

# Petition P-05-895: Rosa's Legacy- Access to veterinary care for companion animals

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Hydref 2019  
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## Research Briefing:

**Petition number:** [P-05-895](#)

**Petition title:** Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals

**Text of petition:** We call on the Welsh Assembly to ask the Welsh Government to introduce a scheme to help responsible owners of companion animals access face to face veterinary consultations and care for their animals.

From this year the Welsh Government will for the first time have their own limited tax making powers. For many years ordinary people have and are still struggling with the basic cost of living. There is no doubt the benefits to people's well-being and mental health that having a pet can have. Many become part of their family. For some who live in isolation or alone they are the only family they have.

Veterinary science like most professions has evolved rapidly in recent years. Veterinary Surgeons, RVNs and their support staff who work on the "front line " in Cymru do so under very challenging circumstances. It's good to see that their governing body the RCVS have in recent years recognised this and put in place measures to try and support mental health wellbeing within the profession. But unlike human health in Wales there is no NHS service for animals that is free at the point of need 24/7.

Under the Animal Welfare Act (England and Wales) of 2006 section 3.16, it is the responsibility of owners to provide five basic welfare needs, the fifth being "protection from pain suffering, injury and disease".

I would argue that as well as a requirement set out in law, we also have a moral and ethical responsibility. This was expressed brilliantly by our former First Minister Carwyn Jones AM

on the floor of the Senedd in July last year "the way we treat animals is an important reflection of the values of our society".

The insurance industry for companion animals has flourished in recent years. But many responsible owners can still struggle to get cover for their pets. Pre-existing conditions, dogs who have been exempted by breed specific legislation, or many pets who simply exceeded the amount of treatment their owners insurance policy covers.

Some third sector organisations like the PDSA have for many years tried to plug the gap. They have done sterling work, but in recent years even they have had to take the heartbreaking decision to cut back on the provision they provide. Some areas in Wales have no charity led animal hospitals or veterinary clinics.

There is also a worrying trend of owners turning to the forum of social media in order to get advice on clinical matters rather than take their animals to a veterinary practice. I know people who man helplines for animal charities. They tell me this trend is repeated with them.

With my background in animal rescue I have been convinced for many years that the increasing numbers of companion animals abandoned or signed over to rescues is due in part to people's inability to fund veterinary care for their animals. Rescues in Wales are full to bursting and all available statistics show such instances and any resulting prosecutions are on the rise.

Such a scheme would firstly help companion animals and their owners. It would also help those who work on the front line in rescue, and not least the veterinary profession in Wales, who also at times work in the most challenging circumstances.

**Petitioner:** Linda Joyce Jones

## Background

There are currently no government schemes to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals in Wales or elsewhere in the UK.

There are several national charities that provide support and veterinary help to pet owners in financial difficulties. However this does not cover the whole of Wales. Most charities have firmly set eligibility criteria. These usually provide financial support in the case of a veterinary emergency. Few charities provide financial support for foreseen and preventative costs, such as vaccinations, but some will assist people on low incomes to help to pay for spaying and neutering. Charities include: PDSA Vet Care, The Blue Cross Animal Hospitals, The RSPCA, The Dogs Trust and Cats Protection.

The Dogs Trust's [Hope Project](#) focuses on providing veterinary care for homeless people's dogs and finding homeless shelters that will accommodate them with their dogs. The Dogs Trust's [Freedom Project](#) provides a fostering service for the dogs of those fleeing domestic abuse and ensuring the veterinary bills of dogs in their care are covered.

In recent years, [pet food banks](#) have been establishing across the UK to help people feed their pets.

As mentioned in the petition, there are a number of veterinary insurance providers.

## Welsh Government action

On 19 June 2018, the then Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths made a [statement in Plenary](#) on Companion Animal Welfare. She stated [emphasis added]:

Animal welfare is a priority for the Welsh Government and the Wales animal health and welfare framework group. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, there is a duty of care on all owners and keepers of animals to ensure their welfare needs are met, whether on a permanent or temporary basis.

[...]

Potential and existing pet owners must consider the future when deciding whether or not to own an animal, including how to meet its welfare needs and the costs associated with doing so. However, I do understand people's circumstances can change. I would like to explore what veterinary provision, assistance and advice is available to people who need help in caring for their pets. This could be during times of illness or emergency, such as fleeing from a violent household. I would like to see a collaborative approach, with information readily available for people when they need it. **Officials will discuss how this can be approached with Animal Welfare Network Wales.**

Lesley Griffiths went on to say that working with charities on this matter was important.

Lesley Griffiths wrote to the Committee on this petition on 3 September. She said:

Welsh Government Officials have been in discussion with Animal Welfare Network Wales who are gathering information on the support provided by Local Authorities in Wales and are currently awaiting responses. Welsh Government will review the report findings and recommendations as soon as it is made available.

## National Assembly for Wales action

In response to Lesley Griffiths's 2018 Plenary statement, Mick Antoniw, AM, raised the issue of the regulation of veterinary fees:

They seem to be largely unregulated, they seem to be increasing by about 12 per cent per annum, and then, on top of that, there's a 20 per cent VAT charge.

He asked that the Minister consider the reduction, or removal, of VAT on veterinary bills. Lesley Griffiths committed to raising this issue with the British Veterinary Association.

Vikki Howells, AM, raised the issue of food banks for pets. She mentioned that the Trussell Trust now accepts pet food and that the first foodbank for pets was set up in Wales. She asked that the Minister consider this aspect of provision in her work to support pet owners.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.