

# What happens when a complaint is made?

For veterinary professionals



In each Australian state and territory and in NZ, a Veterinary Board or Council investigates formal complaints made about registered veterinary practitioners. This AVBC factsheet provides information to veterinary professionals about the Veterinary Boards' approach when notified about a vet's professional conduct.

## What will your Veterinary Board consider?

- state, territory or New Zealand **veterinary and other legislation** (Acts)
- whether conduct meets the reasonable expectations of a vet's peers and the public, as outlined in your Veterinary Board's **Guidelines, Standards or Code of Conduct**
- the context in which the conduct occurred; Veterinary Boards recognise a spectrum of good care from appropriate professional judgement
- Veterinary Boards can also consider whether veterinary professional's standard of practice may have been **impaired by a health issue**. Health impairments are considered through a separate process to professional conduct issues.

## Complaints process

All state and territory boards manage complaints slightly differently depending on their legislative requirements. A general overview of the process appears on the next page of this Factsheet. Check your Board or Vet Council's website for more specific information

## Timing and privacy

Thorough, fair and accurate investigation into complex matters can take many months to complete. Veterinary Board staff will give you regular updates about the progress of your complaint.

The entire process is treated sensitively and only discloses information necessary to fulfill your Veterinary Board's regulatory functions.

## Justice and fairness

All regulators are impartial, and bound by the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness. This means:

- You will be provided with information about the complaint and any other material being considered, and invited to provide your account of the situation.
- You will be given sufficient notice of what and when actions and information are required from you
- You will be provided with written notice of outcome and reasons
- You can appeal decisions through your state or territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

## Possible outcomes

Investigations and hearings are considered a valuable learning opportunity, providing independent review and feedback to both you and the complainant. Veterinary Boards don't approach complaints and hearings. Matters are not approached with a punitive or shaming mindset.

Veterinary Boards aim for complaint outcomes that are consistent, proportionate, transparent and where possible, constructive in strengthening your future practice. Options open to Veterinary Boards vary according to the seriousness of the conduct and the guiding legislation, and can include:

- no further action
- counselling to guide improvement
- relevant further education
- conditions on registration
- caution or reprimand
- fine
- payment of proceedings costs
- suspension or cancellation of registration

Most complaints submitted to Veterinary Boards do not ultimately progress to hearings or findings of unprofessional conduct. The most common outcomes from findings of unprofessional conduct are a requirement to complete, reflect on and implement relevant further education. Only a very small percentage of professional conduct issues that pose serious and ongoing risk may attract a suspension or cancellation of registration.

