



Veterinary and Community Care (VaCC)

Introduction

VaCC's motto is "*Community supporting Community, for the wellbeing of animals and all who care for them*". This means we encompass not only the wellbeing of animals, but also that of clients and vet teams.

Our mission is to fill the gaps, financially, logistically and socially, between clients experiencing vulnerability, and access to veterinary services for the animals in their care.

The crisis being faced by the veterinary profession has been well documented, and we are seeing high rates of attrition, mental health issues and practice culture collapse because of the external influences placing pressure on the profession.

Veterinary and Community Care is part of the solution to a number of these issues.

We aim to reduce the stress on veterinary teams by helping practices manage clients who are experiencing their own life complexities and can be the most challenging to assist in a veterinary setting.

This help to those working in vet practices is achieved by providing access to Veterinary Social Workers, whose training creates an excellent opportunity to provide education, advice, access to additional resources and counselling to animal carers - including the veterinary teams themselves.

Veterinary Social Workers are the cornerstone of our vision. They are the conduit between the people experiencing vulnerability, and the veterinary care their animals deserve. They take the stress, confusion and barriers out of the critical vet-client relationship and allow the veterinary team to focus on doing their job unobstructed.

Currently, there is only one formally qualified Veterinary Social Worker in Australia, who is one of VaCC's Directors, and so it is a high priority of VaCC to create a training program to provide access to this crucial human resource.

VaCC also secures funds to provide essential veterinary care to members of the community that do not have the means to do so or must choose whether to forego the most basic needs of their own to provide for the animals in their care. Community clinics, such as Perth Street Vets who service the homeless community of Perth, is VaCC's initial delivery of this program.

We are focussed on ensuring the great work of Perth Street Vets is maintained and made sustainable. More support and better funding models are required to ensure it is self-sufficient well into the future.

With increased capacity, we can expand the provision of veterinary services to people experiencing vulnerability to a wider section of the community.

We are working very hard to lobby the government for new programs to create funding to support our work.

Another of VaCC's objectives is for this to be a collaborative, collegiate and inclusive initiative that brings people and organisations together. We welcome and seek collaboration with those aligned to VaCC's values and goals.

We would like to note that whenever we refer to veterinary teams or the veterinary profession – this encompasses everyone working in the veterinary field – vet nurses & technicians, practice owners and managers, animal attendants, reception staff, and veterinary social workers, as well as the vets themselves.

VaCC's Values

Supportive - *Enhancing the human-animal bond by supporting the financial, physical and emotional needs of animal custodians and veterinary teams*

Inclusive - *Treating all with equity, fairness and respect*

Collaborative - *Forming a strong, efficient, compassionate network through honest, open and inclusive communication*

Trusted - *Operating under the highest levels of professionalism, compassion and integrity*

VaCC's purpose:

Supporting social hearted veterinary practice for animal custodians experiencing vulnerabilities, to improve the health and wellbeing of animals and all who care for them.

VaCC's goal:

To provide community centered veterinary care that is accessible to the ever-increasing cohort of people experiencing vulnerabilities, and who benefit from the bond they have with the animals in their care.

These clients may include those experiencing vulnerabilities such as;

- Homeless or at risk
- Domestic Violence,
- Aged,
- Physical Disability,
- Mental ill-health or
- Financial disadvantage.

VaCC's goal will be achieved through providing veterinary and allied human health support services to people experiencing these forms of vulnerability, and through supporting a sustainable veterinary profession, where healthy veterinary teams can thrive in a financially viable business.

The results of VaCC's programs will be:

The improved wellbeing and welfare of animals cared for by clients experiencing vulnerabilities - this is a healthy community benefiting from the human-animal bond

and

The improved wellbeing and mental health of veterinary teams working within a sustainable business model – this is a thriving veterinary profession

How will we help?

We know from a plethora of research and data, that the mental health of veterinary teams is closely linked to the challenges of managing complex client interactions and situations.

A major factor contributing to this can be that veterinary teams are not always trained, experienced or supported to provide optimal care and service for complex client situations – which can result in poor wellbeing outcomes for all concerned – the animal, the client and the vet team.

Through VaCC's vision for community centered veterinary practice, including the integral services provided by Veterinary Social Workers, wellbeing benefits will flow not only to these clients and the animals in their care, but also to the veterinary teams themselves, improving the mental health of all who work in the veterinary profession.

VaCC is a registered charity with Tax Deductible Gift Recipient status.

VaCC has achieved this status with objectives that not only focus on the provision of veterinary services to people experiencing vulnerability, but also, to support the mental health and wellbeing of the veterinary profession who serve these people and the animals in their care.

VaCC's over-arching program is Vets In The Community which will facilitate the provision of sustainable community centered veterinary services to clients who are experiencing vulnerabilities.

These take the form of **VaCC Community Clinics (CC)** - which are outreach or pop-up clinic sessions utilising established veterinary practices.

We will invite veterinary practices to join the VaCC Network – to become **VaCC Partner Practices** (PPs). PPs will have the opportunity to host Community Clinics – say on a day or time outside of their regular opening hours.

Clinic locations will be strategically disturbed to facilitate access to our identified clientele.

PPs may also agree to accept referrals from Community Clinics to undertake surgical procedures or medical treatments that are outside the scope of the Community Clinic sessions.

Also, cases that arise during a Partner Practice's regular hours may be candidates eligible for VaCC funding through the **Directed Care Program**. This program is where individual cases are assessed and can be approved to be recipients of VaCC funded services.

Perth Street Vets (PSV) is VaCC's first iteration of a Community Clinic.

As it is operating with the legacy of Pets In the Park, the veterinary services are provided exclusively to a clientele of those experiencing homelessness.

A monthly outreach clinic is currently being provided free of charge with a purely volunteer team. Core veterinary services are provided, with some capacity to have additional services provided to eligible cases through our Partner Practices.

PSV is provided VSW support by one of VaCC's Directors, Wendy Till, who is Australia's only formally qualified, internationally recognized, Veterinary Social Worker.

What is Veterinary Social Work?

When encountering clients who are experiencing vulnerability, the veterinary team often faces challenging and sometimes overwhelming pressures to provide the optimal outcome for both their client and their patient.

These situations often arise where clients take up a large amount of time and resources and take a toll on the team's mental health and capacity to manage their daily workload.

It has been shown in other parts of the world (and also emerging here in Australia) that veterinary teams working collaboratively with allied human health professionals, deliver the best outcome for clients, veterinary teams and animals.

Veterinary Social Work utilises qualified Social Workers who have undertaken further training to recognise and consider the role that the Human-Animal Bond plays in the lives of our clients. They also have an understanding of the unique challenges and stressors on those working in the veterinary field.

They are Social Workers who view situations through a human-animal bond and veterinary world lens - they function at the intersection of veterinary and social work practice.

As VSW capacity increases through VaCC's VSW training and services project, the cohort of clients and patients receiving VaCC funded services will be able to expand beyond PSV clients and will allow us to operate Community Clinics and Directed Care Programs across the VaCC network in WA.

VSW is also emerging on the East Coast - thanks to the incredible work of Dr Lissi Kennedy ([The Social Hearted Vet](#)). Lissi is trailblazing VSW in Australia and already utilizes Social Workers who have undergone training within her [Cherished Pets Community Veterinary](#) practice on the Bellarine peninsula in Victoria.

How to be involved

As well as seeking financial support, we are looking for other types of assistance that will enable us to progress VSW capacity and deliver our VITC programs.

Interested people can sign up on our website through [this form](#). QR code

Learn more about the mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession:

["Sick as a dog"](#) podcasts by Caroline Winter