Veterinary Professionals Act: Modernizing veterinary law

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On June 6, 2024, Bill 171, the *Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, 2024*, came into law in Ontario. This bill introduces the *Veterinary Professionals Act, 2024*, a law designed to replace and modernize Ontario's existing *Veterinarians Act*. The new act includes several provisions impacting the veterinary community, and while it is specific to Ontario, it may serve as a model for other provinces as they look to modernize their veterinary laws.

Non-veterinarian members

Historically, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) has adopted a conservative stance when it comes to non-veterinarians providing alternative therapies to animals. However, the CVO's rebranding to the *College of Veterinary Professionals of Ontario* reflects an acknowledgment that different forms of effective veterinary care can be provided by professionals other than veterinarians.

The *Veterinary Professionals Act* recognizes that therapies once considered alternative are now viewed by the public as mainstream and viable options for pet care. Section 9(5) of the Act allows non-veterinarians to perform certain authorized therapies on animals as laid out in Schedule 1 of the Act, including members of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario or the Ontario College of Pharmacists. These activities may include medical assessments and the prescription of drugs, based on the professional expertise of the member.

However, in an effort to protect the public and avoid confusion, the *Veterinary Professionals Act* includes safeguards. For example, while members of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario may use the title "doctor" when providing care to animals, they are prohibited from using the title "doctor" in written communications related to animal care unless they use their full title, "doctor of chiropractic" or "D.C."

New committees

Veterinarians in Ontario are likely familiar with the various committees that have been statutorily required by the CVO, including the Executive Committee, the Accreditation

Committee, the Registration Committee, the Complaints Committee, and the Discipline Committee.

The Veterinary Professionals Act introduces new committees that replace and supplement the previous ones and address new concerns arising as the profession grows. The new committees are:

1. Executive Committee
2. Accreditation Committee
3. Licensing Committee
4. Investigations and Resolutions Committee
5. Quality Assurance Committee
6. Discipline and Fitness to Practise Committee

Notably, the Licensing Committee replaces the Registration Committee, and the Investigations and Resolutions Committee replaces the Complaints Committee. The Quality Assurance Committee, previously a supplementary entity, is now a statutory requirement, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development and competence among veterinarians. This is further underscored by the introduction of the Discipline and Fitness to Practise Committee. These changes reflect both the need to modernize and update processes, as well recognizing that an aging workforce requires more comprehensive checks and balances in veterinary practice.

Offences

While the *Veterinary Professionals Act* is more inclusive to non-veterinarians, it also increases penalties for non-approved individuals attempting to practice veterinary medicine or carry out prescribed animal therapies. These offences are classified as either Type A or Type B under the Act.

- **Type A offences** occur when a non-veterinarian, outside the exceptions previously noted, carries out an authorized activity such as prescribing a drug or performing a medical assessment on an animal.
- **Type B offences** occur when a non-veterinarian uses a veterinary title, such as “veterinarian,” “veterinary surgeon,” or “doctor,” or fails to comply with the provisions set out in the Act. These offences are designed to create clear distinctions between veterinarians and non-veterinarians, enhancing quality assurance.

This new categorization contrasts with the *Veterinarians Act*, which did not distinguish offences. Penalties for a first offence under the *Veterinary Professionals Act* can include a fine of up to $25,000, with subsequent offences resulting in fines of up to $50,000. Additionally, repeated Type A offences may lead to imprisonment for up to 12 months.

Conclusion

The *Veterinary Professionals Act* marks a significant step forward in enhancing veterinary care for the public in Ontario, recognizing the essential role non-veterinarians may play in providing care. At the same time, the Act seeks to protect the public by introducing safeguards and increasing penalties for breaches, ensuring a balance

between inclusivity and accountability. These updates to veterinary law in Ontario include legal, regulatory and business considerations. For more information on compliance with any of the changes outlined in this article, please contact any of the individuals listed below.

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