

New standard on veterinary legislation

At the 80th General Session of the OIE in Paris in May 2012, the 178 Member Countries adopted a new normative chapter on veterinary legislation for inclusion in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. The new chapter is applicable worldwide.

This standard is the culmination of many years' work on veterinary legislation, a crucial component of good governance of Veterinary Services. It will provide strong support for policies to enhance the effectiveness of national Veterinary Services, based on the adoption of standards of quality and the development and implementation of tools made available to Member Countries, such as the PVS Pathway (PVS: Performance of Veterinary Services).

The newly adopted chapter on veterinary legislation essentially establishes obligations of results rather than of means, thereby respecting the sovereignty of Members and acknowledging the great variety of legal systems around the world.

This standard stipulates the aspects that veterinary legislation must cover to enable the Veterinary Services to strengthen their contribution to food security, animal production food safety, public health and the reduction of biological risks, in particular by increasing the reliability of certification and the safety of trade in animals and animal products. In this way, the standard defines the scope of the veterinary domain, which, depending on the specificities of the Veterinary Services in each country, may extend throughout the food chain continuum from the production site all the way to the consumer's plate, thereby reinforcing the status of the Veterinary Services' sanitary missions as a public good.

Key methodological components, such as prior consultation with stakeholders, a point already mentioned in the recommendations of the OIE PVS Tool for the Evaluation of Veterinary Services, are now explicitly stated in the OIE's international standards on veterinary legislation.

A notable innovation in the new standard is the inclusion of a definition of the quality of veterinary legislation, namely "the technical relevance, acceptability to society, sustainability in technical, financial and administrative terms and provision of a basis for effective implementation of laws". This implies that, when developing veterinary legal standards, it is important to carefully consider not only their technical relevance but also their social, economic and administrative impact and, most importantly, the capacity of operators and controllers to sustainably finance their implementation and supervision.

The chapter provides a common reference and a monitoring tool for the very many national projects with components relating to veterinary legislation, many of which have tended to place the emphasis on technical content of the legislation to the detriment of the key principles of law and the long-term applicability of the legislation.

Thus, in addition to technical aspects, the new standard explicitly refers to the hierarchy of legislation, in other words to the very definition of the rule of law, and the need for well-defined objectives and transparency. In this way, the OIE demonstrates its firm commitment to worldwide efforts to ensure the good governance of Veterinary Services.

As well as general principles and specific definitions, this standard on legislation provides a regulatory framework relating to the powers of the competent authorities, to veterinary medicine and control of the veterinary profession including veterinary para-professionals, to laboratories in the veterinary domain, to health provisions relating to animal production, to regulations relating to transmissible animal diseases, to animal welfare, to veterinary medicines and biologicals, to the health quality of products of animal origin intended for human consumption or animal feed and to import and export procedures and veterinary certification.

This standard also acts as a reference for the OIE Veterinary Legislation Support Programme, which provides methodological support for Member Countries wishing to modernise the quality and scope of their veterinary legislation. Member Countries are encouraged to set up multidisciplinary working group (including veterinarians, legal experts, etc.) to develop the required new veterinary legislation and regulations. In this context, the OIE proposes an ongoing follow up of these national activities by experts specifically trained and certified by the Organisation.

To date, more than 40 Member Countries have joined this programme proposed by the OIE and several have already signed formal agreements with the OIE for long-term assistance. It is a difficult and long-term undertaking, but there is no doubt that progress with the governance and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the Veterinary Services are closely linked to improvement of their legislation in compliance with OIE standards, just as they are linked to the strengthening of their technical and human operational resources.