



## World Veterinary Association Policy on the Role of the Veterinarian in Animal Welfare

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### WORLD VETERINARY ASSOCIATION (AISBL)

Avenue de Tervueren 12  
1040 Brussels, Belgium

T +32 2 533 70 22

E [secretariat@worldvet.org](mailto:secretariat@worldvet.org)

[www.worldvet.org](http://www.worldvet.org)

## INTRODUCTION

*It is widely acknowledged that animal welfare science is a dynamic and multi-disciplinary field of endeavour. Its application includes scientific and ethical obligations to the physical and mental wellbeing of animals, and it also has ethical implications in regards to human social and cultural needs.*

Ensuring good animal welfare is a core mandate of individual veterinarians as well as the veterinary community generally. This concept is articulated by many veterinary organizations in their Code of Practice, Veterinary Oath or other statements of commitment. Such statements centre on the common theme that "a veterinarian should be dedicated to the benefit of society, the conservation of animal resources and the relief of suffering of animals and to promote animal wellbeing".

As scientific knowledge in the field of animal welfare expands, and the expectations of society change regarding animal care, so the commonly accepted definitions of animal welfare have evolved. A global example of this comes from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), which defines animal welfare in their Terrestrial Animal Health Code. This definition concludes by indicating that animal welfare can be assessed by examining how an animal is coping with its living conditions. Further, an animal can be said to be in a positive state of welfare if it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe and able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states, such as pain, fear, boredom, and distress.

This definition is reflective of the "Five Freedoms" that are widely accepted as the foundation of good animal welfare and which are supported by the World Veterinary Association (WVA). The concept of "Five Freedoms" can be paraphrased as:

- ✓ Freedom from thirst, hunger, and malnutrition
- ✓ Freedom from discomfort
- ✓ Freedom from pain, injury, and disease
- ✓ Freedom to express normal behaviours
- ✓ Freedom from fear and distress

Traditionally, the veterinary community has focused on animal health and production as indicators of good animal welfare. Increasingly, it has been recognized that good animal welfare also includes consideration of animal affective state (i.e., how the animal feels) as well as an emphasis on natural living (i.e. consideration of whether the animal can express behaviours that are specific to that species).

The World Veterinary Association recognizes the importance of proper animal welfare, not only to the animals but also to people. It is well recognized that good animal care can have far reaching and positive benefits in a number of areas, including human physical and psychological health, social development, poverty and hunger reduction, disaster management and environmental sustainability.

As global understanding and concern for animal welfare continues to change, so must the education and the role of the veterinary community evolve in this regard, including support of the Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare.

## **WVA POSITION**

The World Veterinary Association holds that the veterinary community generally, and veterinarians individually, must maintain commitment to animal welfare and fulfil duties as animal advocates and leaders in the field of welfare.

Veterinary engagement in animal welfare must encompass a wide range of activities, including, but not limited to:

- ✓ Traditional veterinary roles in disease detection, prevention, and treatment of sick animals.
- ✓ Enhanced understanding and recognition of pain and its mitigation, and implementation of good veterinary practice standards that support improved animal welfare.
- ✓ Educating, informing and influencing animal owners, handlers, producers, and caregivers in regards to best practices regarding animal care.
- ✓ Engagement in scientific endeavours that lead to better understanding of animal welfare and application of this knowledge into practice.
- ✓ Educating and informing the public at large about good animal welfare practices.
- ✓ Influencing policy makers to further protect and improve animal welfare.
- ✓ Engaging in the development of animal welfare policies, legislation and the application of their principles.
- ✓ Engaging in animal welfare assessments and oversight in animal production activities.
- ✓ Encouraging those assurance schemes that promote the best of animal welfare.

The WVA supports enhancing the integration of animal welfare science and practice into veterinary undergraduate education. Day One competencies of all veterinary graduates should be adequate to allow new veterinarians to engage in the discipline of animal welfare. Furthermore, the entire veterinary profession needs to integrate relevant advancements in animal welfare into on-going continuing professional development.