Advocacy update: what's going on with legislative reform

For many years, OVMA has been an active voice in sharing the struggles that our members have felt in providing care to their patients under an antiquated regulatory framework that isn’t reflective of the current approach to veterinary medicine. After nine years of lobbying efforts, we were happy to finally see a commitment by the provincial government in the 2023 budget to modernize the Veterinarians Act.

It’s clear the existing legislation has become a barrier to regulatory effectiveness, in turn putting animal and public protection at risk, while contributing to red tape and a heavy regulatory burden that’s borne by Ontario’s hardworking veterinarians and their teams. While we would prefer faster solutions to issues facing the profession, legislation and regulation development is a slow process, as each stakeholder has its own procedures, approval practices and priorities.

While OVMA staff have been working hard in the background and collaborating with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) and the Ontario Association for Veterinary Technicians (OAVT) to advocate for the profession, you may have questions about the legislation, the process to this point and what to expect going forward.

To help you understand what's currently happening with the modernization process, here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

What formal feedback has OVMA provided on the development of the new Veterinarians Act?

Aside from collaborating with CVO and OVAT, OVMA staff meet with the policy teams at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). This gives us a direct line of communication to share areas of concern and work together on finding the best solutions for the profession.

Key issues for OVMA have been:

- **Defined RVT scope of practice/clarity on delegation** – Allowing clinics to use RVTs to their full ability. This will help support clinics that are overwhelmed and short-staffed. Also maintaining the ability for veterinarians to delegate to auxiliaries to ensure flexibility among different compositions of teams.
- **CVO Council composition** – Ensuring that veterinarians are appropriately represented, even as the college begins regulating RVTs.
- **Complaints process and investigations** – Ensuring the new legislation has more streamlined processes to reduce the amount of work, burden and emotional stress for veterinarians and their teams. Ability to dismiss complaints without merit is critical in the OVMA's advocacy work.
- **Hearings** – Safeguarding veterinarians’ information from the public registry.
- **Quality assurance and mandatory reporting** – While these items will be created under regulation and college policy, we want to make it clear to the government that new programs must prioritize fairness, low-burden provisions and transparency for the profession.

It’s important to note that 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.
Why hasn’t OVMA commented on scope of practice?

As shared in an issue of NewsHound, scope of practice will be defined under regulation rather than in the act. While the ministry’s spring consultation did allude to scope of practice, it was brief. The focus of OVMA’s most recent response is on the act proper, which is why members didn’t see anything mentioned about scope of practice in our response. At this point, discussions on specifics in the yet-to-be-written regulations are hypothetical and until the act’s framework is presented, it’s difficult to make recommendations. We will certainly comment on scope of practice when work has been done in this area.

What other work has OVMA done to ensure veterinarians’ opinions are heard?

OVMA staff and appointed members have and/or are participating on governance, scope of practice and after hours care working groups with CVO. Staff and association representatives will participate on additional working groups in the coming months.

Once the act is passed, will there be any other opportunities for OVMA to provide feedback?

Yes! 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 comply with the law. The regulations will be posted for public consultation, which allows OVMA and members to provide further feedback. Consultations are typically open for 30-90 days.

OVMA will continue to work closely with its small and large animal issues committees, and board of directors (all are comprised of member veterinarians), to ensure the new legislation, regulations and college policy will be fair and inclusive of the current profession, while reflecting the need for more efficient regulation.

If you have any questions about the legislative reform process, we’re here to help! Contact Brandi Deimling, manager of government and external relations, at bdeimling@ovma.org.