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Public Administration Committee
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

By email only: lcpac@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into 'Veticare'

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into the affordability and accessibility of veterinary care in Western Australia (the Inquiry).

Animal Medicines Australia (AMA) is the peak industry association representing the registrants and approval holders of veterinary medicines and animal health products in Australia. They are the local divisions of global innovators, manufacturers, formulators and registrants that supply essential veterinary medicines and animal health products that are critical to supporting Australia's \$40.5 billion livestock industry and 31.6 million pets. Our members represent more than 80% of registered veterinary medicine sales in Australia.

AMA members develop, register and supply innovative new medicines including vaccines and anti-infection medicines to prevent and control outbreaks of animal disease, as well as medicines and treatments that enable good health and wellbeing, and the production of food and fibre products that are safe for human consumption and use. Healthy animals are much less susceptible to disease and infection, and good animal health is essential to good animal welfare.

Animal Medicines Australia commends the Western Australia Government's commitment to ensuring that all animals in WA have access to appropriate veterinary care and is pleased to provide the following comments on the Inquiry for consideration by the Committee.

Key points

- Every animal in Australia should have ready access to veterinary care when required.
- Vulnerable pet owners are increasingly struggling to access veterinary care for their animals – leading to poorer animal welfare outcomes even when registered medicines are available.

- AMA seeks a policy environment that recognises the social value of pets and supports pet ownership, especially for vulnerable owners, including the elderly, people living with disabilities, and people experiencing family or domestic violence etc.
- AMA would welcome consultation on opportunities to develop a sustainable public funding model for the veterinary services in areas of public need, including animal welfare, biosecurity, population control, wildlife health and emergency response services during and following natural disasters.

Western Australia's pet population

From 2020 to 2022, pet ownership reached new heights in Australia as new owners took advantage of the opportunity afforded by flexible work from requirements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. AMA's 2025 *Pets in Australia* survey found that Australia's pet population continues to grow – with around 31.6 million pets now calling home to around 73% of households in Australia.¹

Of the 31.6 million pets in Australia, around 2.2 million (7%) call Western Australia home. Around 21% of WA's pets live in urban or inner city areas, while 65% live in suburbia and 14% live in regional centres or rural areas.

Around 0.52 million (7%) of Australia's 7.37 million pet dogs live in WA, with the majority (approximately 0.44 million) living in Perth. 73% of dogs in WA have been de-sexed and 86% have been microchipped. 94% of dogs in WA have been vaccinated at some point, with 71% receiving a vaccination in the past 12 months. When asked why their dog has not been vaccinated in the past 12 months, the most common reasons were: forgot/didn't get round to it (23%), cost (20%), unnecessary (20%).

Similarly, around 0.47 million (8%) of Australia's 5.83 million pet cats live in WA, with the majority (approximately 0.35 million) living in Perth. 84% of cats in WA have been de-sexed, and while 84% of cats living in Perth have been microchipped, just 70% of cats living outside of Perth have been microchipped. Similarly, while 92% of cats living in Perth have been vaccinated at some point, just 69% outside Perth have been vaccinated. Concerningly, when asked if their cat has been vaccinated in the past 12 months, this number drops to 63% for cats living in Perth and just 18% for cats living outside of Perth. The most common reasons for not vaccinating in the past 12 months were: cost (30%), not required (29%), unnecessary (22%).

Similar to the broader Australian population, around 23% of Western Australians have had to surrender a pet. Of these, 23% surrendered a pet in the past 2 years – slightly less than the total population (30%).

84% of Western Australians took their pets to the vet in the last 2 years – and 11% of owners from Western Australian reported that they required financial assistance to access veterinary care in the past 12 months (similar to the general population at 12%). This was slightly higher in Perth residents (12%) compared with those living in the rest of WA (7%).

Having ready access to the tools and innovative technologies necessary to keep animals healthy, via an extensive, sustainable veterinary sector, is key to sustainable and resilient livestock and companion animal sectors in Australia, with subsequent environmental, economic and social benefits.

Supporting veterinarians and vulnerable pet owners

The relationship between humans and their pets, known as the human-animal bond, is a mutually beneficial relationship between people and animals, influenced by behaviours considered essential for the health and wellbeing of both. Human and animal health sectors, however, tend to operate in silos – meaning that policy development rarely delivers positive outcomes for both people and their pets.

Currently, many veterinary practices and charities provide support and assistance to people in crisis situations, often in the form of "in-kind" labour. People experiencing crisis situations such as homelessness, domestic or family violence, or mental health crises, tend to be socially isolated and

¹ AMA. 2025. *Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people*. <https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/resources/pets-in-australia-a-national-survey-of-pets-and-people-3/>

experiencing increased stress. A pet often provides significant emotional and social support and can even provide short-term health benefits – but, due to a lack of available support, pets can also act as a barrier to seeking assistance.

Veterinarians, veterinary nurses and administrative staff are generally not trained to work with vulnerable people who are experiencing crisis, grief, trauma or emotional distress. Veterinary social workers are trained in engaging with vulnerable people in highly stressful or emotional scenarios and can take responsibility for the human health aspects of veterinary care, thereby enhancing patient outcomes, improve mental health and social connection and provide critical support for veterinarians and other animal health providers.

AMA recommends the WA Government develop a mechanism for supporting the veterinary profession in the provision of veterinary services and ongoing care to vulnerable people and their pets.

Supporting emergency veterinary care for natural disasters and injured wildlife

As our climate changes, extreme weather events are occurring at an accelerated pace – with adverse impacts on the health and welfare of our pets, wildlife and livestock.

The Federal Government has committed to providing up to one billion dollars over five years for disaster risk reduction, through the Disaster Ready Fund (DRF), administered by the National Emergency Management Agency from 1 July 2023. Assistance is available for animal care during natural disasters through the DRF for livestock producers, as well as pet owners, including emergency care. However, these programs are linked to specific natural disaster events and may not be sufficient for the increasingly frequent extreme weather events, particularly in regional and rural areas, and for severe events not declared as ‘disasters.’

The veterinary sector bears significant economic costs (often in the form of “in-kind” labour) in maintaining animal health and welfare on behalf of the broader overall community – particularly during natural disasters or by caring for unowned animals (e.g. wildlife and strays). Veterinarians have a legal responsibility to provide care for unowned animals and not only forego their usual income but also bear the cost of labour and materials associated with that care – in a manner that is not replicated in any other sector.

AMA supports the Australian Veterinary Association’s recommendation to develop a national animal disaster fund to allow consistent secure payment for veterinary services delivered in natural disasters and develop a mechanism for supporting veterinarians providing veterinary care to unowned animals (outside of natural disasters), including Australia’s unique wildlife. This could be modelled on a similar process to that currently being implemented as a part of the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) program – whereby the relevant costs and logistical arrangements are agreed with the private veterinary sector and payment of funds etc. is activated as required.

If we can provide further information at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Unsigned for electronic submission

Dr Katie Asplin

Director, Animal Health Policy and Engagement