

**For discussion
22 June 2021**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights**

Overview of Veterinary Services in Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members on the veterinary profession and veterinary services in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND

2. The Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) (the Ordinance), enacted in 1997, aims at regulating the practice of veterinary surgery, registration of veterinary surgeons and disciplinary control of the professional activities of registered veterinary surgeons so as to ensure a high standard of veterinary services in Hong Kong. The Veterinary Surgeons Board (VSB) was set up under the Ordinance in 1997 and charged with responsibility for the regulation, registration, and disciplinary control of veterinary surgeons as empowered by the Ordinance.

3. All registered veterinary surgeons must have received professional training and obtained the qualifications for registration specified under the Ordinance before practising in Hong Kong. They are required to comply with the Ordinance and the Code of Practice for the Guidance of Registered Veterinary Surgeons (CoP) promulgated by the VSB. The CoP provides guidance to veterinary surgeons on a number of areas, including professional ethics and professional relationships with clients etc. Transgressing accepted codes of professional ethical behaviour may lead to disciplinary action by the VSB.

4. VSB receives and investigates complaints about veterinary surgeons. All complaints are first investigated by the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC), which will determine whether or not the complaint cases should be referred to the Inquiry Committee (IC) for disciplinary inquiry. After the reconstitution of the VSB in 2020, the number of members increased from 10 persons to 19 persons and there is a panel of 18 assessors established from which members of PIC or IC may be appointed, which could help speed up the handling of complaints.

5. On continuing professional development (CPD), the CoP stipulates that registered veterinary surgeons need to maintain currency in skills and knowledge to ensure that the public are consistently offered the best options. The VSB has introduced a CPD monitoring system for the veterinary profession whereby all practising registered veterinary surgeons are encouraged to comply with CPD requirement to ensure that their professional competency is up to date.

SUPPLY OF VETERINARY SURGEONS AND SERVICES

6. Since the establishment of the VSB and the register of veterinary surgeons in 1997, the number of registered veterinary surgeons has been showing an increasing trend. According to the statistical data from the VSB, there were 1 075 registered veterinary surgeons in 2020 which has almost doubled when compared with 10 years ago (565 in 2010). Among the 1 075 registered veterinary surgeons, 47 are authorized to advertise as, or profess to be specialists, which was 24 times of the number 10 years ago (2 in 2010).

7. The vet-to-pet ratio is a common indicator for assessing the overall adequacy of veterinary services in a place. The lower the number of pets in the vet-to-pet ratio, the higher the number of veterinary surgeons and the vet-to-pet ratio there is for that place. The vet-to-pet ratio in Hong Kong in 2018 was 1 to 410¹, which is much higher than those of Singapore (1 to 2 543), the UK (1 to 2 374) and the USA (1 to 3 072). The ratio indicated that we have relatively more veterinary surgeons to provide veterinary services in Hong Kong than these other places.

8. Prior to the launch of Hong Kong's first local 6-year Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine (BVM) programme by the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) in 2017, students who would like to practise veterinary surgery in Hong Kong had to study in universities or colleges that award a qualification recognised by the VSB for the purpose of registration as a registered veterinary surgeon in Hong Kong. 84 students have enrolled in CityU's BVM programme. Same as students studying veterinary programmes in other places, veterinary students of CityU are required to undertake clinical training and clinical rotation in the final years of the programme. The first cohort of 12 students will begin their clinical training in 2021/22.

¹ Based on the Thematic Household Survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in 2018, it was estimated that there were about 405 200 cats and dogs in Hong Kong at the time of enumeration.

9. To facilitate veterinary students to obtain the required clinical training in Hong Kong, having conducted a review of the regulatory regime and the relevant legislative provisions, we propose to amend Schedule 2 to the Ordinance to permit a student of a full-time course in veterinary surgery at CityU or a VSB-recognised university, college or school to practise acts of veterinary surgery as part of the clinical training requirement under that veterinary course under the direction, supervision or direct and continuous supervision, as the case may be, of a registered veterinary surgeon. A two-month public consultation on the proposal has been conducted and we plan to table an Amendment Order to amend Schedule 2 to the Ordinance in June 2021.

10. To ensure that its veterinary students may receive proper clinical training in different disciplines, CityU has established a number of training facilities which include a medical centre, a veterinary laboratory and a pathological biology laboratory. The University is also planning to set up a livestock farm, a mariculture farm and an equestrian centre for training its students. With local veterinary students graduating and joining the veterinary industry from mid-2023, the number of registered veterinary surgeons may further increase in the coming years.

11. According to an estimate by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department in 2020, there are 184 private vet clinics in Hong Kong providing a comprehensive range of veterinary services. Almost all vet clinics provide services for cats and dogs. About half of them provide services for rabbits and hamsters. Some clinics provide services for reptiles (e.g. turtles, snakes, lizards, etc.) and birds. Relevant statistics are set out in **Annex I**. Apart from general consultation, the vast majority of vet clinics provide routine/simple surgery, on-site diagnostic tests, imaging and hospitalisation. Moreover, about half of the vet clinics provide advanced surgery, acupuncture or mobile services. Some vet clinics also provide Chinese veterinary medicine, pet boarding services or pet grooming services. The relevant statistics are set out in **Annex II**.

ADVICE SOUGHT

12. Members are invited to note the overview of veterinary services in Hong Kong.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
June 2021**

Distribution of vet clinics by types of animals treated

	Scope of services by animals treated	Vet clinics providing the service (%)
1	Cats	98
2	Dogs	96
3	Rabbits	51
4	Hamsters	50
5	Reptiles	27
6	Birds	18

Distribution of vet clinics by types of veterinary services provided

	Scope of veterinary services	Vet clinics providing the service (%)
1	General consultation	All
2	Simple surgery	99
3	On-site diagnostic tests	96
4	Hospitalization	94
5	Imaging	93
6	Advanced surgery	50
7	Acupuncture	47
8	Mobile service	43
9	Chinese veterinary medicine	15
10	Pet boarding service	15
11	Pet grooming service	12