

Key messages

GENERAL

Alberta Minister of Advanced Education Marlin Schmidt announced on Oct. 12 that Alberta will not renew its participation in the Western College of Veterinary Medicine's (WCVM) interprovincial agreement after 2020.

The ABVMA is asking that the Government of Alberta restore funding to WCVM and continue to support the successful partnership which has served the west, and specifically Alberta, so well.

LACK OF CONSULTATION

- The Government of Alberta has made the decision to end its 54-year, \$8-million-per-year partnership with the WCVM and the other three western provinces. The decision was made without consulting the province's veterinary profession, agriculture industry or other key stakeholders.

REDUCED CAPACITY TO EDUCATE GRADUATE VETERINARIANS

- The ABVMA is very concerned that the Government of Alberta's decision to withdraw from the interprovincial funding agreement limits the capacity for veterinary education and will effectively cap the number of credentialed veterinarians available to enter practice in Alberta.
- The veterinary profession is concerned that there will be insufficient credentialed veterinarians to meet the needs of society at a time when there is already a shortage of veterinarians and the province's need for veterinarians is expected to increase.
- A reduced capacity to educate Alberta students is expected to result in more students interested in a career in veterinary medicine to seek an education in an American or Caribbean school, at significant increase in tuition costs to the student.

ALBERTA STUDENTS NO LONGER HAVE A CHOICE

- The ABVMA supports the Government of Alberta funding two veterinary schools, University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine's (WCVM).
- After the 2019-2020 academic year, without funding from their home province, Alberta students will no longer be eligible to attend the WCVM.
- The Government of Alberta's decision to withdraw from the interprovincial funding agreement takes away the ability of Alberta students to choose the veterinary school that they wish to attend. While both schools offer internationally accredited DVM programs, there are clear differences in how each school delivers veterinary education and the opportunities available to students at each institution.

DECREASED FINANCIAL COMMITMENT TO VETERINARY EDUCATION

- The Government of Alberta's decision will significantly decrease the amount of money spent on veterinary education programs. ***This decision represents a \$3.3-million annual reduction in the provincial government's commitment to veterinary education, research and animal health in Western Canada.***

- The end of the partnership means that the Government of Alberta is walking away from investment in infrastructure, facilities, equipment and expertise at the WCVM made over the past 54 years.
- WCVM has an extensive history of research partnerships with Alberta government agencies and other organizations based in the province. It is still unclear how the Government of Alberta's decision will affect the WCVM's ability to conduct research and provide outreach to the agricultural industry.

WCVM PROVIDES MUCH MORE THAN SEATS

- WCVM's commitment extends far beyond teaching 80 DVM students from Alberta each year. Under the interprovincial agreement, the WCVM's responsibility to all four western provinces includes seven key commitments that have been met for more than 50 years:
 - Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program
 - post-graduate and specialist training programs
 - research in biomedical and veterinary sciences
 - clinical and diagnostic services
 - continuing education
 - public extension education
 - training support for veterinary technology students

PRODUCING QUALIFIED VETERINARIANS AND VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS FOR ALBERTA

- According to numbers from WCVM, from 2013 to 2016: 97 WCVM graduates — 31 per cent of the college's total crop of 313 graduates during those four years have found jobs in Alberta. This represents a higher number of graduates going to Alberta than what the government funds (80).
- It can reasonably be expected that the other western provinces will not appreciate that veterinary students being funded by them locate to practice in Alberta.
- About 60 per cent of those graduates working in Alberta have entered rural large or mixed animal practice.
- WCVM trains Alberta-based graduate students, interns and postdoctoral fellows. Over the past five years (2012-2017), WCVM has assisted 106 Alberta-based students in achieving post-graduate degrees or training. During that same period, 61 Alberta-based undergraduate students also participated in the WCVM's highly successful summer student research program.

IMPACT OF WCVM RESEARCH — BEEF CATTLE AND BISON EXAMPLES

- The WCVM's research program has a significant impact on Alberta's livestock sector — particularly in beef cattle production. In the past decade, major, WCVM-based research projects have included:
 - Western Canada Beef Productivity Study, led by WCVM epidemiologist
 - Five-year longitudinal study of the Western Canadian cow-calf industry, led by WCVM beef cattle researcher

These studies, both of which will have a lasting impact on livestock production across the West, build on the WCVM's history of beef cattle research that includes pioneer work in the areas of bull reproduction and female fertility, bovine respiratory disease, and beef cattle behaviour and welfare.

- Another example: WCVM researcher with collaborators across Western Canada established the Wood Bison Reproduction Research team in 2006. Its focus is to preserve the threatened species. The project's potential findings will have the greatest impact on Alberta and the Northwest Territories because of the endemic disease among the wood bison herd in Wood Buffalo National Park. The importance to Alberta is the risk represented by the wildlife reservoir of brucellosis and tuberculosis to Alberta livestock and to human health, and the stalemate to conservation efforts for the threatened wood bison species.

IMPACT OF DIAGNOSTIC RESOURCES — THE TOXICOLOGY EXAMPLE

- Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS) operates as a partnership between the Government of Saskatchewan and the WCVM and completes about 10,500 toxicology analyses per year from the province of Alberta. This number has been relatively consistent for the past three years, with an increase each year. Most of the caseload is related to large animals. Establishing the necessary expertise, facilities and equipment to handle the Alberta toxicology caseload would be expensive, with most of this cost related to equipment. The WCVM already houses this equipment at a total cost of about \$1.5 million. A dedicated operator for this equipment is also required. These types of diagnostic services are more effective as a shared resource between provinces. Of concern is that Alberta does not provide full-service provincially funded diagnostic laboratory services like other provinces.
- The toxicological expertise at the WCVM is an essential resource for Alberta veterinarians and producers. WCVM toxicologists regularly consult with Alberta veterinarians, faculty at the University of Calgary, Alberta extension specialists and producers. This year alone, there will be about 200 toxicology-related consultations. Most of these involve interpretation of toxicological data associated with cases, or to discuss investigative strategies in suspected toxicology cases.
- In late 2016 and early 2017, Prairie Diagnostic Services stepped up to provide support to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to handle the high volume of analyses on Alberta cattle that were infected with bovine tuberculosis. PDS performed necropsy examinations with the help and support of WCVM faculty, residents and veterinary students. This support allowed CFIA to expedite their management of the bovine tuberculosis investigation in Alberta, which suffered a severe backlog due to lack of local resources necessary to complete these post-mortem examinations. These laboratory services were not available in Alberta.

IMPACT ON ANIMAL HEALTH

- Whenever an emerging disease threatens the health of Western Canada's livestock herds, WCVM specialists are available to serve on the front lines of these disease investigations — providing their clinical expertise and skills as part of collaborative disease response teams.

VETERINARY TEACHING HOSPITAL

- A key strength of the WCVM is its veterinary teaching hospital — the only one in Western Canada. The WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre (VMC) offers primary care to animal owners as well as advanced referral services to western Canadian veterinarians — including practitioners in Alberta who rely on the VMC for access to new technologies and specialized care of their patients.

- The VMC also provides veterinary students (including senior students from UCVM), residents and clinical interns with the ideal place to develop their clinical and diagnostic skills and to gain hands-on experience with a diverse range of large animal and small animal cases.

RENEGING ON A PROMISE

- When the Alberta veterinary school was created in 2005, the Government of Alberta promised the province's veterinary community, the WCVM and other funding partners that opening a veterinary faculty at the University of Calgary would not alter the funding arrangement, as both programs are complementary to one another.
- The ABVMA and the WCVM support funding for both programs.

IMPACT ON SUSTAINABILITY AND PARTNERSHIP

- Over the past ten years, it has become apparent that the two veterinary programs are complementary and produce graduates with different strengths. In terms of serving Alberta's needs, access to both programs provides more than the sum of each part.
- The Alberta partnership represents about 25 per cent of the annual operating funding provided by the provinces. This loss will have a potentially devastating impact on the college and its ability to meet its mandate to Western Canada without dramatically raising tuition or developing an entirely new structure.
- Alberta's withdrawal from the interprovincial agreement will significantly impact the other western provinces.
- Maintaining existing partnerships and identifying potential funding options is critical to the WCVM's future.
- As well, the province's support will ensure the strength of existing partnerships with University of Calgary, University of Alberta, government agencies and industry stakeholders in the province of Alberta.