# HOUSE BILL REPORT
# ESHB 2247

**As Passed Legislature**

**Title:** An act relating to veterinarian-client-patient relationships.

**Brief Description:** Concerning veterinarian-client-patient relationships.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Health Care & Wellness (originally sponsored by Representatives Parshley, Lekanoff, Reed, Leavitt, Zahn, Gregerson, Berg and Fosse).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 1/14/26, 1/23/26 [DPS].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/12/26, 94-0.
Senate Amended.
Passed Senate: 3/6/26, 30-18.
House Concurred.
Passed House: 3/11/26, 95-0.
Passed Legislature.

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill**

- Establishes requirements for creating and maintaining a veterinarian-client-patient relationship.
- Specifies permissible utilization of telehealth in veterinary care.
- Establishes duties of a veterinarian with regard to animals used in commercial operations.

## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Bronoske, Chair; Lekanoff, Vice Chair; Rule, Vice

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Chair; Marshall, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Valdez, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Davis, Engell, Macri, Manjarrez, Obras, Parshley, Shavers, Stonier, Stuebe and Thai.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Schmick, Ranking Minority Member.

**Staff:** Emily Poole (786-7106).

**Background:**

The Washington State Veterinary Board of Governors (Board) is tasked with protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public and their animals by regulating the competency and quality of veterinary healthcare providers and facilities. The Board has adopted rules relating to topics such as the establishment of veterinarian-client-patient relationships, telehealth, emergency services, and prescription drugs.

**Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:**

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship.
A veterinarian-client-patient relationship is the basis for interaction between veterinarians and their clients and patients, and it exists when the following conditions are met:

- the veterinarian has assumed responsibility for clinical judgment regarding the animal's health, and the client has agreed to follow the instructions of the veterinarian;
- the veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal to initiate, at a minimum, a general or preliminary diagnosis of the animal's medical condition; and
- the veterinarian is readily available for follow-up evaluation or has arranged for emergency coverage and continuing care.

To establish sufficient knowledge of an animal, such that a veterinarian-client-patient relationship exists, a veterinarian must have physically examined the animal within the last year, unless circumstances exist where telehealth is permitted. To establish sufficient knowledge in cases involving several animals, such as at farms, the veterinarian must be personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animals.

When a veterinarian-client-patient relationship has been established, the relationship extends to all veterinarians employed or practicing at the same premises as the veterinarian who established the most current relationship.

A veterinarian-client-patient relationship may be terminated under specified conditions.

Telehealth.
Once a veterinarian-client-patient relationship has been established, ongoing care may be

provided via telemedicine if certain conditions are met. If such a relationship has not been established, allowable telehealth services are limited to:

- teleadvice;
- teletriage in an emergency situation;
- telemedicine for the purpose of prescribing sedation in certain circumstances;
- dispensing drugs prescribed by another veterinarian in certain circumstances; and
- poison control services.

A veterinarian providing care through telehealth must meet specific requirements. A veterinarian providing care for animal patients under the telehealth exceptions for establishing knowledge of a patient may deny treatment because a physical examination is necessary, and must:

- be licensed as a veterinarian in Washington;
- to the extent practicable, have or establish an association with practices that are registered in Washington;
- notify the client that prescription drugs or medications may be available at a pharmacy;
- provide the client with the veterinarian's identity and clinic address; and
- encourage the owner of the animal to schedule an in-person follow-up examination if there are concerns about the animal's health that cannot be addressed through telehealth.

A veterinarian who practices through telehealth must also:

- obtain client consent;
- certify at least 14 days a year, with a minimum of 105 total hours, of practice in a clinic setting with hands-on experience, unless an exception applies;
- comply with applicable privacy protection laws;
- have historical knowledge of the animal patient;
- employ sound professional judgment to determine whether using telehealth is appropriate;
- be familiar with available medical resources, be able to provide the client with a list of nearby veterinarians, and maintain patient records;
- provide the client with certain licensing information;
- secure an alternative means of contacting the client; and
- not claim to be a specialist unless certified as such.

A veterinarian may deny telehealth treatment if they believe that a physical examination is necessary.

Animals Used in Commercial Operations.

For animals or animal products used in commercial operations, the following requirements apply:

- there must be a written agreement between the client and a veterinarian of record who is accountable for drug use and treatments administered on the commercial operation;

- the veterinarian of record is responsible for providing oversight of drug use on the commercial operation;
- provision of drugs or prescriptions must be for appropriate time frames and management groups; and
- a veterinarian issuing a veterinary feed directive must comply with applicable federal laws.

Prescriptions.
A veterinarian may use or prescribe drugs only within the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship, subject to exceptions. Certain limitations apply to prescriptions provided through telehealth.

Definitions.
Definitions are established for "animal patient," "client," "commercial operation," "livestock," "teleadvice," and "telehealth."

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 2027.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

*As part of a pilot project, testimony in this section of the bill report was summarized by generative artificial intelligence and reviewed for accuracy by non-partisan legislative staff. Generative artificial intelligence was used only in this section of the bill report; all other sections were prepared by non-partisan legislative staff without the use of any generative artificial intelligence.*

(In support) The testimony in support of the bill emphasized that Washington is facing a significant veterinary care access crisis driven by workforce shortages, rising costs, geographic barriers, and logistical challenges that prevent timely in-person care. Testimony described how delays or lack of access to veterinary services result in preventable animal suffering, worsening medical conditions, and increased surrender of pets to shelters, particularly among low-income, unhoused, elderly, rural, and medically vulnerable populations. Supporters argued that the bill provides needed clarity around the veterinarian-client-patient relationship while responsibly expanding the use of veterinary telehealth as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for in-person care. Telehealth was presented as a means to allow veterinarians to triage cases, provide follow-up guidance, offer timely intervention, and prioritize limited appointment availability, especially during emergencies or when in-person visits are impractical or unsafe. Testimony highlighted that similar models are widely used in human healthcare and in other states without evidence of harm, and that strong guardrails in the bill preserve professional judgment, accountability, and

patient safety. Supporters further noted that virtual care can reduce barriers related to transportation, disability, work schedules, housing instability, and stress on animals, while helping keep pets with their families and reducing strain on shelters and clinics.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The testimony expressed qualified concerns regarding the proposed legislation, emphasizing that the veterinarian-client-patient relationship is a foundational element of quality veterinary care and has traditionally required a recent in-person physical examination. It noted that the bill represents a shift from this longstanding standard by allowing the relationship to be established without a physical exam in limited circumstances, such as when transportation barriers exist, in-person appointments are unavailable, or an animal's condition is urgent and delay would cause suffering. The testimony indicated that these access-to-care and animal welfare considerations motivated engagement with the bill's development, and it highlighted collaborative efforts to balance expanded telehealth options with professional standards. Support was expressed for amendments that clarify when access-to-care exceptions apply and require clear documentation in medical records to ensure continuity and quality of subsequent care.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Lisa Parshley, prime sponsor; SARAH HOCK, The Washington Federation of Animal Care and Control Agencies; Karri Meleo; Dr. Jen Stonequist, Kitsap Humane Society; Mark Cushing, Animal Policy Group; Brittany Todd-Benesi, ASPCA; Zarah Gaeta, Seattle Veterinary Outreach; Lauren Overman, DVM; and Donna DeBonis, DVM.

(Other) Greg Hanon, Washington State Veterinary Medical Assoc.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.