

# What happens when a complaint is made about a vet?

For members of the public



In each Australian state and territory and in NZ, a Veterinary Board or Council investigates formal complaints made about registered veterinary practitioners. This AVBC factsheet provides information to the public about the Veterinary Boards' approach when notified about a vet's professional conduct.

## First steps

Try to discuss your questions and concerns directly with the veterinarian or practice involved, as they have first-hand knowledge of your situation.

Refer to this factsheet and/or visit your Veterinary Board's website to understand what we consider.

If you still have questions, you can contact your Veterinary Board staff about your options.

All formal notifications submitted in writing, and signed, must be considered by your Veterinary Board.

## What does your Veterinary Board consider?

**State, territory and New Zealand veterinary and other legislation** provides high-level guidance about professional behaviours, including being registered, storing and supplying medicines, using radiation, animal welfare and other aspects of practice.

Additional guidance about conduct that meets the reasonable expectations of a veterinary professional's peers and the public is published by each regulatory Veterinary Board on their website. These **Guidelines, Standards, or Codes of Conduct** are used to consider whether a veterinarian's decisions and actions may have been unprofessional.

Veterinarians work with owners in providing a professional spectrum of good care to animals. Reasonable conduct is influenced by factors such as animal species, practical and physical constraints, owners' personal preferences, and financial limitations. Veterinary Boards take into account the **context** in which a veterinarian's conduct occurred.

Under law, Veterinary Boards can also consider whether a vet's standard of practice may have been **impaired by a health issue** that places animals or people at risk. Health impairments are considered separately to professional conduct issues.

## What doesn't your Veterinary Board investigate?

Veterinary Boards will not investigate complaints which are:

- purely about pricing of veterinary services and products, or outside their jurisdiction in other ways
- vexatious or malicious
- lacking in substance in relation to professional standards



## Investigation of complaints

Each Veterinary Board or Council must follow veterinary legislation and the principles of natural justice so that processes are fair to the veterinary professional involved. More information about your region's process is available on your Veterinary Board's website.

All investigation processes gather information to make an impartial decision about whether further action is needed. Veterinary Boards:

- inform the veterinary professional of your complaint and the issues it raises
- request a written response from the veterinarian and all relevant clinical records
- focus on the evidence and facts
- seek additional necessary information such as clinical records from another practice
- consider the relevant professional standards
- consider any reflection and actions subsequently undertaken by the vet and workplace to strengthen future practice.
- consider the future risk posed by the veterinarian's behaviour



Thorough, fair and accurate investigation into complex matters can take many months to complete. Veterinary Board staff will give you regular updates about the progress of your complaint. The entire process is treated sensitively and only discloses information necessary to fulfill your Veterinary Board's regulatory functions.

## Possible outcomes

Veterinary Boards aim for complaint outcomes that are consistent, proportionate and where possible, constructive in strengthening the vets' future practice.

Options open to Veterinary Boards vary according to the seriousness of the conduct and the guiding legislation and can include:

- no further action
- counselling to guide improvement
- relevant further education
- conditions on registration
- caution or reprimand
- fine
- payment of proceedings costs
- suspension or cancellation of registration

## Further information

Additional information about veterinary regulation, related resources and contact details can be found on your state, territory Veterinary Board or NZ Veterinary Council website.