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Joint AVMA-FVE-CVMA statement on the roles of veterinarians in promoting animal welfare¹

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), and the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) recognize that sentient animals are capable of experiencing positive physical and emotional states (or feelings), including but not limited to comfort and pleasure, as well as negative states, such as pain, fear, and frustration. Accordingly, animals deserve appropriate care, consideration, and respect; that is, animals should experience both a Good Life^{2,3} and a humane death.

There are both societal and professional expectations for veterinarians to provide leadership in animal welfare through actions that stimulate and contribute to public discourse, build community trust, and support community consensus regarding appropriate animal use, care, and treatment. Veterinarians may also share knowledge to promote and support welfare-focused animal care standards and practices.

The AVMA, FVE, and CVMA recognize that veterinarians—as knowledgeable and accountable professionals—have a duty to take advantage of multiple opportunities to advocate for animal welfare at the individual and community levels, as well as through membership in their professional associations ([Appendix](#)). In addition, veterinarians possess key attributes that render them valuable partners and effective animal welfare advocates. Among these are:

- Long-standing credibility earned through serving the public.
- Obligatory adherence to high ethical and professional standards.
- Strong science-based knowledge regarding animal health and husbandry, as well as proficiency in the technical, practical, and ethical application of that knowledge.

¹OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2019). Glossary, definition of Animal Welfare; <https://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=glossaire.htm> (accessed 27Jan2020).

²Mellor, D.J. (2016). Updating animal welfare thinking: Moving beyond the “Five Freedoms” towards “A Life Worth Living.” *Animals*, 6(3), 21; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani6030021> (accessed 27Jan2020).

³Webster, J. (2016). Animal Welfare: Freedoms, Dominions and “A Life Worth Living.” *Animals*, 6(6), 35; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani6060035> (accessed 27Jan2020).



- Empathy to advocate for appropriate animal use, respecting both the animals' quality of life and intrinsic value.
- Direct access to animals, the environments in which they are housed, and the people who own or care for them.
- Regular interactions with other individuals and organizations directly and indirectly responsible for animal welfare.

Establishment, implementation, and support of principles and standards designed to continuously improve animal welfare is a complex dynamic involving animal needs, human needs, societal expectations, and environmental and other sustainability concerns. Actions employed to improve animal welfare should be informed by veterinary, ethological, ecological, economic, and ethical considerations. Veterinarians are, and must continually strive to be, the leading advocates for animal welfare in a continually evolving society.

APPENDIX

Examples of advocacy opportunities for veterinarians to advance animal welfare include but are not limited to the following:

- Individual veterinarians may:
 - Provide interventional and preventive care for their patients.
 - Educate animal caretakers and owners on how to appropriately care for their animals, considering both their physical and mental health.
 - Promote breeding of healthy, robust animals that are raised and kept humanely.
 - Encourage the development and ethical use of new technologies.
 - Advance knowledge to benefit existing animal care systems and propose alternatives to better accommodate animal care.
 - Develop ongoing employee training, outcomes assessments, and continual improvement of policies and procedures that promote animal welfare.
 - Teach and mentor students, veterinarians, and paraprofessionals in the scientific and ethical bases of animal welfare.
 - Complete in-depth evaluations of facilities and animal populations and recommend standard operating procedures and best practices to promote animal welfare.
 - Serve as highly qualified, independent evaluators for animal welfare assurance programs or schemes.
 - Develop and implement rigorous animal welfare policies and procedures for corporations and research entities.
 - Join and engage with veterinary associations (geographical-based and species- or practice-focussed) to serve as the voice of the profession in animal welfare advocacy and educational initiatives.

- At the community level, individual veterinarians and animal care teams may:
 - Provide expertise through advocacy and education of the public (eg, media, politicians, school and community groups).
 - Provide expertise in the development, implementation and enforcement of animal welfare legislation.
 - Deliver community-based animal health care programs that benefit animal and human well-being.

- Veterinary associations, through the strength of their memberships:
 - Serve as the voice of the profession in animal welfare discussions with their stakeholders.
 - Formulate and advocate animal welfare policies to governments and other stakeholders, including corporations, industry groups, and non-governmental organizations.
 - Provide opportunities for their members to serve on intergovernmental organizations and other international entities that establish animal welfare standards and guidelines for the global community.