



August 5, 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 leadership in emergency management planning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario. OVMA is proud to partner with the Government of Ontario to safeguard the province's animals throughout the current emergency, and into the future.

By working collectively to minimize the spread of COVID-19, we can hopefully keep the number of new cases to a minimum and eliminate the need for a second shutdown of Ontario businesses. However, should such a shutdown be necessary, we need to draw on lessons learned during the initial COVID-19 outbreak. In the veterinary sector, one of those lessons was that limiting veterinary practices to the provision of urgent care was unnecessarily detrimental to both the animal population and Ontario residents.

One of the most important services that veterinarians provide is the early detection of medical issues through physical examinations and medical testing. The earlier a veterinarian is able to identify a potential problem, the sooner it can be treated. This is beneficial to both the health of the animal and the financial health of its owner, as treatments tend to be less costly if an issue is addressed before it becomes serious. By restricting the provision of veterinary services to "urgent care only" during the initial provincial shutdown, the identification of health issues was delayed and treatment was deferred, increasing the risk of adverse outcomes. For example, postponing vaccinations increases the risk of a zoonotic disease outbreak, such as the Leptospirosis outbreak which occurred recently in northern Ontario. Postponing a female dog's spay until after her first heat is a risk factor for mammary gland cancer, and postponing of a male dog or cat neutering can result in behavioural issues. Though these and many other examples may not be classified as "urgent", they represent critical preventative procedures that must be completed within a finite period. OVMA therefore respectfully requests that Ontario's veterinary hospitals be allowed to practice without the "urgent care only" restriction, should there be a second economic shutdown due to COVID-19.

In making this recommendation, OVMA is confident that veterinary practices can offer non-urgent services in a manner that protects the health of both veterinary clients and staff. To reduce the risk of spreading a viral infection in clinic, OVMA has worked collaboratively with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario and Dr. Scott Weese, an infection disease expert at the Ontario Veterinary College, to provide guidance and support to the veterinary profession. Numerous guidance documents were made available

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to Ontario's veterinary clinics, setting out best practices for mitigating the spread of COVID-19. Measures enacted by veterinary clinics include, but are not limited to:

- Implementation of curbside drop-off and pickup of animals and medicines or products.
- Enacting telemedicine appointments where possible and appropriate to minimize the number of individuals travelling to and from clinics.
- Staff donning masks and face shields, and PPE where necessary and appropriate.
- Physical barriers at reception.
- Requiring visitors in the clinic to complete a COVID-19 screening questionnaire, and to wear face masks and maintain physical distancing (stages 2 and 3).

Veterinarians have successfully demonstrated the ability to offer preventative medicine while maintaining critical health precautions to minimize the infection risk to staff and clients. Should a regional or provincial shutdown need to take place in the future, the profession is well equipped to continue regular patient care, with established safety procedures, until the crisis has abated. Allowing veterinarians to continue to practice preventative medicine now and into the future of this pandemic will ensure animal health and welfare and decrease long-term risks to human health.

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,



Doug Raven
CEO

cc: Joshua Johnson, Senior Policy Advisor, Community Safety
Dr. Albert Wimmers, President, OVMA