Antimicrobials, including antibiotics, are needed to treat many often serious and severe infections. Development of resistance to antimicrobials by infectious agents is thus a grave public health threat. Currently, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) was responsible for 5 million deaths in 2019 alone, nearly as many as total deaths from COVID-19. This is projected to rise to more than 10 million annually by 2050.

Infectious agents often develop resistance to antimicrobials naturally and slowly over time. But this can be accelerated by the increased availability of drugs in the environment. Such increased availability may be caused by inappropriate usage of drugs in humans, animals, or plants. Another cause is the disposal of drugs or drug-containing wastes in the environment. These usually involve expired or unused drugs from households, stores, hospitals, pharmacies, or effluents from drug manufacturers. Animal and human excreta containing antimicrobials are also a source of environmental contamination, especially where they are used as manure in farms or where sewage is not properly treated before being released into the environment. The increased disposal of drugs in the environment leadsto soil and water contamination that overly accelerates AMR development. AMR is thus a multi-dimensional phenomenon and its mitigation requires multi-sectoral efforts bringing together actors in veterinary and human health, agriculture, environment and many others working together through the ‘One Health’ approach. The WAAW-2022 theme, ‘Preventing antimicrobial resistance together’, is thus most appropriate.

At the World Veterinary Association, we are highly committed to preventing antimicrobial resistance by working together with other stakeholders through the One Health approach.

Pharmaceutical stewardship is one of the WVA’s key strategic goals; for this reason, our association calls attention to the availability and use of effective antimicrobials as essential tools for the health and welfare of animals. Our stewardship goal is to cut on the inappropriate use of antimicrobials in the veterinary profession in an effort
to slow down AMR development. We realize that AMR leads to treatment failures and loss of animal life, drop in production, and ultimately a shortage of foods of animal origin with a huge severe impact on human nutrition and health.

The WVA and its member national associations and stakeholders must work against AMR through awareness campaigns, professional and public education programs, and pharmaceutical stewardship, and propose and share appropriate actions in this with other professions and work together in the One Health approach. The WVA is currently developing a global list of essential veterinary medicines for livestock as part of the pharmaceutical stewardship agenda.

Furthermore, the WVA is committed to the Quadripartite (FAO, UNEP, WHO, WOAH) initiative and welcomes the launch of the Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Platform to assist in preserving antimicrobials as lifesaving medicines and ensuring their responsible use under a One Health approach.

*The WVA president, Dr Rafael Laguens, says:*

“Definitely, the COVID-19 crisis halted efforts to combat AMR; there is an urgent need to return this matter to a prominent place on the agenda. The 1.3 million direct and 5 million indirect human deaths caused by AMR annually are a compelling moral reason for it.”