



WVA Position Statement on Veterinarians as Healthcare Professionals

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POSITION STATEMENT

The WVA recognises that veterinarians should be considered as health professionals¹ whose work contributes to physical, mental, and social well-being of human populations through animal health, welfare, and the human–animal bond.

The WVA believes that, although the primary responsibility of veterinarians is the health and welfare of animals, they contribute significantly to public health and environmental health through direct or indirect services.

- Veterinarians are trained to diagnose and treat illnesses in animals, ensuring the health and well-being of a wide range of animal species from companion animals to livestock and wildlife. They play a critical role in surveying, preventing, and managing diseases in various animal species, from pets to livestock and wildlife, to ensure those diseases do not spill over to humans or affect the safety and wholesomeness of animal products.

- Veterinarians are recognised around the world as trusted health professionals who help protect animal health, human health, and the environment in line with the One Health approach. They work within national and international health systems and are regulated to ensure they meet clear standards of ethics, competence, and professional conduct. Through this role, veterinarians provide essential services such as disease prevention, clinical care, food safety, and population health management, all of which are vital to healthy societies.

- Veterinarians are crucial in supporting animal welfare and public health across different settings. Their work contributes to public services that benefit whole communities, including disease control and access to essential animal health care. They also support international efforts to manage animal diseases that cross borders, which require cooperation between countries. At the same time, veterinarians help farmers and animal-related industries improve animal health and productivity, supporting sustainable livelihoods and food systems. In many low- and middle-income countries, veterinary services are especially important. They help protect livestock, which supports family incomes, reduces poverty, and improves access to safe and nutritious food. In this way, veterinarians contribute not only to physical health, but also to social stability and community well-being.

¹ For the purposes of this Position Statement, the terms “health professionals” and “health workers” are used in line with the working definitions of the World Health Organization and the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) of the International Labour Organization, which explicitly classifies veterinarians (ISCO-08 code 2250) as health professionals.

- Veterinarians working in companion animal practice also contribute directly to public health and well-being by preventing zoonotic transmission in domestic environments and supporting the health benefits associated with the human–animal bond.
- Veterinarians contribute significantly to public health by monitoring and controlling animal diseases that can be transmitted between animals and humans (zoonoses) or negatively affect public health. Their expertise is crucial in surveying, preventing, and managing outbreaks of diseases such as rabies, salmonellosis, and avian influenza.
- Veterinarians play a central role in antimicrobial stewardship, biosecurity, and disease surveillance. In the context of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), they perform a critical health-protective function by ensuring the responsible and prudent use of antimicrobial agents in animals. This stewardship role positions veterinarians alongside physicians and pharmacists as key health professionals contributing to patient safety and to the continued effectiveness of life-saving medicines. Through disease-prevention strategies, vaccination programmes, biosecurity measures, and herd or flock health planning, veterinarians reduce the need for antimicrobials and help mitigate the emergence and spread of resistant pathogens. Their work across clinical practice, population health management, and regulatory surveillance — including at borders and points of entry — contributes to the early detection, prevention, and control of transboundary animal diseases and emerging public-health threats.
- Veterinarians are integral to food safety systems, including both terrestrial and aquatic production systems. They supervise the health of food animals, ensuring that the meat, dairy, fish and other animal products that reach consumers are safe, wholesome, and free of contaminants.
- By helping to keep food safe from farm to table, veterinarians play a direct role in protecting human health and nutrition. Their work helps ensure that food systems are safe, sustainable, and able to withstand shocks such as disease outbreaks or environmental change. These strong food systems are widely recognised as essential to healthy societies.
- Veterinarians engage in public health research to advance not only veterinary medicine and animal husbandry practices, but also human health. They also educate animal owners and the public about animal welfare, health, and overall care, enhancing community health outcomes.
- By safeguarding animal health and welfare, veterinarians also contribute to the mental and social well-being of human populations. This includes supporting the human–animal bond, where interaction with companion animals and the responsible care of livestock are associated with psychological, social, and emotional benefits for caregivers and communities. Veterinarians study the health of animals, including wildlife, and ecosystems, contributing to biodiversity and environmental conservation efforts. Their role in managing wildlife populations and diseases can have significant implications for entire ecosystems and public health.

- Veterinarians play an important role in protecting the health of the environment and ecosystems, recognising that the health of animals, people, and nature are closely connected. Through upstream prevention, including disease prevention at the source, by keeping watch on diseases where wildlife, livestock, and humans interact, and by supporting good ecosystem management, veterinarians help protect biodiversity and reduce health risks linked to environmental damage, climate change, and changes in land use. This work is becoming increasingly important for preventing future health threats and anticipating emerging risks. It reflects the One Health approach, which recognises that the health of people, animals, and plants depends on healthy ecosystems and cannot be considered in isolation
- Veterinarians often work alongside other health professionals, including physicians, public health officials, biomedical research scientists, veterinary paraprofessionals, laboratory technicians and environmental scientists, reflecting a shared skill set, ethical framework, and responsibility within health systems. Their professional competencies, clinical training, ethical obligations, and scope of practice align closely with those of other health professionals, supporting their recognition within health workforce classifications based on skills and responsibilities rather than sectoral placement.
- Like other health professionals, veterinarians adhere to ethical standards and demonstrate compassion in their practice, advocating for the humane treatment of their patients.
- Veterinarians participate in shaping policies related to animal health, welfare, and public health, influencing regulations that protect both animals and human populations.
- Veterinarians participate in disaster preparedness and response efforts to protect the health and well-being of their communities.
- Veterinarians contribute directly to environmental health, particularly within animal production systems, through sustainable herd management, biosecurity, waste and effluent control, and technical guidance aimed at minimizing environmental impacts. These interventions protect water, soil, and air quality, reduce disease vectors, strengthen agro-ecosystem resilience, and thereby support public health and food security.

BACKGROUND

Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity². The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social situation.

Nutrition, lifestyle, environment, and genetics are considered the four pillars of health and determinants thereof. When any one or more of these is compromised, health is at risk, and some form of health care is required as a support system. Proper nutrition by provision of safe and wholesome food from secure food sources is a critical part of health and development. Better nutrition

² World Health Organization. (1946). *Constitution of the World Health Organization*. <https://apps.who.int/gb/bd/PDF/bd47/EN/constitution-en.pdf>

is related to improved infant, child, and maternal health, stronger immune systems, safer pregnancy and childbirth, lower risk of communicable and non-communicable diseases and longevity.

The WVA provides a veterinary oath which states:

I, as a Member of the Global Veterinary Profession, do solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge, skill, and training: To prevent, diagnose, treat, and manage pain and disease in all animal species to the best of my ability in keeping with the principles of veterinary ethics and relevant law. To communicate and help prevent the impact of zoonotic diseases and public health risks, or environmental contaminants of animal origin. To advocate for the humane and sustainable management of terrestrial, aerial, and aquatic animals in their diverse ecosystems through stewardship to reduce environmental impacts. To contribute to animal, human, and environmental health by continually developing my competencies as a health professional, acting with integrity and compassion, and promoting health and welfare of humans and animals.

Veterinarians have the opportunity and the responsibility to protect public health and well-being in all that they do. Their broad, comparative veterinary medical training and environmental perspective add critical insights to solving a broad spectrum of health problems, including but not limited to those involving animals directly or indirectly. Today, with public awareness of and focus on food safety and security, concerns over bioterrorism and natural disaster preparedness, the environment, and biodiversity, and the highly visible epidemics, veterinarians play a critical role as members of a collaborative health effort.

The Institute of Medicine³ has defined public health as “what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.” Veterinarians are making important contributions to public health in the areas of food security and safety, surveillance and prevention of emerging infectious diseases, environmental health, zoonotic and non-zoonotic disease surveillance, prevention, and control, health security, policy, and basic, applied, and clinical biomedical research.

Consistent with this definition, veterinarians are involved at every stage of public health — from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery. They help monitor health risks, provide early warning of emerging threats, support emergency response, and assist communities in rebuilding after crises. During emergencies and disasters, veterinarians play a vital role in protecting animal health, safeguarding food supplies, and supporting livelihoods. By doing so, they help protect human health and contribute to social stability and community resilience.

The WVA emphasizes that the *One Health* approach is indispensable to achieving global health resilience. Modern challenges—ranging from zoonotic spillovers to antimicrobial resistance and climate-related disease emergence—highlight the need for human and veterinary medicine to work under a unified, cross-sectoral framework.

This integration ensures that both human and animal health systems function collaboratively rather than in parallel, enhancing early detection, prevention, and coordinated response to public health threats. Building new cross-sectoral models that gather human and veterinary medicine under a single

³ Division of Health Care Services, & Committee for the Study of the Future of Public Health. (1988). The future of public health (Vol. 88, No. 2). National Academies Press.

operational framework would allow society to prevent many health crises rather than simply react to them.

Veterinarians, by virtue of their comparative medical training and ecological perspective, are uniquely positioned to strengthen pandemic resilience and contribute directly to the well-being of human populations.

From a global normative perspective, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) sets international standards to protect animal health, public health, and safe trade. Veterinarians are the professionals who put these standards into practice. Veterinarians operationalise these standards through surveillance, reporting, risk management, and the strengthening of Veterinary Services and their governance. Their role within international health governance further reinforces their status as essential health professionals contributing to global health security and resilience.

Veterinarians, through their regulated practice, scientific expertise, and broad contribution to health systems, make a lasting difference to the health of animals, people, and the environment. For these reasons, they are recognised as health professionals.

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