

Purpose

The community is entitled to expect the business of State to be conducted with efficiency, fairness, impartiality and integrity. The aim of this policy is to provide an ethical framework for the decisions, actions and behaviour of members of the Board of Veterinary Practitioners of NSW (Board).

Policy

1. *Responsibility to the government of the day*

It is the Board's responsibility to administer the *Veterinary Practice Act 2003* (Act) and *Veterinary Practice Regulation 2013* (Regulation), and functions as stated in the Act (s 79). The object of the Act (s 3) is to:

- a) promote the welfare of animals
- b) ensure that consumers of veterinary services are well informed as to the competencies required of veterinary practitioners
- c) ensure that acceptable standards are required to be met by veterinary practitioners so as to meet the public interest and national and international trade requirements and
- d) provide public health protection.

2. *Honesty, integrity and public interest*

- i. Board members are to treat members of the public and their colleagues fairly and consistently, in a non-discriminatory manner with proper regard for their rights and obligations.
- ii. All Board decisions and actions of the Board must be reasonable, fair and appropriate to the circumstances, based on the consideration of the relevant facts, and supported by adequate documentation.

3. *Responsive service*

- i. Board members, through the staff of the Board unless otherwise approved, are to provide relevant and responsive service to the public, providing all necessary and appropriate assistance.
- ii. Information should be provided promptly and in an appropriate format. The information should be clear, accurate, current and complete.
- iii. Board members should have an understanding of their role and the role of the Minister of Primary Industries in relation to the Board.
- iv. Board members should attend all Board meetings as far as possible and allow necessary time to prepare for meetings.
- v. Between meetings, Board members have a responsibility to respond promptly to matters brought to their attention by the Registrar or other members of the Board.
- vi. Board members should restrict discussion of Board matters to Board meetings unless otherwise directed by the President or the Registrar to respond via email communication.

4. *Economy and efficiency*

- i. Board members should keep up to date with advances and changes in the veterinary profession and look for ways to improve performance and achieve high standards of public administration.
- ii. Board members should have a clear understanding of their public duty and legal responsibilities and must act for the proper purpose and without exceeding their powers.
- iii. Board members should use their authority, available resources and information only for the work-related purpose intended.

Procedure

1. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- i. Conflicts of interest exist when it is likely that a Board member could be influenced, or could be perceived to be influenced, by a personal interest in carrying out their public duty. These interests may include:
 - a) direct or indirect pecuniary interests in a matter being dealt with by the Board or having friends or relatives with such an interest

- b) personal beliefs or attitudes that influence the impartiality of advice given and
 - c) personal relationships with people the Board is dealing with that go beyond the level of a professional relationship.
- ii. It is up to individual Board members to recognise and acknowledge dualities of interest (situations in which two or more interests coexist) and conflicts of interest (actual or potential contradictory interests) and to disclose them to the Board.
- iii. The Board will consider the disclosure (in the absence of any members who disclosed a conflict) and determine whether or not those conflicted members should:
- a) take any part in any decisions of the Board, including voting, on the matter
 - b) participate in any deliberation on the matter or
 - c) be present during the deliberation and the voting on the matter.
- iv. The Board will consider the following in determining the approach to a disclosure:
- a) whether the conflict needs to be avoided or simply documented
 - b) whether the conflict will realistically impair the disclosing person's capacity to impartially participate in decision-making
 - c) alternative options to avoid the conflict
 - d) the Board's objects and resources and
 - e) the possibility of creating an appearance of improper conduct that might impair confidence in, or the reputation of, the Board.

2. EXPENDITURE

- i. Board members must ensure the efficient and responsible expenditure of the Board's funds.
- ii. Claims by Board members for travel, accommodation and other expenses incurred performing the Board's work must be honest and accurate and should be compliant with applicable Australian Taxation Office Taxation Determinations.

3. ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS OR BENEFITS

- i. Board members should not accept a gift or benefit that is intended to, or is likely to cause them to act in a partial manner in the course of their duties.
- ii. Board members should inform the Board if they believe they have been offered a bribe, or if they have been offered a benefit or favour.

4. DISCRIMINATION AND HARRASSMENT

- i. Board members must not harass or discriminate against other Board members, staff members or members of the public on the grounds of gender, marital status, pregnancy, age, race, ethnic or national origin, political conviction, religion, physical or intellectual impairment, or sexual preference.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE WORK OF THE BOARD

- i. Board members have the right to comment on matters affecting the veterinary profession but must be aware that there are times that public comment may appear to be an official comment on behalf of the Board. In these circumstances, members should preface their remarks with a comment that they are made in a private capacity and do not necessarily represent the official view of the Board.
- ii. The President is the official spokesperson of the Board unless other members are directed by the Board to act in this capacity.
- iii. As a general rule, members can only disclose information that is normally given to the public seeking that information and should only disclose other official information or documents if, in the course of their duties:
 - a) when proper authority has been given
 - b) when required to, or authorised, to do so by law and
 - c) when called to give evidence in court.
- iv. Comments should be confined to factual information, and opinions on official policy, or practice, should only be given if required to do so by law.

6. PROTECTING OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

- i. Members must not disclose or use any confidential information without official approval. Confidential information is information that is not available for public access via the Board website.
- ii. Unauthorised disclosures may cause harm to individuals or give an individual or organisation an improper advantage.
- iii. The integrity and credibility of the Board may be damaged if it appears to be unable to keep its information secure.
- iv. Board members must make sure that confidential information, in any form, cannot be accessed by unauthorised people, and that sensitive information is only discussed with those who are authorised to have access to it.
- v. Board papers and files issued to Board members should be kept secure and destroyed or deleted when no longer required.
- vi. Care must be taken when Board papers or files are being accessed in a public place or when Board matters are being discussed over a mobile phone with others present.
- vii. Board members must abide by these directions even after their term of appointment to the Board ceases.

7. USE OF OFFICIAL FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

- i. Board facilities and equipment should only be used for private purposes when official permission has been given.

8. REPORTING OF CORRUPT CONDUCT, MALADMINISTRATION, AND SERIOUS AND SUBSTANTIAL WASTE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES

- i. If a Board member suspects another member of corrupt conduct, maladministration or serious or substantial waste of the Board's resources the matter should be reported to the Board President or Registrar.
- ii. Board members also have the right to report matters of suspected corrupt conduct to the ICAC, suspected substantial waste of Board money to the Auditor General, and suspected maladministration to the Ombudsman.
- iii. Certain protection against reprisals for such reporting is provided by the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994*.

Monitoring

The President will seek an assurance that this policy has been adhered to from each member of the Board annually at the time of review.

Training and Communication

The Registrar is responsible for ensuring that all Board members receive training in the objectives of this policy, the scope of this policy and the proper exercise of this policy.

Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually or with the appointment of each new Board to ensure that it remains appropriate to the organisational structure and operations of the Board and compliant with the relevant legislation.