

Email sent 18 December, 2020

To:

Hon. Ross Romano, Minister of Colleges and Universities  
Hon. Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs  
Hon. Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Growth

Cc:

Ari Laskin, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
Shelley Tapp, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
Tara Barry, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs  
John Kelly, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
Rahul Bedi, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, Ministry of Economic, Development Job Creation and Growth  
Giles Gherson, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Economic, Development Job Creation and Growth  
Mike Schreiner, MPP, Guelph  
Charlotte Yates, President and Vice Chancellor, University of Guelph  
Jeffrey Wichtel, Dean, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph  
Mellissa McDonald, Director Government Relations and Community Engagement, University of Guelph

Dear Ministers Romano, Hardeman and Fedeli,

I represent the Ontario Shelter Medicine Association, an association of veterinarians and veterinary technicians who work in animal shelters and promote and provide accessible and affordable veterinary care. The human-animal bond and the need to support people and their pets is critical during this time of stress, bereavement, mental health challenges and economic hardship.

On behalf of the Ontario Shelter Medicine Association, I strongly support the designation of veterinary medical education at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) at the University of Guelph as an essential training program in the event of a provincial lockdown. An amendment to include veterinary medicine in the list of instructional programs, as described in Ontario Regulation 82/20: Rules for Areas in Stage 1, would allow for in-person training of up to fifty students during a lockdown.

Currently, in the event of Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) Public Health moving to the "Grey – Lockdown" zone, OVC would be limited to ten students per instructional space. This limit would have a significant impact on the training and education of veterinary students and would put their school year and degrees at risk. Students enrolled in the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and veterinary technician programs undertake rigorous in-person clinical training in order to graduate and receive accreditation. To date, face-to-face instruction has already been reduced to the lowest extent possible without negatively impacting key clinical curriculum.

OVC graduates provide the main source of veterinary medical professionals in Ontario. The initial restrictions of the pandemic have resulted in an increased workload that is putting a great deal of strain on the veterinary profession. This sector is already experiencing a growing shortage, especially in rural and remote regions. The animal sheltering and welfare community has specifically identified a shortage of veterinarians in North America as one of our most significant challenges.

A number of organizations, including the OVC, have made tremendous efforts to provide veterinary services to Indigenous communities in recent years. These initiatives are heavily dependent on veterinarians, who support public health by administering rabies vaccines and through spay and neuter clinics, which help reduce serious dog bite incidents in communities with free-roaming animals. Loss of these resources would erode trust and be detrimental to the welfare of people and animals in these communities.

The potential loss of an entire cohort of veterinarians and technicians would be devastating for the welfare of animals and the people who love them.

As further public health restrictions are considered in Ontario, it is important that continuity of the training of veterinarians and technicians be considered as essential. We ask that you consider an amendment to Regulation 82/20 to include veterinary medicine in the list of instructional programs in Schedule 3, Section 2, Subsection (1.1).

Thank you for your consideration,

Dr. Linda Jacobson BVSc MMedVet(Med) PhD  
President and Treasurer  
Ontario Shelter Medicine Association  
<https://www.ontariosheltermedicine.org>