

April 28, 2021

Hon. Anne Kang
Ministry of Advanced Education
Room 346, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Minister Kang,

We are writing to you today to reiterate our concern about the shortage of veterinarians in British Columbia and the impact it is having on animals, their owners and the vets themselves.

This is not a new issue; in fact, it was raised by our caucus in [December 2019](#) but unfortunately, we haven't seen any movement on it — and the situation is becoming much more serious.

Many people have adopted pets during the COVID-19 pandemic, seeking out the comfort and companionship of animals during this stressful time. These connections are important and nice to see, but they have also increased the demand for veterinary services. Demand already outstripped the number of veterinarians available before the pandemic, so many pet owners are now finding it virtually impossible to find a practitioner able to take them on as patients. It's taking them two weeks or longer to get an appointment.

The situation is even worse in rural areas, where veterinarians report it can take eight weeks or longer for them to book appointments. In some cases, the animals suffer tremendously or even die before getting the help they need. This is a tragic and heartbreaking consequence of the shortage.

In addition, the added pressure on veterinarians is becoming unmanageable. They are stressed out, burned out, and exhausted as they try to offer care to as many patients as possible. Veterinarians are caring people by nature, and they love what they do. The thought of turning away animals and their owners is unfathomable, so many of them are taking on more work and feeling the effects of that intense schedule.

One of the solutions to this shortage is to simply train more veterinarians. B.C. students wishing to become veterinarians in Canada can attend the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon (WCVM) — B.C.'s regional vet school. However, only twenty B.C. students are admitted to this four-year program each year.

Recently it was announced that Alberta, which has its veterinary school for Alberta residents, will no longer send any of its Alberta students to Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon (WCVM). Those twenty seats that were reserved for Alberta students are now available.



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We would like to know whether B.C. will pursue these seats and fund them, so that we can double the number of practitioners being trained each year. If not, what measures are being pursued that will help resolve this urgent situation?

We are not the only ones concerned about this issue. The Society of BC Veterinarians Chapter has reached out to your ministry to secure a meeting to discuss the need to educate more B.C. veterinarians and collaborate on solutions. Unfortunately, they say they have been rebuffed on multiple occasions. They have now written a letter to all MLAs to seek support for their efforts and note that many B.C. animal rescue groups will be joining their public cause as well.

It is our hope that there will be an open dialogue on this issue, and an earnest effort to find ways to increase the number of veterinarians in British Columbia for the benefit of people and animals alike. We look forward to your reply, outlining the efforts made to date on this important file.

Sincerely,

Coralee Oakes
MLA, Cariboo North
Official Opposition Critic for Advanced Education

Ian Paton
MLA, Delta South
Official Opposition Critic for Agriculture

cc: Hon. Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture
cc: Shirley Bond, Interim Leader of the Official Opposition