

# SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION

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SPECIAL-PURPOSE REVIEW

## State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners

2022-23

88TH LEGISLATURE



# SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION



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*Cover photo: The Texas State Capitol was completed in 1888. With the Goddess of Liberty atop the dome, the Texas State Capitol Building is 19 feet taller than the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. The photo shows the south facade of the Capitol. Photo Credit: Janet Wood*

# **STATE BOARD OF VETERINARY MEDICAL EXAMINERS**

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# AGENCY AT A GLANCE

The Legislature created the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners in 1911 to regulate the practice of veterinary medicine, surgery, and dentistry.<sup>1</sup> The agency's mission is to establish and enforce policies to ensure the best possible quality of veterinary services and equine dental care for the animals of Texas. To fulfill this mission, the agency carries out the following key activities:

- Licenses veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and equine dental providers.
- Sets standards for the practice of veterinary medicine and equine dental services.
- Enforces the Veterinary Licensing Act by investigating and resolving complaints against licensees and taking disciplinary action when necessary.

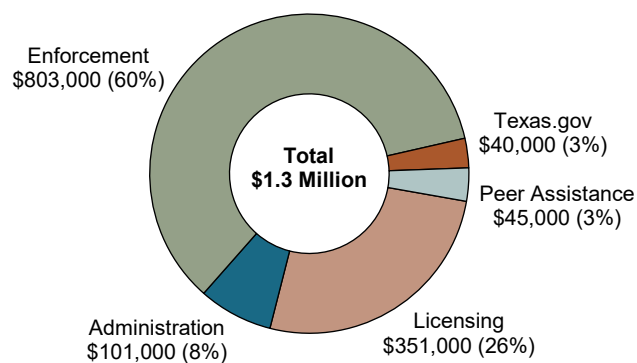
## Key Facts

**Governance.** The board consists of nine members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate — five veterinarians, one licensed veterinary technician, and three members of the public — who serve staggered six-year terms.<sup>2</sup> The governor designates the presiding officer.<sup>3</sup> Veterinarian members of the board must have resided and been practicing veterinary medicine in Texas for at least six years preceding their appointment.<sup>4</sup>

- **Funding.** In fiscal year 2021, the agency operated on a budget of about \$1.3 million, with the majority of revenue coming from licensing fees. The pie chart, *State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Expenditures*, breaks out the agency's spending by major program areas.

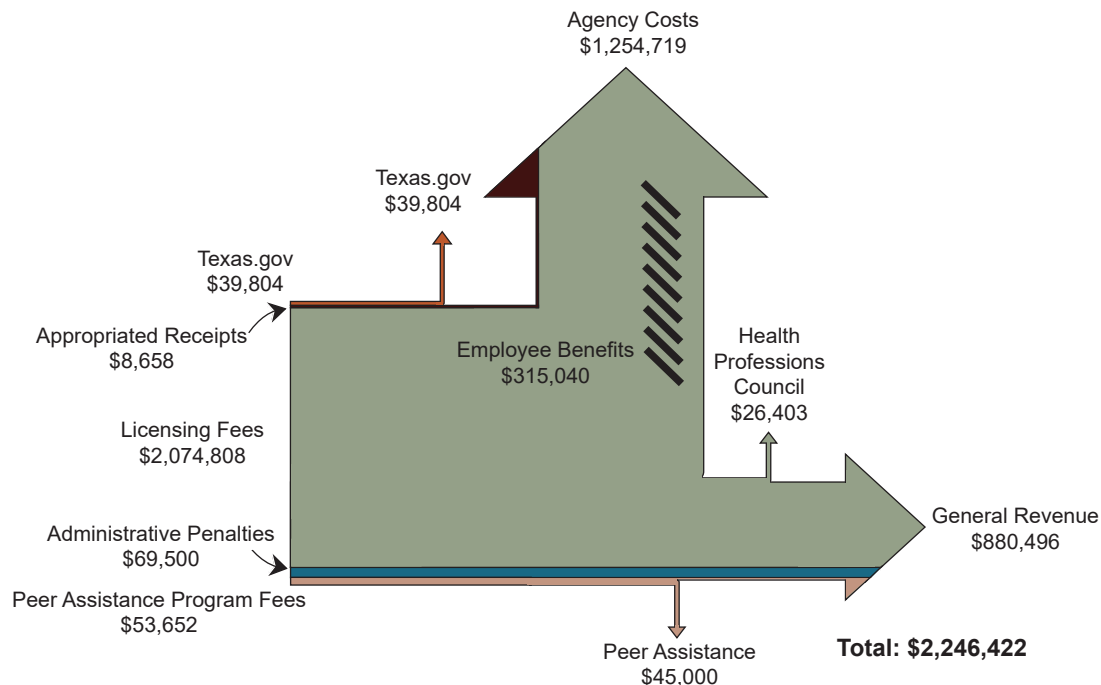
The agency generates revenue in excess of what is needed for operations, transferring more than \$880,000 in fees to the General Revenue Fund in fiscal year 2021. The chart on the following page, *Flow of State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Revenue and Expenditure*, shows the overall impact of board revenue and expenditures in fiscal year 2021.

**State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Expenditures - FY 2021**



- **Staffing.** The agency, headquartered in Austin, employed 19 full-time employees in fiscal year 2021. Six investigative staff work in the field and are located in Allen, Austin, Corpus Christi, Houston, San Antonio, and Weatherford. Additionally, the agency is a member of the Health Professions Council, which provides supplementary information technology staffing for the agency and other health professions licensing agencies.
- **Licensing.** The agency determines eligibility, processes license applications and annual renewals, performs criminal history checks, and administers jurisprudence exams for three occupations.

### Flow of State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Revenue and Expenditure - FY 2021



**Veterinarians.** The Veterinary Licensing Act requires Doctors of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) to be licensed by the agency to practice veterinary medicine in Texas.<sup>5</sup> In addition to other requirements, applicants must graduate from an accredited school or college of veterinary medicine, or provide proof of equivalence; complete a fingerprint criminal history background check; and pass both the national licensing and state jurisprudence exams to qualify for licensure. The board also requires licensed veterinarians to comply with all requirements of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), including registering with the DEA and complying with recordkeeping requirements.

**Licensed Veterinary Technicians (LVTs).** The state began licensing LVTs in 2013.<sup>6</sup> A license to work as a veterinary technician is not mandatory, but individuals cannot refer to themselves as LVTs without a license. LVTs assist veterinarians in animal care and veterinary tasks, such as taking basic vital information, suturing, and inducing anesthesia. By virtue of their license, LVTs may conduct these tasks with a lower level of veterinary supervision than unlicensed veterinary assistants or technicians. LVT applicants must graduate from an accredited veterinary technician program, and pass both the national licensing and state jurisprudence exams.

**Equine Dental Providers (EDPs).** The state began licensing EDPs in 2011.<sup>7</sup> EDPs may perform a statutorily defined set of dental procedures on equine animals under the general supervision of a licensed veterinarian. Applicants must complete an agency-approved equine dentistry certification program and pass the state jurisprudence exam. The board has a statutory equine dental provider advisory committee, consisting of two EDPs engaged in the practice for five years before appointment and a veterinarian in good standing who supervises an EDP, to advise and assist the board in adopting rules and determining disciplinary actions related to EDPs.<sup>8</sup>



The table, *State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Licensees and Fees*, shows the number of licensees and amounts of certain annual licensing fees at the end of fiscal year 2021.

**State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners  
Licensees and Fees - FY 2021**

License Type	Number of Licensees	Initial Application Fee	Renewal Fee
DVM	10,209	\$515 <sup>9</sup>	\$195
LVT	2,250	\$50	\$50
EDP	60	\$100	\$83
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,519</b>		

- **Inspections and enforcement.** Enforcement staff conducts compliance inspections of licensees; investigates possible violations of the Texas Veterinary Licensing Act and related rules by licensed and unlicensed individuals; and enforces federal and state regulations regarding controlled substances. The agency receives complaints from licensees and members of the public, and initiates its own complaints from compliance inspection reports. If the agency finds a violation, it may impose a sanction or combination of sanctions.<sup>10</sup> In fiscal year 2021, standard of care and practicing without a license were the most common licensee violations. The agency received 451 complaints and averaged 464 days to resolve complaints in fiscal year 2021. The agency also conducted 56 inspections in the same fiscal year.

The board cooperates with the DEA and the Texas State Board of Pharmacy to track and monitor prescriptions of controlled substances by veterinarians. The textbox, *Texas Prescription Monitoring Program*, provides more information about controlled substances oversight by the program and other stakeholders.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Texas Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP)**

- The PMP collects and monitors prescription data for all Schedule II, III, IV, and V controlled substances dispensed in Texas.
  - Statute allows prescribers, pharmacists, and related regulatory agencies to check a patient's information in the database to determine potential drug diversion or drug abuse.
  - If the board determines a veterinarian has potentially harmful prescribing or dispensing patterns, the board may initiate a complaint using the information obtained through the PMP.
- **Peer assistance.** The agency contracts for peer assistance services for licensees who may be impaired by substance abuse or dependence, or mental illness. Through the peer assistance program, licensees are evaluated to determine if they are safe to practice and, if not, may be subject to treatment and monitoring before being allowed to practice. In fiscal year 2021, 24 licensed individuals participated in the peer assistance program.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 76 (HB 62), Acts of the 32nd Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> All citations to Texas statutes are as they appear on <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/>. Sections 801.051, 801.052, and 801.054, Texas Occupations Code.

<sup>3</sup> Section 801.055, Texas Occupations Code.

<sup>4</sup> Section 801.052(a)(1), Texas Occupations Code.

<sup>5</sup> Section 801.251, Texas Occupations Code.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 481 (SB 1312), Acts of the 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 940 (HB 414), Acts of the 82nd Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Section 801.551, Texas Occupations Code.

<sup>9</sup> Fees listed for veterinarians apply to the regular veterinary license and not special, temporary, or inactive licenses.

<sup>10</sup> 22 Texas Administrative Code, Section 575.25.

<sup>11</sup> Sections 481.076 and 481.0764, Texas Health and Safety Code; Section 801.5011, Texas Occupations Code.

# SPECIAL-PURPOSE REVIEW: STATE BOARD OF VETERINARY MEDICAL EXAMINERS

## The Board Has Failed to Implement the Sunset Commission's Database Recommendations.

### Introduction

The State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners has undergone three Sunset reviews over the last six years. Following the board's Sunset review in 2017 that identified significant issues with data management, the 85th Legislature continued the agency for only four years and limited the scope of the subsequent Sunset review to evaluating the ongoing appropriateness of statutory recommendations previously adopted by the Sunset Commission.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, Sunset staff once again found the agency struggled to manage its data, particularly its enforcement data.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the 87th Legislature passed Senate Bill 713 requiring Sunset staff to perform a special-purpose review to evaluate the board's implementation of its database system and its processes and procedures for collecting and analyzing data.<sup>3</sup> The bill also requires the State Auditor to conduct an effectiveness audit after December 1, 2023, to evaluate the board's implementation of data-related recommendations previously adopted by the Sunset Commission as well as any recommendations resulting from this special-purpose review.<sup>4</sup>

### Findings

#### **The board failed to properly contract for a new database and continues to struggle with data collection, tracking, and analysis.**

Consistent with the 2017 Sunset review, the board continues to demonstrate exceptionally poor contracting practices. When evaluating an agency's contracting operations, Sunset uses the general framework established in the *State of Texas Procurement and Contract Management Guide*, as well as documented standards and best practices compiled by Sunset staff.<sup>5</sup> Among these, an agency should formally document all of its contracts, including a well-defined Scope of Work. According to board staff, the agency entered into two separate contracts with vendors approved by the Department of Information Resources to procure a new database for its licensing and enforcement functions, but neither resulted in a useable database. In March 2018, the agency entered into the first contract, with GTS Technology Solutions, Inc. for the Nuvola database and spent \$74,568.<sup>6</sup> However, this contract was cancelled when the primary subcontractor on the project went out of business, forcing the agency to start over and seek out a new vendor. Sunset staff was able to independently corroborate the documented expenditures for this contract.

The agency stated it entered into a second contract in January 2020 with SHI Government Solutions, Inc. for the InLumon database and paid \$108,500.<sup>7</sup> Again, the database was never completed, but Sunset staff was unable to corroborate the expenditures for this second contract. After the agency's executive staff resigned in April 2022, the agency could not find and was unable to produce the second contract

The agency spent \$183,095 to acquire a new database and never received a final product.

or a documented Scope of Work for Sunset staff.<sup>8</sup> Without these, the agency is unable to determine what the agreed upon deliverables were and what would have constituted completion of the contract. More concerning is the failure to have a written, documented contract, which frustrates efforts to hold the agency accountable for the expenditures of public funds and raises questions of misuse. In total, the agency spent \$183,095 attempting to purchase a new database and never received a final product. Currently, the agency is seeking both federal funding and an exceptional item request in its fiscal year 2024-25 Legislative Appropriations Request for \$143,110 in one-time costs and \$276,120 in ongoing expenses for a new database.<sup>9</sup>

Without a new database, the agency has been unable to improve how it collects and makes use of data. The previous Sunset recommendations addressing the board's poor data collection, tracking, and analysis were ultimately supposed to improve the agency's internal processes, responsiveness to stakeholders, and enforcement efforts. Instead, the agency continues to rely on separate Excel spreadsheets to manage its data, which limits its ability to perform data analysis and is prone to input errors. Sunset staff also had difficulty obtaining reliable budget information and had concerns with the reliability of the agency's licensing and enforcement data.<sup>10</sup> While not applicable to this special-purpose review, Sunset staff continued to receive stakeholder input — including complaints — about the agency, raising significant concerns about its management, transparency, and responsiveness to the public. In addition, the board took an average of 464 days to resolve a complaint in fiscal year 2021 — up from 221 days in fiscal year 2015 — prompting an investigative report on long resolution times.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, as response times have risen, the board conducted only 56 inspections in fiscal year 2021, a steep decline from prior years in which the board routinely conducted more than 500 inspections. Without addressing basic, but important, state agency operations like contracting and data management, the board will continue to struggle to meet its important mission of establishing and enforcing policies to ensure the best quality of veterinary services and equine dental care for the animals of Texas.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 536 (SB 319), Acts of the 85th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, *State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners Staff Report with Final Results*, Austin: Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, June 2021, pp. A3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 850 (SB 713), Acts of the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 850 (SB 713), Acts of the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, *State of Texas Procurement and Contract Management Guide*, accessed online March 5, 2020, <https://comptroller.texas.gov/purchasing/docs/96-1809.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Information Resources (DIR) Contract TSO-3655.

<sup>7</sup> DIR Contract TSO-3984.

<sup>8</sup> The executive director, the director of operations, and the executive assistant all resigned.

<sup>9</sup> Texas Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners, "Legislative Appropriations Request For Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025," September 2022, pp. 4-6, accessed online October 26, 2022, <http://docs.lbb.texas.gov/Main/DocDisplay.aspx>.

<sup>10</sup> With the agency's data management difficulties, concerns with consistency of data tracking, and the limited scope of Sunset staff's review, Sunset cannot verify the accuracy of the agency's data.

<sup>11</sup> KXAN, "Is your pet's vet safe? Backlogged Texas cases may make it hard to know," news story last updated May 16, 2022, accessed online October 26, 2022, <https://www.kxan.com/investigations/is-your-pets-vet-safe-backlogged-texas-cases-may-make-it-hard-to-know/?ipid=promo-link-block2>.



# Sunset Special-Purpose Review of the *State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners*

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