

Petition launched for rates relief

By Georgina Mills

THE BVA is encouraging vets and vet professionals to get behind a petition urging the government to grant business rates relief to human and animal healthcare providers affected by Covid-19.

The petition, which is being led by the British Dental Association, calls on the government to allow community-based healthcare services – including vet practices, dentists and physiotherapists – access to the same financial support offered to other high street businesses that have been struggling under lockdown.

If it achieves over 100,000 signatures, it will be considered for a debate in parliament.

In mid-March, chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that businesses in England in the retail, hospitality, leisure and childcare sectors were eligible for 100 per cent business rates relief for a year. Similar measures have been introduced in Scotland and Wales, and in Northern Ireland all business have been offered a three-month rates holiday covering April, May and June.

Vet practices do not qualify under the scheme, despite the fact that

many are high street businesses deriving a significant proportion of their income from the sale of pet products and medicines.

The BVA is fighting the financial corner for the veterinary sector. Many practices have experienced dramatic drops in their turnover as they prioritised 24/7 essential care and scaled back their schedules and staffing rotas to keep clients and colleagues safe.

Research by the RCVS in April found that a quarter of practices had seen their weekly turnover reduced by 75 per cent in the early days of lockdown, and two-thirds had seen it halved. A similar survey in May found turnover was beginning to recover but many practices were still facing financial challenges.

As well as supporting the petition, the BVA has written to the Treasury and devolved governments to voice vets' concerns, co-signed a letter alongside eight professional bodies representing human healthcare providers including dentists, optometrists and osteopaths, and mobilised its members to contact their local MPs and devolved parliamentarians with their concerns.

Several hundred BVA members

have already downloaded template letters from the association's website, and parliamentarians representing a wide cross-section of regions and parties have pledged their support.

BVA president Daniella Dos Santos said: 'It's a huge concern that vets are still being overlooked when many other high street businesses have been offered an economic lifeline.

'With the launch of this petition boosting what is already a huge groundswell of support for human and animal healthcare businesses in our communities, we urge the government to look again at how it can protect these vital and valued services.

'The veterinary community is at its strongest when we come together to call for action on the issues that matter most to our profession and animal welfare. Please support this petition and share it widely; every signature helps to amplify vets' concerns and get us a step closer to the government taking action on this critical issue.'

The petition can be signed at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/318568>



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