



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

## Welfare of animals must be considered policy

The *Veterinary Practice Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct 2018* (the Code) states **that veterinary practitioner must at all times consider the welfare of animals when practising veterinary science.**

Veterinary practitioners are trained on how to assess animal health and welfare, and how to optimise the care and management of animals. It follows that by virtue of their training, skill and expert knowledge, veterinary practitioners have a professional duty to consider the animal's welfare when performing veterinary services.

To demonstrate that the animal's welfare has been considered the veterinary practitioner should:

- Take appropriate and timely steps to reduce and eliminate an animal's unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.
- When performing a procedure on an animal ensuring that the animal is provided with effective pain relief to alleviate, prevent and reduce unreasonable or unnecessary pain for an appropriate amount of time following the procedure.
- Only provide surgical or medical intervention in relation to an animal's heritable condition or disease if failure to treat that condition or disease would cause unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress to the animal.
- Satisfy themselves, and be able to provide evidence, that any person acting under their supervision, direction and/or authority who performs a procedure on an animal is appropriately trained, supervised and has competency to be able to perform the procedure.
- Engage in veterinary practice in accordance with current relevant animal welfare legislation, standards and codes.

### Animal welfare legislation

Veterinary practitioners must ensure that they and those they work with have working knowledge and comply with the various laws, regulations and codes of practice relating to animal welfare in the ACT that are relevant to the work they are undertaking.

These include:

- [Animal Welfare Act 1992](#)
- [Animal Welfare Regulation 2001](#)
- [Domestic Animals Act 2000](#)
- [ACT Codes of Practice for animal welfare](#)

In the course of their work, veterinary practitioners must not ignore circumstances where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that animal welfare standards have been breached.

## **Pain management**

The failure of a veterinary practitioner to provide appropriate pain relief may constitute unsatisfactory professional conduct.

Contemporary veterinary medicine recognises that preventing and alleviating pain and distress is necessary for good animal welfare. The community rightfully expects that the prevention and management of pain in animals is a priority for veterinary practitioners.

All surgical and non-surgical procedures involving tissue damage can be expected to be painful. It is not reasonable to allow an animal to feel pain or distress where this may be safely prevented and/or managed. An analgesia plan must be tailored for each patient and type of procedure and be continued for an appropriate period after the procedure.

Being able to assess pain is a crucial part of pain management. Veterinary practitioners are expected to have a sound knowledge of the physiology of pain and pharmacology of pain control substances.

The use of pain relief in veterinary medicine is subject to ongoing research and refinement. Veterinary practitioners should ensure their pain management protocols are reviewed regularly to ensure they are to current contemporary standards.

## **Invasive treatments and procedures**

Veterinary practitioner should only carry out invasive treatments or procedures on animals:

- When the procedure is reasonable and appropriate in the circumstances in order to prevent, diagnose or treat an illness or injury; or
- In accordance with accepted livestock husbandry practices; or
- In accordance with generally accepted principles of responsible pet ownership, e.g. desexing cats and dogs

Veterinary practitioners should not carry out invasive treatments and procedures on animals:

- for the convenience of the owner, when not in the best interests of the animal
- for cosmetic reasons
- that do not meet accepted professional standards

## **Genetic defects**

It is unethical for a veterinary practitioner to perform a surgical operation on, or to provide medical treatment for an animal if the primary purpose of the operation or treatment is to conceal the animal's true genetic status so as to enhance its value for sale, breeding or showing in competition. For this reason, a veterinary practitioner must not perform such a procedure unless the primary purpose is to relieve or prevent pain or discomfort, or to improve health or function for the animal concerned.

Where a client's animals are found to carry inherited defects that compromise their welfare or that of their prospective progeny, veterinary practitioner must give the client sound genetic counselling and management advice which is in the best interests of the animal and its progeny. The owner should be counselled on the advisability or otherwise of sterilising the animal to restrict the perpetuation of the heritable defect.