

## Why change the Veterinarians Act 2005?

The Veterinarians Act 2005 (The Act) does not reflect how veterinary care is delivered today. It places disproportionate pressure on veterinarians, limits team-based care and provides no regulation to other parts of the sector. This creates risks for animal welfare, public confidence and sustainability of the profession.

### The case for change

Confidence in the veterinary sector is critical to ensuring a healthy New Zealand economy. A sustainable, trusted veterinary profession is essential to protecting animal health and welfare, biosecurity, food safety and overseas market access for our animal products.

The Vet Council believes the Act needs updating to reflect current veterinary practice and issues faced by the industry. These include workforce shortages, increased demand and changing service models. We do not believe The Act serves vets, animals and the public as well as it could.

In 2024, more than 450 veterinary professionals and organisations were surveyed to understand the challenges the veterinary sector was facing, and how law change might help.

### Findings

Shortcomings in The Act, combined with an international shortage of vets, have contributed to an increased pressure on the veterinary sector over the previous decade. Key shortcomings with the Act are:

1. **Allied veterinary professionals (veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians) are underutilised due to lack of regulation.** This means there are legal and practical limits to what can be delegated to them. This holds back team-based veterinary care and means that veterinary services are not as efficient as they could be. Regulation would allow AVPs to do more, as part of the care team, which would also reduce pressure on veterinarians.
2. **All regulatory requirements sit with individual veterinarians.** This is despite many current standards sitting better with veterinary businesses. Individual vets often have little or no say in how things are run (e.g. controlled drug storage and provision of emergency afterhours services) but the responsibility sits with them because they are the ones regulated under the Veterinarians Act. This is also true for complaints, which must focus on a veterinarian, even when the real issue is with the business system they work within. Registration of veterinary service providers would spread responsibility more evenly and limit the burden on individual veterinarians. It would allow the regulator to better deal with underlying systems issues, leading to better outcomes.
3. A lack of service provider regulation also means that there is **no regulation of emerging technologies** that could have major impacts on the public and on confidence in the veterinary sector. An example is the emergence of online and AI driven veterinary services targeting consumers, which are completely unregulated.
4. The Act requires **every complaint about a veterinarian to be put through a legal process**, without any power to triage even the most minor or vexatious complaints. This is needlessly inefficient and wasteful, and it puts unnecessary pressure on both the veterinarian and the complainant in cases that clearly have no merit.

### What change would achieve

Updating The Act to regulate AVPs and veterinary service providers would:

- Enable safer, more efficient team-based care
- Reduce pressure and burnout on veterinarians
- Improve accountability at a system/business level
- Allow emerging technologies and services to be appropriately overseen
- Deliver better outcomes for the profession and therefore animals and the public

If AVPs were regulated, they could perform some of the tasks veterinarians do and increase the sustainability of the veterinary workforce. Regulating clinics would help ensure veterinary standards are being maintained and can be monitored more easily.

With appropriate training, delegation and oversight some examples of work AVPs could do:

- Metricechecking and metritreatments for post calving metritis
- Intravaginal Device (IVD) Insertion and Removal as part of synchronization programs
- Ultrasound Scanning and manual palpation for Pregnancy Diagnosis
- Uncomplicated Calvings and Lambings
- Administration of Pre-Authorized Emergency Treatments (e.g. Downer Cows, Bloat, calvings with complications)

With appropriate training, delegation and oversight some examples of work vet nurses could do:

- Inducing and maintaining anaesthesia
- Sedation, positioning and taking of radiographs
- Nurse-led consultation including vaccinations of healthy animals
- Minor surgical procedures
- Diagnostic procedures
- Initial triage and assessment of emergency cases

### **What's Next**

The Case for Change and more information about the proposed options are available on the [Vet Councils website](#).

If you support updating the Veterinarians Act to better reflect today's veterinary practice and to better protect the sustainability of the profession, we encourage you to read the Case for Change and consider writing to your local MP or relevant Minister in support of updating The Act. If you would like to discuss further with the Vet Council, we would love to hear from you and can be reached at [vet@vetcouncil.org.nz](mailto:vet@vetcouncil.org.nz)