AVMA Policy — from Start to Finish

WHAT ARE POLICIES?
Policies are the guiding principles of the Association. AVMA has three categories of policy. AVMA professional policies provide guidance on the practice of veterinary medicine. Endorsed policies are policies adopted by other groups and supported by the AVMA. Administrative policies are primarily internal and direct the operation of the Association.

The AVMA encourages its members to voluntarily adhere to policies impacting the practice of veterinary medicine as these policies are developed by peers on behalf of the profession. AVMA policies are not, and do not supersede, law or regulation. The AVMA Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics are unique in that violation of these may result in disciplinary action by the AVMA.

WHY ARE POLICIES NEEDED?
Not only do policies provide guidance to the veterinary profession, they also provide a message platform from which the Association can advocate for the profession on legislation, regulation, public outreach, and more. AVMA policy is a crucial component of Association efforts in striving to meet its mission and objective.

Laws and regulations governing and impacting the veterinary profession vary among states as well as nations. AVMA professional policies—those that address the practice of veterinary medicine—help to advance the science and art of veterinary medicine, facilitate harmonization across the profession, and clarify the AVMA position. In addition, the AVMA is often approached by regulators, legislators, the media, allied organizations, advocacy groups, and others interested in the Association position on a given issue. Because AVMA policy encapsulates the opinion of the profession, policy provides the basis for responding to such inquiries. Similarly, policy provides the guidance needed by the Association to consider and form an official position on legislation, or determine if and how it might become involved in other activities related to that issue.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE POLICY PROCESS?
Policy creation is a team effort—for and by the members. The process involves the greater membership, guided by volunteer veterinary leaders. The AVMA organizational structure is designed to facilitate consideration of scientific information and pertinent viewpoints in decision-making and policy formulation. By late 2012, the AVMA will activate an enhanced, web-based, comment process to allow for member input on all policies under deliberation.

HOW IS POLICY MADE?
AVMA policy is approved by the Board of Directors acting on recommendations from AVMA entities (e.g., Councils, Committees, Task Forces), or by the House of Delegates (HOD) acting on resolutions submitted by the Board of Directors, the House Advisory Committee, any organization represented in the House, a HOD reference committee, or by petition of AVMA members. Pathways to Policy (below) summarizes the various routes an idea may take to form policy.

AVMA entities that advise the Board are structured to ensure the presence of necessary expertise relevant to the subject matter considered and the HOD structure provides representation of the many facets of the profession in regard to species and activity. AVMA staff also maintains an awareness of emerging issues, member concerns, and scientific information in order to keep volunteer leaders informed of the potential need to establish new policy or to review or revise existing policy.

Approval of a recommendation or resolution establishes AVMA policy. Disapproval of a recommendation or resolution does not establish countering policy, but simply rejects the proposal embodied in the recommendation. Proposed changes to policy proceed through the same advisory, review, and decision process as is required for establishing new policies.

WHEN ARE POLICIES DEVELOPED, CHANGED OR ELIMINATED?
Policy-making is a dynamic process that must stay abreast of changing circumstances and needs of the profession. Policies are created or revised when the Association needs to establish or modify its position or take action on issues (including legislation) of import to veterinary medicine. In addition to the ongoing evaluation of policies relevant to continued, emerging, or resolved issues, each policy has a five-year review cycle. If a policy is no longer relevant or necessary, it may be rescinded (eliminated).

WHERE DO I FIND AVMA POLICIES?
Policies addressing the practice of veterinary medicine are posted in the Knowledge Base of the AVMA website and highlighted in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA).