



Veterinary  
Practitioners  
Board

# Complaint Investigations

# Agenda



Legislation



Board  
composition



Board  
functions



Complaint  
investigations



Statistics

# Legislation

The object of the *Veterinary Practice Act 2003* (NSW) is to regulate the provision of veterinary services for the following purposes:

1. To promote the welfare of animals
2. To ensure that consumers of veterinary services are well informed as to the competencies required of veterinary practitioners
3. To ensure that acceptable standards are required to be met by veterinary practitioners so as to meet the public interest and national and international trade requirements
4. To provide public health protection



# Board composition

The Board consists of 8 members appointed by the Governor and selected by the Minister:

1. One veterinarian representing specialist veterinarians
2. One veterinarian representing urban veterinarians
3. One veterinarian representing rural veterinarians
4. One veterinarian representing academics in the field of veterinary science
5. Two veterinary practitioners selected personally by the Minister
6. Two persons who are not veterinarians selected by the Minister to represent consumers of veterinary services



# Board functions

The Veterinary Practitioners Board (Board) has a number of functions including:

1. To register veterinary practitioners
2. To license veterinary hospitals
3. To investigate complaints against veterinary practitioners and take disciplinary action against veterinary practitioners



# Complaints against veterinary practitioners

- Any person, including the Board, may make a complaint against a veterinary practitioner in respect of the veterinarian's conduct
- The Board does not have the legislative authority to investigate complaints concerning fees or charges and refers such complaints to the Department of Fair Trading
- The Board is not required to investigate a complaint against a veterinarian if the complaint is made more than 3 years after the conduct is alleged to have occurred
- Complaints must be made in writing, must identify the complainant and the Board requires that the details of the complaint be verified by statutory declaration

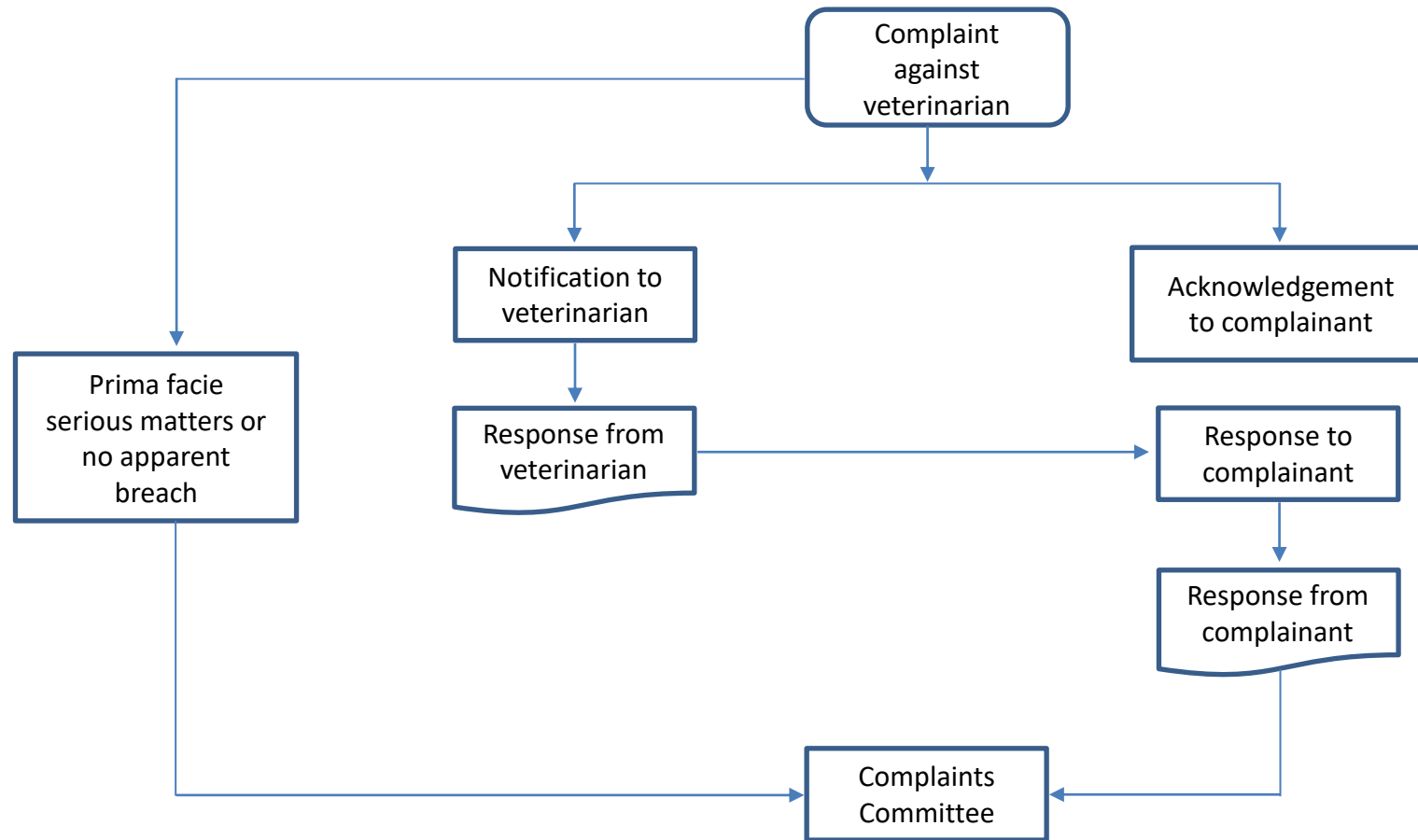


# Complaints against veterinarians

- The Board delegates the function of investigating complaints to a Complaints Committee
  - 2 veterinarian members
  - 1 non-veterinarian member
  - Others as required
- The Complaints Committee collects information from the complainant, the veterinarian and other sources as required
- The Board has the power to summon a person to appear before the Board to give evidence and to produce documents
- The Complaints Committee makes a recommendation to the Board
- The full Board determines the complaint
- Alternatively, a committee chaired by an Australian lawyer may determine the complaint

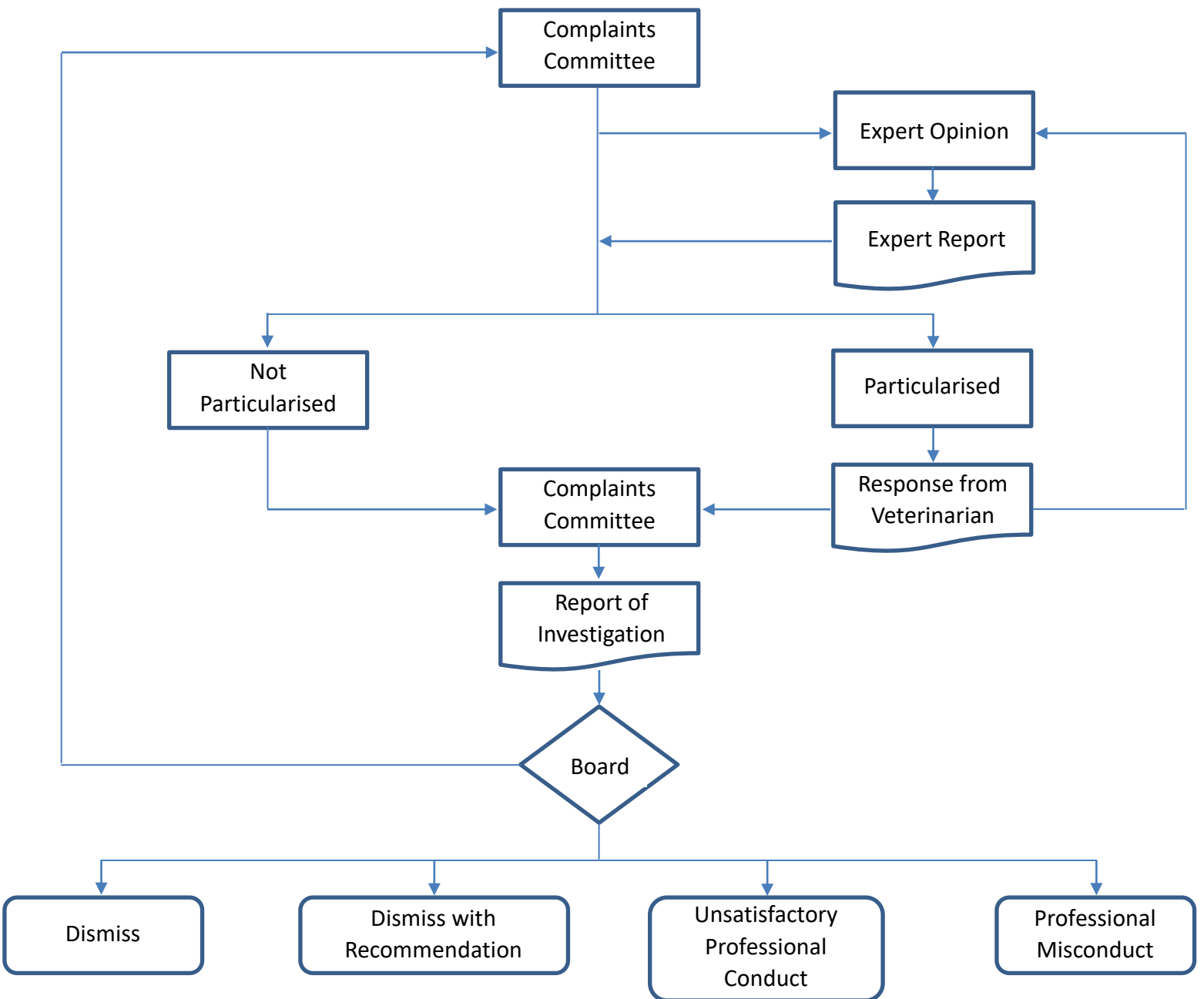


# Investigation of complaints – gathering information





# Investigation of complaints – determining the complaint



# Decision after investigation of a complaint

If the Board makes a finding of unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct the Board may take one or more of the following actions including:

- Reprimand or caution the veterinarian
- Impose a fine on the veterinarian
- Impose conditions on the veterinarian's registration

For more serious matters, the Board may apply to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a disciplinary finding including cancellation of registration.

In the above circumstances, the Board may suspend the veterinarian's registration pending determination by the Tribunal.

# Review of Board decisions

The Tribunal may also be asked by the veterinarian to review of a disciplinary finding made by the Board.

A veterinarian may appeal a decision of the Tribunal to the Supreme Court of NSW.



# Board decisions

- The legislated role of the Board is to investigate complaints against individual veterinarians with the underlying aim of regulating the profession to promote animal welfare and protect the public
- There is however good evidence that better patient outcomes will derive from a focus on systems and processes
- A movement away from a culture of fear about admitting error may provide more opportunities to improve outcomes for patients and individual veterinarians



# Unsatisfactory professional conduct and professional misconduct

Findings against veterinarians may generally be classified into three main categories:

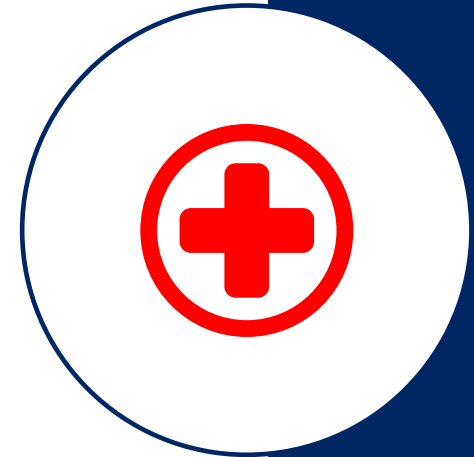
1. Conduct
2. Performance
3. Health



# Health program for veterinarians

In addition to a range of physical conditions, the Board is aware of research regarding the incidence of stress and depression in the veterinary profession.

The Board has developed a [health program for veterinarians](#) modelled on a program created by the Medical Council of NSW and the goal of this program is to enable veterinarians to work their way through their health issues with the support of suitably qualified professionals and the Board.

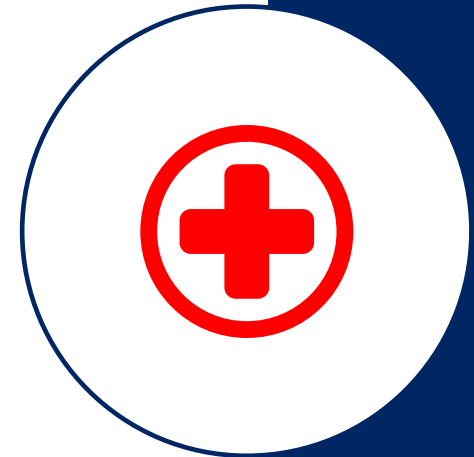


# Support

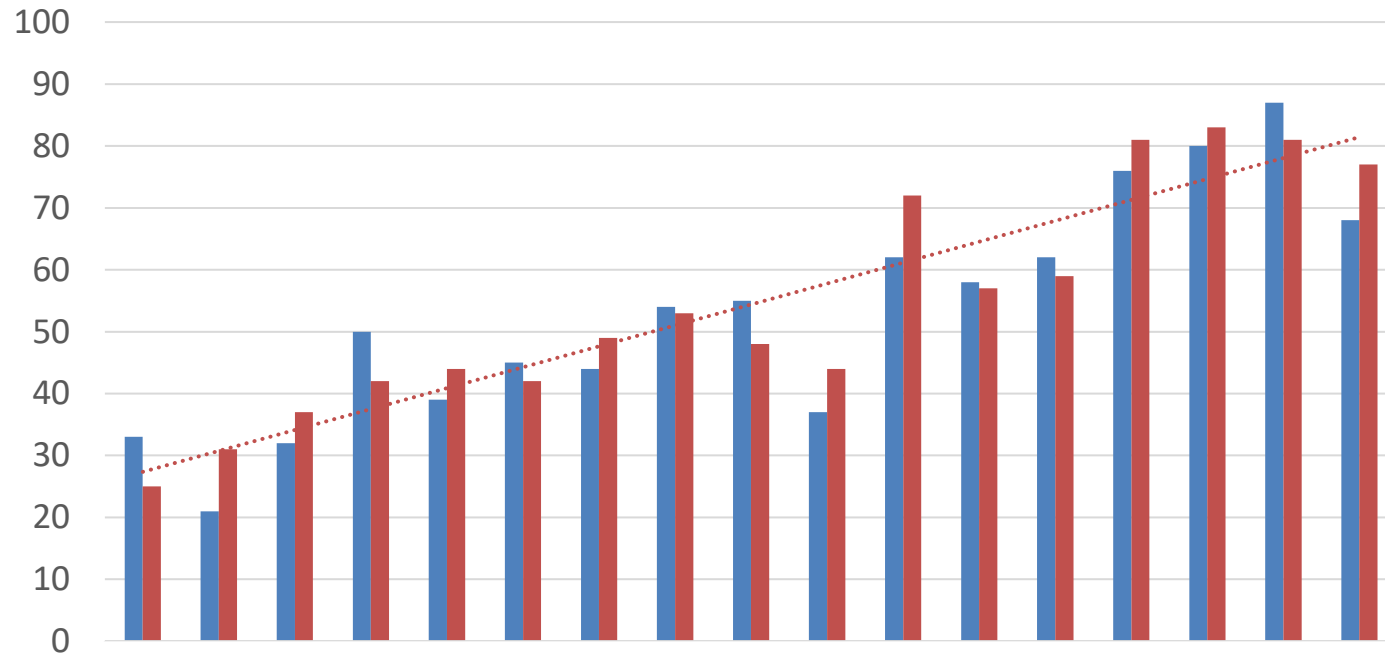
The Board appreciates that stressors associated with the performance of the professional duties of a veterinarian may be increased during a complaint investigation process.

The Board's Complaint Officer is a trained counsellor and able to assist both veterinarians and members of the public involved in complaint investigations.

Veterinarians may also receive support from colleagues, the [Australian Veterinary Association](#), professional indemnity insurer, the [Doctors' Health Advisory Service](#) and generic support services such as [Lifeline](#) and [Beyond Blue](#).



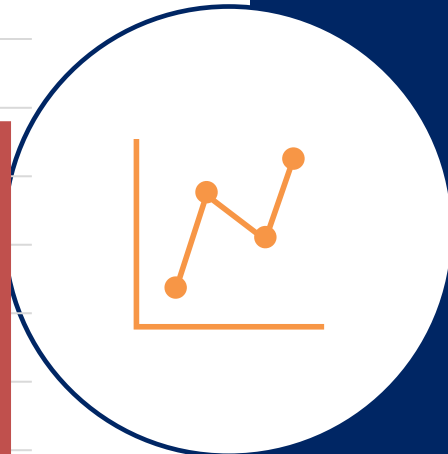
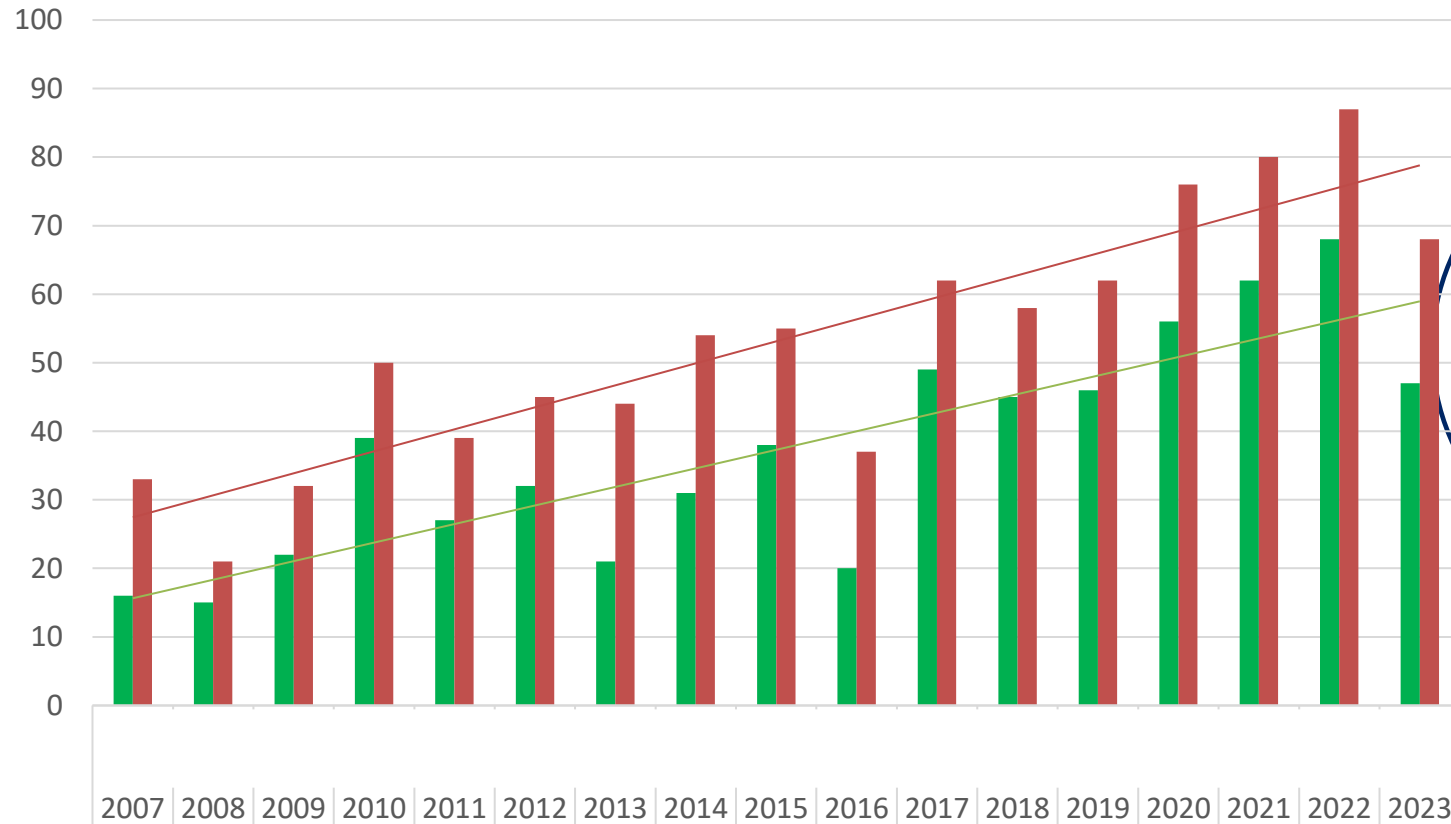
# Complaints – new and finalised 2007-2023



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Finalised Complaints	33	21	32	50	39	45	44	54	55	37	62	58	62	76	80	87	68
New Complaints	25	31	37	42	44	42	49	53	48	44	72	57	59	81	83	81	77

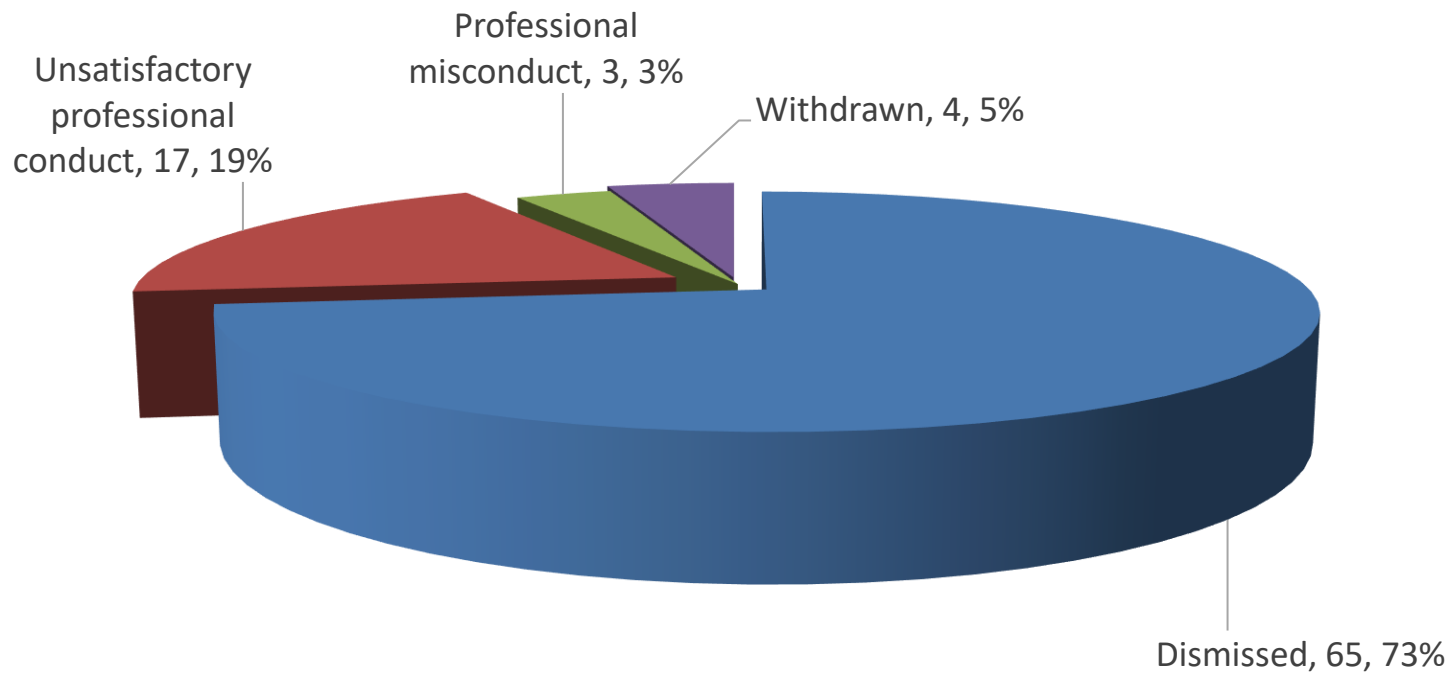


# Complaint decisions - dismissed 2007-2023

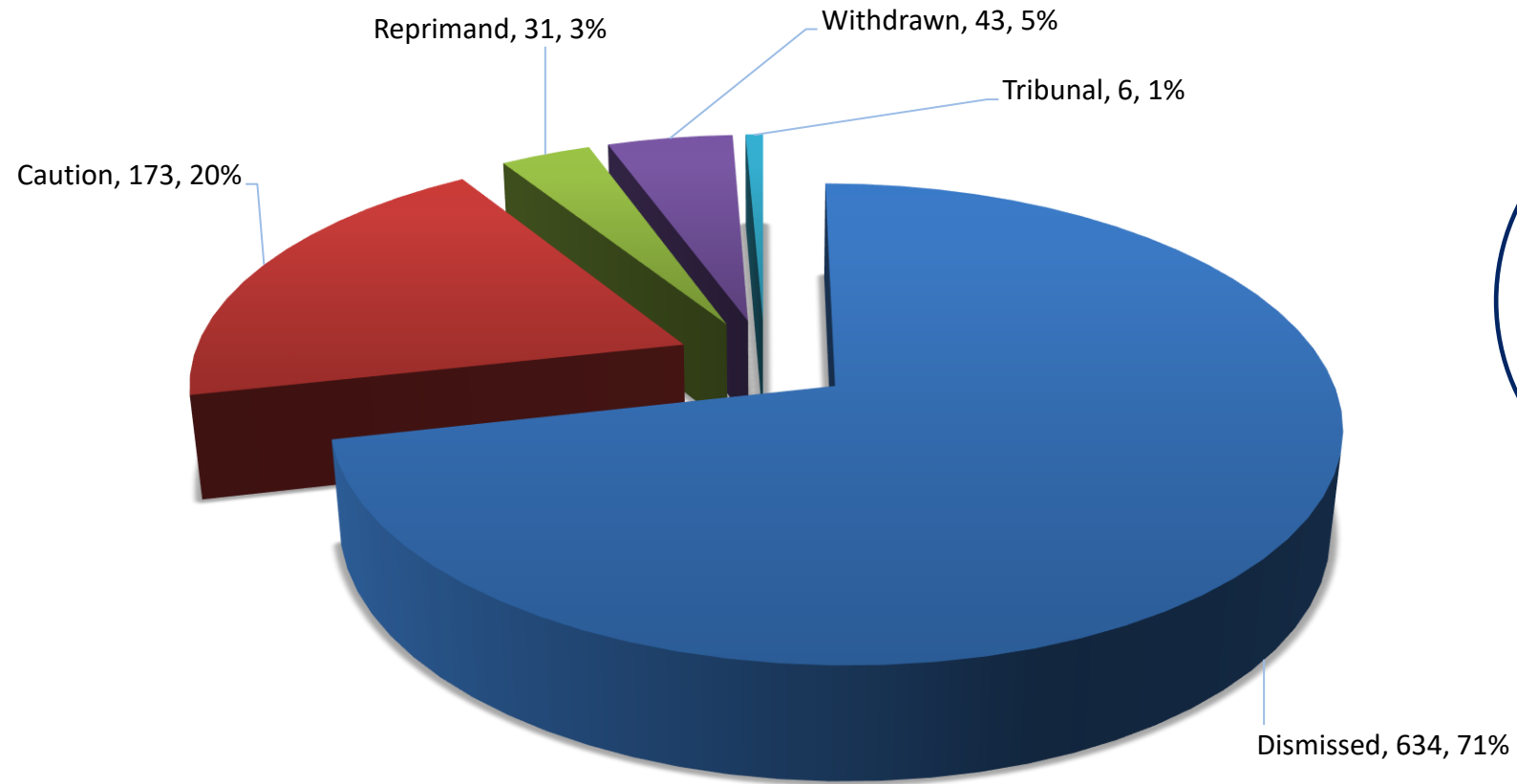


■ Dismissed	16	15	22	39	27	32	21	31	38	20	49	45	46	56	62	68	47
■ Finalised Complaints	33	21	32	50	39	45	44	54	55	37	62	58	62	76	80	87	68

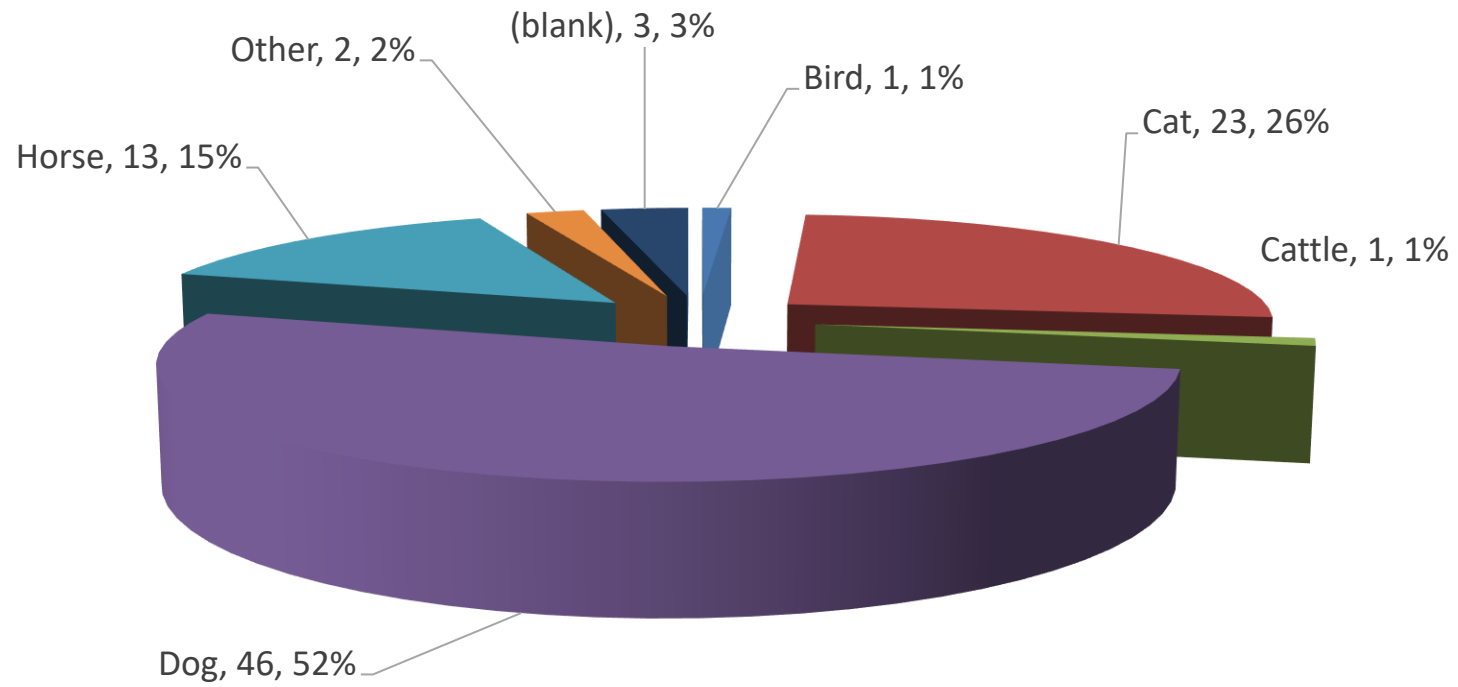
# Complaint decisions - veterinarians 2023



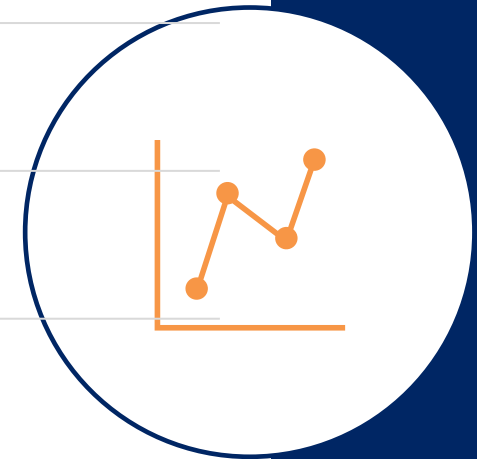
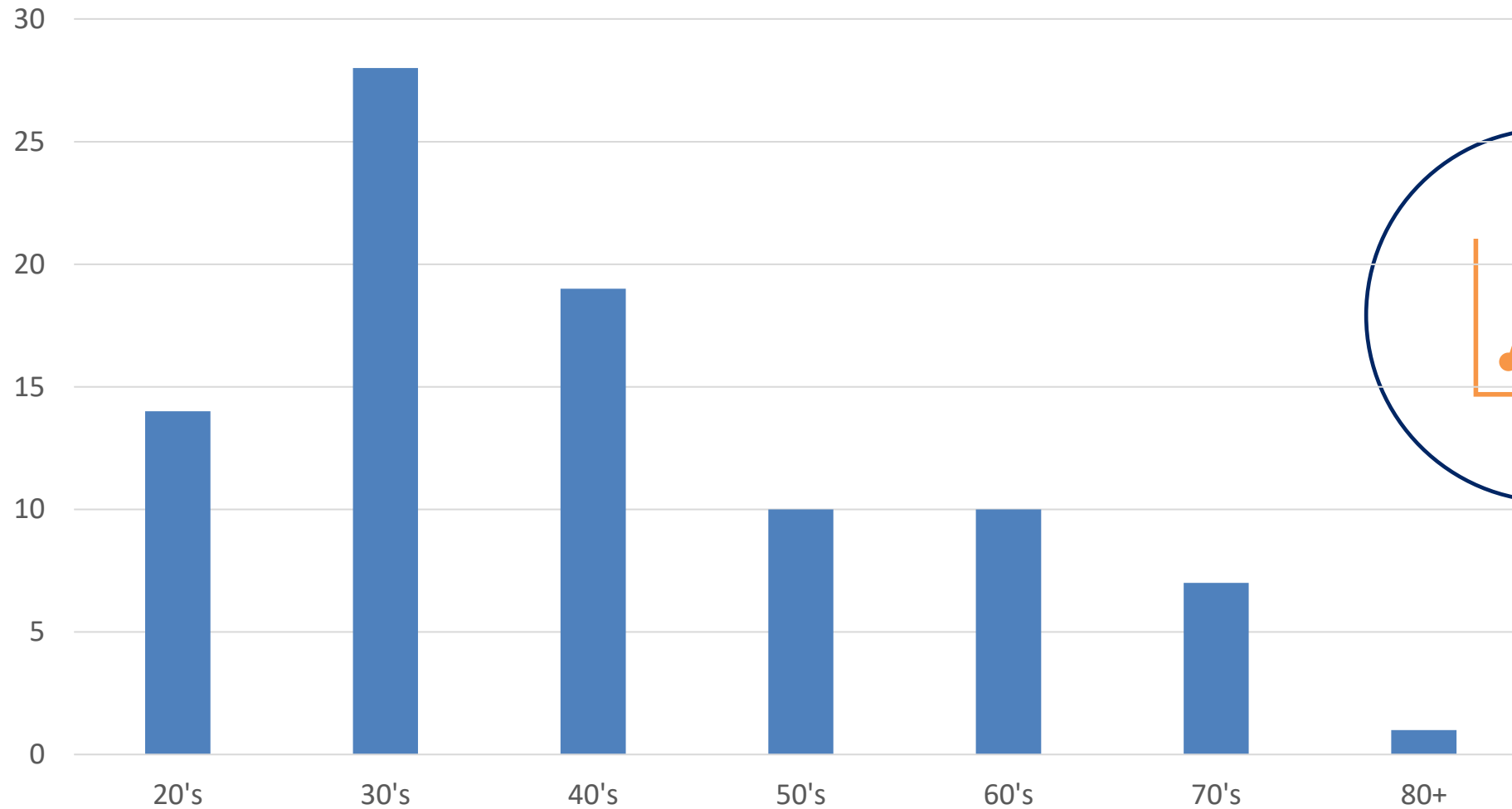
# Complaints investigated by decision 2007-2023



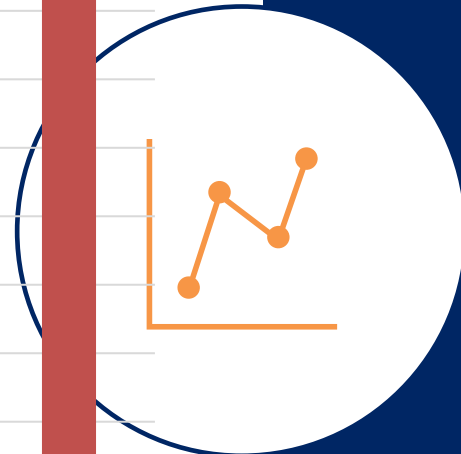
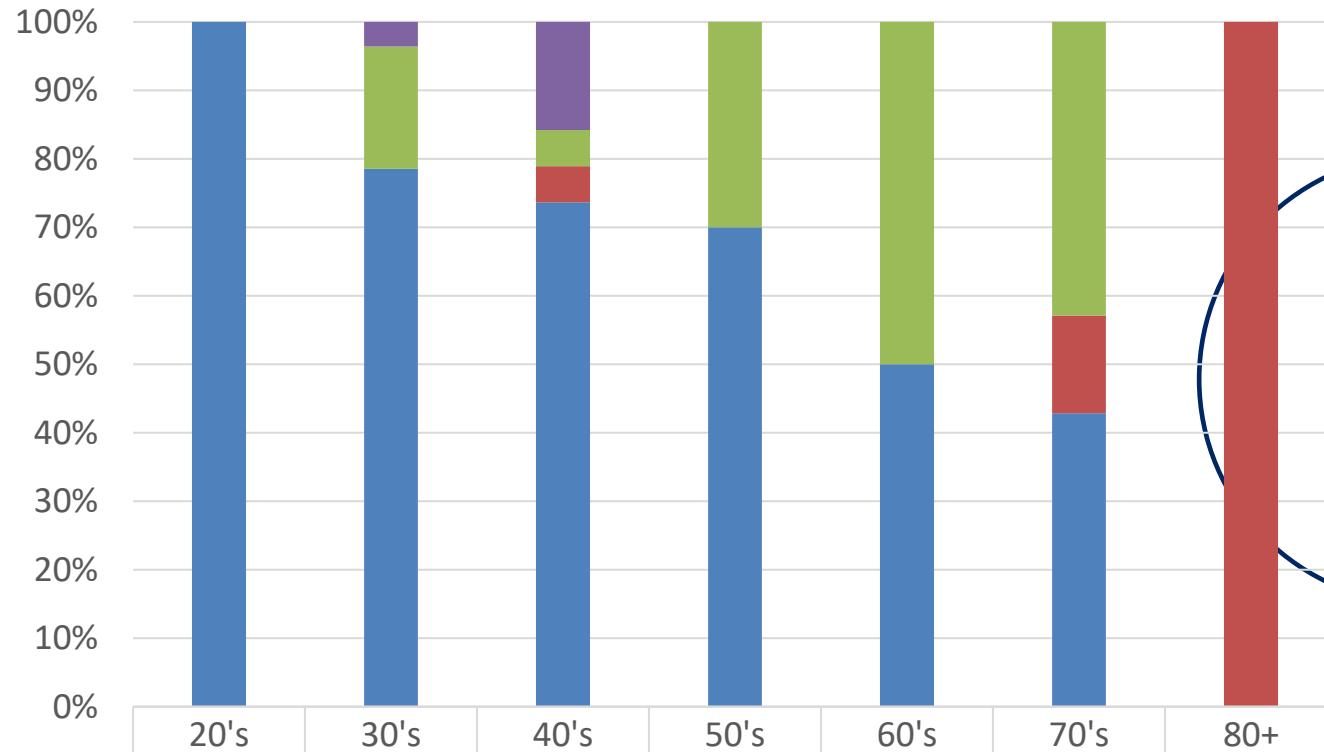
# Complaints by species 2023



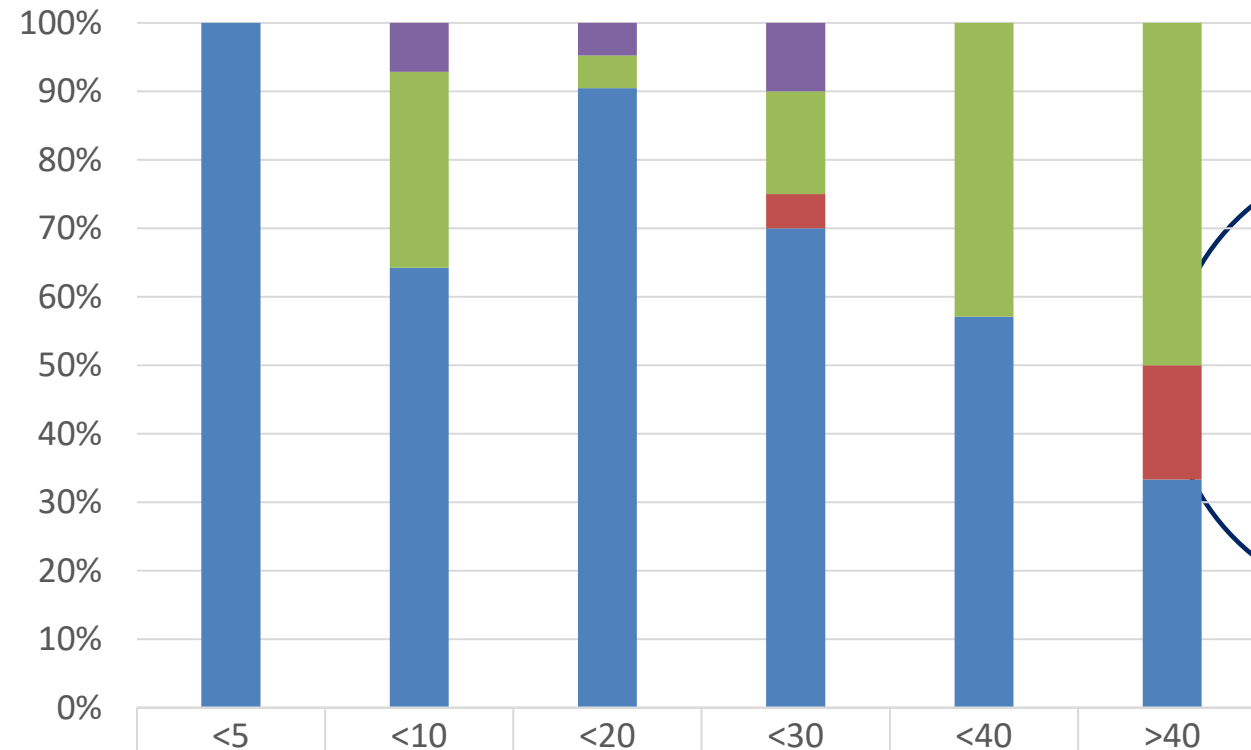
# Complaints by age group of veterinarian 2023



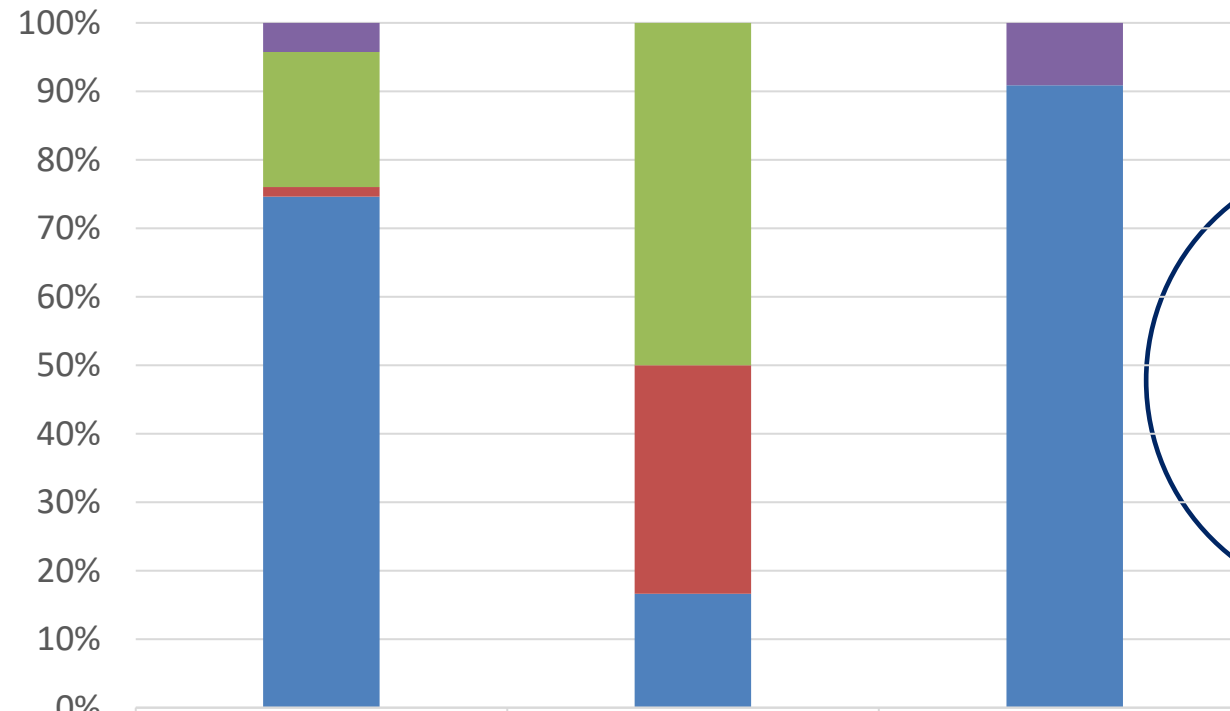
# Complaints by age group of veterinarian and decision 2023



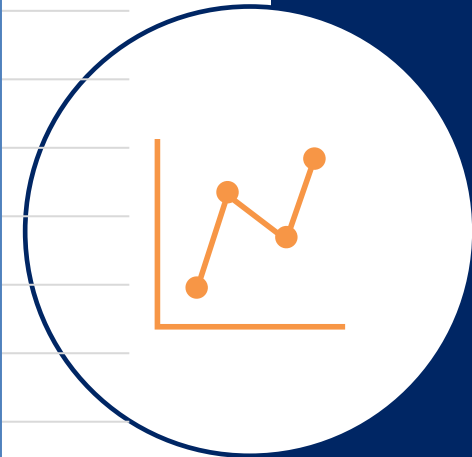
# Complaints by years graduated veterinarian 2023



# Complaints by registration division 2023

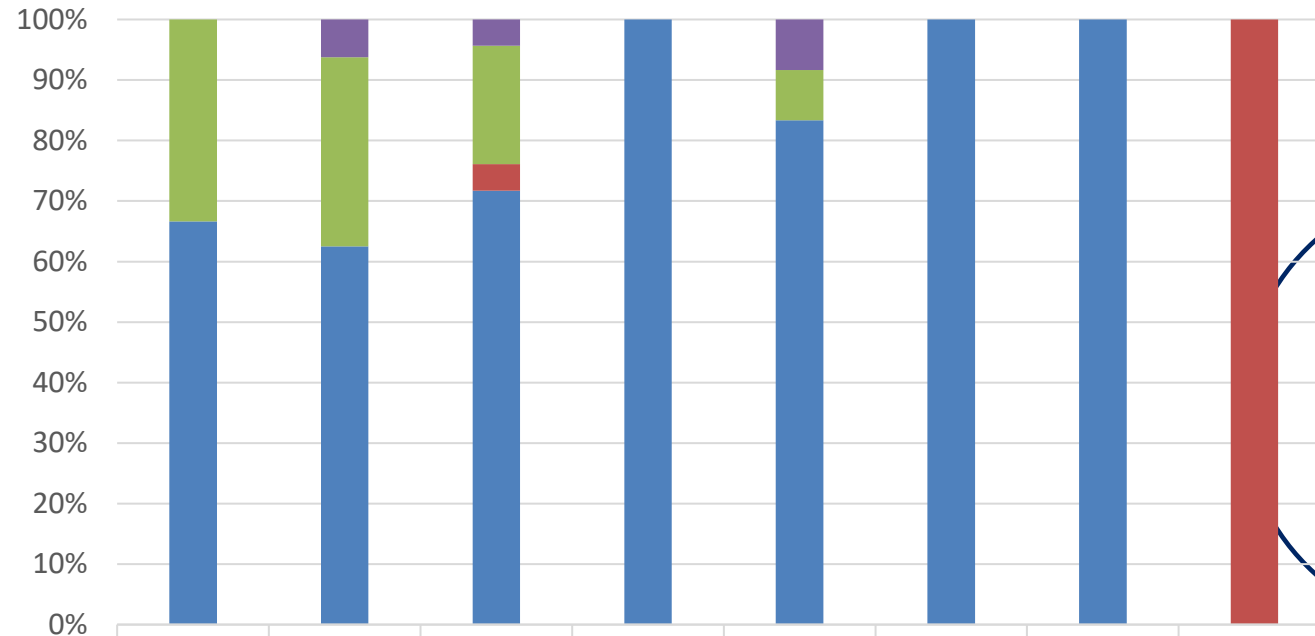


	Full	Honorary	Specialist
Withdrawn	3		1
Unsatisfactory professional conduct	14	3	
Professional misconduct	1	2	
Dismissed	53	1	10



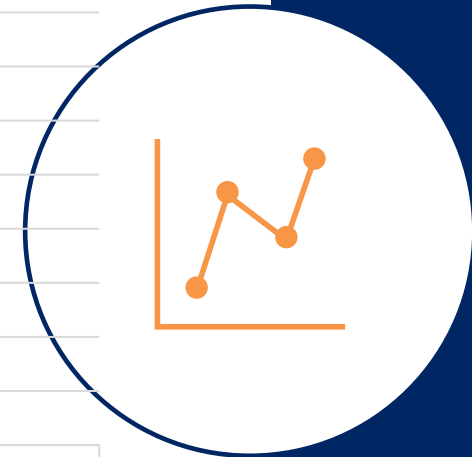
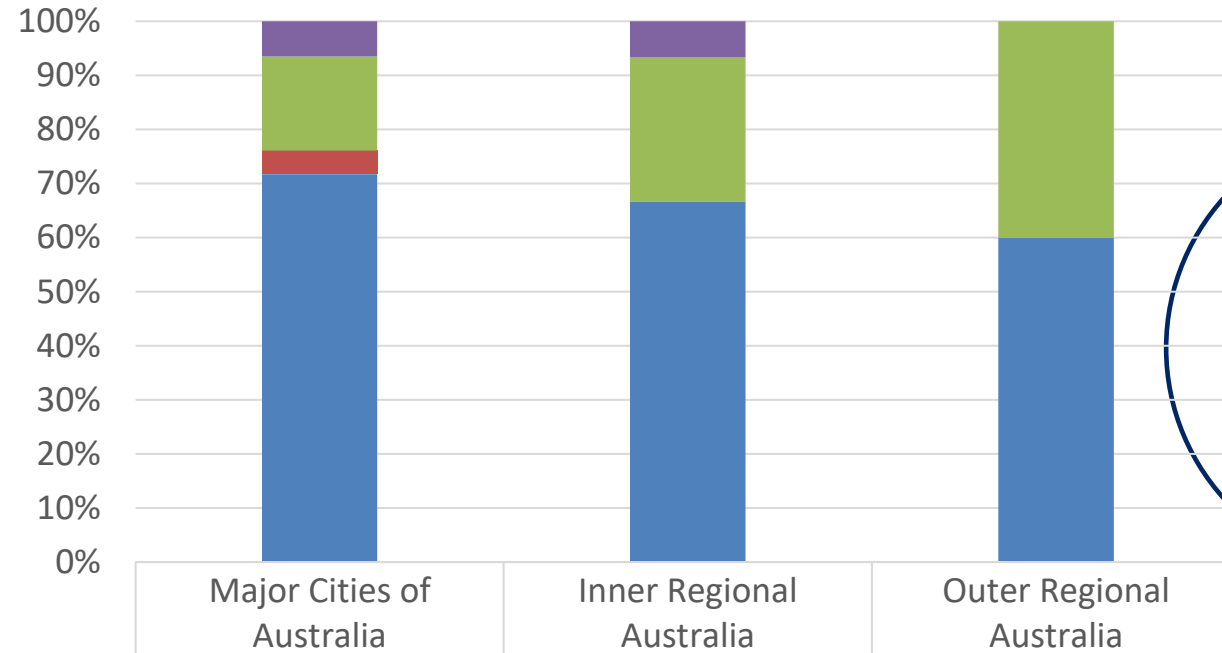


# Complaints by type of practice 2023



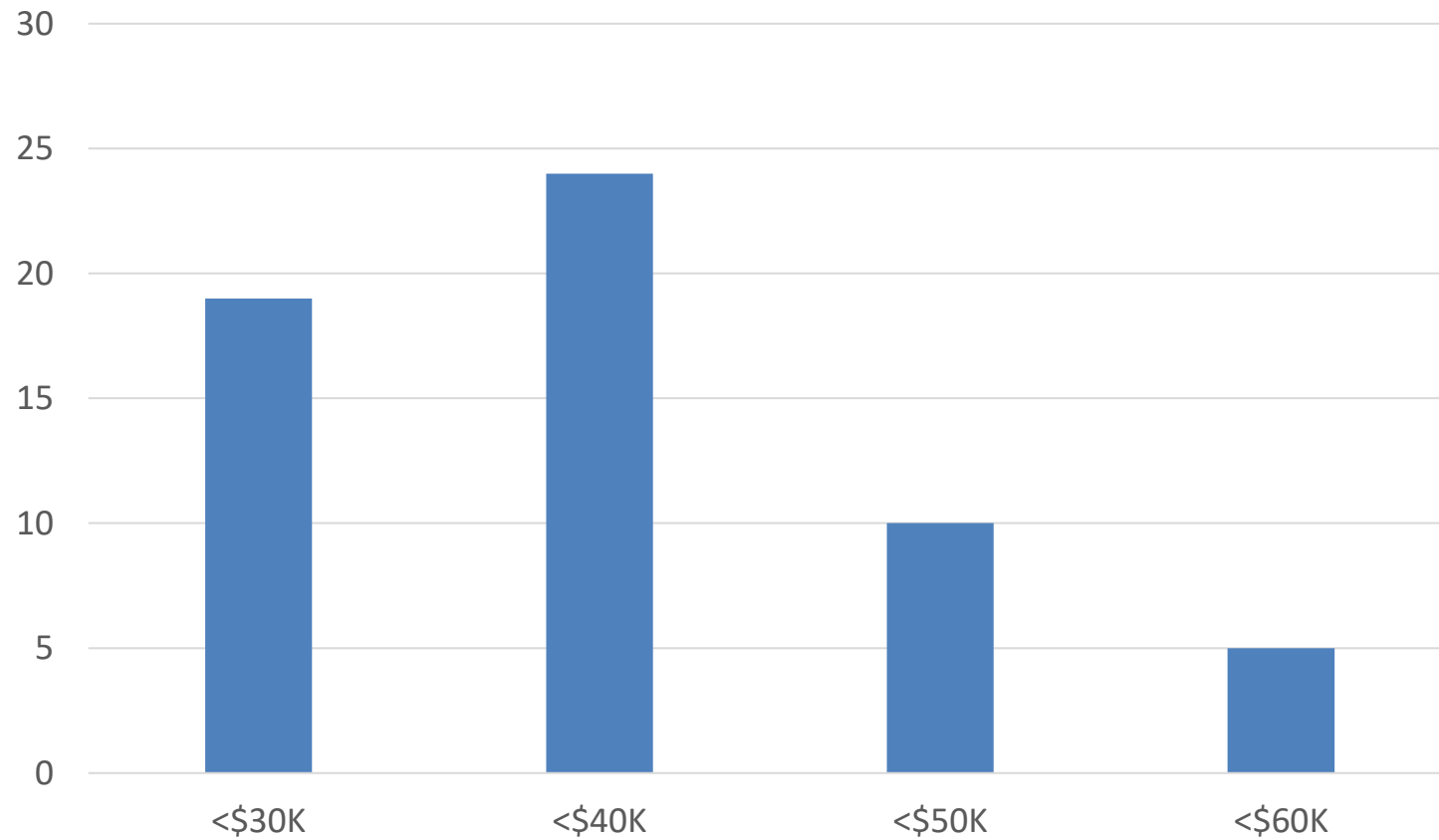
	General Large Animal Practice	General Mixed Animal Practice	General Small Animal Practice	Specialist Large Animal Practice	Specialist Small Animal Practice	Other Veterinary Pursuit	University	Retired
Withdrawn		1	2		1			
Unsatisfactory professional conduct	2	5	9		1			
Professional misconduct			2					1
Dismissed	4	10	33	4	10	1	3	

# Complaints by remoteness 2023

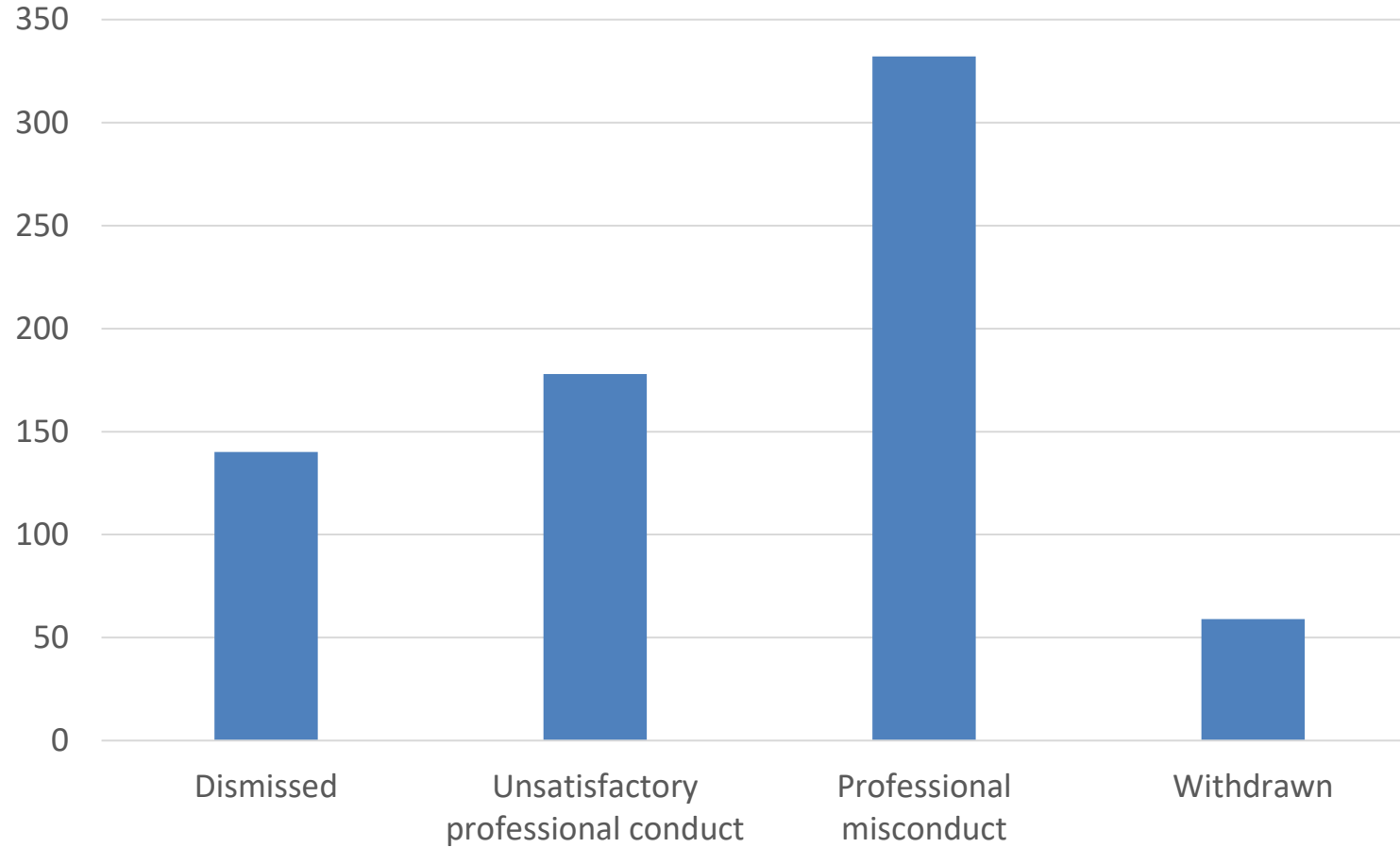


■ Withdrawn	3	1	
■ Unsatisfactory professional conduct	8	4	2
■ Professional misconduct	2		
■ Dismissed	33	10	3

# Complaints by median personal income 2023

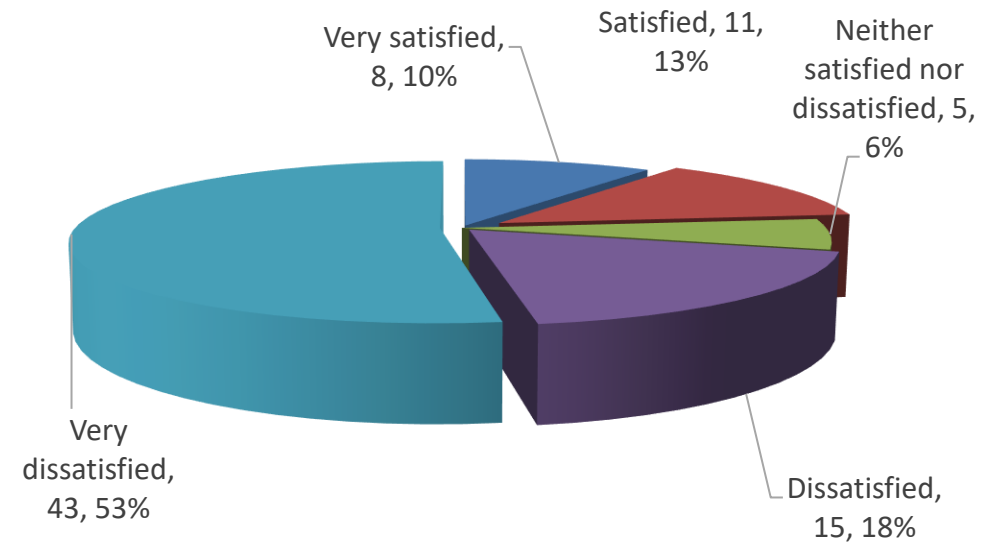
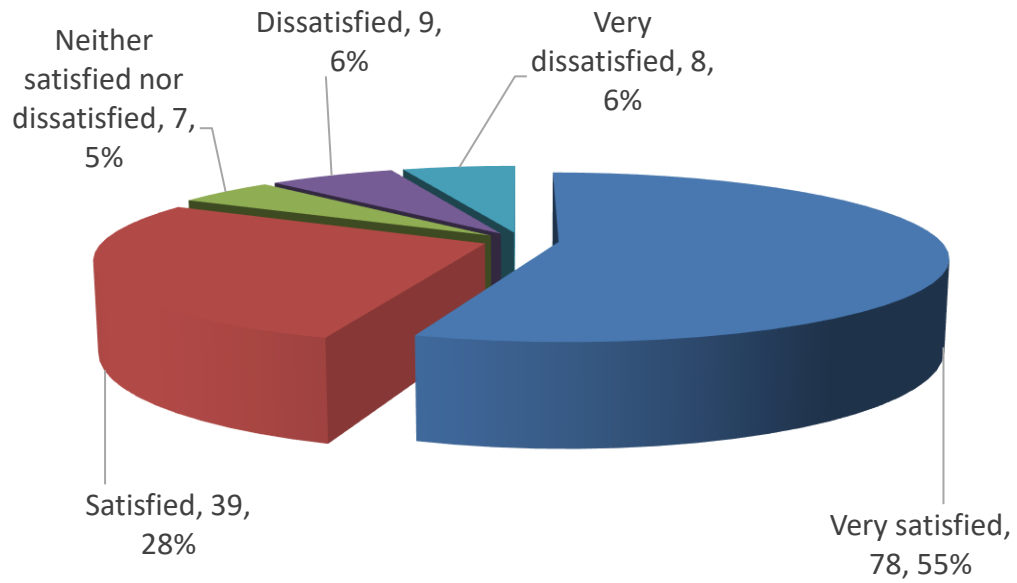


# Average time to completion 2023



# Complaints

## Feedback on outcome

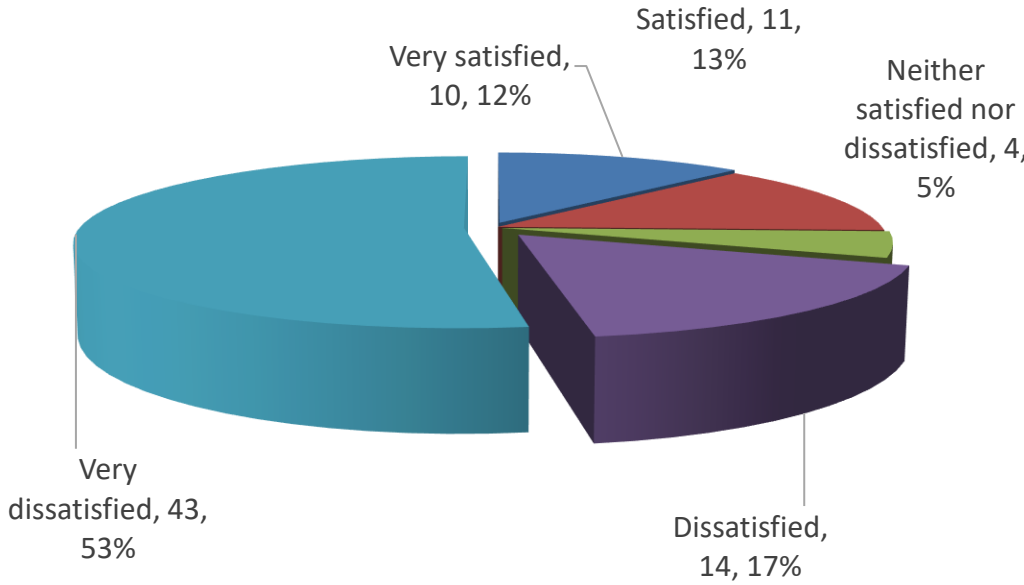
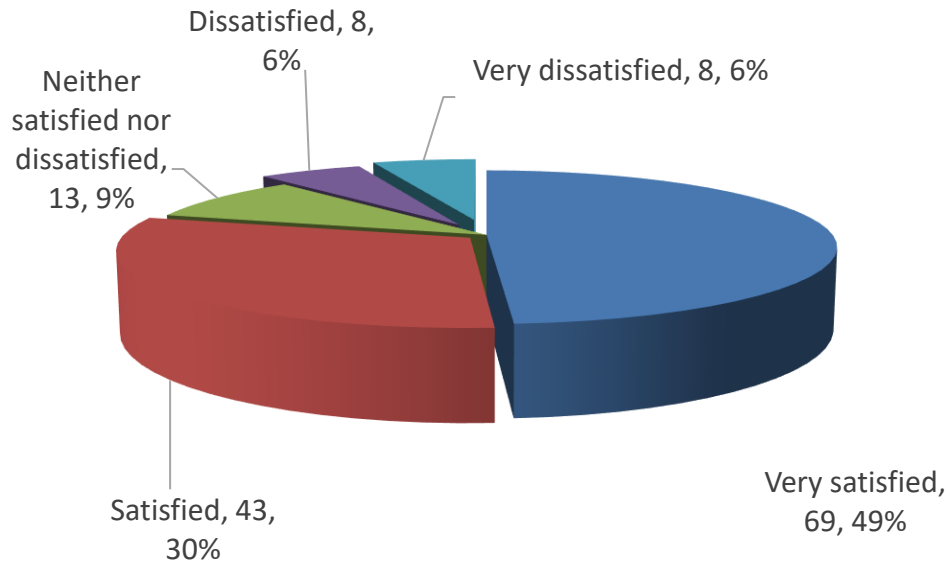


# Complaints

## Feedback on reasons

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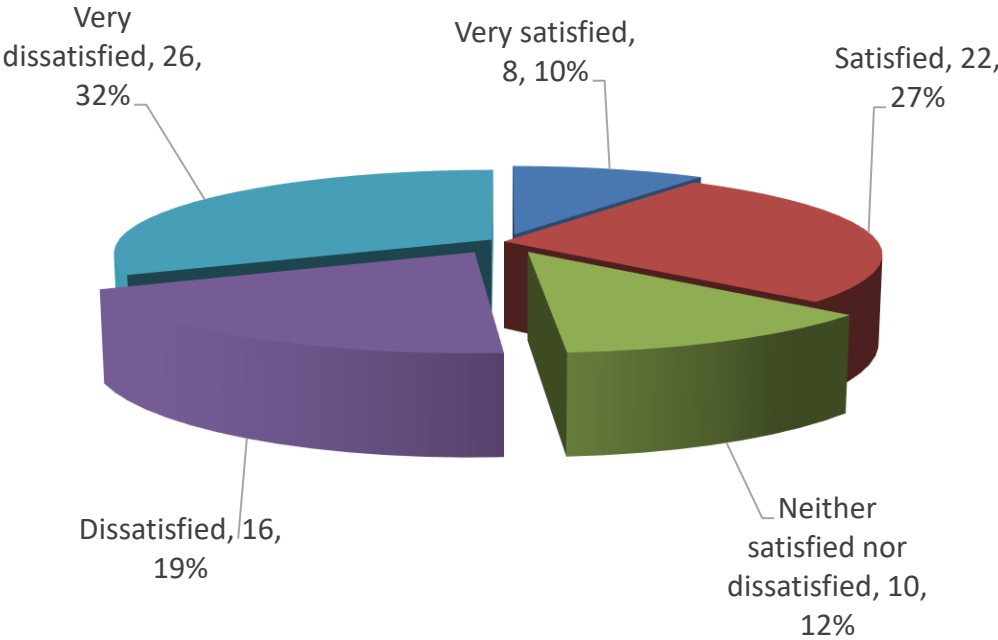
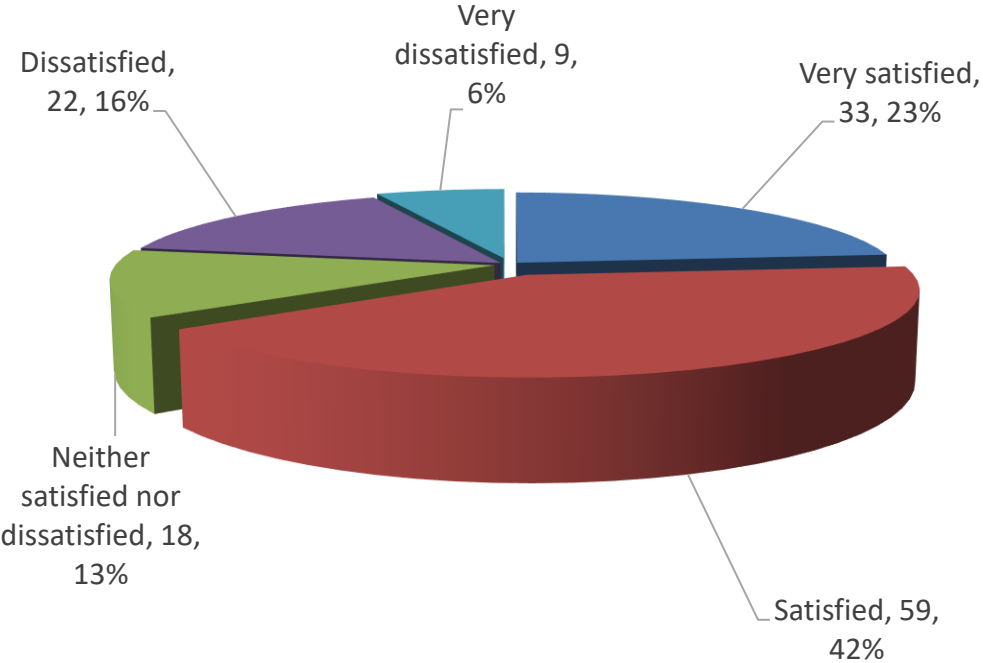


# Complaints

## Feedback on processes

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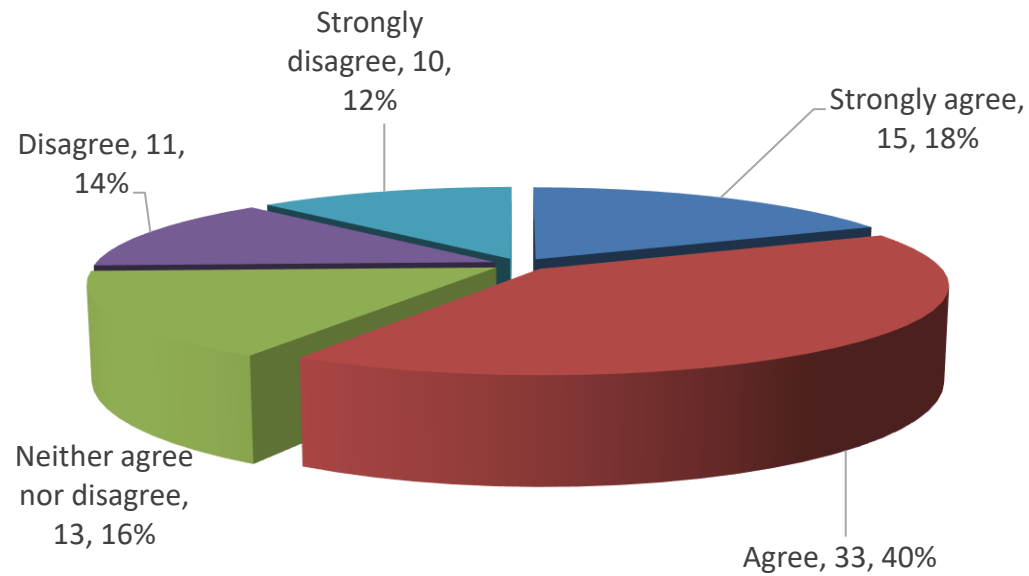
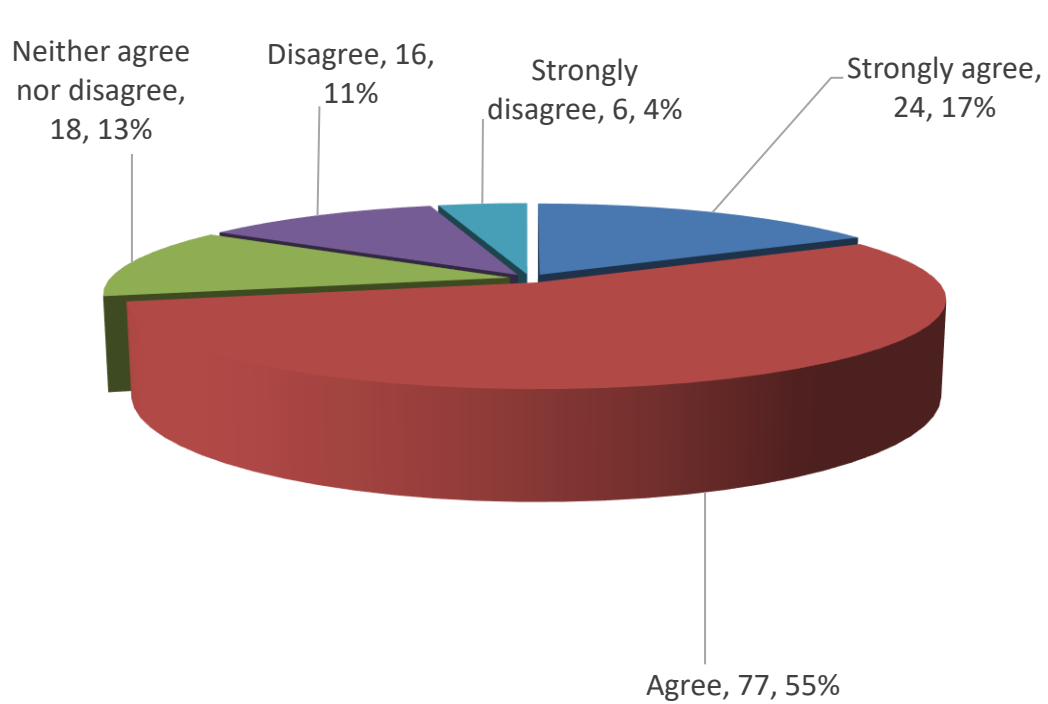


# Complaints

## Feedback on communication

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# Complaints Feedback Summary

- Stressful
- Unfair
- Too long
- Presumption of guilt
- Bias
- Too long
- Issues not addressed
- Veterinarian lied

# Summary



The Board consists of 6 veterinarians and 2 non-veterinarians.

It is responsible for regulating the veterinary profession to promote animal welfare and protect the public.



The Board must investigate each complaint received and any person can make a complaint against a veterinarian.



The Board has a standard process for investigating complaints. The focus is on the individual veterinarian.

A finding against the veterinarian may be traced to conduct, performance or health issues.



The number of complaints received has been increasing annually by around 7%. The majority of complaints are dismissed (>70%) and the average time taken to complete an investigation is 150 days.



Most veterinarians are satisfied with the outcome of an investigation but fewer are satisfied with the process.

Most complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of an investigation but fewer are dissatisfied with the process.

# Questions

