



March 19, 2020

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Solicitor General
25 Grosvenor Street, 18th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

Dear Minister Jones,

On behalf of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA), I would like to thank the Ministry for its on-going work in emergency management planning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario.

Ontario veterinary hospitals are implementing a variety of protocols to ensure the safety of staff and clients during the pandemic. Those protocols, which include implementing in-clinic social distancing practices, enhancing cleaning and disinfecting of all surfaces between appointments, curbside appointments, postponing non-essential client visits and increasing the use of telemedicine, have enabled veterinary hospitals to continue to meet patient needs while limiting the potential for community spread of COVID-19. However, there is an escalating concern from the public that veterinary clinics will be forced to close, should the Province decide to close all businesses not deemed to be providing essential services. OVMA is aware that under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, veterinary medicine is not considered an essential service in Ontario. Should a province-wide suspension of services be implemented, there could be adverse consequences for animal health and wellbeing. As a result, OVMA is urging the Province to deem veterinary medicine an essential service.

Veterinarians play a vital role in protecting the health and wellbeing of both people and animals:

- **Veterinarians play an integral role in zoonotic disease prevention and management that could pose harm or be fatal to humans**, for example rabies, tick borne Lyme disease and parvovirus. Veterinarians need to be able to evaluate presumptive cases and take necessary steps in mitigating risks to other animals and humans.
- **Veterinarians provide guidance and support to herd health integral to the food chain supply.** Maintaining the supply of healthy food producing animals is essential should boarder closures be announced. Canada will be relying on its own farming industry and veterinarians play an important role in ensuring the safety and quality of the food chain.
- **Veterinarians and veterinary technicians provide care to laboratory animals** which are critical to the development of pharmaceuticals, including vaccine developed to fight COVID-19. The highest quality of care is required to ensure rapid development.

- **Treating sick and injured animals.** It is essential that veterinarians are available to treat emergency cases, such as life-threatening injuries and illnesses, and to prescribe medications for both acute and chronic conditions.
- **Veterinarians working in zoos, aquariums, and with wildlife.** Should these services be closed to the public, continuity of care must be maintained for these animals.

I appreciate the consideration with 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 cursive script, appearing to read "Doug".

Doug
OVMA, CEO

CC'ed – Joshua Johnson, Senior Policy Advisor, Community Safety

CC'ed – Dr. Albert Wimmers, DVM, OVMA Board President