

# Alberta Veterinary Profession Companion Animal Emergency Response Plan

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## List of Acronyms:

AARCS - Alberta Animal Rescue Crew Society

ABSPCA – Alberta Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

ABVMA - Alberta Veterinary Medical Association

ABVTA - Alberta Veterinary Technologists Association

AEMA - Alberta Emergency Management Agency

AETF - Alberta Emergency Task Force

CADRC – Companion Animal Disaster Response Capability

CATF – Canadian Animal Task Force (formerly Alberta Spay and Neuter Task Force)

ESS - Emergency Social Services

GoA - Government of Alberta

ICS - Incident Command System

LAEMR - Alberta Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation

PESS – Provincial Emergency Social Services

POC - Provincial Operations Centre

## Background

The veterinary profession in Alberta has been engaged in emergency response by providing veterinary medical services to companion animals evacuated or otherwise impacted by emergencies.

Most notably, the veterinary profession response was critical in the large-scale evacuation of companion animals and their subsequent care and reunification of pets with owners of Fort McMurray in 2016 as a result of wildfires.

The '*ABVMA Report on Veterinary Profession Response to the Fort McMurray Animal Evacuation*' April 2018 (Appendix A) details the veterinary profession's response and makes a number of recommendations to improve animal emergency response.

The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA) report along with '*What we Heard: Companion Animal Emergency Response*' from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, October 2017 (Appendix B) were well received by government and resulted in the establishment of the Companion Animal Disaster Response Capability (CADRC) Steering Committee and Working Group.

The resulting Companion Animal Disaster Response Capability (CADRC) Strategy and Operational Plan seeks to support local authorities in their Emergency Social Services (ESS) planning and response and where necessary, provide resources to aid in emergency response.

The CADRC Operational Plan was endorsed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in 2021. The Plan has been communicated with municipalities through engagement with Rural Municipalities of Alberta and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association.

The CADRC Operational Plan sets out roles and responsibilities for the ABVMA and Alberta Veterinary Technologists Association (ABVTA).

ABVMA and ABVTA established a Working Group to develop a plan for meeting the roles and responsibilities for the profession responding to emergencies when activated under the CADRC Operational Plan. The *Alberta Veterinary Profession Companion Animal Emergency Response Plan* will guide how the veterinary profession in Alberta will respond when called upon to assist during emergencies affecting companion animals in the future. The plan is intended to be general and scalable. Specific actions will be determined at the time of the emergency following the general principles outlined in this plan.

## Companion Animal Disaster Emergency Response Capability Strategy and Plan – An Overview

During the Fort McMurray wildfires and resulting evacuation of residents, the veterinary profession stepped up to assist with the evacuation and care of animals displaced with their owners and those left behind in residences.

Veterinary practices across the province provided housing and medical care and veterinarians and technologists volunteered to assist with evacuation, triage, housing and medical care of rescued animals.

The ABVMA Report on the Veterinary Profession Response to the Fort McMurray Animal Evacuation (2018) was provided to government, Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Community and Social Services. Provincial Emergency Social Services (PESS) was already engaged in assisting municipalities with Emergency Social Services (ESS) planning and encouraging local authorities to include companion animals in ESS plans.

ABVMA, ABVTA, Alberta Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ABSPCA), Canadian Animal Task Force (CATF), Alberta Animal Rescue Crew Society (AARCS) and other stakeholders with support from Provincial Emergency Social Services (PESS) formed the Companion Animal Disaster Response Capability Steering Committee to develop plans for dealing with companion animals in emergencies.

From the CADRC Steering Committee, a working group was struck to develop the Strategy and Operational Plan. The Plan was approved by the Minister of Municipal affairs in 2021 and has been socialized with Rural Municipalities of Alberta and the Municipalities Alberta (formerly Alberta Urban Municipalities Association).

### CADRC Strategy

The CADRC Strategy provides an approach for the evacuation, care and treatment of companion animals. Societal expectation is that companion animals can be evacuated with owners, made safe, secure and provided emergency medical services. How this can be established, coordinated, supported and sustained is the goal of the CADRC strategy, recognizing that CADRC is all about supporting local authorities.

In order for the CADRC Strategy to be successful:

1. Local authorities need to accept and then include companion animals in emergency response plans.
2. There needs to be effective education and training plan for the local or regional emergency management/emergency social services staff and animal care workers and volunteers who would be involved (directly or indirectly) with the companion animal disaster care plan.
3. There will need to be validation of the plan through functional and full-scale exercises involving local authorities, the Government of Alberta (GoA) and animal rescue and care organizations associated with a provincial animal disaster response capability.

4. The requirement for an effective public communications plan must not be underestimated. People must be aware of any registration portals, websites or processes through which their companion animal(s) can be pre-registered, registered and be looked after during emergencies.

### CADRC Operational Plan

The scope of the CADRC Operational Plan is clearly defined. The plan is for companion animals only. A companion animal is defined in the plan as a *“domesticated or domestic-bred animals, avian or exotic animals who live in mutually beneficial relationships whose needs can be readily met as companions in a home or are in close daily relationship with humans and whom are not used for commercial/agricultural purposes”*. It is not intended to cover livestock and wildlife, though there are some animals that are conventionally thought of as livestock that may be considered companion animals such as backyard chickens and pigs.

The scope includes the reception, health assessment, housing and care provided to animals evacuated with their owners and also support to the rescue and recovery of animals that may be left behind by owners.

#### Assumptions

- Local authorities have the responsibility to respond to emergencies and need to consider Emergency Social Services supports, which should include plans for companion animals.
- CADRC will support local authorities in planning for ESS involving companion animals
- Some local authorities will have limited resources to plan and respond to emergencies involving companion animals and where a local authority does not have an ESS plan that will deal with companion animals, a local authority may activate CADRC and request support.
- CADRC resources including Alberta Animal Rescue Crew Society (AARCS), Alberta Emergency Task Force (AETF) and the Canadian Animal Task Force (CATF) may initially respond
- CADRC resources may need additional resources from the veterinary profession.
- CADRC may operationalize a companion animal care facility at three levels - close, regional or general.
- Costs for ESS, including those for animal care, may be submitted as part of a disaster recovery program

The CADRC Strategy and Operational Plan are attached as Appendices C and D to this document.

## Activation of the Veterinary Profession during CADRC deployment

The authority to respond to emergencies, including those that involve companion animals, rests with the local authority.

A local authority is a city, town, county or other municipality.

The Alberta Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation (LAEMR) requires that a local authority have an emergency management plan and that plan includes emergency social services. Providing care for companion animals is considered part of emergency social services.

Ideally, local authorities will have a plan in place to respond to emergencies and provide care for companion animals. If the scale of the emergency can be handled by the local authority, veterinary care is expected to be supplied by local veterinary professionals and other companion animal support groups

Where the capacity of a local authority to respond is exceeded, the local authority may activate CADRC. If CADRC requires additional veterinary professional resources, CADRC may request from ABVMA and ABVTA veterinary professional resources, activating this plan.

## Responsibilities and Recruitment of 'Team Leads'

Incident Command System (ICS) requires that certain individuals within an organization are in positions of leadership to oversee defined aspects of incident management. While veterinary professionals will occupy most of their time in an 'operational' role, some may be involved in planning. Whether veterinarians and technologists are deployed operationally in a division, branch or group will depend on the scope of the activation.

In any case, certain veterinary professionals will be asked to take on a leadership role in the activation, including planning and operations. These individuals are referred to as "Team Leads".

## Team Leads Responsibilities

Collaborate with CADRC representatives in the planning for an animal care facility, including initial set up and management plan with consideration of expected numbers, types and medical condition of animals. The responsibilities include:

1. Collaborate with CADRC representatives to select, contact and schedule veterinarians and veterinary technologists.
2. Ensure orientation of veterinarians and veterinary technologist and other team leads.
3. Assist CADRC with orientation and training of non-veterinary professional volunteers when necessary.

4. Liaise with community veterinary practice entities for referral of medical cases as necessary.
5. Provide oversight of the processes for admission, triage, treatment and discharge of animals.
6. Provide oversight of the triage and treatment of sick or injured animals.
7. Provide oversight of the facility regarding animal health, biosecurity and welfare in accordance with ABVMA Standards as set out in Appendix E.
8. Oversee communication with owners regarding discharge where appropriate.
9. Communication with ABVMA and ABVTA CADRC representatives.

## Requirements for Team Leads

1. It is considered ideal that a Team Lead will be a registered veterinarian or veterinary technologist.
2. Willing to engage in training in emergency/disaster veterinary medicine on an ongoing / as required basis.
3. Team Leads will operate on rotational shifts to provide oversight as required during the operational period.

Remuneration and expenses for Team Leads will be subject of further conversations with Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) to understand costs that may be claimed by a local authority for reimbursement under a Disaster Recovery Program.

## Recruitment and Selection of Team Leads

1. Three to five (3-5) Team Leads will be required; ideally Team Leads will be available from different regions of the province though this is not required.
2. The call out for individuals interested in a Team Lead position will be made at the same time and using the same process as development of the Master List referred to in the next section of this plan. The sections above on responsibilities and requirements will serve as a 'job description' for the role.
3. The number of Team Leads and the scheduling and division of duties will be determined at the time of the activation. This may include:
  - i. Facility Team Lead – building, supplies, admin/staff, transport/ biosecurity
  - ii. Veterinarian / Animal Health Team Lead – admission/discharge, triage, treatments/hospitalization, kenneling, checking ABVMA Standards as set out herein.



- iii. Administrative Team Lead – communication with clients, interagency communication, coordination of volunteers.

## Process for call out of veterinary professionals during emergency response

Veterinary professionals identified on the Master List will be called out following a CADRC activation which would occur at the request of a local authority. A local authority will not be contacting the ABVMA/ABVTA directly for veterinary professionals. On occasion, a CADRC resource such as AARCS or CATF that has existing relationships with local authorities or indigenous communities may require additional veterinary professionals to assist a local authority outside of a CADRC activation.

### **Master List**

ABVMA will create and maintain a master list of registered veterinary professionals and certified and inspected veterinary practices willing to help during an activation (Appendix G). This includes veterinary practices willing to provide care to evacuated animal owners and accept cases referred from a CADRC animal care facility.

The Master List will include the professionals' area of interest / expertise, municipality and their willingness to travel.

The Master List will be accessible by ABVMA / ABVTA CADRC representatives and Team Leads.

### **Recruitment**

The process to populate the Master List will initially include:

1. Members of the Companion Animal Emergency Response Plan Working Group and personal contacts.
2. Recruitment activities through ABVMA and ABVTA email, social media and member magazine.
3. Members who volunteer will be asked to contact a specific ABVMA staff person who will compile the Master List.

The Master List will need to be reviewed and confirmed on an annual basis.

### **Number of Veterinary Professionals needed during an activation**

The number of veterinary professionals required will be dependent on the scope of the emergency including numbers and types of animals being cared for, the type of animal care facility to be established (local, regional or general) and the existing resources (AARCS, CATF, Alberta Emergency Task Force (AETF)) currently deployed.

The numbers are difficult to predict and will not be known until such time that an activation is requested.

Team Leads in consultation with ABVMA and ABVTA CADRC representatives will determine the number of veterinary professionals required during the operational period.

**Process to reach veterinary professionals during an activation**

ABVMA / ABVTA CADRC representative in consultation with Team Leads will be responsible for identifying who will be called from the Master List.

It is expected that the call out may be targeted or could be general to all members on the list, depending on the needs identified. Best efforts will be made to contact veterinary professionals that are local to the emergency or facility where attendance is required.

Veterinary professionals will be contacted during an activation using the information provided by members and collected on the Master List.

Only in exceptional circumstances is a general call out to all ABVMA and ABVTA members not on the Master List expected to be required.

**Regional Representation**

Recruitment of veterinary professionals to the Master List from all parts of the province may support local emergency response in a region through building awareness.

ABVMA and ABVTA activities that encourage and support veterinary practices to engage with their local authority to plan for emergency animal response are included in future work recommendations.

There is a benefit to having trained and experienced personnel local to a proposed animal care facility.

The plan does not contemplate creating divisions or regions to be applied during activation of a plan at this time.

## Training of veterinary professionals supporting CADRC activation

Training to be divided into:

- 1) Training in preparation for emergency response (prior to)
- 2) On-site training (during emergency)

### **Training in Preparation for emergency response**

#### 1. Incident Command System Training

Two recommendations from the “ABVMA Report on Veterinary Profession Response to the Fort McMurray Animal Evacuation recommendation was that

*“Animal rescue organizations that provide volunteers for animal emergency response should ensure appropriate training. Volunteers must work within the ICS structure”.*

*“That all levels of government make available ICS training for members of any organization that may become involved in animal care emergency response”.*

Members of the ABVTA Board of Directors were provided access to the online Incident Command System (ICS) 100 level training and as a result several members of the working group had access to this introductory course.

Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) agreed that members of the ABVMA and ABVTA Working Group and staff be considered as primary students and be permitted access to the ICS 100 level online course.

This plan recommends that:

- a. ABVMA/ABVTA members identified as willing to be called in an emergency response activation be provided the opportunity to access ICS training and be encouraged to complete the training.
- b. Appropriately trained members be available during activation.
- c. Team Leads be provided the opportunity to complete ICS training.

#### 2. Reception Centre Software Training

A recommendation from the “ABVMA Report on Veterinary Profession Response to the Fort McMurray Animal Evacuation recommendation was that:

*“Coordination of Online Resources -That there be a coordinated and preferably single online resource for the submission of requests for animal assistance. This will maximize efficiency of retrieval of animals from residences and reunification”.*

Alberta Emergency Task Force has developed a cloud-based software program that will integrate with the provincial ESS reception center program. Recognize that a local authority may have their own reception center registration software.

Veterinary professionals will be provided an opportunity to become familiar with the software program prior to emergency response.

The Working Group will need to further investigate the software capabilities, specifically in related to the software capability to create and maintain a medical record.

### **On-site Training (During an Activation)**

Provisions will be made for training of veterinary professionals on site on the specific protocols for the following:

1. Incident Command Structure and function of the animal care facility. How does the facility operate in terms of planning, operations, logistics and finances.
2. Triage Training - what to look at first when animals are admitted, animals that need immediate assessment.
3. Behaviour assessment – determine if animals are at risk for handling.
4. Admission processes and forms. Current planning is that a cloud-based software will be used for animal reception, care records and re-unification. Planning for paper-based records in the event that internet access is unavailable is recommended.
5. Physical facility setup and layout, referencing the Facility Standards (Appendix E) and which includes:
  - a. training on biosecurity for volunteers/staff
  - b. Training on any isolation procedures for needed areas
  - c. Training on airflow, husbandry concerns for exotics, birds etc.
6. Training on animal care for non-professional volunteers
  - a. Feeding/watering needs
  - b. Cleaning and disposal of wastes
  - c. Ensuring volunteers are educated in human health risks.
  - d. Safe transport of pets requiring veterinary care

Protocols for each section above will be developed in advance and adapted to the specifics of the individual emergency event. These protocols are listed and will be included in Appendix F. The ABVMA and ABVTA Representatives will be responsible for storing and accessing these manuals. They will be reviewed on a periodic basis to ensure that they are kept up to date.

## Standards for Facilities, Equipment, Personnel and Operational Procedures for a Companion Animal Emergency Response facility

### ABVMA Veterinary Practice Entity Standards

In Alberta, veterinary medicine is delivered by registered veterinary professionals out of a certified and inspected veterinary practice entity (VPE).

The Alberta Veterinary Profession General Regulation sets out processes for the development and verification of minimum practice standards for all veterinary practice entities.

The ABVMA Practice Inspection and Practice Standards Bylaw and the inspection of practices provides a quality assurance program to ensure all VPEs meet minimum practice standards for facilities, equipment, personnel and operational procedures and protects the public when accessing veterinary medical services.

### Companion Animal Emergency Care and Support Facilities

Local authorities (municipal, regional or First Nations) may on their own initiative or with the support of the Companion Animal Disaster Response Capability (CADRC) establish a facility that can provide shelter, care and basic veterinary care to animals that are displaced due to an emergency. Animals requiring an advanced level of diagnostics or treatment will be referred to a local veterinary practice entity.

Such animal care will:

- Provide safe, secure shelter and feeding of animals that are owned by members of the public.
- Provide care for animals that may be in the possession of the owners or lawfully in possession of a bylaw or peace officer under legislated authority.
- Medical services provided will be limited to basic veterinary care and cases requiring advanced diagnosis and treatment will be referred to a local veterinary practice.

### Veterinary Medical Care – A Critical Element

A critical element of these facilities is that some animals displaced due to an emergency will require veterinary medical care. This may be due to injury as a result of the emergency (such as trauma, thermal injury, etc.), or inadequate nutrition or dehydration, or due to a pre-existing illness or chronic medical condition.

Providing quality veterinary medical care requires a secure, safe, and clean facility with good heating, ventilation and lighting. There must be suitable ability to house and care for patients with proper consideration given to biosecurity including isolation. Proper equipment, trained personnel and operational procedures for intake, triage, basic medical care and referral must also be in place.

All of these essential components must also meet certain minimum standards so that the veterinary professional(s) may deliver quality veterinary medical care that meets the acceptable professional standards and public expectations.

However, given the nature and location of these emergency care and support facilities, they are not expected to meet the same minimum standards for VPEs that are set out in the Practice Inspection and Practice Standards (PIPS) Bylaws.

Further, the short time frame to operationalize such animal care and support facilities does not lend itself to the process or time frame for application and inspection to verify compliance with the standards.

### Objective of the Facility Standards

Notwithstanding the practical limitations of operationalizing such a facility and the incompatibility with the application of the ABVMA PIPS Bylaw Quality Assurance program, certain minimum standards / best practices are set out in Appendix E that should be met by any companion animal emergency care and support facility.

Recognize the definition of 'companion animal' as set out in this plan and in the CADRC operational plan, the facility standards are developed for traditional companion animals (cats and dogs) and exotic species. Traditional livestock species that may meet the definition of companion animal as set out are not contemplated in these facility standards. Any presentation of those non-traditional / crossover livestock species will require ad hoc consideration.

These standards or best practices will support delivery of quality emergency veterinary medical care and promote the adoption of minimum standards and best practices for facilities, equipment, personnel and operational procedures for all companion animal care and support facilities.

The standards are expected to evolve and expand as care and support facilities are operationalized and veterinary professionals have the opportunity to validate the standards set out in Appendix E.

An effort to try to achieve these standards is expected, whether such a facility is operationalized by a local authority or upon CADRC activation of a direct, close or general support facility.

### Who will Use these Facility Standards?

Given this objective, the intended audiences of the facility standards include:

- Veterinary professionals working with local authorities to develop companion animal emergency response plans.
- Local authorities working with veterinary professionals, local animal welfare organizations and other collaborators to develop their own companion animal support facility plans.
- CADRC resources (including the AARCS, CATF, ABSPCA) that may be called upon to provide direct or close support to a local authority.
- Veterinarians and veterinary technologists working during a CADRC deployment to assure minimum standards that support delivery of quality veterinary medicine.
- AEMA ESS when working with other jurisdictions.

### Limitations

While the facility standards set out in Appendix E are intended to provide guidance toward achieving minimum standards and best practices, there may be certain operational procedures and protocols that are required that are currently out of the scope of this document and will appear in the appropriate appendix.

## Compensation of veterinary professionals responding in emergencies

AEMA has determined that the Alberta Emergency Social Services (ESS) Costing Guidelines, which provide the eligible Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) costs, will include compensation to veterinarians and technologists deployed to provide animal care.

Historically there have been no submissions to a DRP for veterinary related costs.

There is currently lack of clarity about what is expected for the Costing Guidelines. Work is needed on this topic.

### **Volunteerism**

An activation of veterinary professionals should provide that some veterinary professionals will volunteer their time and will not submit expenses for compensation.

Volunteerism has some limits; this was seen in 2016 Fort McMurray evacuation and may be exacerbated by the current crisis level shortage of veterinary professionals. Compensation will be critical to support response by the veterinary profession.

## Process for Procurement of Equipment and Supplies

CADRC resources including CATF and AARCS will have limited equipment and supplies for initial set up of a local, regional, or general companion animal care facility.

It is expected that the logistics for procurement of equipment and supplies will be through the activation of the facility and primarily the responsibility of CADRC.

This may be through CADRC member organizations and include Provincial Operations Centre (POC) logistics and finance.

This will be outside of the scope of this plan.

## Appendices

- A. ABVMA Report on Veterinary Profession Response to the Fort McMurray Animal Evacuation (2018)
- B. What we Heard: Companion Animal Emergency Response (October 2017)
- C. Companion Animal Emergency Response Capability (CADRC) Strategy
- D. Companion Animal Emergency Response Capability (CADRC) Operational Plan
- E. Standards for Facilities, Equipment, Personnel and Operational Procedures for a Companion Animal Emergency Response facility.
- F. Protocols as listed under training section including:
  - Triage Training
  - Behaviour assessment
  - Admission processes and form completion.
  - Biosecurity
  - Isolation procedures
  - Husbandry concerns for exotics, birds etc.
  - Protocols for animal care for non-professional volunteers
  - Feeding/watering needs
  - Cleaning and disposal of wastes
  - Ensuring volunteers are educated in human health risks.
  - Process of referral to veterinary practice entity
  - Transport of animals to veterinary practice
- G. Master List of Registered Veterinarians, Veterinary Technologists and Veterinary Practices (Review and Update annually February)
- H. Initial Call List and Contact Numbers – ABVMA ABVTA CADRC Representatives and Team Leads (Review and Update annually February)
- I. ABVMA / ABVTA Emergency Response Planning Working Group Terms of Reference
- J. Operational Companion Animal Support
- K. Flowchart – DRAFT



## Recommendations for Future Work

- 1) Communicate with CADRC on:
  - Development of ICS structure for operation of an animal care facility including logistics and finance
  - Training for ABVMA ABVTA on the registration software
- 2) Communicate with AEMA on further development of eligible expenses for veterinary professionals, veterinary care and expenses for the Costing Guidelines for a DRP. This will also consider mileage/hotel/food for volunteers and the costs for medical and critical cases referred to local veterinary practices.
- 3) Training for veterinary practices that may be engaged in emergency planning or response with their local authority:
  - Preparation of a basic manual for use in the field.
  - Assist veterinary practice in outreach to municipalities to ensure they are considering companion animals, provide some training in requirements in facility
  - CE for interested veterinary professionals—potential emergency conditions that may be common in floods, fire etc.
- 4) Verify with ABVMA Registrar that the following may be undertaken:
  - Recruitment of veterinary practices through the annual ABVMA VPE renewal, specifically solicit whether a practice is interested in participating in an emergency response. If there is interest, request additional information regarding species of interest, and capacity to provide staff, materials, or in-hospital care of displaced clients & animals, medical care for animals, or other resources.
  - Recruitment of veterinary professionals through the annual ABVMA registration renewal, specifically whether in the event of an emergency response, individual veterinarians and veterinary technologists are willing to be contacted and participate in the response. If there is interest in participation, requesting additional information such as species of interest, region where they are located their willingness to travel would be helpful.
  - ABVMA will provide administrative support for recruitment and scheduling of veterinary professionals.
- 5) Survey Members about attitudes on volunteerism and compensation:
  - A small groups of vet professionals were questioned in regards to their volunteer experience during the Fort McMurray disaster. The resounding response was that they were proud of their volunteerism during this time and that they would have donated any offer of compensation to the affected families, to animal care or to the lead veterinarian. All of them report that they would volunteer again.

- The Emergency Response Planning Group should consider a survey of veterinarians and veterinary technologist volunteers from Fort McMurray Fire (2016) regarding their volunteer experience.
- Some possible topics could include:
  - Satisfaction in experience volunteering
  - Willingness to volunteer their time again
  - Estimate of out of pocket expenses
  - Willingness to do overnight shifts
  - Thoughts on need for compensation
  - What would prevent them from volunteering again