



Canadian Veterinary  
Medical Association

Association canadienne  
des médecins vétérinaires

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations to  
the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance**

**in Advance of the Upcoming 2024 Federal Budget**

**August 2, 2023**

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**Recommendation 1: That the federal government address workplace shortages and ensure there is a robust veterinary workforce through additional investments for projects and veterinary infrastructure.**

**Recommendation 2: That the federal government address workplace shortages by investing in the mental health of all veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals.**

**Recommendation 3: That the federal government invest in ways to maintain and strengthen the availability of critical veterinary drugs in the interest of protecting public health and safety, animal health and welfare, and food safety and security. Canada should lead in collaboration with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to improve shared drug approval pathways making the process more efficient and economical.**

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## Background

Since 1948, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) has been the national and international voice for Canada's veterinarians, providing leadership and advocacy for veterinary medicine. CVMA speaks for over 25,000 veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians and technologists throughout the country. CVMA works with members across Canada to ensure optimal care for our patients and clients in addition to promoting best practices for environmental stewardship.

The CVMA is pleased to have collaborated and continues to participate on many projects with colleagues in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. As Canada's national veterinary organization, the CVMA has the experience, national reach, and long-established reputation to credibly and efficiently engage with and assist a wide array of other stakeholder groups including provincial governments, other health professions, international organizations, the public, livestock producers, and others.

Veterinarians in private practice, industry, and government play integral roles in early detection, response and recovery from foreign animal and zoonotic diseases, helping ensure food safety and security, protecting species diversity, contributing to climate change resilience and consequence management. We work closely with livestock producers and the aquaculture sector to promote and maintain biosecurity on thousands of land-based and water-based farms from coast to coast.

In addition, veterinarians provide diagnostic services in laboratories, support vaccine production and licensing, conduct research into emerging pathogens that affect both animal and human health and serve as faculty at Canada's teaching institutions that are a fundamental pillar of sustaining and enhancing the capacity of Canada's health care system. The expertise of veterinary epidemiologists was crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the country we play a vital role in safeguarding the health and welfare of animals and public health. Veterinary oversight underpins the ability of Canada to trade in animals and animal products and thereby supports the well-being of the Canadian agricultural and aquaculture sectors which are critical to the Canadian economy.

Our work is based in science and driven by evidence. The CVMA remains a leading advocate for animal health and welfare in Canada and works closely with federal agencies, and other stakeholder organizations to address matters of One Health which respects the interrelationship between animal, human and environmental health.

## A Robust Veterinary Workforce

The veterinary profession in Canada faces pressing challenges that demand immediate attention from the federal government. The ESDC's Canadian Occupation Projection System (COPS) shows that the labour market supply of Veterinarians is in a structural supply deficit in the short term and in projections until 2031.<sup>1</sup> This shortage has significant implications for animal health and welfare, public health, the Canadian economy as well as the well-being of individual veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals.

The workforce shortage poses a significant threat to the veterinary profession and its ability to provide quality care for clients.

Practice owners and employers are struggling to hire and retain veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals, leading to concerns about maintaining the highest standards of care. Annual graduation rates from Canadian veterinary and technician/technologist colleges barely keep up with attrition rates from the profession, while Canada's increasing population necessitates a net annual growth in professional numbers to sustain quality services for clients.

As the veterinary workforce shortage is a global issue, it is imperative that Canada addresses this challenge urgently and comprehensively. The federal government's support in the form of additional investments for projects and veterinary infrastructure is crucial to ensure a robust veterinary workforce and quality animal care and health protection for all Canadians.

We propose collaborating with the federal government to secure funding, including infrastructure investments, to address this shortage effectively. We also look forward to continuing our partnership with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to facilitate the entry of foreign-trained veterinarians into the Canadian workforce expeditiously.

To enhance the veterinary workforce, CVMA recommends further investments in projects such as a *national testing centre for internationally educated veterinarians*. Current licensure requirements for internationally educated veterinary applicants include multiple choice testing and practical examinations. The problem with practical examinations is that they are expensive and logistically complex to deliver. Opening a national testing centre would increase the available opportunities for internationally educated veterinarians to complete the licensure process and assist in expanding veterinary service capacity for the public.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Canadian Council of Veterinary Registrars (CCVR) collectively wrote to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) at the University of Saskatchewan,

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) 2022 Projects: Imbalances Between Labour Demand and Supply (2022-2031). Page 16. <https://occupations.esdc.gc.ca/sppc-cops/l.3bd.2t.1ils@-eng.jsp>

Saskatoon endorsing a proposed testing center at the University. There is widespread support for this project at the other Veterinary Colleges and within the profession.

Veterinary medicine, animal welfare and public health are foundational to the Canadian economy and culture. Canada needs a veterinary workforce enhancement program that supports expansion and innovation of clinical teaching, training, and research needs for the next generation of veterinarians, in response to societal needs and increased veterinary service requirements at all levels and across all sectors. This should include funding for elements such as the following.

1. A dedicated infrastructure fund for veterinary and technician schools for capital projects directly or indirectly related to expanding/enhancing the veterinary workforce, and for the training of veterinarians to better manage biothreats, disease emergencies, animal welfare issues, and food safety.
2. A federal program to incentivize veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians and technologists to work in less populated areas and to provide services to the far north.
2. Recruitment and on boarding of foreign trained veterinarians (FTVs) leading to eligibility for provincial licensure. Included under this would be:
  - a. As outlined above, support for a national testing center
  - b. Subsidization of the cost of the clinical year pathway

**Recommendation 1: That the federal government address workplace shortages and ensure there is a robust veterinary workforce through additional investments for projects and veterinary infrastructure.**

## **Mental Health of Veterinary Professionals**

A concerning proportion of veterinarians' experience burnout and mental health issues, with one in five reporting suicidal ideation during their careers.<sup>2</sup> These distressing statistics underscore the urgent need to prioritize the welfare of veterinary professionals and their animal health teams and address the emotional toll the profession takes on its practitioners.

CVMA has already allocated significant resources to address mental health awareness and to providing support for its members and students. However, despite commendable efforts, a significant number of veterinary professionals still hesitate to discuss their mental health concerns or seek help. This reluctance exacerbates the problem and highlights the urgency for collective action to remove the stigma associated with mental health in the veterinary profession.

To prioritize the mental well-being of veterinary professionals, we propose the following actions.

Firstly, advocating and investing in greater mental health awareness. Direct and accountable funding for mental health services for professions such as veterinarians is one way the federal government can support mental health and remove the stigma associated with speaking about personal illness.

Second, addressing workforce shortages would immensely impact veterinary professionals' well-being. The current workforce shortage places considerable strain on veterinary teams, resulting in longer workdays without sufficient respite. This intensified workload, coupled with pre-existing stressors, significantly impacts the mental health and overall well-being of the veterinary team.

**Recommendation 2: That the federal government address workplace shortages by investing in the mental health of all veterinary professionals.**

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<sup>2</sup> Croteau, Jill. "Veterinarians More than Twice as Likely to Have Suicidal Thoughts than Other Canadians: Study." Global News, May 12, 2021. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7856867/veterinarians-suicide-thoughts-rate-canada/>

## **Maintaining and Strengthening Availability of Critical Veterinary Drugs in the Interest of Protecting Public Health and Safety, Animal Health and Welfare, and Food Safety and Security**

Veterinarians in Canada have experienced for several years significant challenges in accessing several pharmaceutical agents including antimicrobials, anti-parasitics, analgesics, sedatives, and other medications critical to animal health, animal welfare, public health, and food safety and security.

Many critical drugs are currently not available to veterinarians to treat their patients because of supply chain issues or because of Canada's smaller market coupled with reluctance on the part of manufacturers to invest in the costly registration process overseen under Health Canada. An example is the lack of registered antimicrobial drugs for treating infections in livestock such as dairy cattle, swine, and poultry.

In other cases, older drugs are being removed from the Canadian market without replacement because of recent rule changes by Health Canada with respect to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP).

A significant impact of this unstable situation with respect to veterinary drug availability is that in addition to risks to the health and welfare of animals, Canadian livestock producers are put at a competitive disadvantage with those in countries where availability exists.

It is important to note that disease in food animals that cannot be treated appropriately in Canada, because of a lack of effective drugs, could lead to risks impacting food safety and food security for Canadians as well as the promotion of antimicrobial resistance due to the use of less effective but available drugs. This will not only impact safety and security within Canada, but also with our international partners in trade.

A current example of a looming threat to veterinary drug availability that crosses animal health and welfare and public health is an animal sedative known as *xylazine*, which is being used as an adulterant in the illegal drug supply (particularly in combination with fentanyl) and thereby posing a serious public health concern in Canada. As such, the federal government must address this emerging threat while also ensuring the continued availability of xylazine for legitimate veterinary use.

Xylazine plays a vital role in veterinary medicine as an essential tool for the safe and humane handling of animals. As the federal government explores potential risk mitigation measures, it is crucial that they strike a balance between addressing the public health concerns related to xylazine's misuse in the illegal drug supply and ensuring that veterinary professionals continue to have access to this essential drug.

The CVMA remains committed to collaborating with relevant federal authorities and advocating for improvement to the veterinary drug regulatory system to ensure the health and well-being of Canadians and their animals. CVMA will also continue to work to ensure prudent use of all drugs used by the veterinary profession in Canada.

By striking a careful balance between regulation to mitigate risk and availability of medications, the federal government can safeguard public health while supporting the critical need for enhanced veterinary drug availability in Canada.

**Recommendation 3: That the federal government invest in ways to maintain and strengthen the availability of critical veterinary drugs in the interest of protecting public health and safety, animal health and welfare, and food safety and security. This should include Canada leading collaboration with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to improve shared drug approval pathways that are more efficient and economical**