by the time conditions like a urinary blockage or bloat become obvious to goat or sheep farmers, the condition is an emergency, yet without a relationship with a veterinarian, emergency care is unavailable for new clients. Worse, we are now hearing that referrals between veterinarians for these small ruminants, especially on Vancouver Island, are often going unattended as there are simply not enough veterinarians. There is no more capacity for new clients. The animals die in particularly painful ways.

We hear from a few retirement-aged veterinarians that they have tried to sell their practices for years, and ultimately closed their doors for lack of a replacement veterinarian. We heard from one non-veterinarian who owned a practice that they, too, closed their doors when they could not hire a veterinarian for that community.

COVID only made matters worse: veterinarians were declared essential services and now work excessive hours caused by an increase in pet acquisition and increased time per

appointment due to COVID protocols and increased delays between appointments due to cleaning procedures.

The BC students at WCVM have offered to contact government to express their displeasure. They do not understand why 20 of them were admitted as BC students, and another 15 admitted as Canadian (unfunded) students. So, in addition to serious concerns about entering a profession where the shortage of veterinarians negatively impacts their work daily, they are also upset that 15 of them (unfunded Canadian – BC students) pay \$67,000 a year in tuition while their BC-funded cohort each pay \$11,000.

The public calls us begging for help and asking us why we cannot get the government to train more veterinarians to address the dire shortage in BC.

**We ask you the same question: why can't this government address the shortage of veterinarians by increasing the number of BC students trained as veterinarians?**

#### THE PROBLEM

BC is suffering from a shortage of veterinarians and as of the 2020 intake at BC's regional veterinary university, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM), an additional 20 seats for students became available. All these additional seats could have been allocated to BC to increase the number of BC students from 20 to 40 per year, had the Ministry of Advanced Education approved the additional funding required to secure these positions.

Beginning in 2018, the BC Minister of Advanced Education was asked to obtain these seats, which would include seats for rural and northern BC students, to address the rural need for veterinarians, and Indigenous seats, to encourage and provide real opportunities for Indigenous BC students.

The Ministry of Advanced Education funded the Chapter to complete a Labour Market Study in 2019. Upon finalization of the report, the Ministry withheld its permission for the Chapter to release the report to the public. We have now sought legal advice and have released the report, attached.

The Dean of the WCVM has confirmed these 20 previously-Alberta seats could be made exclusively available to BC for the 2022 intake, providing BC commits to the additional funding by March 1, 2022. There is some talk that an immediate decision by the BC government to increase funding from 20 to 40 students may be accommodated by WCVM for the September 2021 intake (as some of those unfunded Canadian students are, in fact, BC students).

#### A SOLUTION WAS DECLINED

The Minister of Advanced Education refused to fund these available 20 seats. WCVM had no choice but to make these available seats open to Canadian and International students. Those available 20 seats that BC requested (and continues to request) instead went to both Canadian and International students.

It is noteworthy that when WCVI opened up those 20 available seats to all Canadians, 15 of those went to BC students who each paid about \$67,000 per year from their own pocket to attend; having not been selected as funded BC students. This means they graduate with the possibility of significant student loan debt, unless they have families who could pay the increased fee.

**The Chapter believes that admission should be open for 40 BC seats without consideration of an applicant's ability to pay or incur debt.**

It is also of note that BC had more than 145 qualified applicants for its 20 BC seats. There was no shortage of qualified applicants and BC would have no problem filling 40 BC seats.

#### COST FOR ANOTHER 20 BC SEATS?

Current funding of our assigned 20 BC seats for the four-year program resulting in a DVM degree is \$8.3 million per year (there are 80 BC students at WCVI: 20 in 1st year, 20 in 2nd year, 20 in 3rd year, and 20 in 4th year -- total cost of \$8.3 per year).

It is assumed that if BC were to increase its student contingent to 40 BC students each year, **the ADDITIONAL cost would be less than \$2.1 million in the first year**, less than \$4.2 million in the second year, less than \$6.3 million in the third year and an additional \$8.3 million in the fourth and all subsequent years (subject to scheduled increases already approved by the BC government). Thus, the cost to the province of BC for educating 40 BC veterinarians would be \$16.6 million a year, instead of educating 20 veterinarians a year at a cost of \$8.3 million a year.

#### HELP FOR RURAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WAS DECLINED

We explained that with an additional 20 BC seats at WCVI, we could work with WCVI to ensure that there were equity seats for qualified BC Indigenous applicants (currently there are only 2 Equity seats for three provinces to share). We explained that with an additional 20 BC seats at WCVI, we could work with WCVI to ensure there were preferential spaces available for qualified applicants wishing to return to northern or rural communities, where the shortage of veterinarians is currently dire. Neither of these arguments for rural or Indigenous communities were persuasive with the Minister of Advanced Education.

#### SUMMARY

As predicted in our Labour Market Study, the shortage of veterinarians has and will continue to have a significant negative effect on the health and welfare of companion animals; equines; farm animals; exotic animals; birds; wildlife; aquatic animals; honeybees; and more.

The shortage of BC veterinarians has and will continue to have a significant negative effect on public health as BC veterinarians play a substantial role in public health, antimicrobial stewardship, and zoonotic disease surveillance.

The shortage of BC veterinarians, left unresolved by the provincial government, will continue to be directly responsible for animals suffering and dying, including hampering rescue organizations' abilities to seek veterinary care for the animals they rescue.

Finally, the shortage of BC veterinarians will continue to negatively impact the working conditions, working hours, mental health and resiliency, and work-life balance of the overwhelming majority of veterinarians we hear from every week.

The current situation caused by the dire shortage of veterinarians is not sustainable.

**If animal health and welfare, biosecurity, zoonotic surveillance, food security as well as One Health issues are important to you and your constituents, we urge you to help us obtain a meeting with Minister Anne Kang as soon as possible.**

**We request your support for needed funding for the additional 20 BC seats at WCVN in the 2022 intake or earlier, before the fate of many animals and people are further jeopardized due to inadequate access to veterinarians and veterinary care now as well as into the future.**

Sincerely,



Dr. Al Longair, President, Duncan



Dr. Jess Robertson, Vice President, Delta



Dr. Rob Ashburner, Secretary-Treasurer, Vancouver



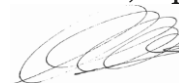
Dr. Sarah Armstrong, Past President, Vancouver




Dr. Chris Armstrong, Director, Whistler



Dr. Fraser Davidson, Director, Squamish



Dr. Marco Veenis, Director, Kelowna



Dr. Paul Kennedy, Director, Prince Rupert

## Appendix 1

### Indigenous Applicants from BC

Western College of Veterinary Medicine Self-Identified Indigenous Student Applicants from BC (as provided by WCVN)

2020

2 BC Indigenous Student applicants    1 Successful BC Pool Indigenous

2019

8 BC Indigenous Student applicants    1 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

2018

7 BC Indigenous Student applicants    1 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

2017

4 BC Indigenous Student applicants    0 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

2016

1 BC Indigenous Student applicants    0 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

2015

1 BC Indigenous Student applicants    1 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

2014

4 BC Indigenous Student applicants    1 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

2013

6 BC Indigenous Student applicants    0 Successful BC Pool Indigenous Student applicants

During this same time period, out of the total 33 Indigenous BC Student applicants, 2 were admitted under the regular intake program. In total, out of the 33 Indigenous BC Student applicants, only 7 students in total were admitted through both programs combined. With an increase of 20 additional BC student spaces each year, BC could have its own dedicated EE (educational equity) program, ensuring real opportunities for successful qualified BC Indigenous applicants.

## Appendix 2

### MEDIA ATTENTION

Veterinarians struggling during pandemic

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ab3zmpoozj9hpSP9uWUCKTudsceq1Vzb/view>

Vet shortage to blame for lack of emergency animal care in Penticton, BC veterinarians

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7645845/vet-shortage-lack-of-emergency-animal-care-penticton-b-c/>

Vet Shortage of veterinarians

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2128038>

CTV news limited class worsens

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/mobile/video?clipId=2128814>

Major shortages in the Veterinary clinics across BC | CKPGToday.ca

<https://ckpgtoday.ca/2021/02/17/major-shortages-in-the-veterinary-clinics-across-b-c/>

Animals are suffering: B.C. veterinary shortage exacerbated by pandemic

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-veterinarian-shortage-1.5765461>

Veterinarian shortage creates pet predicaments in Prince Rupert

<https://www.thenorthernview.com/local-news/veterinarian-shortage-creates-pet-predicaments/#>

It's becoming a crisis: Veterinarians say B.C. isn't doing enough to fix shortage

<https://bc.ctvnews.ca/it-s-becoming-a-crisis-veterinarians-say-b-c-isn-t-doing-enough-to-fix-shortage-1.4731142>

Funding training could help with B.C. veterinarian shortage, says society

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/news/local-news/funding-training-could-help-with-b-c-veterinarian-shortage-says-society>



## **Appendix 3**

### **CURRENT EFFORTS AND TIMELINE FOR REQUESTS 2018 to 2021**

October 2, 2018 Chapter Board and staff met with Minister Popham and DM and BC's Chief Veterinarian, who all supported our request for all 20 seats and facilitated a meeting with Minister Mark by providing contact info.

October 26, 2018 emailed requesting a meeting with the Minister Mark and Chapter Board

November 1, 2018 received an email from Minister AdvEd office declining our invitation to meet with the Minister "Minister Mark would like to thank you for the kind request to meet – unfortunately her calendar is fully engaged and I am unable to accommodate your request at this time – the Minister has asked that I pass along her sincere apologies – I have forwarded your request to our Deputy Minister's office to have staff meet on her behalf – your understanding is much appreciated – thanks and please let me know if I can be of further assistance."

December 19, 2018 Chapter Board met with DM Ag and ED Ag (and others). It was a good meeting and we were told to perform a labour market study which AdvEd paid for.

February and March and April 2019 Chapter was involved in a comprehensive labour market study which concluded that BC was short 100 veterinarians per year for each of the next 5 years (500 short). The top recommendation from the labour market study was to secure the 20 additional WCVN seats with an increase in equity seats for qualified Indigenous BC students. Overall numbers are there as WCVN receives 140 qualified applicants for the current 20 seats.

April 4 Chapter requested that the DM of Agriculture and the DM of Advanced Education attend our presentation of our labour market study. This was declined.

May 24, 2019 Chapter Board and staff attended an in-person meeting with about a dozen representatives and analysts from both Ministries.

June 2019 was called by someone in the Ministry of AdvEd and advised that there was no permission for us to release the labour market study and that we could not release the report, and to date, some 19 months later, we still do not have permission to publish our report.

June 2019 contacted DM Ag about progress of securing the 20 extra seats and was told to leave it with him, that he was meeting with DM AdvEd.

June 19, 2019 was advised that the ADMs were meeting to discuss our request.

September 9, 2019 was advised that there was a meeting between the two DMs AG and AdvEd to discuss our request.

September 11, 2019 was told there would be no money by DM Ag.

September 27, 2019 received an email on behalf of Minister Mark saying that despite broad-based support, funding is not available.

September 27, 2019 received a contentious disappointing call with ADM. Notes to Board.

January 16, 2020 wrote to Min. Mark's assistant Diego acknowledging that our Board member spoke to Minister at constituency open house and agreed to meet with our Board, stating she had never

been asked before (we provided documentation of all our efforts). Despite this, still no meeting forthcoming.

2020 COVID and provincial election. Veterinarians declared essential services and work excessive hours caused by an increase in pet acquisition and increased time per appointment due to COVID protocols and increased delays between appointments due to cleaning procedures.

January 20, 2021 requested meeting With Minister Kang.

January 29, 2021 meeting with Minister Kang confirmed for February 16, 2021.

February 9, 2021 advised that Minister Kang had an urgent meeting with Premier 7 days in the future and will cancel and substitute her Deputy.

February 9, 2021 received confirmation of Deputy meeting and were denied a new date with Minister Kang until the "executive" advised her of the outcome of the meeting

February 11, 2021 confirmed again our meeting with Deputy

February 15, 2021 provided additional material for Deputy by email on holiday Monday.

February 16 Chapter attended Zoom meeting set up by the Min Adv.ED with Chapter staff and 6 veterinarian board members who diverted time away from clients, patients and personal matters to attend. Unfortunately, no one from the Ministry showed up. After 20 minutes, Chapter staffed located someone at the Ministry who said there was no intention of anyone from the Ministry attending this meeting time, and Ministry staff erred in not advising the Chapter.

February 16, 2021 requested new meeting with Minister Kang personally as well as had agreement to also meet with Deputy Min. The Ministry has promised a meeting with Minister, but no date provided yet.

March 11, 2021 met with DM AdvEd and DM Ag. Were advised the DM Ag would schedule another meeting with us "soon" so they could get up to speed on the issues. Requested again a meeting with Minister Kang. Not provided.