

Reporting Animal Abuse or Neglect

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Introduction

This Position Statement describes the position of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario regarding the reporting by veterinarians of animal abuse and neglect. The reporting of actual or suspected abuse or neglect of animals may be necessary to protect the health and welfare of animals and people. It is the responsibility of other legislated organizations to investigate such reports.

Position Statement

Veterinarians have a legal and ethical obligation to report animal abuse or neglect.

Veterinarians are mandated to report when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an animal is being abused, being subject to undue physical or psychological hardship, privation or neglect, including by participating in fights with other animals, or is being trained to fight another animal to a provincial animal welfare inspector (*Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act*, 2019, S.O. 2019, c. 13, s 14).

Making a professional judgement of abuse, physical or psychological hardship, privation or neglect of an animal(s) or group of animals is challenging. No single indicator is often sufficient to enable a veterinarian to establish reasonable grounds to believe that an animal is suffering



from abuse or neglect. Reasonable grounds arise from first-hand information and/or detailed reports, and refers to the facts or circumstances which would cause a person of ordinary and prudent judgment to have a strong belief beyond a weakly substantiated suspicion, but less than a certainty.¹ The College further interprets reasonable grounds to include information acquired during the veterinarian's assessment of the animal or herd and/or discussion with the owner/custodian/caregiver that could lead them to suspect abuse, physical or psychological hardship, privation or neglect.

Regulation 1093 does not expressly require that veterinarians release confidential information about clients and/or animals in cases of suspected abuse. However, the Regulation permits veterinarians to release information concerning a client, an animal, or any professional service performed for an animal, to any person other than the client or another member treating the animal when required or authorized to do so by law, which is inclusive of appropriate release to the police, a provincial animal welfare (PAWS) inspector, or animal control.

Legislative Authority

Veterinarians Act, R.S.O. 1990, s. 30(4) R.R.O. 1990,

Reg. 1093: General s. 17(1) (*Veterinarians Act*)

Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019, S.O. 2019, c. 13

Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, S.C. 2000, c.5)

Resources

The following can be found at the College's website at cvo.org:

1. Legislative Overview: Mandatory Reporting

¹ The following may lead a veterinarian to suspect abuse or neglect:

- Presentation of non-accidental injuries;
- Conflicting or unrealistic explanation of how injuries occurred;
- Delays in obtaining veterinary care or treatment for serious problems;
- Physical signs of neglect (e.g., severely matted hair, untrimmed nails/hoofs, malnourishment, infected wounds, presence/smell of excrement); or
- Refusal to treat or euthanize when an animal is suffering or in pain.



Other References

The following can be found on the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association website:

- [Responsibility of Veterinary Professionals in Addressing Animal Abuse and Neglect \(2024\)](#)

The following documents and websites may also be useful:

- Arkow, P., Boyden, P. and Patterson-Kane, E. (2011). [Practical Guidance for the Effective Response by Veterinarians to Suspected Animal Cruelty, Abuse and Neglect](#), Schaumburg, IL: American Medical Veterinary Association.
- British Veterinary Associations, [Abuse in Animals and Humans](#).

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website (www.cvo.org) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.