

# Exploring the Costs of Veterinary Healthcare and Its Value to Society



Veterinary healthcare plays a vital role in safeguarding animal welfare, public health, and food safety. Yet, the costs associated with veterinary services often raise concerns among pet owners, farmers, and policymakers. Unlike human healthcare, veterinary care is primarily privately funded, meaning that owners bear the financial responsibility of treatment without the support of government-backed healthcare systems.

The costs of veterinary services stem from multiple factors, including advanced medical procedures, specialist training, and the growing demand for high-quality care.

The [European Board of Veterinary Specialisation \(EBVS\)](#) certifies veterinary specialists across 38 disciplines, ensuring that animals receive expert care that is comparable to human medicine.

However, as veterinary science advances, the costs of diagnostics, surgery, pharmaceuticals, and preventive medicine have also increased.

This article explores the costs of veterinary healthcare, its impact on public health and animal welfare, and the broader economic benefits of investing in veterinary services.

## The Rising Costs of Veterinary Services

The cost of veterinary healthcare has risen in recent decades due to various factors, including:

### 1. Advancements in Medical Technology

Modern veterinary medicine has evolved significantly, incorporating MRI scans, endoscopy, minimally invasive surgery, and advanced cancer treatments. These technologies improve animal health outcomes but require significant investment in equipment and training.

### 2. Specialised Veterinary Training

Veterinary specialists undergo extensive training to provide advanced care. The EBVS ensures that specialists meet rigorous European standards, enabling them to handle complex cases in fields such as surgery, cardiology, neurology, and oncology. However, ensuring access to advanced care also includes expenses of skilled staff, advanced medical equipment, modern facilities, and the ongoing training needed to stay up to date with the latest treatments.

### 3. Pharmaceutical Costs and Antimicrobial Resistance Management

Veterinary medicines, including antibiotics, vaccines, and pain management drugs, are essential to animal care. Strict regulations on antimicrobial use, aimed at reducing [antimicrobial resistance \(AMR\)](#), require veterinarians to adopt alternative treatments and preventive approaches. Usually, disease prevention is more economical in the long run, but short-term expenses may impact treatment decisions for farmers and pet owners.

### 4. Preventive Care and Long-Term Health Management

Preventive healthcare, including vaccinations, parasite control, and regular check-ups, helps to reduce the incidence of diseases such as rabies, avian influenza, and bovine tuberculosis.

While these services incur costs, they ultimately protect both animal and human populations by preventing outbreaks and reducing the need for expensive emergency treatments. The One Health approach, which recognises the interconnection between human, animal, and environmental health, is key to ensuring responsible medication use while safeguarding public health.

## 5. Emergency and Critical Care Services

In emergency cases, rapid diagnosis and treatment are crucial. Specialist-led emergency veterinary services require 24/7 staffing, advanced equipment, and intensive care units, all of which contribute to costs of veterinary care. In human medicine, many of these costs may be subsidized by insurances or governments, meaning that patients are often unaware of the total cost of the healthcare services they received.



# The Value of Veterinary Healthcare to Society

Veterinary healthcare extends beyond treating individual animals—it plays a critical role in **public health, food safety, and economic stability**, as well as **animal welfare**. The European veterinary sector contributes significantly to various areas, including:

## 1. Public Health and Disease Prevention

Veterinarians are at the frontline of **zoonotic disease prevention**, identifying and controlling infections that can spread from animals to humans. Rabies, avian influenza, and COVID-19 highlight the importance of a robust veterinary healthcare system in preventing global pandemics. The **One Health** approach integrates veterinary expertise with human medicine to reduce the **risk and overall cost of future health crises**.

## 2. Food Safety and Agricultural Sustainability

Veterinary specialists ensure that livestock is healthy, reducing the risk of foodborne illnesses such as salmonella and E. coli. Healthy animals lead to safer meat, dairy, and egg production, benefiting consumers by improving quality as well as maintaining agricultural and economic stability, particularly in terms of trade. Additionally, veterinarians contribute to sustainable farming practices that reduce environmental impact while improving productivity. For example, crop rotation with livestock is more efficient at carbon sequestration and simultaneously improves soil quality compared to continuous crop farming.

## 3. Animal Welfare and Ethical Responsibility

High-quality veterinary care upholds [animal welfare standards](#), ensuring that pets, livestock, and wildlife receive humane treatment. Poor animal welfare not only causes suffering but can also have economic consequences, as stressed or diseased animals produce lower-quality products, typically incur more veterinary expenses and have higher mortality rates.

## 4. Economic Contribution to the GDP

Veterinary healthcare supports **Europe's agricultural economy**, improving productivity in farming and animal husbandry. [Research indicates that investment in animal health increases yields](#), reduces losses from disease, and contributes to global trade by ensuring compliance with international health regulations. [Agricultural contributions to the European market](#) have remained strong for the past 15 years, and accounted for about **€220 Billion in 2023**.



## 5. Advancements in Translational Medicine

Veterinary medicine also contributes to **translational research**, where findings from animal healthcare inform human medical advancements. For instance, veterinary oncology research has provided insights into cancer treatments for both animals and humans, demonstrating the interconnectedness of medical fields.

## Balancing Cost with Long-Term Benefits

While veterinary healthcare can involve significant costs, it is an investment in **public health, economic stability, and ethical responsibility**. For pet owners, prevention is often key in reducing overall costs throughout the pet's lifespan. In larger scale agriculture, governments and policymakers can support the veterinary sector by:

- Encouraging **preventive healthcare** to reduce long-term treatment costs
- Investing in **veterinary education and research** to advance medical knowledge
- Supporting **One Health initiatives** that integrate veterinary and human medicine
- Implementing **subsidies and insurance models** to make veterinary care more accessible



## Recognising the Value of Veterinary Healthcare

Veterinary healthcare is more than just an expense—it is a **critical investment** in animal welfare, public health, food safety, and economic growth. As specialists certified by the [European Board of Veterinary Specialisation \(EBVS\)](https://www.ebvs.eu) continue to advance veterinary medicine, the need for greater recognition of their contribution to society remains essential.

Policymakers, farmers, pet owners, and the public must acknowledge that veterinary professionals are key players in **disease prevention, sustainable agriculture, and global health security** in addition to **animal health and welfare**. By valuing and supporting veterinary healthcare, society benefits from healthier animals, safer food, and stronger public health systems.

To learn more about how veterinary specialists contribute to animal and public health, visit [www.ebvs.eu](https://www.ebvs.eu).

More Resources:

<https://www.eesi.org/articles/view/the-climate-and-economic-benefits-of-rotational-livestock-grazing>

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13593-024-00977-1>