

Mental Health Challenges in Veterinary Medicine and How to Address Them



European veterinary professionals are essential to ensuring animal, public, and food safety. From addressing zoonotic diseases to supporting sustainable agriculture, veterinarians are at the heart of the One Health approach. Yet, behind this essential contribution lies a continued, growing concern: the mental health crisis within the veterinary profession.

High workloads, ethical dilemmas, emotional fatigue, and financial pressures have contributed to alarming rates of burnout, anxiety, and depression among veterinarians. As the [European Board of Veterinary Specialisation \(EBVS\)](#) continues to champion excellence in veterinary specialisation, addressing the mental health of these professionals is not just an ethical imperative—it's also a matter of human welfare and system resilience.

Understanding the Scope of the Problem

Prevalence of Mental Health Issues

Several studies have highlighted the mental health burden within the veterinary field:

- A 2022 study in the [Journal of Veterinary Medical Education](#) reported that veterinary professionals are at increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation compared to the general population.
- In the UK, the [Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons \(RCVS\)](#) found that 21% of respondents to its survey were experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress.

These issues are not limited to one region. Across Europe, similar trends persist, particularly in rural or underserved areas where resources are stretched and support systems are limited.

Contributing Factors

Key stressors contributing to mental health challenges in veterinary professionals include:

- **Moral distress and ethical challenges:** Euthanasia decisions and inability to treat due to financial constraints.
- **Long working hours and inadequate work-life balance.**
- **Low salaries:** In many European countries, veterinary salaries do not reflect the complexity and public value of the work, especially compared to other health professions. This economic undervaluation contributes to dissatisfaction and burnout.
- **Veterinary desertification:** Certain rural or economically disadvantaged regions experience a shortage of veterinary professionals, leading to professional isolation and unmanageable workloads for those who remain.
- **Client expectations and compassion fatigue.**
- **Isolation:** Particularly for those in remote or solo practices.

Why It Matters for Society

The well-being of veterinarians directly impacts public health outcomes. Their roles are deeply integrated in:

- **Zoonotic disease surveillance** (e.g., avian influenza, West Nile Virus, etc)
- **Reducing antimicrobial resistance**
- **Improving animal welfare standards**
- **Food safety and quality assurance**
- **Sustainability in animal production systems**
- **Pandemic preparedness through early detection of animal-borne threats**

Mental fatigue and burnout can impair clinical judgement, reduce retention in rural or specialised roles, and affect the delivery of care across multiple sectors.

Supporting veterinarians is not only a workforce issue—it is a public health priority within the One Health framework.



Evidence-Based Strategies to Support Veterinary Mental Health

1. Promoting Open Dialogue and De-stigmatisation

Encouraging open conversations about mental health reduces stigma. National veterinary associations and employers must create environments where discussing emotional well-being is safe and supported.

2. Workplace Interventions

Evidence shows that supportive leadership, manageable caseloads, flexible schedules, and peer support networks significantly reduce burnout rates. Many employers are implementing structured wellbeing programmes, but these skills must also be taught and made available to everyone working within veterinary medicine. This includes not only students and employers but also academics, veterinary nurses, industry personnel and workers, and more.

3. Access to Mental Health Services

Provision of confidential mental health services tailored to the veterinary profession—whether in person or online—is vital. Programmes like [Vetlife \(UK\)](#) or the [European Federation of Psychologists' Associations](#) could be leveraged or localised.

4. Building Resilience in Training

Veterinary curricula, both undergraduate and postgraduate, will soon need to integrate resilience training, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies as core components of education. Early intervention during student years can reduce future risk.

5. Recognition and Remuneration

Policymakers and industry stakeholders must acknowledge the complexity and value of veterinary work, especially specialist roles in public health and translational medicine, through appropriate compensation and recognition. In turn, this requires that veterinary professionals are able to voice the value of our contribution and learn how to effectively work together with the other stakeholders integral to OneHealth and legislation.



A Healthy Profession Builds a Healthier Europe

Veterinarians are vital to our society, ensuring the health of animals, protecting human populations from disease, and supporting sustainable food systems. Yet, the mental health challenges facing this essential workforce can no longer be overlooked.

We call on policymakers, veterinary institutions, employers, and the public to prioritise the mental well-being of veterinary professionals. Whether through funding support services, reducing stigma, or implementing systemic workplace reforms, the time to act is now.

Learn more about how EBVS supports veterinary specialists and their role in building a healthier, more sustainable future at www.ebvs.eu.