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Developed in partnership
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National Trends in Veterinary Complaints and Regulatory Decisions

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Introduction

The Canadian Council of Veterinary Registrars (CCVR) fosters collaboration among Canada's veterinary regulatory bodies. To support their public interest mandate, the CCVR acts as a forum for information exchange and issue tracking at the provincial, national, and international levels. This includes examining trends in complaints against veterinarians and regulatory decision-making practices across Canada.

This report provides an overview of the veterinary regulatory process and summarizes complaint data from 2019 to 2023.

Understanding the Veterinary Complaints Process

When concerns arise regarding the delivery of veterinary care, there are formal processes in place to protect animals and the public. Each province has a regulatory authority (as a College or veterinary medical association) that oversees the licensing and conduct of veterinarians and has a formal complaints and discipline process. These processes protect the public and animals and ensure veterinarians meet ethical, professional, and competency standards.

Provincial Regulators

Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (ABVMA)

College Of Veterinarians Of British Columbia (CVBC)

College Of Veterinarians Of Ontario (CVO)

Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA)

New Brunswick Veterinary Medical Association (NBVMA)

Newfoundland And Labrador College Of Veterinarians (NLVetCollege)

Nova Scotia Veterinary Medical Association (NSVMA)

Ordre Des Médecins Vétérinaires Du Québec (OMVQ)

Prince Edward Island Veterinary Medical Association (PEIVMA)

Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association (SVMA)



Complaints Process

Each province has a distinct complaint process to comply with provincial regulations. However, these processes share common steps which are outlined here.

Who can file a complaint?

Anyone can file a complaint— members of the public, other veterinarians, or staff.

How are complaints filed?

Complaints are submitted in writing to the relevant provincial regulatory body. Most regulators provide online forms, email, or mail-in options for submitting complaints.

What happens after a complaint is filed?

The provincial regulatory body reviews the complaint to ensure it falls within its jurisdiction. If accepted, it proceeds to a formal review and investigation process.

Complaints are assessed by committees, investigators, or organizational representatives. This may involve gathering medical records, interviewing parties, and consulting expert opinions. Based on the findings, a decision is made on whether action is warranted.

Most provincial regulatory bodies allow for an appeal of the decision by the complainant or the veterinarian. Serious concerns may be referred to a hearing process. This is separate from the complaints process. Hearings tend to be held in tribunals and are generally appealable to provincial Courts.

Serious disciplinary actions and decisions are usually published publicly to inform the public and ensure transparency.

Complaint Outcomes

Complaints can be dismissed if no concern is identified. If a concern is identified, actions taken may include:

- 1 Providing advice
- 2 Remediation such as education or training
- 3 A hearing that is made open to the public

Note

The complaints process conducted by each provincial regulatory body is not a court of law and therefore cannot award financial compensation.

The focus is on professional conduct or competency, not general dissatisfaction with fees or issues that are under the purview of a different regulator.

The table below presents the various outcomes that may result from a given complaint. A single complaint may have multiple outcomes depending on the specifics of the complaint. The more serious outcomes can only result from hearings in most Canadian jurisdictions.

Outcome	Definition
Dismissed	Closed with no further action required by the veterinarian.
Advice	Written or verbal advice given to the veterinarian.
Caution	A formal admonishment applied outside of a hearing.
Restriction or condition on license	Examples: unable to prescribe; unable to supervise technicians.
Remediation	Examples: supervised practice; education course/program; mentorship; incapacity/fitness to practice assessment; practice inspection; medical records review/assignment of practice advisor.

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Complaint Outcomes

Outcome	Definition
Reprimand	A formal admonishment within a hearing.
Suspension	Temporary removal of license to practice.
Revocation of Licensure	Permanent removal of license to practice.
Sanctioned Costs	Requirement to pay for the expenses incurred by the regulatory body during the investigation and disciplinary process.
Fine	Monetary penalty.

Complaints Overview

Complaints Opened & Closed

The number of complaints opened and closed across Canada from 2019 to 2023.

Note: the number of complaints opened in 2019 and 2020 was not available.

Year	Complaints Opened	Complaints Closed
2019	-	447
2020	-	585
2021	786	603
2022	766	609
2023	563	503



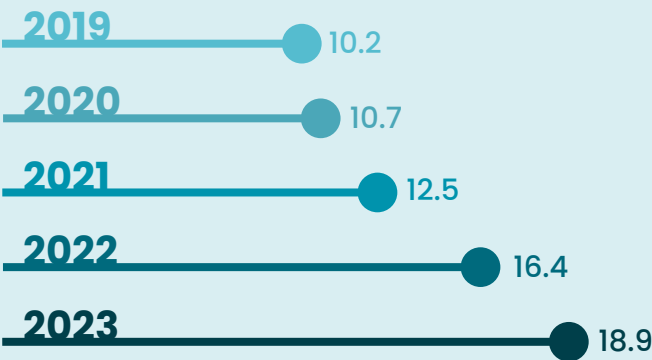
Complaints Overview

Time to Resolution

The time to resolve a complaint is variable across Canada. Resolution time varies by province, and jurisdictions with longer backlogs have taken steps to address these delays. Complaints that are complex, contested, or subject to hearings and appeals may take longer to resolve.

The median time to resolve a complaint in months is presented to the right.

Median number of months to resolve a complaint (by year)



Source & Focus of Complaints

91% Member of the Public

3.5% Veterinarian

3% Provincial Regulator

2.5% Other

Above: The source of complaints received from 2019 to 2023, categorized by who made the complaint.



93% Companion Animal



3% Equine



2% Large Animal



2% Other

Above: The focus of complaints received from 2019 to 2023, categorized by the type of animal involved.

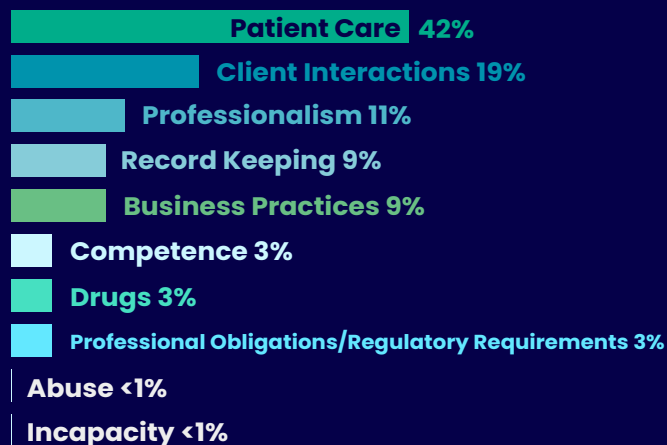
Complaints Overview

Types of Complaints & Outcomes

All complaints opened are categorized based on the nature of the complaint. Ten primary complaint categories are used (see complaint categories directly below). Note that multiple complaint categories may be assigned for a given complaint based on the circumstances of the complaint.

Proportion of *complaint* categories applied to all complaints closed from 2019 to 2023.

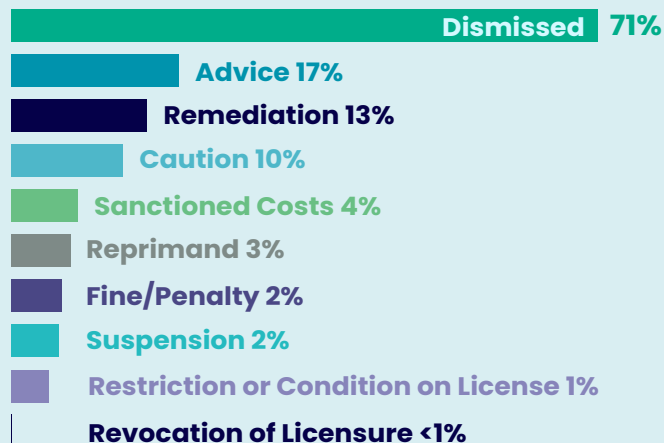
Over this 5-year period, the most common complaints included concerns related to patient care (42% of all complaints), client interactions (19% of all complaints), and professionalism (11% of all complaints).



Proportion of *outcome* categories applied to all complaints closed from 2019 to 2023.

Note that the total does not add up to 100% because one complaint may have multiple outcomes.

Over this 5-year period, 71% of all complaints were dismissed, meaning no concern was identified.



Key Trends & Findings

Most complaints relate to issues such as communication, record-keeping, and other procedural matters. These are generally considered lower-risk concerns, rather than indicators of serious professional misconduct or clinical incompetence.

While regulatory processes vary across Canada, the nature of complaints and resulting outcomes are broadly consistent. Across jurisdictions, regulators are supporting both the public and the veterinary profession by addressing and remediating conduct and competency issues as they arise.

The nature of the complaints received does not suggest widespread concerns with veterinary competency.

Conclusion

Veterinary regulators across Canada are committed to upholding their mandate to regulate the profession in the public interest. They are actively reviewing and improving their processes for addressing complaints to fulfill this responsibility. The Canadian Council of Veterinary Registrars will continue to support this work by fostering communication and collaboration among regulators nationwide.

If you have questions or concerns about veterinary care, please contact your provincial veterinary regulator.

