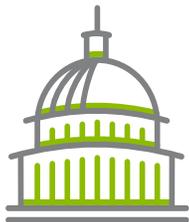


# AVMA FEDERAL ADVOCACY UPDATE

## FALL 2021



The advocacy team is hard at work, strengthening working relationships and building momentum in Congress for legislative and funding priorities essential to veterinary medicine.

In the House of Representatives, AVMA's sustained advocacy for the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) Enhancement Act has expanded the number of cosponsors to a total of 39, already higher than the number of cosponsors in the previous Congress. The AVMA has also secured the introduction of the Paws Off Act of 2021, which would require food containing the sugar substitute xylitol to include a warning label specifying its toxic effects. Xylitol is a substance highly poisonous to dogs and other pets.

Thanks to a recent Senate introduction, the AVMA-championed Healthy Dog Importation Act, a bill that ensures dogs are in good health when entering this country, has been introduced in both chambers of Congress.

With the fiscal year ending on September 30, Congress is working on the next appropriations bill to ensure the government stays funded and open. During this process, the AVMA has been engaging with lawmakers and working with coalitions to advocate for funding programs critical to the veterinary profession. These programs include the VMLRP, the Veterinary Services Grant Program (VSGP), and the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Database. If the latest version of the government funding bill passes, the AVMA will have secured an increase in funding for the VMLRP and VSGP.

Recently, the AVMA and the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus hosted a virtual lunch and learn about the emerging threat of African swine fever (ASF) with Dr. Harry Snelson, Executive Director of the American Association of Swine Veterinarians. Veterinarian Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.) and Rep. Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.), Co-chairs of the Veterinary Medicine Caucus, opened the meeting emphasizing the need to increase awareness in Congress about how ASF could impact the United States. Dr. Snelson discussed the impact ASF would have on the U.S. swine industry and highlighted the policies and biosecurity measures that are instrumental in preventing ASF from entering the country. This is the third virtual briefing the AVMA and the Veterinary Medicine Caucus have hosted during the current Congress to help educate congressional staffers about issues important to the veterinary profession.

The AVMA is pleased to share this update with you highlighting the current policy landscape for these issues and others affecting veterinary medicine. Help advance the AVMA's legislative agenda by discussing the importance of engaging with the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](http://avmacan.avma.org)) with your colleagues and ask them to follow through when they receive an alert to reach out to their representatives in Congress on a particular legislative issue. You can really make a substantial difference as we join as a unified front to let our voices be heard.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FOR VETERINARY MEDICINE



### SMALL BUSINESS ISSUES

#### **The Budget Reconciliation Package:**

The Administration has proposed a sweeping reconciliation package including tax provisions that would impact veterinarians and practice owners.

The AVMA's advocacy team is actively engaged with the small business stakeholder community to oppose tax increase proposals that would negatively impact the veterinary profession.

#### **The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)**

**PPP Direct Forgiveness Portal:** The SBA launched a Direct Forgiveness Portal that allows Paycheck

Protection Program (PPP) borrowers whose loans are \$150,000 or less to apply for forgiveness directly to the SBA by submitting a simple, online application.

**Association Health Plans:** Recently, the AVMA worked with the Senate and the House to secure the introduction of legislation that would solidify a national framework for Association Health Plans. The Association Health Plans Act of 2021 (H.R. 4547), would expand the ability of associations, like the AVMA, to sponsor affordable, high-quality healthcare options for small businesses and their employees.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT DEBT



### Higher Education Reforms:

The AVMA is active in its engagement with Congress and the Administration to ensure the veterinary profession's principles on higher education are heard. As the Department of Education (ED) prepares to propose regulations for programs authorized under the Higher Education Act, **the AVMA submitted comments** urging the Department to be responsive to the needs of graduate veterinarians and veterinary student borrowers.

Over the next few months, the ED will be implementing an **overhaul of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program** – a program that forgives the remaining debt on eligible loans for borrowers who have worked at least 10 years in public service or the nonprofit sector. Many of the AVMA's higher education priorities are reflected in the changes that will be made to the PSLF program. Changes include simplifying the PSLF application process, automatically enrolling service members and federal employees that are eligible for PSLF, reviewing denied PSLF applications, identifying and correcting errors in PSLF processing, and offering a temporary opportunity to give borrowers credits for prior payments they made that would not otherwise count toward PSLF.

**Suspension on Federal Student Loan Repayment and Interest Accrual:** The Administration has continued the suspension of federal student loan repayment and interest accrual until January 31, 2022, due to COVID-19.

## ANIMAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS



### Healthy Dog Importation Act:

The AVMA is working with key stakeholders and members of Congress to build support for the Healthy Dog Importation Act, which would strengthen dog importation requirements and provide the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with additional tools to monitor the health of dogs being imported into the U.S. If passed, the legislation would require every dog entering the country to be permanently identified, in good health, and accompanied by a health certificate from a licensed veterinarian accredited by a competent veterinary authority recognized by the USDA.

In June, the CDC implemented a temporary suspension of dog importation from countries that are considered high-risk for dog rabies. On August 6, the USDA issued a Federal Order to help prevent African swine fever (ASF) from entering the U.S. through dog importation. These two policies set in

### Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program:

The Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) plays a critical role in closing food animal and public health veterinary medicine access gaps by offering three years of educational loan repayment in exchange for service in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-designated veterinarian shortage areas. For 2021, the USDA announced 221 designated veterinarian shortage areas in 48 states. The AVMA is working closely with the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to improve customer service and implementation of this important veterinary workforce program.

The AVMA is the leading champion of the VMLRP Enhancement Act (S. 2215/H.R. 2447), which has now been reintroduced in both chambers of Congress. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) reintroduced the VMLRPEA in the Senate. Earlier this year, Representatives Ron Kind (D-Wis.) and Adrian Smith (R-Neb.) reintroduced the legislation in the House of Representatives.

This legislation would exclude VMLRP awards from gross income, thus ending the federal taxation of these awards. Since the VMLRP is currently paying the withholding for the tax on behalf of recipients, ending the tax would allow more VMLRP funds to be used for awards and increase the number of veterinarians that receive student loan relief. AVMA members are encouraged to use the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](http://avmacan.avma.org)) to contact their legislators in support of this legislation.

motion by the CDC and USDA emphasize the need to permanently improve dog importation standards.

Representatives Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.) and Dusty Johnson (R-S.D.), Co-chairs of the Veterinary Medicine Caucus, reintroduced the legislation in the House of Representatives while Senators Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Tina Smith (D-Minn.) introduced the bill in the Senate.

**One Health:** The AVMA was instrumental in the reintroduction of the Advancing Emergency Preparedness Through One Health Act (S. 861/H.R. 2061). The bipartisan bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Schrader (D-Ore.) and Johnson (R-S.D.) and Senators Tina Smith (D-Minn.) and Todd Young (R-Ind.). The legislation requires the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Agriculture, and Interior to work with other federal agencies to develop, publish, and submit to Congress a national One Health Framework for coordinated federal activities under the One Health Program. The AVMA is working

with stakeholders to drive bipartisan support for the bill in the 117th Congress.

AVMA members can contact their representatives and urge them to support the legislation through the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](https://avmacan.avma.org)).

Recently, the House passed the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which included the Advancing Emergency Preparedness Through One Health Act.

## PHARMACEUTICAL ISSUES



### **Mandatory Prescription Writing:**

The AVMA strongly opposes unnecessary federal legislation that would interfere with the practice of veterinary medicine and has been successful, to date, in preventing the reintroduction of the veterinary prescription mandate bill in the 117th Congress.



## ANIMAL WELFARE

**PAST Act:** S. 2295/H.R. 5441, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, would crack down on the practice of horse soring by

providing the enforcement mechanisms necessary to catch bad actors and preserve horse welfare. The bipartisan legislation has been introduced in both chambers of Congress by Senators Mark Warner (D-Va.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Representatives Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.). Use the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network to urge your members of Congress to support this bill ([avmacan.avma.org](https://avmacan.avma.org)).

**Paws Off Act:** The Paws Off Act of 2021 (H.R. 5261) would require food containing the sugar substitute xylitol to include a warning label specifying its toxic effects. Xylitol is highly poisonous to some pets, especially dogs. The artificial sweetener is most often found in sugar-free gum and breath mints, but may also be present in vitamins, cough

## FY 2022 APPROPRIATIONS

As the Senate and House appropriations committees address the FY 2022 funding bills, the AVMA is advocating for funding programs vital to veterinary medicine.

On top of potentially securing an increase in funds for the VMLRP (\$10 million) and VSGP (\$3.5 million), the AVMA has been educating Congress about the need to increase funding for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (\$30 million) and funding for the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Database (\$2.5 million). Furthermore, the AVMA is working to secure the additional funding needed to modernize the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI, the nation's only BSL-3 laboratory for wildlife medicine.

Now that the fiscal year has ended and there is no final budget agreement in Congress for next year, the recently passed short-term funding package will fund the government through December 3 to give Congress more time to pass a full budget for 2022.

**Surveillance:** The AVMA also continues to engage with the USDA on the implementation of \$300 million for monitoring and surveillance of susceptible animals for incidences of SARS-CoV-2 that was successfully included in the American Rescue Plan, which passed into law at the end of 2020.

The easiest way for AVMA members to contact their representatives in Congress on this issue is through the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](https://avmacan.avma.org)).

drops, sugar-free desserts, mouthwash, toothpaste, and other household items. This legislation would help inform pet owners about the products that contain xylitol in order to keep their pets safe.

Representatives David Schweikert (R-Ariz.) and Greg Stanton (D-Ariz.) introduced the bill in the House of Representatives. Reach out to your representative in Congress about this bill through the AVMA Congressional Advocacy Network ([avmacan.avma.org](https://avmacan.avma.org)).

**PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act:** The AVMA-supported Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act passed Congress and is now law. This legislation authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide dog-training skills and service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses, regardless of whether they have mobility issues.

## AMBASSADOR PROGRAM UPDATE

The AVMA Ambassador Program connects veterinarians directly with members of Congress. Ambassadors visit with lawmakers in their home state, building relationships and ensuring that they hear directly from constituent veterinarians about issues that are important to the profession. So far this year, 28 AVMA Ambassadors have completed 20 events with Senators and Representatives from 14 different states. Some of these meetings have consisted of legislators visiting veterinary practices to see first-hand how policy issues affect the profession and our animal patients. Other meetings have taken place virtually or at fundraisers through the AVMA PAC. Since the program began in 2018, 194 Ambassadors have completed 197 events with 121 legislators across 41 different states.

If you're interested in meeting with your members of Congress to discuss top-priority issues facing the practice of veterinary medicine, please email Susie Dumond at [sdumond@avma.org](mailto:sdumond@avma.org).

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**To contact Congress on these issues, visit  
AVMA's Congressional Advocacy Network:  
[avmacan.avma.org](http://avmacan.avma.org)**