

## Important Client Update: Changes to the provision of after-hours services for small animal emergencies.

With the nearest 24-hour veterinary hospital being in the southern suburbs of Perth, around a 90-minute drive from Bunbury, we feel it is critical to maintain a local after-hours service. For many unwell or injured pets, such a 90-minute drive would be the difference between life and death.

We have, however, found that the increasing load on our after-hours service is creating a situation where it is not sustainable in its current form. With a number of Veterinary service providers in Bunbury and the surrounding areas no longer offering an after-hours emergency service, the result has been larger out-of-hours demand placed on fewer Veterinary practices.

In order to continue offering this essential service, we will be making a number of changes to how the service operates, with the aim of being able to continue to provide quality short-notice emergency care for pets in the Greater Bunbury area, whilst encouraging non-emergency queries / care to patiently wait for commencement of regular business hours.

One of the emerging issues we face is the large number of non-urgent calls our vets are receiving outside of regular business hours. In a survey we completed across a 3 month period, 80% of the calls received after-hours did not require immediate / emergency veterinary attention. This means our vets who participate in the emergency on-call service rota (who work full days and then cover nights and weekends on call as well) are often being woken up during the night or having family time disrupted for things that could wait until the practices reopen.

As a result of this, for our **small animal clients**, we will be implementing a fee to contact the duty vet. This will be in the form of a telephone payment gateway, where clients who wish to contact the **emergency vet on-call for small animals** will be prompted to complete a credit card payment of \$100 prior to being connected with the duty emergency vet. Once connected, clients are encouraged to raise their concerns, and then the duty vet will triage the situation and determine if an emergency consultation or just first aid / home nursing care phone advice is required. If your pet does require an emergency in-clinic consultation with the duty vet, an after-hours consult fee will still apply. This has been set at a level which reflects that \$100 has already been charged for the telephone triage service.

This system is expected to free up the duty vet to address urgent calls. We often find there is a delay in our ability to address emergency calls due to the vet being engaged on the phone discussing a non-urgent Veterinary matter with another client. It also means that our vets should be disturbed less at night, avoiding unnecessary fatigue and assuring sustainability regarding our vet team's continued provision of high-quality business-hours Veterinary care.

In the rare event where our duty vet is engaged on the phone with another inbound emergency caller, and you, as the second inbound emergency caller (having already paid via the gateway to speak to the duty vet) have your call go through to message-bank, please leave a clear message for the duty vet including your name and phone number and you will be called back as soon as the duty vet finishes their previous call for no additional cost.

To help clients reduce their need to call the vet outside of business hours for more minor health queries, we would recommend that everyone downloads the free of charge First Aid For Pets app, which can be found at <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/first-aid-for-pets/id799460675> (iOS) or [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.boehringer.FirstAidForPets&hl=en\\_AU&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.boehringer.FirstAidForPets&hl=en_AU&gl=US) (Android). This is a great resource that we anticipate will help with general advice, and provides a useful guide as to when emergency veterinary attention is recommended.

We thank our loyal client base in advance for their understanding and support to assure we are able to maintain this important life-saving service for the pets of the Greater Bunbury region.