



**WSAVA**  
Global Veterinary Community

# Our Direction

---

Strategic Plan 2023 – 2025  
Approved

# 1 Table of Contents

2	<u>Executive Summary .....</u>	3
3	<u>About the WSAVA.....</u>	6
3.1	BACKGROUND TO THE ASSOCIATION .....	6
3.2	WSAVA VALUES – HOW WE THINK, BEHAVE, ACT. ....	6
3.3	TRADITIONAL WSAVA ACTIVITIES – WHAT WE’VE BECOME KNOWN FOR .....	6
3.4	OUTGOING STRATEGIC PLAN (2019 – 2022).....	7
3.5	DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW STRATEGY.....	8
4	<u>The World Today .....</u>	10
4.1	COMPANION ANIMAL VETERINARY MEDICINE .....	10
4.2	WHAT’S DRIVING PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP ASSOCIATIONS? .....	13
4.3	THE IMPACT ON THE WSAVA .....	15
5	<u>Our Direction .....</u>	16
5.1	VISION .....	16
5.2	MISSION.....	16
5.3	AUDIENCE.....	17
5.4	FOCUS AREAS.....	18
5.4.1	FOCUS 1: SETTING STANDARDS FOR COMPANION ANIMAL VETERINARY PRACTICE .....	19
5.4.2	FOCUS 2: PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COMPANION ANIMAL VETERINARY TEAMS.....	19
5.4.3	FOCUS 3: CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE .....	20
5.4.4	FOCUS 4: WSAVA’S COMMUNITY .....	20
5.4.5	FOCUS 5: ENABLING FACTORS .....	21
6	<u>What Next?.....</u>	22

## 2 Executive Summary

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) is an association of associations. Its members include 115 national, regional, and special interest companion animal veterinary associations, from around the world. Together, they represent around 200,000 individual veterinarians. The association aims to advance the health and welfare of companion animals around the world and to advocate on behalf of companion animal veterinarians globally.

The current WSAVA strategic plan was developed in 2018 and covers years 2019, through to 2022<sup>1</sup>. The process of updating the strategic plan for years 2023 – 2025 started in early-2022. To start with, the forces affecting veterinary practice and membership associations today were analysed and emergent themes identified. These themes are summarized in the coming paragraphs for contextual purposes.

### Developments in the companion animal veterinary sector

For veterinarians in developed countries, the sheer pressure of their work contributes to the mental health challenges and burnout experienced by many. This leads to staff attrition which ratchets up the pressure on remaining team members. These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of leadership and management skills across a profession in which clinical skills are valued more highly than any other.

Meanwhile, accustomed to a 24/7, digital-enabled world, the expectations of clients of their veterinary practices are changing. Veterinarians working in countries in which companion animal practice is still emerging face the additional hurdle of struggling simply to gain access to the essential drugs they need to provide care to their patients.

Of course, there are positive developments too. An initiative led by the WSAVA is seeking to resolve the problem of the inequity of access to veterinary medicines around the world. Meanwhile, advances in online learning technologies offer the potential to transform veterinary education, enabling veterinary students and veterinarians to benefit from the latest knowledge wherever they are.

---

<sup>1</sup> [WSAVA Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022](#)

There is, however, much still to do. At a time when pet ownership levels are increasing rapidly and as the benefits of pet ownership to human mental health become ever clearer, providing a rewarding and safe environment in which dedicated veterinary professionals can enjoy a satisfying career and deliver a high standard of care is the very least we should expect.

### Developments in the association sector

Professional membership associations are not exempt from the turbulence created by current global instability, the climate emergency and heightened financial pressures around the world. In fact, even before the seismic events of the last few years, they were being challenged by a range of socio-economic trends and, if anything, the pace of change is accelerating. The key drivers of change are: financial instability and economic recession, demographic shifts, advances in technology, and a desire amongst professionals to belong to a community.

### What are the WSAVA's key priorities for the years 2023-2025?

So, what do these global factors mean for the WSAVA? The answer is that they present us with choices to make in creating our new strategic plan to ensure we remain relevant in a changing world.

The outcomes we envisage include:

- a new focus on the whole veterinary team
- expanding our work to include non-clinical standards and skills development.
- more clearly defining member benefits
- diversifying our income streams
- creating an updated association structure that enables us to work more effectively and efficiently.

To help us achieve these outcomes, from 2023, the WSAVA will focus its resources in four key areas:

- setting veterinary standards for companion animal veterinary practice
- personal and professional development for the companion animal veterinary team



- campaigning for change on key issues that affect the companion animal veterinary community.
- expanding the WSAVA community.

Each of these key areas is complemented by supporting objectives, which are set out in the full report. To support these first four focus areas, the WSAVA will also invest in aspects of its operational infrastructure to set them up for success. We call these aspects: our enabling factors.



## 3 About the WSAVA

### 3.1 Background to the association

Founded almost 70 years ago, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) is an association of associations. Its members include 115 national, regional, and special interest companion animal veterinary associations, from around the world. Together, they represent more than 200,000 individual veterinarians. The association aims to advance the health and welfare of companion animals around the world and to advocate on behalf of companion animal veterinarians globally.

### 3.2 WSAVA values – how we think, behave, act.

The WSAVA community lives and breathes its values which guide every aspect of its work to create a committed and collaborative community of veterinary peers. Its values are to:

- always act with integrity
- be passionate and professional in delivering its activities.
- be engaging to all – veterinary professionals, stakeholders, and pet owners.
- empower its members to be the best they can be.

### 3.3 Traditional WSAVA activities – what we've become known for

The WSAVA's activities fall into four key areas:

- **The creation of 'standardization guidelines' in key areas of companion animal veterinary care**

Its peer-reviewed and regularly updated Global Guidelines are the WSAVA's most frequently downloaded and highly regarded resources. They are developed by experts to be relevant to veterinarians wherever in the world they are in practice. Nutrition, pain management, vaccination and animal welfare are just some of the topics supported by WSAVA Global Guidelines, with others in development.

- **The provision of continuing education (CE) tailored to the needs of companion animal veterinarians.**

The annual WSAVA World Congress is the association's flagship CE event. It offers delegates a feast of learning from global experts, as well as the opportunity to network with colleagues from around the world. In addition to its annual congress, the WSAVA offers face-to-face CE to its members in countries where companion animal practice is still emerging, together with a growing range of state-of-the-art online learning through its online education portal, the WSAVA Academy.

- **Raising awareness of the importance of companion animals in One Health**

The current understanding of One Health often focuses on interactions between man, production animals, wildlife, and the environment. Yet the highly beneficial bond between many humans and their companion animals brings with it challenges, including the risk of zoonotic disease transmission, abuse, as well as specific One Health issues, such as canine rabies, leishmaniosis, and obesity. The WSAVA is working ensure that the growing significance of the human-companion animal bond within One Health is fully appreciated and acted upon.

- **Advocating on behalf of companion animal veterinarians and their patients on key issues affecting their health and welfare**

Whether it's the difficulty they experience in accessing the drugs they need to treat their patients; limitations to veterinary education in their country; concerns about mental health or animal welfare, the companion animal veterinary profession around the world faces many challenges. The WSAVA advocates for its members at a global level, highlighting the value of their work and working with stakeholders to develop practical solutions to the problems they face.

### **3.4 Outgoing strategic plan (2019 – 2022)**

The WSAVA's previous strategic plan was developed in 2018 and covers the years 2019 through to 2022. It highlighted activity in eight priority areas:

1. WSAVA structure
2. WSAVA brand
3. Communication strategy

4. Volunteer management
5. Member relations
6. Global Guidelines
7. Global Continuing Education
8. Strategic partnerships.

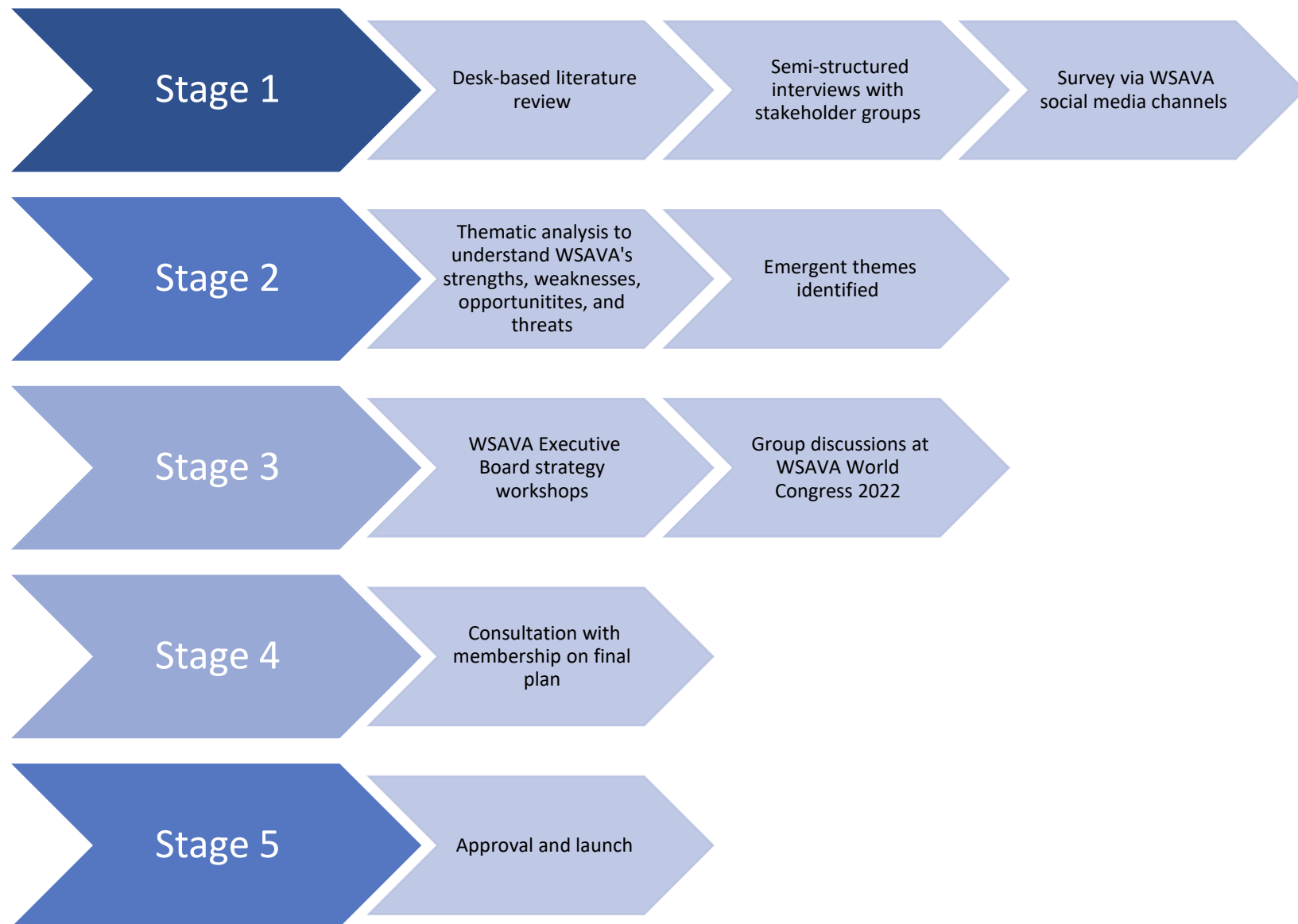
The plan can be read in full on the WSAVA [website](#).

### 3.5 Development of a new strategy

The process of updating the WSAVA's strategic plan for the years 2023 – 2025 started in early 2022. The approach taken is summarised overleaf.







## 4 The World Today

### 4.1 Companion animal veterinary medicine

The current backdrop of global instability and heightened financial pressures are simply adding to the challenges already facing the veterinary profession globally. With a suicide rate significantly higher than that of the general population, a 2019 WSAVA survey confirmed that the mental health of veterinarians and veterinary technicians/nurses was an issue in all parts of the world and a particular problem in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America<sup>2</sup>.

A 2015 paper also suggested that studies had identified a link between suicide and occupation, including the healthcare professions and the veterinary profession. The paper stated that the rate of suicide in the veterinary profession had been pegged as close to twice that of the dental profession; more than twice that of the medical profession, and four times the rate in the general population<sup>3</sup>.

For companion animal veterinarians in developed countries, the sheer pressure of their work; the long hours; staff shortages; poor remuneration and rising client expectations all contribute to the mental health challenges and burnout experienced by many. This leads to staff attrition which ratchets up the pressure on remaining team members.



---

<sup>2</sup> [WSAVA Professional Wellness Group Survey 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Stoewen D. L. \(2015\). Suicide in veterinary medicine: let's talk about it. The Canadian Veterinary Journal, 56\(1\), 89–92.](#)

These challenges can be exacerbated by a lack of leadership and management skills across a profession in which clinical skills are valued more highly than any other. Efforts are now being made to redress this imbalance and upskill those with leadership and management responsibilities through additional non-clinical training. Taking this one step further, in the UK, evidence-based bespoke qualifications for the veterinary profession in leadership and management have now been introduced<sup>4</sup>.

Developing individuals with leadership potential in the profession will remain a critical priority for the foreseeable future, especially as the world in which the running of companion animal veterinary businesses continues to evolve.

Meanwhile, accustomed to a 24/7, digital-enabled world, client expectations of their veterinarians are changing. With veterinary fees often regarded as outlandishly expensive, clients seek affordability, transparency and, above all, high quality service. Companion animal veterinary businesses are realising the need to engage with clients effectively, utilising the whole veterinary team, not only to retain their loyalty but also to increase the welfare of their patients, by providing education and support in addition to consultations.

If these are the challenges faced by companion animal veterinarians in the developed world, the fact is that those working in countries in which companion animal practice is still emerging face additional hurdles, not the least of which is struggling simply to gain access to the essential drugs they need to provide care to their patients. Caused primarily by financial and regulatory issues, this situation is, of course, a serious welfare issue for millions of companion animals. However, it is also a contributor to stress and burnout among veterinarians in affected countries as it can mean that they are unable to provide the level of care and treatment they have been trained to deliver.

Of course, there are positive developments too. An initiative led by the WSAVA is seeking to resolve the problem of the inequity of access to companion animal veterinary medicines around the world and both the WSAVA as a whole and most WSAVA members are actively

---

<sup>4</sup> [UK's evidence-based veterinary leadership and management qualifications](#)

working to provide additional support to veterinarians and their employers to tackle the profession's significant mental health challenges.

Meanwhile, advances in online learning technologies offer the potential to transform veterinary education, enabling veterinary students and veterinarians to benefit from the latest knowledge wherever they are. New technologies are also offering new ways of collecting health data, diagnosing illness, and delivering veterinary care.

There is, however, much still to do. At a time when pet ownership levels are increasing rapidly and, as the benefits of pet ownership to human mental health become ever clearer, providing a rewarding and safe environment in which dedicated veterinary professionals can enjoy a satisfying career in companion animal practice and deliver a high standard of care is the very least we should expect.

The WSAVA is leading efforts globally to drive the changes required to realize this goal.



## 4.2 What's driving professional membership associations?

Professional membership associations are not exempt from the turbulence created by the current global instability and heightened financial pressures around the world. In fact, even before the seismic events of the last few years, they were being challenged by a range of socio-economic trends and, if anything, the pace of change is accelerating. The key drivers of change are:

- **Financial instability and economic recession**

A tightening financial situation means that associations and individuals scrutinize their expenditure much more closely. If they perceive that they are not receiving value from a membership, it is an 'easy' expense to cut. This means that associations must focus single-mindedly on ensuring that they are providing the demonstrable value and benefits to members which will ensure that continued membership is seen as essential.

- **Demographic shifts**

With a reported 71% of an average association's membership aged over 40<sup>5</sup>, attracting younger members is a long-standing challenge for associations. Young professionals, at the start of their career and often with young families, are already time-poor but evolving societal expectations are throwing a new ingredient into the mix.

Millennials and (looking ahead) Generation Z are reportedly less likely to join associations because they prefer a more informal and personalized approach to that they perceive to be offered by a traditional association. They tend to build their careers across a multitude of social and professional channels and will compare their interactions with an association online to the experiences they have with the likes of Amazon, Spotify, Netflix. Importantly for associations reliant on event income, they are less interested in small talk at industry events and meetups and are less likely to attend an annual event just to catch up with other professionals.

---

<sup>5</sup> [The 2022 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report](#)



Attracting younger members to an association requires a comprehensive understanding of their values and a focus on delivering a service that supports these values. This being said, it is also important not to ignore the needs of older members.

- [Advances in technology](#)

Technology is a game-changer because not only is technology changing the way in which we communicate, but it is also changing the way in which we search, review, and absorb information. Successful associations will be those which harness new technologies to offer education, resources, and other benefits to their members, not only in traditional face to face settings but increasingly through digital means.

- [It's not all doom and gloom.](#)

The 2022 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report reports that 38% of its respondents experienced an increase in total membership counts during the pandemic – an increase from 26% in 2020. This shows that growth is possible and achievable with the adoption of the right strategy.

The human sense of belonging is very strong, and this is where being part of a community, whether online, face to face or both, can prove an important driver for association membership - if the value proposition meets its members' needs and is innovative in its delivery.



### 4.3 The impact on the WSAVA

So, what does all this mean for the WSAVA? The answer is that it presents us with a variety of distinct choices. The outcome we envisage for these choices is highlighted overleaf.

	WSAVA's Current State	WSAVA's Target Future State
Audience	Veterinarian	One veterinary team
	Specialists, academics, and organised veterinary medicine	
Content	Clinical	Holistic: clinical & non-clinical
Member Benefits	Ambiguous	Clearly defined for each member category
Income	Congress & sponsorship dependent	A diverse range of income streams
Organisation Structure	Discrete and siloed	Integrated and efficient

## 5 Our Direction

### 5.1 Vision

---

*All companion animals worldwide receive veterinary care that ensures their optimal health and welfare.*

---

### 5.2 Mission

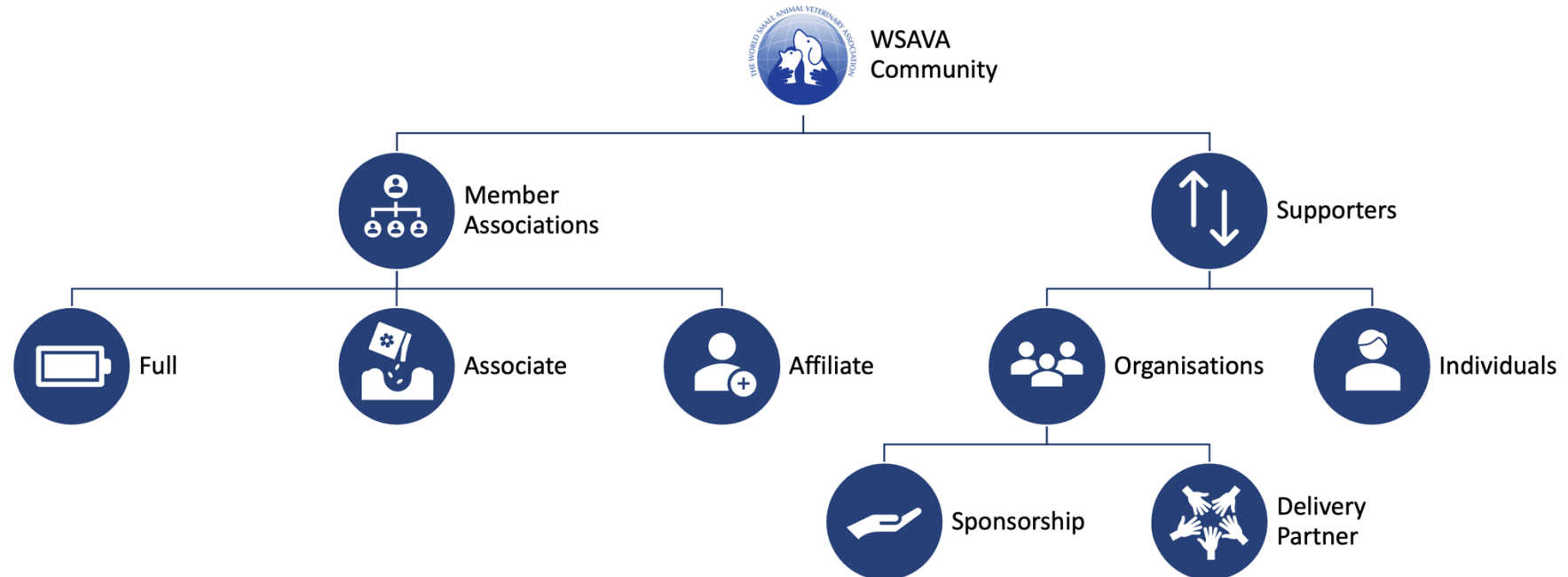
---

*To advance the health and welfare of companion animals worldwide through an educated, committed, and collaborative global veterinary community.*

---

### 5.3 Audience

The WSAVA community is made up of two groups: our member associations and our supporters. Our member associations will continue to reflect the unique make up of companion animal veterinary practice around the globe. We will strengthen our community and voice by broadening the range of organisations we work with, whether as sponsors or as delivery partners. Formalising how individuals from the wider veterinary team can get involved with the WSAVA, for instance, through benefitting from our education products and community groups, will strengthen our community in size and increase its diversity.



## 5.4 Focus Areas

The WSAVA is now focusing its resources and effort in five areas:

1. Setting Standards for Companion Animal Veterinary Practice
2. Personal and Professional Development for Companion Animal Veterinary Teams
3. Campaigning for Change
4. Strengthening the WSAVA Community

To support these first four focus areas, the WSAVA will also invest in aspects of its operational infrastructure in order to set them up for success. We call these aspects:

5. Our Enabling Factors.





#### 5.4.1 FOCUS 1: Setting Standards for Companion Animal Veterinary Practice

##### Objectives:

1. Update our existing Global Guidelines, in accordance with the needs of our community.
2. Translate our Global Guidelines into accessible and user-friendly formats.
3. Create a variety of Global Resources focusing on the non-clinical aspects of companion animal veterinary practice.
4. Create a variety of Global Resources which focus on the veterinary nursing/technician aspects of companion animal veterinary practice.

#### 5.4.2 FOCUS 2: Personal & Professional Development for Companion Animal Veterinary Teams

##### Objectives:

1. Hold World Congresses that are industry leading and contribute towards WSAVA's sustainability goals.
2. Fully review the purpose and delivery of our World and Regional Congresses.
3. Create a professional development strategy that integrates all the WSAVA's education content; both online and offline and includes non-clinical content (such as leadership and management skills, professional wellbeing, effective communication).
4. Using the WSAVA's Guidelines as a foundation, design certificate programmes that are targeted at the companion animal veterinary team.

### 5.4.3 FOCUS 3: Campaigning for Change

#### Objectives:

1. Continue the WSAVA's campaign to tackle the inequity of access to companion animal veterinary therapeutics, and antimicrobial resistance.
2. Become a more environmentally sustainable association and demonstrate to our members how they can be too.
3. Design the processes and structure required for WSAVA to campaign for change effectively, and efficiently.
4. Create and nurture relationships with the individuals and organisations that will help us to advance our advocacy ambitions.
5. Create an advocacy toolkit for member associations in order to support them in advocating on issues in their own country or region.

### 5.4.4 FOCUS 4: WSAVA's Community

#### Objectives:

1. Review WSAVA member benefits and ensure they reflect the needs of current and potential members.
2. Create a community structure that represents the breadth and depth of our communities' interests, including regions, roles, and specialisms.
3. Introduce processes and tools for regular dialogue between the WSAVA and its members and supporters.

4. Become a more socially sustainable association by improving our diversity, equity, and inclusion performance.

#### 5.4.5 FOCUS 5: Enabling Factors

##### Objectives:

1. Become more financially sustainable by diversifying the association's income streams.
2. Design and implement a fit for purpose people structure, including volunteer and paid team roles.
3. Digitally transform the WSAVA's processes to reduce waste and make it easier for our community to get what they need.
4. Become better known, understood, loved, and respected by the global veterinary community.

## 6 What Next?

Work is already underway to convert our focus areas and objectives into more tangible, tactical plans. For 2023, a more detailed work plan has been produced. This will be repeated for 2024, and 2025. It is the WSAVA's intention to share progress reports with member associations twice annually: at the mid-year mark and at the annual meeting of members during the World Congress. If you have questions regarding any component of this document, or would like to get involved, you can contact the WSAVA's Executive Director, Richard Casey<sup>6</sup>.



---

<sup>6</sup> [richard.casey@wsava.org](mailto:richard.casey@wsava.org)