

Animal Welfare and Quality of Life: Advancements in Veterinary Specialisation



When we talk about animal welfare today, it goes far beyond comfort, housing, or nutrition. It's about recognising animals as sentient beings, understanding the biological, psychological, and social factors that influence their quality of life, and integrating that understanding into science-based veterinary care. Across Europe, the [European Board of Veterinary Specialisation \(EBVS\)](#) plays a vital role in this evolution, certifying 39 recognised veterinary specialties that contribute directly to animal health, public health & biosecurity, and the broader One Health initiative.

The Evolving Understanding of Animal Welfare

Animal welfare has moved from a narrow focus on preventing suffering to a multidimensional framework that considers both physical and emotional well-being. The "Five Domains Model" ([Mellor et al., 2020](#)) now guides modern welfare assessment, highlighting the interaction between nutrition, environment, health, behaviour, and mental state.

Veterinary specialists are central to applying this model in real-world contexts. Whether assessing pain in companion animals, improving housing conditions for livestock, or evaluating stress in wildlife, their expertise ensures welfare standards are both evidence-based and ethically grounded.

Veterinary Specialisation: Precision for Welfare and Health

EBVS-recognised specialists operate across 39 disciplines, from anaesthesia and internal medicine to animal behaviour, epidemiology, and welfare science. Each specialisation contributes uniquely to improving animal and public health:

- Veterinary Anaesthesia and Analgesia experts reduce pain and stress during medical procedures, directly influencing welfare and recovery outcomes.
- Veterinary Behaviourists address behavioural issues that often lead to abandonment or euthanasia, improving the human-animal bond.
- Veterinary Pathologists and Public Health Specialists monitor diseases that affect both animals and people, helping prevent zoonotic outbreaks.
- Welfare Science Specialists guide policymakers and industries toward sustainable, humane livestock production systems that align with EU animal welfare regulations.

These collective efforts demonstrate how veterinary specialisation strengthens not only animal welfare but also the resilience of societies that depend on them, from farming economies to food security systems.

The Connection Between Animal Welfare and Public Health

Animal, human, and environmental health are inseparable, a principle at the heart of One Health. Improving welfare reduces the risk of disease transmission, enhances productivity, and supports food safety.

For example, poor welfare in livestock is linked to higher stress levels and weakened immune responses, which can increase susceptibility to infectious diseases and the need for antimicrobial use. According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA, 2023), improving welfare conditions directly contributes to reducing antimicrobial resistance, a shared global threat.

Veterinary specialists in epidemiology and infectious disease play an instrumental role in building early-warning systems, ensuring data-driven disease control, and informing EU policy responses during health crises, such as avian influenza or African swine fever outbreaks.



Advancing Quality of Life Through Evidence and Collaboration

Veterinary specialists work alongside researchers, public health agencies, and policymakers to ensure that decisions affecting animals are grounded in scientific evidence. Their expertise extends to developing welfare indicators, improving diagnostic tools, and designing sustainable production systems that balance economic efficiency with ethical responsibility.

Education also plays a key role. [EBVS](#) supports continuous professional development and harmonised certification across Europe, ensuring that veterinarians maintain the highest standards of care. By fostering collaboration and mobility among specialists, [EBVS](#) helps bridge gaps between clinical practice, research, and policy, a vital step toward improving the welfare and quality of life of all species.

The Broader Impact: From Animal Welfare to Societal Wellbeing

Animal welfare has measurable effects beyond the farm or clinic. Healthier animals contribute to safer food systems, lower public health risks, and more sustainable agriculture. The [One Health framework](#) recognises this interconnectedness, positioning veterinary expertise as essential to Europe's environmental, economic, and societal wellbeing.

Moreover, improved welfare supports mental health and emotional stability for people who depend on or care for animals, from farmers to pet owners. In this way, veterinary specialists contribute not just to the health of animals, but to the quality of life across the human-animal interface.



Supporting Animal Welfare through Veterinary Expertise

Every veterinary specialist certified by the [European Board of Veterinary Specialisation \(EBVS\)](#) represents a commitment to improving the lives of animals and people across Europe. From reducing antimicrobial resistance to advancing food safety and sustainability, these professionals embody the One Health philosophy in action.

To learn more about how EBVS supports excellence in animal welfare, public health, and quality of life across Europe, visit www.ebvs.eu.