

Taking a **Look** into the **VETERINARY** profession

Everything you need to
know about becoming a
veterinarian in Ontario



ONTARIO
VETERINARY
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION

Deciding to become a veterinarian



Veterinarians play important roles both in animal and human healthcare.

Today's veterinarian is dedicated to protecting the health and welfare of both animals and people. Veterinarians are highly educated and skilled in preventing, diagnosing and treating animal health problems. Because their knowledge and training extends to a number of closely-related areas, veterinarians are often involved in more than animal medicine.

Today, more than 9,000 veterinarians are professionally active in Canada. They provide a wide variety of services in private practice, teaching and research, regulatory veterinary medicine, public health, private industry and other specialized services.

Deciding on a career isn't easy. That's why it's important – even at this stage in your life – to do some real soul searching and research, asking such questions as: what kind of lifestyle do I want to enjoy in the future? What kinds of things are important to me? What kinds of things do I enjoy talking about or doing? What level of income will I need to be able to do the things I need and want to do (e.g., buy a house, have and support a family/social life, travel)?

If you're interested in a career as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), here are a few ideas to help you through your research stage:

- Talk to people (e.g., Talk to as many veterinarians as possible. Ask to spend some time in their clinics – see what it's really all about.)
- Visit the campus of a veterinary college (e.g., attend open houses to see the facilities and laboratories, talk to students, check out the animals.)
- Volunteer, complete a co-op placement, or find a part-time job at a veterinary clinic, zoo, animal shelter or humane society – see, touch, feel and hear what it's like to work in that environment.
- Read about the profession (e.g., articles, books, internet web sites – there are many web sites and chat rooms that deal with being or becoming a veterinarian.)

Some commonly asked questions about being a veterinarian

What kinds of things should I be interested in?

Working with animals, working with people, science, biology, figuring out how things work, figuring out why things aren't working as they should, problem-solving, multitasking, etc...

What are some of the things I'll need to be able to do as a DVM?

Analyze; communicate; empathize; handle animals of different sizes and temperaments; manage staff; keep detailed, accurate records; manage inventories; keep up to date with veterinary research (via reading, continuing education), etc...

What are some other things I should be thinking about?

The kinds of animals you like to work with: Large – e.g., horses, cows, pigs; small – e.g., cats, dogs, ferrets; exotic – reptiles, birds, zoo animals.

The work schedule you would prefer: Do you enjoy working different shifts? (a.m./p.m., weekends) Do you prefer a set schedule?

The salary you hope to make: What kind of a lifestyle would you like? Do you want to own your own business? Do you plan on having children? Are you the kind of person who likes a more lavish lifestyle?

Where would you like to live/work? Do you love big cities or do you prefer country life? Would you like to work indoors or outdoors? Would you like to work in another country?

Can you handle blood and gore? Are you squeamish when it comes to seeing blood? Is it something you can learn to deal with?

Do you have any physical/emotional problems which might hinder your ability to serve as a veterinarian? (e.g., Do you have a number of allergies? Do you have asthma? Do you have a bad back?)

I love animals. Does that mean that I should become a veterinarian?

Not necessarily. A lot of people love animals, but not everyone likes the idea of having to do some of the things that veterinarians do (e.g., surgery, euthanizing someone's pet, dealing with aggressive animals, helping deliver calves at 3 a.m.).

There are many different career options in the veterinary/animal healthcare industry, besides becoming a veterinarian, which may appeal to you, including, veterinary technician, hospital administrator or manager, research scientist, animal groomer, pet store/retail operator, pet food manufacturer... Do some research, discover your options.

Perhaps you won't find anything you're truly interested in undertaking as a career in this field. You can always opt to get involved with animals via volunteer work (e.g., at an animal shelter). That way, you can work in the kind of profession that satisfies your intellectual and financial needs AND – on the side – you can spend time with the types of animals you care so much about.



Becoming a veterinarian

A three-stage process



Once you've decided that you want to become a veterinarian, you need to figure out how to get there.

This diagram provides an overview of the major steps you'll need to undertake in order to make your way from high school student to fully licenced veterinarian and beyond.

Details of each stage are included in the following pages.



SO MANY OPTIONS

Once you have completed your education and you are a licenced veterinarian, your career options are plentiful. Above are examples of some of the choices you will have.

Stage 1: Getting into a DVM program



Admittance into a veterinary medical program is extremely competitive. Research the various programs (as early as possible) to ensure that all entry requirements are met and that there aren't any surprises when the time comes to apply. Admission is based on a number of factors which are different at each veterinary college. Below are short descriptions of admission criteria used across Canada.

Academic

While you don't necessarily need to be an A+ student, it certainly helps to ensure you have the highest grades possible, especially in the high school courses identified by your university of choice as required admission courses, and in the university courses required by the DVM program you want to get into.

Tips: Make sure you know which pre-requisites you need at any given stage throughout your education (e.g., high school courses you need to get into a university undergraduate program, undergraduate university courses you need to get into a DVM program).

If you choose to complete your undergraduate degree or courses at a university different than the one you'll attend for your DVM, have the DVM program coordinator/registrar confirm in writing that the courses you are taking at the other university do, in fact, qualify as required pre-requisites.

MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)

You must submit an MCAT score when applying to a DVM program. Be sure to find out what you should know for the exam (e.g., first-year biology, physics, chemistry and organic chemistry), when MCATs are held in your area, where you can write the MCAT and when the written score will be available. The weight of the MCAT score on your application varies and is not generally a deciding factor. Individuals should aim to achieve the highest scores possible as success on an MCAT exam is based not on your actual grade, but rather on how well you did relative to all the other people who wrote the exam in that given year.

Experience

This is one of the factors that can really have a profound effect on a veterinary college's decision to choose you over other candidates with equal or better grades, and equal or better MCAT scores. Try to get as much relevant volunteer or work experience as possible as early as possible. Opportunities are everywhere – veterinary clinics, farms, animal shelters, zoos, pet stores and co-op programs.

Tips: Try to get as much diverse experience as possible (small, large and exotic animals). Keep track of who you work with so that when it comes time to gather reference letters for your DVM application, you'll know who to ask.

Other

Many universities now use a number of other techniques to help select the right students for their programs, such as personal interviews, written essays, attendance at information seminars, etc.

Tips: During personal interviews, make sure to project the right image. Be as prepared as possible. Bring along anything that might help support your cause (e.g., reference letters, your resume – if you don't have a resume, put one together. List your education, volunteer experience, hobbies, even your pets (past and present) and summaries of your research into DVM programs).

Also, don't forget to look and act professional. Make sure you know what you'd like the interviewer to know about you. Oh... and be on time.

Stage 2: Qualifying for a veterinary licence

Once you have been accepted into a DVM program, your next challenge is to complete the program and prepare for your licensing examinations – roughly four years later. The following are some frequently asked questions designed to help you peer into life as a veterinary student.

What's it like to be in a DVM program?	DVM programs are fast-paced and physically and mentally demanding. The programs involve theoretical, in-class seminars and tutorials as well as practical, hands-on components in the form of laboratories.
What kinds of courses do DVM students take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterinary biochemistry• Veterinary anatomy• Veterinary physiology• Principles of disease in veterinary medicine• Anesthesiology• Principles of surgery• Equine medicine & surgery• Food animal medicine & surgery• Medicine & surgery of the dog and cat• Health management• Art of veterinary medicine• Veterinary externship
Will I actually perform surgery on animals?	Yes. Lab or clinical practice is a major component of all DVM programs. The CVO grants DVM students temporary licences allowing them to care for and treat animals throughout the program. Students begin to perform surgery on live animals in third year.
How much does veterinary college cost?	Lots. For example, tuition alone at the Ontario Veterinary College in 2003 was almost \$5,500 per semester. Be sure to take full advantage of the school breaks to work and save money for books, lab materials, living expenses (food, shelter, entertainment). Bursaries, scholarships, awards and other financial assistance are usually available on a limited basis. Ask about your university/college's financial assistance programs.
Will I be able to work or get involved in other activities while in the program?	DVM programs are extremely demanding both physically and with respect to your time. Practical (or <i>lab</i>) work often takes place either early in the morning or during the evening. However, some students do manage to hold part-time jobs and get involved in other activities around campus (e.g., varsity sports, clubs). A select number of on-campus jobs normally exist which students find ideal, both because of location and the kind of experience acquired.
Do I have to maintain a certain grade average?	You may be required to maintain a specific grade minimum in certain courses to be able to move on from year to year. Check with the program administration.
Can I take courses outside the DVM program?	Absolutely. Veterinary schools encourage students to be well-rounded individuals. In fact, some universities require students to take a certain number of courses outside their specialized area of study. Check with your university/college to ensure that you know what's expected for your degree.

Licensure Exams



The final formal step in becoming a veterinarian is acquiring a professional licence. Individuals wishing to practice veterinary medicine in Ontario must complete the following:

1. **The National Examination Board (NEB) Examination** (2 parts)
 - Administered in Ontario by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA):
 - i. **The North American Veterinary Licensing Exam (NAVLE)**
 - Individuals wishing to practice in Canada or in the United States must complete this exam.
 - ii. **The Clinical Proficiency Exam (CPE)** – This is a practical, hands-on examination of the candidate's medical and surgical skills (at least 4 days in duration). Individuals who graduated from a non-accredited veterinary college, and individuals who do not pass the NAVLE exam after two tries must successfully complete the CPE.
2. **CVO Jurisprudence Exam** – Administered by the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) in Guelph. This exam is required by the Veterinarians Act of Ontario for all individuals wishing to practice veterinary medicine in Ontario. CVO is the licensing and regulatory body for the veterinary profession in Ontario. CVO is independent of any professional association. In other provinces, however, the professional association and the licensing body are one and the same.

Stage 3: Practising veterinary medicine

Choices, choices, choices ...

Once you are a licenced practitioner, the world of possibilities opens up in terms of possible career paths. Job prospects are generally plentiful for veterinarians in Ontario. OVMA keeps track of veterinary help wanted ads.

If you plan to go into clinical practice you might work as a(n):

Associate Veterinarian: Most recent graduates start their careers as associate veterinarians, that is, as employees of a veterinary practice. Associate veterinarians can work either full or part-time, days, evenings, shift work or on-call, as permanent employees or on contract. Advantages of working as an associate veterinarian include: more stability of employment, eligibility for staff benefits, limited administrative responsibilities, etc. . .

Locum: This is the term used to identify freelance veterinarians, that is, veterinarians who choose to work for themselves, offering their services to different veterinary practices on an as-needed basis. Advantages of this option include: mobility, variety, a frequent change of scenery, high demand (locums are in high demand as many practice owners employ locums during vacation time), you can set your own schedule, freedom to choose when to work, flexibility to move from town to town, etc. . .

Specialist Veterinarian: After graduating as a DVM, some people choose to continue their studies in order to become a specialist in a particular field (e.g., oncology, cardiology, ophthalmology, dentistry, etc. . .).

Practice Owner/Partner: Many veterinarians aspire to either own their own practice or become a partner in a practice. As a practice owner, you get to make the decisions, enjoy (generally) a higher income, set your own vacation time, attain higher status within the community (because you're a business owner), etc. . .

Where else can you work?

Most people are familiar with veterinarians in private practice. These veterinarians treat pets, horses and food animals (e.g., cattle, pigs, sheep, poultry). However, veterinarians also play a major role in a number of other industries and therefore can be found in the most interesting of places.

Consultants: Many veterinarians move on to become consultants to their own peers, (e.g., some go back to school to become lawyers specializing in veterinary/animal rights law, some return to school for a Master of Business Administration degree to specialize in helping veterinarians set up and run their practices).

Education: Veterinarians often return to school to pursue post-graduate training to teach college or university courses in science or veterinary medicine.

Government: Veterinarians play a role in setting policy and regulations which are enacted as laws concerning many areas of animal health and public health and safety. In their work on behalf of either provincial or federal governments, they may be employed by such agencies as Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency where the responsibilities can include animal disease control, enforcement of all import/export regulations, inspections for regulatory compliance, etc. . .

Industry: Many veterinarians work as product developers or consultants working in such areas as pet food or pharmaceutical manufacturing and sales.

Lobby movements: Some professionals prefer to put their knowledge to work in areas such as animal rights protection and advocacy.

Research: Veterinarians may also choose to become researchers, working in laboratories to discover new cures and treatments for human and animal healthcare.

What kinds of animals will you work with?

Small Animal Practice: cats, dogs, gerbils, hamsters, birds, rabbits...

Mixed Animal Practice: from cats and dogs to horses, pigs, goats, sheep (a bit of everything)

Large Animal Practice: cows, horses, sheep, llamas, pigs, poultry, elk...

Exotic or Avian Animal Practice: zoo animals, reptiles, birds...

Aquaculture: farmed fish



Life as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM)

Is the work of a veterinarian rewarding?

A veterinarian's work is generally very rewarding. All you need to do is walk into any clinic and take a look at the many thank you letters – usually hanging on the walls or displayed around the counter – to see how much veterinarians are respected by their clients and to see how much veterinarians do for their clients – both in terms of helping animals with their healthcare needs, and providing emotional support to animal/pet owners.

In terms of compensation, veterinarians are amongst the highest paid professionals in Ontario, in company with human doctors, dentists, lawyers, optometrists, pharmacists and chiropractors.

How does OVMA help veterinarians enjoy their careers?

As with any profession, being a veterinarian has its challenges. After all, being a veterinarian isn't just about treating animals – it's also about running a business (making sure the business is profitable and efficient), managing people (employees, clients, suppliers), being recognized in your community as an authority on animal health and welfare, being a person who enjoys life outside of work (with friends, family, adventure, etc. . .)

That's where the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) comes in. OVMA is the professional association representing veterinarians in the Province of Ontario, working in private practice, government, academia, industry and public service.

OVMA is the North American leader in the area of veterinary economic research. Research undertaken by the Association is used by practice owners across not only Ontario, but also across Canada – and now across the United States. OVMA research concentrates on issues such as:

- Customer Service & Satisfaction
- Employee Satisfaction & Retention
- Economic Change (e.g., profitability, effects of change-inducing factors)
- Area Differences (e.g., variations in the profession based on geographic location)
- Associate Salaries & Compensation Packages
- Best Practices (e.g., model practice management techniques)
- Veterinary Technician Job Satisfaction & Retention
- Large Animal Practice Statistics
- Small Animal Practice Statistics
- Gender Issues (e.g., salary and practice differences amongst men and women)
- Continuing Education Needs
- Veterinary Human Resources.



For more information about becoming a veterinarian at any stage of your education, talk to your local veterinarian or contact OVMA, CVO or the University of Guelph. (see back cover for full details)

Veterinary Resources



Veterinary medical programs in Canada

There are four accredited universities with veterinary medical programs in Canada. Because of the limited number of spaces in these programs, most universities have very strict policies about giving priority to applicants from defined geographic regions. Applicants are therefore encouraged to apply to the university closest to their place of residence.

Ontario Veterinary College,
University of Guelph
Tel: (519) 824-4120
Email: ovcinfo@uoguelph.ca
Web: www.ovcnet.uoguelph.ca

Atlantic Veterinary College,
University of Prince Edward Island
Tel: (902) 566-0882
Email: avc@upei.ca
Web: www.upei.ca/~avc

Veterinary Faculty of Medicine,
University of Montreal
Tel: (450) 773-8521
Web: www.medvet.umontreal.ca

Western College of Veterinary Medicine,
Tel: (306) 966-7454
Web: www.usask.ca/wcvm

Need more information?

Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (professional association)

245 Commercial Street, Milton, ON L9T 2J3
Tel: (905) 875-0756 Toll-free Tel: 1-800-670-1702
Fax: (905) 875-0958 Toll-free Fax: 1-877-482-5941
E-mail: info@ovma.org
Web site: www.ovma.org

College of Veterinarians of Ontario (licensing and regulatory body of Ontario)

2106 Gordon Street, Guelph, Ontario N1L 1G6
Tel: (519) 824-5600 Toll-free Tel: 1-800-424-2856 (Ontario Only)
Fax: (519) 824-6497 Toll-free Fax: 1-888-662-9479 (Ontario Only)
E-mail: inquiries@cvo.org
Web site: www.cvo.org

MCAT Program Office

American College Testing Program
2255 North Dubuque Road,
Tyler Building, Iowa City, IA, USA
52243-4056
Tel: (319) 337-1357
Web site: www.aamc.org

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (administers the NAVLE exam)

339 Booth Street, Ottawa, ON K1R 7K1
Tel: (613) 236-1162 Fax: (613) 236-9681
E-mail: info@canadianveterinarians.net

National Examining Board

Email: neb_bne@canadianveterinarians.net

Becoming A Veterinarian

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The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association is a professional association representing veterinarians in the Province of Ontario, working in private practice, government, academia, industry and public service.

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association focuses its efforts on the following areas: economic research for veterinarians, continuing education and professional development, public relations campaigns and activities, government relations, and providing discounted products and services to members.