

Working for you: Welfare and Public Policy Advisory Council

By Bart Sutherland, DVM

Composed of 14 members united by a passion for equine welfare and advocacy, the AAEP's Welfare and Public Policy Advisory Council serves as a vital voice in monitoring welfare issues and matters of public policy affecting both the equine industry and the veterinary profession. Through its work, the council advises AAEP leadership on emerging challenges and recommends courses of action to ensure the association remains a leader in protecting horses and supporting the veterinary community.

Guiding welfare policy updates

Over the past year, the council has reviewed and recommended updates to several AAEP position statements:

- Equine Dentistry
- Thermocautery or Pin Firing
- Use of Hog Rings
- Use of Horses in Urban Environments
- Use of Vesicants

Additionally, after receiving updates from a former USDA staff member and an advisory board representative, the council recommended reapproval of the joint position statement with the AVMA on the Management of Bureau of Land Management Wild Horses and Burros. This issue remains a priority, with further discussion underway to identify the best strategies for addressing overpopulated herds.

Expanding the conversation on Social License to Operate

Recognizing the importance of public perception in equine practice, the council spearheaded a July webinar on social license to operate featuring Dr. Camie Heleski. The session advanced understanding of SLO among members, offering tools to communicate effectively with the public and safeguard the profession's ability to serve horses.

Addressing the midlevel practitioner debate

In response to proposals to create a midlevel veterinary practitioner role, the AAEP convened a dedicated Midlevel Practitioner Task Force. Meeting regularly throughout the year, the task force evaluated potential impacts, aligned messaging and led targeted advocacy. Notable outcomes include:

- Strengthening the AAEP's opposition position statement on midlevel practitioners.
- Assisting Colorado-based AAEP members in publishing op-eds to raise awareness of the risks.
- Delivering timely advocacy resources through informational e-blasts, infographics and social media messaging.
- Publishing an educational article in *Equine Veterinary Education* by Dr. Jim Zeliff, contextualizing Colorado's legislative outcome and implications for other states.

- Hosting a strategic stakeholder meeting at the 2024 AAEP Annual Convention with AVMA, task force members and state advocates.
- Sharing resources with veterinary colleges and AAEP student members to encourage early engagement and informed discussion within the academic community.

Targeting improved Caribbean racehorse welfare

In conjunction with the Racing Committee, the council recommended, and the board of directors approved, allocation of professional expertise and staff time to develop a focused plan of engagement with appropriate stakeholders, with the goal of improving veterinary oversight, racing safety and aftercare for Thoroughbreds in the Caribbean. Members of a subcommittee have been identified and will begin work in 2026.

Looking ahead to 2026

With several projects in progress and new initiatives beginning, the Welfare and Public Policy Advisory Council continues to make meaningful strides on behalf of horses, veterinarians and the future of the profession.

Dr. Sutherland is chair of the Welfare and Public Policy Advisory Council.



Caribbean Thoroughbred Aftercare

Victor Spider made 147 starts at Hipódromo Camarero in Puerto Rico until Caribbean Thoroughbred Aftercare successfully advocated for his retirement in 2017 at the age of 10. CTA reunited Victor Spider with his Kentucky breeder in October 2017, one month after Hurricane Maria decimated the island.