



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Telemedicine Policy

Veterinary telemedicine can be used by veterinarians in the ACT and may be a helpful tool to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Veterinary telemedicine is the use of technology such as phone, email, or video conferencing to provide veterinary care including diagnosis and treatment without being physically present with the animal or owner.

The ACT Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct allows for authorising (prescribing) restricted veterinary medicines:

- to a person responsible for the care of an animal that the veterinary practitioner has physically examined or has under his or her direct care, and only in respect of that animal; or
- to a person responsible for the care of an animal/s, with the written authority of another veterinary practitioner who has physically examined the animal concerned or has it under his or her direct care, and only in respect of that animal.

In light of the risk COVID-19 poses, we believe that it would be appropriate to allow veterinary practitioners to use veterinary telemedicine to authorise medicines where they can reasonably judge it safe to do so using patient histories and/or recent visits to the premises even without having seen the animal recently. We consider that it would be justified in this extreme situation to protect veterinarians, their staff, and the wider public. Risk assessment and professional judgment by the veterinarian in each case is still vital.

Veterinary practitioners must still ensure that the following conditions are adhered to:

- The veterinary practitioner must be registered in the ACT or their current registration recognised in the ACT under Part 4 of the *Veterinary Practice Act 2018*;
- There must be a bona fide veterinarian–client–patient relationship that is real and not merely nominal (i.e. there should be evidence of previously being seen at the practice, of assuming the responsibility for the diagnosis, treatment and outcome), except when acting only in a tele triage (emergency) capacity, or in an emergency health situation where human face to face contact is not available;
- A complete and accurate medical record in line with Veterinary Practitioner Board’s requirements must be produced and retained. [Management of Clinical Records](#);
- When accepting an animal for diagnosis or treatment using telemedicine the veterinary practitioner must ensure he or she is available for the ongoing care of the animal or if he or she is not available make arrangements for another veterinarian to take over the care of the animal.
- Credentials of all service providers, as well as disclaimers around the limits of telemedicine resources, should be unambiguously disclosed to the client;
- The veterinary practitioner must be satisfied that the data presented by the client is reliable; he or she must have sufficient trust in the client’s ability to assess accurately and describe signs (for example temperature, heat and swelling, halitosis,



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abdominal pain) and that the technology is satisfactory for the purpose (e.g. lameness examination);

- Veterinarians must appreciate the limitations of technology-based patient consultations and where appropriate refer the patient for a face-to-face consultation.
- Telemedicine should not be used as a substitute or as a replacement for clients attending a veterinary practice where it is reasonable to do so or in situations where a veterinarian or veterinary practice is easily accessible.
- The veterinary practitioner providing a telemedicine services must not receive an inducement for providing a referral.

The supply of restricted drugs must only occur where the veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) to initiate at the very least a general or preliminary diagnosis of their medical condition. At all times, such supply must meet the requirements under the [Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008](#). In all cases adequate instructions, including any possible side effects and risks to humans administering these drugs, must be provided to the client. The veterinarian must be available, or advise the client where they can obtain emergency coverage, for follow-up evaluation in the event of an adverse reaction or failure of the treatment regimen.

Risk assessment and professional judgement must be used by the veterinary practitioner in determining whether using telemedicine is appropriate and necessary for each case. When making decisions of this kind, some of the key questions to consider are:

- Have I received and documented sufficient information to establish identification and ownership of the animal?
- Do I have evidence to support treatment of the patient?
- Is immediate action necessary and in the interests of animal welfare?
- Can I delay treatment until a physical examination is possible?
- Can I refer the animal/owner to another veterinary practice/ veterinary surgeon?
- Has the client provided informed consent?
- What are the risks (including consideration of the nature and quantity of any drugs being prescribed)?
- What are the benefits?
- How, and how often, will I follow up with the owner to monitor the animal's progress?
- In my professional opinion, is my decision reasonable and would it be considered reasonable by a group of my peers in all the circumstances?
- Would I be able to justify my decision?