



December 3, 2020

The Honorable Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
438 University Ave, 8th Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Elliott,

On behalf of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA), I would like to thank the Ministry for its on-going leadership in health protection during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario. OVMA is proud to partner with the Government of Ontario to safeguard the province's animals and animal owners throughout the current emergency, and into the future.

The people of Ontario have been working collectively to minimize the spread of COVID-19. However, it has become evident that, despite best efforts, the virus will not be successfully contained until such time as a significant portion of the population has been vaccinated against COVID-19. As the Ministry begins to develop its vaccine distribution plan, OVMA respectfully requests that veterinarians and their staff be prioritized for access to a COVID-19 vaccination.

OVMA understands and appreciates that the initial vaccination effort will focus on those at high risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 and those who are working on the frontlines of the human health and long term care fields. Another key population will be those contributing to the maintenance of other essential services for the functioning of society. Given the role that veterinarians and veterinary staff play in the protection of both animal and human health, OVMA strongly urges the Province to include veterinary practice teams in that essential service category.

Veterinary practices have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic, protecting the health of Ontario's animals and their owners, safeguarding Ontarian's food supply, as well as providing medical care within the shelter system. Unfortunately, the physical layout of most veterinary hospitals makes social distancing difficult. While veterinary teams have done their best to protect both hospital staff and animal owners through the use of curbside service, masking, reduced staffing and other measures, the difficulties associated with operating a veterinary hospital in that manner are considerable. The additional time required for each appointment or other service, combined with a province-wide shortage of veterinarians and veterinary technicians, is resulting in significant delays for many animal owners in terms of obtaining needed veterinary care. That is in turn placing tremendous stress on both veterinary hospital staff and Ontario residents seeking medical treatment for their pets, and endangering the health of the animals requiring care.

In addition, should a staff member test positive for COVID-19, Public Health could determine that the entire veterinary clinic team be required to self-isolate, depriving all of the hospital's patients with immediate access to needed care.

Veterinarians providing care through mobile or house call services, are also at a higher risk because they are entering a client's home or farm. This may require close contact with the animal owner for restraint and examination purposes. In some situations throughout the pandemic, it has been prudent for appointments to be rescheduled or diverted to a veterinary clinic, but this is certainly not a long-term solution.

Veterinarians therefore request the Ministry's assistance in ensuring the continuity of emergency and preventative care for the province's animals during this difficult time, by recognize that veterinarians and their staff are providing an essential service and giving due consideration to veterinary teams when establishing its priorities for COVID-19 vaccinations in the province.

I appreciate your consideration of the above request. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, you can contact OVMA's Manager of Government and External Relations, Brandi Deimling at 1-800-670-1702 ext. 224.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Albert Wimmers', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Albert Wimmers, DVM  
President