

For Immediate Release

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The Government of Alberta's Historic Commitment to Strengthen the Veterinary Profession in Alberta is a positive step forward for Alberta's animal owners and provincial economic growth

Edmonton, AB – The Alberta veterinary profession together with municipal and agricultural stakeholders have been calling attention to labour shortages with indications that this global problem has grown to crisis levels in Alberta impacting access to animal care, human health and threatening the growth of the Alberta economy. The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) and the Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association (ABVTA) welcome the Alberta government's investments in Budget 2022 that help to address these workforce challenges and position Alberta as a world leader in veterinary education and international talent attraction.

In April of 2021, the ABVMA published a Veterinary Professional Workforce Study, which highlighted vacancy rates for veterinary professional positions, including veterinarians at 16.7% and veterinary technologists at 18.8% being exponentially higher than the provincial average of 2.6%. Demand for veterinary services is expected to outpace population growth with the current education and training system unable to meet growing demand.

Budget 2022 through the Alberta at Work initiative provides direct investment of \$59 million over three years to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Calgary (UCVM) for infrastructure expansion. The initiative further provides targeted and needed enrolment expansion for veterinarians and veterinary technologists at UCVM and technical colleges in Alberta. Further investments for targeted immigration attraction streams to rural Alberta will also position Alberta as a place welcoming the best veterinary talent.

“Veterinarians and veterinary technologists are critical to the health of Alberta's animals, the sustainability of Alberta's communities and to the Alberta economy growing forward. Labour shortages are real, growing and pose a risk to lives and livelihoods. This investment will help address labour gaps and ensure a new generation can pursue quality veterinary education and veterinary careers in Alberta, especially in rural Alberta. Today is a positive step forward for our profession, for all animal owners and for Alberta.”

- Dr. Pat Burrage, President, ABVMA

“The Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association welcomes today's budget announcements that will expand veterinary education and veterinary professional labour attraction efforts. Veterinary technologists are a critical part of the veterinary teams delivering services throughout Alberta communities that keep Alberta animals healthy and keep our communities healthy. Veterinary professionals have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic and the Alberta at Work initiative offers us hope that the Alberta government is committed to helping attract, train and employ more veterinary professionals at this critically important time.”

-Karen Melnyk, President, ABVTA

Veterinary medicine plays a critical role in relation to key industries, public health, food security and safety, and sustainability of local communities. A December 2021 Economic Impact Assessment examined key economic impacts of veterinary practices and based on the total revenues of Alberta veterinary practices is estimated to be approximately \$1.1 billion. The total (direct, indirect and induced) output of the veterinary sector in Alberta is estimated at \$2.021 billion. The total GDP is estimated at \$1.075 billion with total government revenues of \$206 million.

“There is unprecedented collaboration between the ABVMA, ABVTA, UCVM, technical colleges, rural municipalities and other stakeholders working on the workforce challenges. This largest public investment in veterinary education by the Government of Alberta is a generational game changer for our profession and Albertans. We will be continuing our collaborative work with the stakeholders and our profession to find solutions to address the acute veterinary workforce shortage issues. Today is a decisive step forward as we strengthen recruitment, training and retention of our professionals to serve the growing need in Alberta.”

-Dr. Darrell Dalton, Registrar, ABVMA

“Innovative veterinary education is integral to building the next generation of economic prowess and community health in Alberta. The Alberta government investment at UCVM is a legacy investment. \$59 million in infrastructure money in addition to significant enrolment investment will expand our world class veterinary program allowing more Alberta students to graduate and work in Alberta while also increasing access to international veterinarians. UCVM is ready and excited at this opportunity to grow and educate a new generation of veterinarians and provide Alberta communities with the support they need.”

-Dr. Renate Weller, Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary

“Sustainability and growth of our rural communities is dependent upon availability of skilled labour and appropriate supports to attract professionals to our communities. Veterinary shortages have been an ongoing concern to our rural residents be it the pet owner or our agricultural producers. Budget 2022 and the Alberta at Work initiative provides necessary and timely investment for the expansion of veterinary education, skills training and attraction efforts. Capital funding for Alberta’s Broadband Strategy is also critical to our attraction of professionals, including veterinarians and their families. We look forward to continuing our work with UCVM, the ABVMA and the Alberta government to ensure Alberta is a leader in training veterinary professionals who pursue long careers in our rural communities.”

-Angela Aalbers, Reeve, Mountain View County

Budget 2022 provides a bold and decisive investment in veterinary medicine that will bolster the health and welfare of animals, growth in rural communities and the health of Albertans. Graduates of veterinary medical programs will be in demand for decades. These investments will expand the opportunity for Alberta students to be trained in Alberta and build long-standing careers in the Alberta communities they know best.

The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) is the professional regulatory organization governing the practice of veterinary medicine in Alberta under the authority of the Veterinary Profession Act. As a self-governing profession, the ABVMA performs its regulatory and professional enhancement functions in accordance with the law and in a manner responsible to the public of Alberta. Providing leadership in animal health and welfare is a core objective of the ABVMA.

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