



THE COLLEGE OF  
VETERINARIANS  
OF ONTARIO

# PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARDS & Veterinary Medicine in Ontario

## What are Professional Practice Standards?

Professional Practice Standards are published documents that state the generally accepted behaviours expected of veterinarians for a particular aspect of their work. They contain criteria that the profession as a whole agrees are “essential” to competent, ethical practice. Developed by consensus, Professional Practice Standards reflect the current values of the profession; as living documents, they are updated as practice evolves over time.

Standards apply to all members of a profession, across the full range of settings, roles, and practice environments in which they work. Published Standards are used to provide guidance to the members of a profession and as yardsticks against which professional behaviours might be measured.

## Why Standards?

Standards are essential instruments in the toolbox of all self-regulating professions. Colleges are mandated by statute to develop, establish, and maintain the standards of a profession in these broad categories of professional activity:

1. knowledge and skill;
2. qualification;
3. practice; and
4. professional ethics.

Professional Practice Standards are useful to practitioners, too. Veterinarians are able to glance at these brief, high-level documents to confirm what is expected of them in various situations. Since Professional Practice Standards are outcomes-based, not rules-based, they provide clarity about responsibilities, while leaving it up to the individual professional to decide *how* the standard is best met.

Professional Practice Standards serve an additional educational purpose: members of the public can access these documents in order to understand the essential expectations for veterinarians, as well as how self-regulation of the profession works.

## What is the Difference between Professional Practice Standards and Other Documents?

The figure below provides an overview of the College's policy structure for veterinary medicine in order of authority (the *Act* sets the highest requirements for compliance), with a brief explanation of where the documents fit in the self-regulation of veterinary medicine in Ontario:

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### ***Veterinarians Act***

Establishes the authority of the College and its statutory committees, and mandatory requirements for members of the profession; developed with stakeholders, passed by the Province, and proclaimed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

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### **Regulation 1093**

Specifies legal requirements for administration of the Act, for members' practice, and professional conduct; mandatory for all members of the Profession; developed through consultation with stakeholders, passed by the Province, and proclaimed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

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### **Professional Practice Standard (PPS):**

Contains requirements based on current practises as expected by members of the profession; consistently applied to all members.

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### **Policy Statement:**

Describes how the College interprets existing legislation and what the College will do/how it will react in certain circumstances.

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### **Position Statement:**

States the position taken by the College on a topical or controversial matter to clarify an issue for the public and members, without dictating clinical practice requirements. *Examples include Cosmetic Surgery and Pain Management.*

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### **Guide or Guideline:**

Recommendations and suggestions for meeting expectations stated in a Professional Practice Standard.

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### **Legislative Overview:**

Describes the expectations of a veterinarian found in legislation other than the *Veterinarians Act*.

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None of these published documents are to be confused with generalized "Standards of Practice" or "Standards of Care," both of which are broad terms used to cover both published and unpublished current standards of a profession. A Standard of Practice at any given time is determined by a panel of peers using a compilation of published policies of the College, peer-reviewed literature, clinical guidelines, and generally accepted expectations. These are context dependent and evolve over time.

Professional Practice Standards are available on the College website under the Resources–Policies & Publications tab. They are a resource for the veterinary community and the public, in keeping with the mission of the College:

*“To guide, govern, and inspire excellence in the profession through partnerships  
with veterinarians and the public in the service of society.”*

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