



ALBERTA
AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Drumbeller-Stettler*

FEB 02 2023

Cathy Heron
Mayor, City of St. Albert
President, Alberta Municipalities
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Dear Mayor Heron:

Thank you for your November 9, 2022 letter regarding the resolution that passed at the Alberta Municipalities Fall Convention. This is certainly a very important issue and one that we have heard about from individual municipalities and agricultural service boards.

I assure you that the Government of Alberta is taking the needs of rural Albertans seriously. We are working to expand the availability of veterinary education in Alberta. As you mentioned, veterinary medicine is a key contributor to Alberta's economy, and rural Alberta relies heavily on veterinary medicine, especially in the area of livestock production.

You may be aware that – as with other health professions – the issue of attracting and retaining veterinary professionals in rural areas is a complex and multifaceted problem, with no simple solutions. University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) and other schools have been extensively studying the admissions process so more graduates enter and remain in rural veterinary practice. As noted in your letter, UCVM's most recent approach to admissions requires a minimum academic performance to ensure successful completion of the academic aspects of the program. Once an applicant is considered academically qualified, the remainder of ranking is based on a comprehensive file review of an applicant's background, areas of interest, work experience, volunteer efforts and, eventually, the multiple interview process.

Veterinary medicine is an extremely challenging program and profession. It provides a critical function in the health and welfare of our animals, market access for our animals and animal products, food safety and public health. Therefore, it is important to not undervalue the minimum academic standards for success. I am also aware that UCVM regularly reviews and modifies its curriculum to help ensure the program meets the needs of rural areas and the livestock community. Agriculture and Irrigation remains engaged through the participation of the Chief Provincial Veterinarian as an ex-officio member of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) Council and as a member of the UCVM Stakeholder Advisory Committee, both of which are exploring several options to address this important issue.

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Your letter also acknowledges the Budget 2022 commitments made possible through the Alberta at Work initiative, which will see Government of Alberta provide \$59 million in capital investment over three years to expand UCVM infrastructure and \$8.4 million to support targeted expansion in enrollment for veterinarians and veterinary technologists at the UCVM and technical colleges in Alberta. These investments will help address the current shortage of veterinarians across the province by increasing the number of veterinarians graduating in Alberta to 100 students per year. Providing more educational opportunities close to home ensures Albertans have access to the skills and knowledge they need to build successful careers, give back to their communities, and help Alberta prosper.

The Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism is also providing support to the ABVMA. This will include identifying potential Labour Market Partnership grant projects that support veterinary attraction and retention initiatives, promotion of occupation and opportunities, exploring international labour pools and labour mobility matters. The Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism will also support sector employers with the guidance and resources they need for attraction, recruitment and retention activities, including the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program, which has multiple streams to support rural opportunities.

We continue to work with the ABVMA and UCVM on additional mechanisms to enhance recruitment to and retention in rural areas. If you would like to connect with Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation further on this topic, please contact Dr. Keith Lehman, Chief Provincial Veterinarian, at keith.lehman@gov.ab.ca. You may also wish to reach out directly to the UCVM by contacting Kristy Mahar, Admissions and Recruitment Coordinator at kmahar@ucalgary.ca or Dr. Renate Weller, Dean of UCVM, at renate.weller@ucalgary.ca.

Thank you again for writing and sharing your perspective. I will continue working with my cabinet colleagues to ensure Alberta's post-secondary system continues to meet the needs of rural Albertans.

Sincerely,



Honourable Nate Horner
Minister, Agriculture and Irrigation

cc: Honourable Rajan Sawhney, Minister, Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
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