An update on the Veterinarians Act

A discussion paper on the proposed updates to the Veterinarians Act was posted on Ontario’s Regulatory Registry outlining the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affair's (OMAFRA) suggested approach to modernizing several items under the legislation. The discussion paper was open for public comment for 90 days and was part of a second round of consultations by the ministry, which continues to build on the feedback shared since the first consultation in November 2022.

At its April meeting, OVMA's board of directors reviewed OMAFRA's discussion paper. Based on feedback provided by the board, key recommendations were provided to the ministry. You can view OVMA's full response.

Some members may be surprised by OVMA's suggested recommendations, as they don’t encapsulate certain concerns that members have shared. While all member comments are taken into consideration, there are steps the association must take prior to including them in advocacy efforts.

Member feedback is reviewed by OVMA's board of directors, comprised of fellow member veterinarians. One of the board’s many roles is to consider all the issues, evaluate the validity and weigh the variables, such as the profession’s interest against the government’s priority of protecting the public. The board then discusses and determines what would be within scope and reasonably attainable.
Below are some frequently asked questions to help you understand the modernization process:

**What is the process for the development of the new legislation?**

The modernization of the Veterinarians Act will be completed in phases. After this recent consultation regarding the high-level concepts to be revised under the act, the legislation will be drafted and then presented to the government for debate and approval. The legislation serves as the general rules/structure that will govern the new college and licensed veterinarians. Once the legislation is passed by the government, which requires three readings in the legislature, regulations will be developed to serve as the policies for the college and profession to be in compliance with the law. Unlike the legislation, the regulations will be posted for public consultation, which allows OVMA and members to provide additional feedback. The regulations will delve into the specifics of the delivery of veterinary medicine on topics such as scope of practice. Many of the issues shared by members during this consultation will be outlined in regulation or college policy rather than in the new act.

Below is an example of the differences between legislation, regulations and college practice standards or bylaws:

**Veterinarians Act Legislation**
- Licensing provision states that only a veterinarian with a licence may practice veterinary medicine in the province. Laypeople would not be allowed.

**Veterinarians Act Regulations**
- Licensing provisions state how to obtain a licence, types of licences, restrictions, and revoking of licences.

**College Policy and Bylaws**
- Council approves policies, providing direction to College staff on licensure processes, delivery and renewals.

**How long will it take for legislation to be developed?**
Even though the process to modernize the Veterinarians Act started in 2014, the journey to finalize a new act could be anywhere from a one- to two-year process. OVMA will continue to work closely with its small and large animal issues committees and board of directors to ensure that the new legislation, regulations and college policy will be fair, inclusive and reflective of the current profession, while reflecting the needs of the profession to be more efficiently regulated.

Is there going to be a lot of change for veterinarians?

From a day-to-day perspective for veterinarians, there will be very little to no change to current obligations and responsibilities. Most of the changes will be regarding the inclusion of registered veterinary technicians, their licensing program and specifics around delegation. The legislation and corresponding regulations will hopefully be more transparent and specific compared to the current antiquated Veterinarians Act.

Does the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) make the final decisions on the legislation?

As a regulatory body, CVO cannot approve the legislation or make final decisions. Acts are owned by the government. The legislation provisions and final decisions are all made by OMAFRA’s policy and legal teams, and ultimately approved by members of provincial parliament serving in the Ontario legislature. Furthermore, it’s important to note that OMAFRA’s teams are consulting with the Ministry of Health to ensure consistency between regulated health professions and within the various acts.

What will happen to CVO?

There will be a transitionary period from the time the legislation is passed and enacted, to regulation development and implementation. Essentially, at the time the act is enacted, the current College of Veterinarians of Ontario will cease to exist and simultaneously a new college of veterinary medicine will begin (the name of the new college is yet to be confirmed). A transitionary council will be authorized to aid in the transition, as well as refine regulations and the new college bylaws in accordance with the new legislation.

Resources for online pharmacies

As online retail and services become commonplace, consumers are increasingly expecting flexibility and freedom of choice for how they acquire essentials. With online pet pharmacies
gaining popularity during the pandemic, OVMA has kept member concerns regarding clients accessing medications top of mind.

As outlined in the Veterinarians Act, clients can ask for a prescription from their veterinarian and have it filled outside of the clinic, and veterinarians can charge a prescription writing fee. CVO has provided guidance on this issue in its Guide to the Practice Standard – Prescribing (starting on page 10) and on the Frequently Asked Questions page of its website. Given its mandate, CVO can't regulate prescriptions filled by pharmacies or veterinarians outside of the province.

When a client makes a request, veterinarians should explain that out-of-country products aren't subject to the same regulations as drugs approved by Health Canada, which could pose a risk to their pet's health. To educate consumers, Health Canada has released information on buying drugs online. The United States' Federal Drug Administration also has a website with resources on purchasing medications online safely, and how to spot a questionable pharmacy. Concerns regarding medications dispensed with an in-store or online pharmacy within Ontario can be directed to the Ontario College of Pharmacists.

In terms of the modernization of the Veterinarians Act, it's OVMA's understanding that the new legislation will seek to formalize these current expectations and limitations regarding pharmacists.