

Kelly Lush

From: Kelly Lush
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To: Kelly Lush
Subject: FW: Ontario Protecting Northern and Rural Livestock Producers

From: Ontario News <do.not.reply@ontario.ca>
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To: Jennifer White <jwhite@huronkinloss.com>
Subject: Ontario Protecting Northern and Rural Livestock Producers



NEWS RELEASE

Ontario Protecting Northern and Rural Livestock Producers

Province expanding eligibility and modernizing the Veterinary Assistance Program to support Ontario's agriculture sector

February 25, 2026

[Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth](#)

TORONTO — The Ontario government is modernizing the Veterinary Assistance Program (VAP) by expanding eligibility and streamlining the application process to ensure livestock producers in Northern and rural Ontario have reliable access to veterinary care. As part of the government's plan to protect Ontario, these changes will help strengthen the province's agri-food sector and support the vital work of veterinarians to safeguard livestock health.

“In the face of economic uncertainty, our government is protecting Northern and rural Ontario’s agriculture sector by cutting red tape and streamlining this vital program to help the industry thrive,” said George Pirie, Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth. “The Veterinary Assistance Program has a long history of supporting veterinarians and farmers, and this redesign is an important first step in strengthening the program to better support agricultural production.”

Ontario’s agri-food sector supports more than 867,000 jobs and contributes \$51.4 billion to the province’s GDP. By expanding eligibility, updating compensation rates and opening applications to all eligible veterinary practices, the province is taking action to help the livestock industry remain competitive and resilient.

First introduced in 1945, the Veterinary Assistance Program provides financial support to veterinarians delivering care to animals on farms across Northern and rural Ontario, including support for locum assistance, travel and continuing education costs. In 2024, the province completed the first formal review of the program since 2004, engaging veterinarians, producers and sector partners to identify opportunities to improve access, efficiency and long-term sustainability.

Updates to the Veterinary Assistance Program will take effect on April 1, 2026, and include:

- Expanding eligibility so all veterinary practices providing services in eligible areas can apply
- Streamlining the application process by allowing veterinary practices to submit applications directly to the Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth
- Recognizing registered veterinary technicians as eligible participants
- Adding honeybees and fish as eligible livestock
- Increasing the call compensation rate for isolated veterinarians by nine per cent and increasing the per kilometre compensation rate for non-isolated veterinarians by an additional 30 cents, while also making telemedicine an eligible expense
- Updating budget allocations to ensure available funding is fully utilized

“This initiative, together with others like the Veterinary Incentive Program, is making it easier for farmers and large animal owners to access veterinary care when and where they need it,” said Trevor Jones, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. “Veterinary services are essential to the strength of Ontario’s agri-food sector and our

government is working to address the challenges farmers face in northern and rural communities to protect our province's livestock industry.”

Through these changes, Ontario is ensuring veterinary practices have fair and equitable access to program funding while maintaining essential services for livestock producers. Veterinary practices may begin submitting applications for the 2026-27 round of funding in late March 2026.

Ontario will continue working with farmers, producers and veterinarians to explore further enhancements to the Veterinary Assistance Program as part of its ongoing commitment to protect Ontario's agri-food sector and build stronger, more resilient northern and rural communities.

Quick Facts

- VAP was established in 1945 by Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness and was transferred to the Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth in 1997.
- Veterinarians were previously nominated to the program through the Veterinarian Services Committees and the Northern Producer Animal Health Network. Beginning in late March 2026, veterinary practices can submit an application directly to the Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth.
- Beyond VAP, Ontario also supports access to veterinary services through its [Veterinary Incentive Program](#). The program provides grants of up to \$50,000 over five years to newly licensed veterinarians practicing in underserved areas of Ontario that provide care to animals such as cattle, sheep, goats and poultry.

Quotes

"Given the significant economic impact livestock farmers have in our rural communities throughout the province, it is important to ensure they have access to the local services they need to succeed. Modernizing VAP is a great step forward to ensure veterinarians' businesses can thrive, so farmers can count on having access to valuable veterinary services, close to home."

- Lisa M. Thompson
Minister of Rural Affairs

"Modernizing the Veterinary Assistance Program reflects our government's commitment to cutting red tape and making essential services easier to access. By streamlining applications and removing outdated requirements, veterinary professionals and agricultural producers can spend less time navigating administrative processes and more time supporting the health of Ontario's livestock industry. These commonsense improvements reduce barriers, strengthen the agriculture sector and help ensure Ontario's food supply chain remains strong and resilient."

- Andrea Khanjin
Minister of Red Tape Reduction

"Ontario's aquaculture producers put fresh and nutritious seafood on the tables of families across the province. These enhancements to the Veterinary Assistance Program will help fish farmers continue to get the veterinary services they need to keep their fish populations safe and healthy. This is another step our government is taking to protect the agricultural industry and northern and rural communities."

- Mike Harris
Minister of Natural Resources

"Ontario's farmers welcome the action by the provincial government to strengthen large animal veterinary access across Northern Ontario. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture strongly supports Ontario's modernization of the Veterinary Assistance Program – a truly collaborative effort that will deliver real results. For livestock farmers and rural communities in Northern Ontario, this is a significant and very welcomed step forward."

- Drew Spoelstra
President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

"The beef sector is an important contributor to Ontario's economy and supports the growth of families, businesses and communities in the province. For our sector to thrive, beef farmers need access to large animal veterinary care. Ensuring access to veterinary services for beef farmers across Northern Ontario and other rural regions of the province has been a top priority for our association. As we work toward meaningful solutions, we are pleased to see progress in the modernization of the Veterinary Assistance Program, including funding and participant eligibility along

with enhanced program administration and delivery. We look forward to working with the government on further improvements to strengthen the program and ensure beef farmers have reliable access to critical veterinary care services."

- Jason Leblond
President, Beef Farmers of Ontario

"Aquaculture is a key economic driver in Northern Ontario, supporting good jobs, strengthening rural communities and contributing to a strong domestic food supply in an environmentally sustainable way. Our sector has significant opportunity for growth and sustained investment in animal health is essential to realizing that potential. Expanding the Veterinary Assistance Program to include aquaculture improves access to specialized veterinary expertise and proactive support to help protect our livestock. Maintaining the highest standards of fish health, animal welfare and environmental stewardship is central to our work. Ontario's many fish farmers thank the Government of Ontario for recognizing us as farmers and as valued contributors to Northern Ontario's thriving agricultural sector."

- RJ Taylor
Managing Director, Ontario Aquaculture Association

"We're encouraged by the ministry's collaborative approach and pleased to see these initial enhancements to the Veterinary Assistance Program. These updates reflect the importance of ongoing dialogue between the government and the veterinary profession, as the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association has long advocated for updates to ensure the program remains responsive to the evolving needs of veterinarians and the communities they serve, including expanded eligibility to support more species and veterinary facilities. These changes represent an important step forward. We look forward to continuing our work with the ministry to build on this progress and ensure the program can reach its full potential by supporting veterinarians in underserved regions through increased funding and strengthened herd health, as well as enhance the economic resilience of Northern Ontario."

- Brandi Deimling
Manager of Government and External Relations, Ontario Veterinary Medical Association

"The Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) applauds this important update to the Veterinary Assistance Program. As Canada's leader in veterinary education, OVC is committed to training practice-ready veterinarians who can serve rural and remote communities. This investment complements provincially supported initiatives such as the

Collaborative Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Program and the Veterinary Incentive Program, which together help ensure our graduates are equipped to meet the evolving needs of Ontario's animal owners."

- Jeffery Wichtel

Dean, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph

"Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs) provide vital services for animals across Northern Ontario. The Ontario Association of Registered Veterinary Technicians (OAVT) welcomes these impactful changes to VAP, especially the streamlining of the VAP claims process, reimbursement for RVT travel to and from calls and the inclusion of telemedicine. These changes will expand the accessibility of RVT services in high-need northern regions. The OAVT applauds Premier Doug Ford and Minister George Pirie for their leadership and commitment to strengthening animal care in the North."

- Elise Wickett

Executive Director and Registrar, Ontario Association of Registered Veterinary Technicians

Additional Resources

- [Veterinary Assistance Program](#)

Media Contacts

Sam McCormick

Minister's Office

Sam.McCormick@ontario.ca

Media Relations

Communications Branch

mediadesk.MNEDG@ontario.ca

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