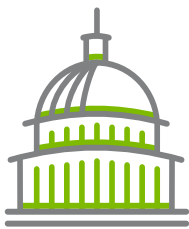


# AVMA FEDERAL ADVOCACY UPDATE

## SUMMER 2021



Throughout the 117th Congress, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has been working closely with the House, Senate, and federal agencies to advance legislation and secure federal funding for veterinary programs that support the profession.

On April 21, the AVMA hosted a historic virtual fly-in that brought 211 veterinarians and veterinary students together to conduct 90 meetings with Senate offices and 128 meetings with House offices. It was the highest attended legislative day in AVMA history.

The event allowed the AVMA to further engage with congressional offices on the profession's legislative priorities and enhance the advocacy team's working relationships in Washington, DC. The momentum created from the fly-in helped lead to the Senate reintroduction of the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program Enhancement Act (VMLRPEA) - legislation that participants identified as a top priority during the event. The AVMA's opposition to prescription mandate legislation was also a focal point during the fly-in, and thanks in part to AVMA

member advocacy, the Fairness to Pet Owners Act has not yet been reintroduced in the 117th Congress.

Partnering with the Veterinary Medicine Caucus, which is led by veterinarian Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.) and Rep. Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.), the AVMA hosted two virtual briefings to educate congressional staffers about animal welfare and research with a focus on the Animal Welfare Act.

By engaging directly with Congress and coordinating with allied organizations, the AVMA has advanced the profession's legislative agenda during the 117th Congress. These accomplishments include:

- Reintroduction of legislation that advances One Health.
- Preventing, to date, the reintroduction of the prescription mandate legislation.
- Reintroduction of legislation that enhances the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.
- Reintroduction of dog importation legislation that would improve dog importation standards.
- Ensuring federal programs important to the veterinary profession are properly funded.

## LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK FOR VETERINARY MEDICINE



### SMALL BUSINESS ISSUES

#### **The American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan:**

The administration has proposed a sweeping infrastructure package that includes tax consequences that

would impact veterinary associates and practice owners. The AVMA's Advocacy team is actively engaged with Congress and the small business stakeholder community to oppose and minimize any tax increase proposals that would negatively impact the veterinary profession.

**Retirement Plans:** The Securing a Strong Retirement Act of 2021 (H.R. 2954) recently passed the House Ways and Means Committee, and a Senate version of the bill, the Retirement Security and Savings Act (S. 1770), has been introduced. The bipartisan, bicameral bill is a sequel to legislation enacted in December 2019 that helped set the stage for the AVMA Trust to launch the AVMA Trust Retirement Plan for veterinary business owners, including the self-employed. The AVMA's advocacy team was heavily involved in support of the legislation in the previous Congress.

This legislation would make it easier for small businesses to band together and improve retirement offerings. Provisions include:

- Allowing individuals to save for retirement longer by increasing the required minimum distribution age to 75.
- Increasing the yearly amount of allowed catch-up contributions by an index rather than fixed dollar amount.
- Increasing the limit on catch-up contributions for ages 62, 63, and 64.
- Allowing employers to match a portion of an employee's student loan repayment and contribute it to their retirement plan even if the employee is not contributing themselves.
- Expanding automatic enrollment in retirement plans.

The AVMA supports the legislation and will advocate for its passage in the House and Senate to further enhance veterinary small business retirement options.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT DEBT



### Higher Education Reforms:

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), which governs higher education and federal student loan policy, is again expected to be addressed by the 117th Congress. The AVMA will continue to use the following principles to guide our advocacy:

- Protect and improve the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.
- Establish a federal refinancing option to permit federal graduate and professional student loans to be refinanced whenever interest rates are lower and economic conditions are more favorable.
- Lower interest rates.
- Eliminate origination fees.
- Maintain federal student loan borrowing limits.
- Restore graduate and professional student eligibility for subsidized loans.
- Automatically pause student loan repayment and interest accumulation for veterinarians pursuing advanced education and training, as proposed by the VET MED Act.
- Expand tools available for veterinary small business owners to help recruit and retain veterinarians through the ability to provide tax efficient funds to assist with payment of their educational debt burden.
- End taxation on the forgiven portion of student loans after the standard 20-25-year repayment terms.
- Encourage institutions of higher education and lenders to offer training to help students make informed decisions about how to finance their graduate education.

**Suspension on Federal Student Loan Repayment and Interest Accrual:** As reported in previous updates, the administration has continued the suspension of federal student loan repayment and interest accrual until September 30, 2021, due to COVID-19.

### Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program:

The Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) plays a critical role in closing food animal and public health veterinary medicine access gaps by offering three years of educational loan repayment in exchange for service in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-designated veterinarian shortage areas. For 2021, the USDA announced 221 designated veterinarian shortage areas in 48 states. The AVMA is working closely with the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to improve customer service and implementation of this important veterinary workforce program.

The AVMA is the leading champion of the VMLRP Enhancement Act (S. 2215/H.R. 2447), which has now been reintroduced in both chambers of Congress. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) reintroduced the VMLRPEA in the Senate. Earlier this year, Representatives Ron Kind (D-Wis.) and Adrian Smith (R-Neb.) reintroduced the legislation in the House of Representatives.

This legislation would exclude VMLRP awards from gross income, thus ending the federal taxation of these awards. Since the VMLRP is currently paying the withholding for the tax on behalf of recipients, ending the tax would allow more VMLRP funds to be used for awards and increase the number of veterinarians that receive student loan relief. AVMA members are encouraged to use the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](http://avmacan.avma.org)) to contact their legislators in support of this legislation.

## ANIMAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS



### Healthy Dog Importation Act:

The AVMA is working with key stakeholders and members of Congress to build support for the Healthy Dog Importation Act (H.R. 4239), which strengthens dog importation requirements and provides the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with additional tools to monitor the health of dogs being imported into the U.S. If passed, the legislation would require every dog entering the country to be permanently identified, in good health, and accompanied by a health certificate from a licensed veterinarian accredited by a competent veterinary authority recognized by the USDA. Representatives Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.) and Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.), Co-chairs of the Veterinary Medicine Caucus, reintroduced the legislation in the House of Representatives.

**One Health:** The AVMA played an instrumental role in the reintroduction of the Advancing Emergency Preparedness Through One Health Act (S. 861/H.R.

2061). The bipartisan bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Schrader (D-Ore.) and Johnson (R-S.D.), and Senators Tina Smith (D-Minn.), and Todd Young (R-Ind.). The legislation requires the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Agriculture, and Interior to work with other federal agencies to develop, publish, and submit to Congress a national One Health Framework for coordinated federal activities under the One Health Program. The AVMA is working with stakeholders to drive bipartisan support for the bill in the 117th Congress. AVMA members can contact their representatives and urge them to support the legislation through the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](http://avmacan.avma.org)).

The AVMA also continues to engage with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the implementation of \$300 million for monitoring and surveillance of susceptible animals for incidences of SARS-CoV-2 that was successfully included in the American Rescue Plan, that passed into law at the beginning of 2021.

## PHARMACEUTICAL ISSUES



### Mandatory Prescription Writing:

The AVMA has been successful, to date, in preventing the reintroduction of the veterinary prescription mandate bill in the 117th Congress.

The AVMA strongly opposes unnecessary federal legislation that would interfere with the practice of veterinary medicine. The prescription mandate proposal would require a veterinarian to automatically provide a copy of a prescription for a companion animal to a client, which can be filled at a pharmacy. The bill was first introduced in 2013 and has failed to advance because of the AVMA's effective advocacy efforts.

During the legislative fly-in, AVMA members communicated directly to congressional offices

about the unintended consequences of the proposal and utilized online pharmaceutical data and market trends to illustrate that veterinarians routinely provide prescriptions to clients upon request for filling at a pharmacy of their choice.

While the mandatory prescription bill has not yet been introduced in this Congress, AVMA members **must continue to contact their legislators and ask them to oppose this proposal.** It is important to explain why a new federal prescription mandate would interfere with the ability of veterinarians to provide optimal care to their patients; is unnecessary because veterinarians already provide prescription portability for clients; and how compliance would be an onerous administrative burden on veterinary small businesses.

## ANIMAL WELFARE



**Horse Welfare:** H.R. 921, the Horse Transportation Safety Act, bans the use of double-decker trucks to transport horses. The bill was reintroduced in February

2021. The language of the bill was included in the surface transportation legislation that was recently passed by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

**Hot Cars Act:** The Helping Overcome Trauma for The Children in Rear Seats or the "Hot Cars Act of 2021" (H.R. 3164) would require the Secretary of Transportation to issue a rule requiring all new passenger motor vehicles to be equipped with a child safety alert system. The AVMA supported this legislation in the last Congress because it will help prevent dogs and cats from being inadvertently locked in a car.

## FY 2022 APPROPRIATIONS

The AVMA is currently engaging with lawmakers and working with coalitions to advocate for funding programs critical to the veterinary profession. The Senate and House appropriations committees are currently drafting the funding bills for fiscal year 2022 (FY 22). The AVMA is seeking increases in funding for the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (\$10 million), Veterinary Services Grant Program (\$3.5 million), and National Animal Health Laboratory Network (\$30 million), as well as continued funding for the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Database (\$2.5 million). Furthermore, the AVMA is working to secure the additional funding needed to modernize the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI, the nation's only BSL-3 laboratory for wildlife medicine. AVMA's advocacy team is pushing Congress to finalize and pass the FY 22 funding bills before September 30, 2021, the end of the current fiscal year.

This year, the AVMA has submitted appropriations requests to over 60 congressional offices, which has led to more than 200 interactions with members of Congress and their staffs highlighting the importance of the profession's funding priorities.

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**To contact Congress on these issues, visit  
AVMA's Congressional Advocacy Network:  
[avmacan.avma.org](http://avmacan.avma.org)**