

Caribbean Racehorse Welfare Working Group: Building partnerships to advance equine welfare

By Stuart Brown, DVM, and Raul Bras, DVM, CJF

Editor's Note: With the Wearable Biometric Sensor Research Project presented on page V being a focal point of the Racing Committee's work over the past year, the committee decided to dedicate its spotlight report in this issue to the subject of AAEP's important and ongoing efforts toward enhancing the welfare of racehorses in the Caribbean. This is a joint project overseen by the Racing Committee and Welfare & Public Policy Advisory Council.

In late 2025, the AAEP established the Caribbean Racehorse Welfare Working Group to strengthen equine welfare, veterinary oversight and aftercare for Thoroughbred racehorses in the Caribbean. The formation of the group reflects AAEP's continued commitment to supporting veterinarians and industry partners while promoting consistent welfare standards across the broader U.S. racing ecosystem.

The group comprises Dr. Stuart Brown (chair), Dr. Leah Gray, Dr. Scott Hay, Dr. Joel Lugo, Dr. Nick Smith and Dr. Raul Bras (board liaison).

Why the working group was formed The Caribbean racing community—particularly in Puerto Rico—plays an important role in the broader Thoroughbred industry. At the same time, differences in regulatory frameworks, available resources and infrastructure present unique challenges for maintaining consistent welfare standards.

The working group was charged with developing a focused plan of engagement with key stakeholders to improve veterinary oversight, racing safety and aftercare, while also strengthening AAEP's leadership role in promoting equine welfare across jurisdictions. From the outset, the group emphasized a collaborative, relationship-based approach. Rather than prescribing solutions, members committed to listening first—understanding local challenges, identifying opportunities and building trust with veterinarians, racetrack leadership, regulators and aftercare organizations.

Early engagement and assessment

A January 2026 visit to Puerto Rico marked a significant milestone in the group's work. During the visit, working group members met with veterinarians, racetrack management and regulatory officials to assess current practices and identify areas for improvement. This was heavily supported by relationships fostered through the American Veterinary Medical Association and engagement with College of Veterinary Physicians of Puerto Rico leadership.



Jen Roytz

Dr. Stuart Brown speaks with Puerto Rican regulatory veterinarians.

Discussions centered on several key themes:

- Frequency of racehorse starts within a year-round racing calendar
- Pre-race examination procedures
- Governance and regulatory challenges
- Economic pressures affecting horse populations and care
- Medication regulations and oversight

Veterinarians and track leadership expressed a willingness to engage and improve conditions, and several local stakeholders emerged as strong partners for continued collaboration. The group also emphasized the importance of incremental, achievable changes, such as strengthening veterinary inspections and refining medication practices, as a practical path toward long-term improvement.

Momentum through collaboration Following the January engagement, Hipódromo Camarero's data analyst participated in a three-hour training session with The Jockey Club Information Systems team focused on modules within the Equine Injury Database and risk-factor identification. This step represented meaningful progress toward enhanced injury tracking and risk management.

Collaboration continued in April when Dr. Garcia Blanco, a key veterinary figure in Puerto Rico, visited Keeneland during the spring meet. Hosted by Dr. Stuart Brown and joined by Dr. Nick Smith, Dr. Garcia Blanco observed race day safety protocols, regulatory veterinary workflows and early-morning training oversight.

continued next page

Caribbean Racehorse Welfare Working Group, continued

These exchanges represent a core strategy of the working group: sharing proven practices, shortening the learning curve and fostering sustainable improvements through peer-to-peer collaboration.

Areas of focus

The working group's efforts have centered on three primary areas:

- 1. Veterinary oversight and racing safety** Members have evaluated pre-race and post-race examination procedures, injury reporting practices and medication policies. The group is also identifying best practices drawn from U.S. racing models and the Equine Injury Database to support risk-based safety strategies.
- 2. Stakeholder engagement and education** Continuing education opportunities and professional exchanges remain a key priority. Plans are underway to expand educational programming and strengthen relationships with local veterinary organizations.
- 3. Aftercare and long-term sustainability** Opportunities are being assessed to support aftercare infrastructure and partnerships that promote successful rehabilitation and rehoming of retired racehorses.

Looking ahead

While still in its early stages, the Caribbean Racehorse Welfare Working Group has already made meaningful progress by building relationships, identifying priorities and initiating collaborative projects. The group will continue to:

- Strengthen engagement with local veterinarians and regulators
- Support data-driven safety initiatives
- Expand educational opportunities
- Identify sustainable improvements in veterinary oversight and aftercare
- Provide recommendations and updates to AAEP leadership

This work reflects AAEP's broader commitment to advancing equine welfare through collaboration, professional leadership and practical solutions. By partnering with stakeholders in the Caribbean, AAEP is helping foster improvements that benefit the entire Thoroughbred industry.

Drs. Brown and Bras are the chair and board liaison, respectively, for the AAEP's Caribbean Racehorse Welfare Working Group.