



January 10, 2025

The Honourable Trevor Jones, MPP
Associate Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response
Treasury Board Secretariat
Whitney Block
Room 4320
99 Wellesley St W
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3

Dear Associate Minister Jones,

On behalf of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA), and the 5,500 veterinarians the association represents, I would like to thank the Treasury Board Secretariat and Emergency Management Ontario for the opportunity to review and comment on Bill 238, *Emergency Management Modernization Act, 2024: Proposed amendments to the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*.

OVMA reviewed the proposed changes presented in Bill 238 and would like to provide feedback, specifically, regarding the inclusion of veterinarians as essential personnel in an emergency management capacity. As experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, veterinarians are pivotal in managing the health and welfare of animals, which is an often-overlooked yet essential component of any emergency management plan.

As such, any provincial emergency management framework should ensure that it recognizes veterinarians as essential personnel, acknowledging them as a critical component of emergency preparedness and response. The reasons for this are outlined below:

- **Veterinarians play an integral role in zoonotic disease prevention and management that could pose harm or be fatal to humans.** Their skills are vital in the event of an outbreak or bioterrorism event, as veterinarians are highly trained in identifying and controlling the spread of diseases that can impact both animals and humans. Veterinarians need to be able to evaluate presumptive cases and take necessary steps in mitigating risks to other animals and humans. Additionally, by managing animal populations and ensuring they receive proper care, veterinarians help prevent uncared-for animals from becoming vectors for disease or creating additional safety hazards in emergency situations.
- **Veterinarians provide guidance and support to herd health which is integral to protecting the food chain supply.** Maintaining the supply of healthy food producing

animals is essential, particularly following extreme weather events or wildfires. Veterinarians facilitate the treatment of evacuated or displaced animals, ensuring their well-being. Their ability to maintain the health of livestock as a part of the province's emergency management response assists in stabilizing the agricultural supply chain and prevents future disruptions in food production. In the event of border closures, Canada would be relying on its own farming industry and veterinarians play an important role in ensuring the safety and quality of the food chain.

- **Veterinarians are crucial for establishing, coordinating, and maintaining emergency infrastructure for animals.** Veterinarians assist in managing emergency animal care facilities that provide treatment to animals in crisis situations. Their involvement ensures these facilities are equipped to handle the needs of animals, providing a sanctuary during emergency response efforts.
- **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 to ensure the health and welfare of all Ontario animals. Veterinarians are also trained in recognizing and treating behavioural aspects of animals that are often unrecognized by non-veterinary personnel and are crucial for ensuring the safety of humans and other animals.
- **Veterinarians and veterinary technicians provide care to laboratory animals** which are critical to the development of pharmaceuticals, including vaccine developed to fight various diseases. The highest quality of care is required to ensure rapid development.
- **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.

Given their significant contributions to emergency management, it is clear that veterinarians should be considered as essential personnel in the provincial emergency management framework, avoiding the unintended consequences experienced by veterinarians and their patients during the initial stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Their involvement ensures a comprehensive approach to emergency response and recovery, addressing both human and animal needs. Recognizing veterinarians as essential personnel would also improve coordination and resource allocation, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of emergency responses.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with your office or Emergency Management Ontario to inform the modernization of the Act. Working closely together, we are optimistic that we can address issues of common concern and strengthen Ontario's emergency management program. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, you can contact OVMA's Manager of Government Relations 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 black ink, appearing to read 'B. Laing', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Brendon Laing, DVM
President