

Licensure in Veterinary Medicine

How it protects the public and our animals

Veterinarians and veterinary technicians care for the health and welfare of animals and work to improve public health. Veterinarians diagnose, determine prognosis, and prescribe treatment, while veterinary technicians carry out prescribed treatments and provide nursing care. The two professions work as a team in clinical practice, and while researching medical and behavioral conditions and diseases of pets, livestock, and other animals. The primary purpose of licensing veterinarians and veterinary technicians is to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of the public and animal patients.

All U.S. states and territories have regulatory boards tasked with enforcing the licensure of veterinarians and regulating the practice of veterinary medicine in those jurisdictions. A large majority of states also require licensure for veterinary technicians. Most of the boards that regulate the veterinary professions are comprised of public members in addition to veterinary professionals.

Regulators ensure that those engaging in the practice of veterinary medicine or technology meet a minimum level of competence through recognized educational programs and successful completion of an examination. After initial licensure, veterinary professionals must continue to receive education and updated training throughout their careers. In addition, the boards have been delegated with enforcement authority to, for example, determine whether a licensed individual has practiced to a standard. Licensure also ensures that veterinarians and veterinary technicians are familiar with, and understand, the state's laws and regulations governing their professions.

Regulatory boards also promulgate rules and regulations governing the profession, including in many states the operation of veterinary clinics and hospitals. The boards investigate complaints against veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and in some cases clinics and hospitals. The licensure and disciplinary process is critical to professional accountability, and guards against unqualified individuals harming animal health and welfare and failing to protect public health.

Public protection through licensure is equally essential for fields where public health may be impacted. Veterinary professionals play a key role in disease prevention, identification and treatment of zoonotic diseases, ensuring the safety of food and feed, dog bite injury prevention, animal control, and ensuring the functional health of working animals, such as service dogs.

Veterinarians prescribe medications, and both veterinarians and veterinary technicians dispense and administer medications, including controlled substances and opioids. With respect to opioids, tremendous societal effort is currently being focused on preventing their diversion and abuse. Veterinary professionals take thoughtful actions that promote the responsible use of opioids, and aim to avoid misuse or unintended consequences. These include meticulous record-keeping and control of opioids, as well as a multi-modal approach to patient care that uses not only pharmaceuticals, but also other interventions to effectively manage pain.

Critics have argued that licensure is a barrier to competition and imposes unnecessary costs on those who wish to practice their profession of choice. In fact, some research indicates that licensure does not limit competition. Rather, licensure supports a greater supply of qualified workers and enhanced access for traditionally disadvantaged groups, specifically women and minorities. ¹

The American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) is studying ways to promote uniformity and standardization in licensure, and the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) is actively collaborating with state veterinary technician associations to standardize veterinary technician credentials to support mobility and license portability. Also, the AAVSB has developed the Veterinary Application for Uniform Licensure Transfer (VAULT), a service that provides a centralized, uniform process for veterinary regulatory boards to obtain a verified, primary-source record of a veterinarian or veterinary technician's credentials to make licensure decisions more efficient. These improvements and efficiencies are designed to minimize the costs and time involved in licensing veterinary professionals, while continuing to fulfill the boards' mission to safeguard the public.

The undersigned organizations believe that licensure of veterinarians and veterinary technicians is key to public protection and helps ensure that our pets, livestock, and other animals receive the high quality of health care they need and deserve.



This statement has been approved by American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Veterinary State Boards, Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges and National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America. (April 2018)

¹ B Redbird, The New Closed Shop? The Economic and Structural Effects of Occupational Licensure, American Sociological Review 82 (3), 600-624 (2017).