



## Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges

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### **Why the need to establish a competitive grant program to build capacity in veterinary medical education**

There is a demonstrated shortage of veterinarians in the areas of public practice including public health, biomedical research, and food system veterinary medicine. 50% of U.S. Public Health Service veterinary medical officers are now eligible for retirement. The USDA, underserved at present, predicts a shortfall of nearly 600 veterinarians by 2007. There are severe shortages of board-certified laboratory animal veterinarians to care for and supervise the use of animals in biomedical research. 43% of veterinary pathology positions are unfilled, and many pathologists are near retirement. Food animal agriculture, already underserved by veterinarians, will see further erosion of practitioners due to retirement, lifestyle choices, and shifting veterinary focus.

There are approximately 85,000 veterinarians in the United States today. In the next 40 years, just to keep up with the current service that veterinarians provide society, the country will need the equivalent of nine new veterinary colleges. The need for services provided by veterinarians is expected to grow another 25% in the next ten years. In 2012 the Bureau of Labor Statistics expects there to be 28,000 veterinary job openings due to growth and net replacements – a turn-over of nearly 38%. In comparison, the growth rate for physicians and surgeons during this period is projected to be 19%. Overall there are approximately three applicants for every veterinary student selected nationally.

There are 28 colleges/schools of veterinary medicine in the United States graduating approximately 2600 new veterinarians each year. All of these schools are at their maximum capacity of students they can accept for the professional program due to space limitations for diagnostics, research, laboratories, and teaching. Laboratories, teaching hospitals, veterinary research facilities, and animal diagnostic areas are built specifically for use with animals ranging from laboratory animals, livestock species, and wildlife. This is not generic university space but space built with unique safety, restraint, and handling requirements that are not commonly found on American campuses.

The one limiting factor that all the veterinary colleges/schools have for graduating more veterinarians to go into public practice areas is the building of the unique space needed to train veterinary students. Other health professions programs that have workforce concerns do not face capacity issues within their respective institutions, making need for capacity building grants even more paramount. A needs assessment conducted in 2004 shows that the 28 veterinary medical colleges/schools would be able to **increase** enrollments by an additional 192 students the first year if the facilities needed in the needs assessment were built. This number of increased students in the professional program increases each succeeding year (2nd year--256 students, 3rd year--335 students, 4th year--398 students, 5th year--423 students) if additional facilities are built.

There are other resources that the veterinary colleges/schools need to increase enrollment in the public practice areas; however, if the needed space to educate these additional students is not built, the other resources needs are moot. These other needs include, but are not limited to, additional faculty, faculty start-up funds, program administration resources, student and faculty travel resources, one-time equipment purchases, and student scholarships.

S746 authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human Services to award competitive grants to eligible entities for the purpose of improving public health preparedness through increasing the number of veterinarians in the workforce. Specifically, the grants will be awarded based on the ability of the applicant to increase the number of veterinarians who are trained in specified public health practice areas and the ability of the applicant to increase capacity in research on high priority disease agents including CDC's Critical Biological Class A Agents. Of these agents, 5 out of the 6 viruses, all three of the bacteria and the one toxin cause diseases that are common to humans and animals and can be spread from animals to humans.

The fundamental need for construction money lies at the very heart of dealing with the shortage of veterinarians in public health. Colleges of Veterinary Medicine can only meet growing needs if they are allowed to grow as well. Without an opportunity to compete for federal funded construction money any other efforts to increase enrollment will fall far short of what is truly needed to combat this issue of national concern.

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5/18/07