

Thriving individuals in thriving communities



Executive Summary

The Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework is informed and led by stakeholders in the veterinary profession and is for all members of the veterinary community. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is proud to champion the framework on behalf of the veterinary industry, and we wish to acknowledge and thank all those involved in bringing it to life.

In 2021 the AVA commissioned workplace mental health experts, SuperFriend, to undertake research into the mental health and wellbeing of the veterinary workforce. This included building an understanding of psychosocial risk and protective factors in the industry, and gathering input and insights into potential initiatives, interventions, and solutions to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the profession.

The research showed that 66% of the 2500 participants who took part in the survey had experienced a mental health condition, with over 40% affected in the previous 12 months. More than 50% of respondents indicated their work had a negative impact on their mental health. This reinforces other scientific evidence that suggests that working in the veterinary industry may cause or exacerbate mental ill-health and suicide risk.

Of the several recommendations resulting from the research two were considered a priority - forming a Veterinary Wellness Steering Group and developing a nationally consistent mental health and suicide prevention framework specific to the veterinary profession.

The THRIVE Veterinary Wellness Steering Group was formed, and in October 2022 veterinary professionals from a range of disciplines and roles came together for a roundtable discussion. The participants committed to collaborating as one profession to create resources to support a mentally healthy veterinary community.

The steering group developed this Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework in consultation with veterinarians, veterinary nurses, technicians, students and other stakeholders. It aims to support individuals, workplaces, and organisations to implement well-being strategies that positively impact mental health outcomes for all veterinary team members.

Effective partnerships and strategic connections in the veterinary industry and the broader community will bring the framework to life - designing and embracing initiatives that address each of its components and supporting the wellbeing of veterinary workers and the sustainability of the industry.

Mental health and suicide prevention at work

An integrated wellness approach is recommended when assessing and addressing workplace or workforce mental health. This encompasses three main areas of activity:

- (i) Preventing harm and mental ill-health from psychosocial hazards in the industry;
- (ii) Promoting mental health by leveraging protective factors such as strengths, capabilities, and the rewards of work;
- (iii) Protecting individuals who experience stress and mental ill-health.

We are all responsible and accountable to prevent, promote and protect ourselves and each other. By collaborating, workplaces can manage the risks and cultivate ways of working that move towards eliminating, minimising, and preventing psychological harm.

This framework is applicable to **everyone** in the veterinary community from students to people working in clinical practice, those in academia, industry, government and any other related veterinary field. We see the framework as a living document which will evolve and improve over time.

The THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework underpins our industry-led veterinary wellness initiative, THRIVE - which aims to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.



THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework Snapshot

PREVENT

Preventing harm from psychosocial hazards in the industry

We are well prepared to fulfill our roles in the veterinary industry.

We work in a safe and supportive team environment.

Regulatory frameworks support our psychological health and safety.

PROMOTE

Promoting strengths, capabilities and the rewards of work

We are recognised and rewarded for the work we do and the value that it brings.

We work in an industry where belonging and diversity are embraced.

We are supported to grow and to be well.

PROTECT

Protecting us when we experience stress and are unwell

We are able to speak openly about stress and mental ill-health.

We check in and support each other to get the help we need.



Our work-places make reasonable adjustments to allow us to contribute.



ava.com.au/THRIVE

THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

The Australian veterinary industry recognises the value of an integrated approach to workplace mental health and suicide prevention, one that supports the profession through three founding pillars: prevention, promotion, and protection.

 <p>Prevent</p>	<p>PREVENT: Preventing harm from psychosocial hazards in the industry</p> <p>Ready to work in the veterinary industry. Our training is holistic, building our self-awareness, and equipping us with the non-technical skills that allow us to effectively apply our knowledge when we enter the workforce.</p> <p>Safe and supportive workplaces. All members of veterinary teams work together to identify psychosocial risks. Safe, open conversations create the trust that allows a collaborative approach to the design and management of work, reducing or eliminating the impact of hazards.</p> <p>Industrial awards and legislation set us up for success. Regulatory and membership bodies advocate for awards and legislation that act as minimum standards. Compliance with legal obligations prevents harm.</p>
 <p>Promote</p>	<p>PROMOTE: Promoting strengths, capabilities, and the rewards of work</p> <p>Meaning and value. Our work is meaningful and positively impacts our mental health. We are valued and rewarded for the work that we do. We are recognised for the essential contribution we make to animals, communities, and businesses.</p> <p>Diversity, inclusion and belonging. Equity and diversity in our community is embraced and contributes to our strength. The acceptance and tolerance of ideas and identities is paramount. We work as a team, as part of a veterinary community that accepts us and encourages us to be our real selves.</p> <p>Whole person wellbeing and growth. Life-long personal and professional development is promoted and tailored to the unique interests and values of each individual. We are supported to find the balance between work and the other aspects of our life that allows us to be well.</p>
 <p>Protect</p>	<p>PROTECT: Protecting us when we experience stress and are unwell</p> <p>Raising awareness and reducing stigma. We may have times when we are stressed or experience mental illness. We feel safe to share this with others knowing that it will not have a detrimental effect on our careers.</p> <p>Early intervention and support. We check in with each other regularly. Responding quickly and compassionately helps people to locate and access the support that they need.</p> <p>Flexibility. The people working in our industry have diverse needs. We learn from people's lived experience and make reasonable adjustments that allow them to contribute sustainably to the workplace.</p>

Resources

As a veterinary industry we are working together to maintain the most relevant mental health resources available. We have included information on some resources that will get you started.

The Australian Veterinary Association has made a commitment to manage more detailed and veterinary-specific information on their website. Please visit ava.com.au/THRIVE to find further resources that assist to prevent, promote, and protect mental health.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the passion and commitment of all individuals who have contributed to this framework. Those with lived experience of mental ill-health, veterinary professionals and stakeholders who identify strongly with the veterinary profession. Thank you for sharing your unique voice, and for your pledge to veterinary wellness.



PREVENT: Resources and support services for understanding the legislation and regulation that help prevent harm in our industry.

- **Fair Work Australia**
- **Safe Work Australia***
 - Model Code of Practice - Managing psychosocial hazards at work
- **Animal Care and Veterinary Services Award**
- **Australasian Veterinary Boards Council:** Promoting the integrity and sustainability of the veterinary profession.

PROMOTE: Resources and support services that promote team strengths and capabilities.

- **Beyond Blue** – Work and mental health: Providing details on how to build a mentally healthy workplace.
- **Head to Health:** An online platform provided by the Australian Government that offers information and support for mental health.
- **SANE:** 1800 187 263: A national mental health organisation providing information, resources, and support for people with complex mental health issues in Australia and for the families and friends that support them.
- **Employee Wellness Programs:** Workplace wellness programs that focus on stress management, healthy lifestyle choices, and work-life balance can help employees cope with the demands of their job and reduce the risk of burnout.
- **Individual, leadership and/or business development training and coaching:** Supporting individuals and teams with their non-technical skill set, mindset, and workplace culture.
- **THRIVE Cultivating Safe Teams Pilot Program:** Supporting the mitigation of common stressors in veterinary workplaces and promoting a culture of psychological safety.
- **Mentoring programs** such as the AVA new graduate mentoring program, can help to support diversity goals, increase productivity, develop leadership skills, and shift culture.

PROTECT: Resources and support services for protecting team members when they are unwell. The asterisked services (*) are available 24/7.

- **Lifeline*** | 13 11 14: A national crisis support and suicide prevention helpline offering support for anyone in need.
- **Beyond Blue*** | 1300 224 636: A national non-profit organization that provides information and support for people with depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. They offer a helpline, online resources, and counselling services.
- **Suicide Call Back Service*** | 1300 659 467: A free nationwide service providing phone and online counselling to people affected by suicide.
- **headspace*** | The National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25-year-olds.
- **Mensline Australia*** | 1300 78 99 78: Support for men.
- **QLIFE** | 1800 184 527: A national support service for LGBTIQ+ folks operating daily from 3pm-12am.
- **13 YARN*** | 13 92 76: An Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders crisis support line.
- **Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)** | 1300 687 327: The AVA provides members, the vet professionals that work for them (who may not be members) and family members with access to counselling services, as well as a range of other support services, including financial advice, legal support, and personal assistance.
- **Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA)** | The VNCA provides members access to professional counselling services and wellbeing resources.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)** | Provide confidential counselling services for employees and their families, including support for mental health and wellness.

Please visit the AVA website ava.com.au/THRIVE for further resources.

*Please seek advice and support from your state/territory regulator