

Strengthening the future of equine practice: AAEP Healthy Practice Committee

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The Healthy Practice Committee was created in 2025 through the strategic merger of three AAEP efforts: the Wellness Committee and two Transforming Equine Practice task forces focused on emergency coverage and practice

culture. This structure reflects a core truth: Individual well-being, team dynamics and practice structure are inseparable. Rather than addressing these challenges in isolation, the committee aims to develop integrated resources and educational programming that enhance the quality of life for veterinarians and their teams.

A year of building momentum

Over the past year, the Healthy Practice Committee has focused on building a strong foundation for long-term impact. A comprehensive 2025–2027 Strategic Plan was developed to outline priorities, goals and opportunities for engagement across the profession.

The committee also articulated its values and mission to guide future initiatives that reflect the realities of modern equine veterinary medicine and ensure that high-quality tools are not only developed but also reach the practitioners who need them most.

Why healthy practice matters

Healthy practice is not a peripheral concept; it is foundational to the sustainability of equine veterinary medicine.

At the individual level, equine veterinarians face long hours, physical risk, emotional investment in patients and clients, and difficulty maintaining boundaries. These pressures can erode wellbeing over time. Creating space for psychological safety, work-life integration and professional growth is critical for preventing burnout.

At the practice level, culture is a defining factor in success. Workplace culture, encompassing shared values, communication styles, recognition and opportunities for growth, directly influences retention, productivity and patient care outcomes. Practices that invest in wellbeing cultivate more engaged teams, stronger collaboration and improved long-term viability.

Importantly, data consistently highlight that veterinarians value culture, mentorship and fulfillment as highly as, if not more than, compensation when choosing where to work. Healthy practice, therefore, is not only about wellbeing but also a key strategy for recruitment and retention in a shrinking workforce.

From resources to action

The Healthy Practice Committee is leveraging recent AAEP resources, such as the Practice Culture and Emergency Coverage Toolkits, to support those in equine practice.

The **Practice Culture Toolkit** outlines seven interconnected pillars: non-salary benefits, physical and mental safety, connection and community, mattering at work, professional and personal life, communication and opportunities for growth.

These pillars reinforce an essential message that no single intervention creates a healthy practice. Rather, sustainable change comes from consistent, collective effort across all aspects of work and life. This toolkit provides actionable tools to help both practice owners and associates make meaningful improvements.

The **Emergency Coverage Toolkit** details innovative emergency coverage models that bring different solutions to assist practitioners in reducing the burden of 24/7 client care. The toolkit provides a step-by-step overview for each emergency coverage model.

Looking ahead: A year-long campaign

Building on this momentum, the Healthy Practice Committee will launch its first coordinated annual campaign at the 2026 AAEP Annual Convention in Las Vegas, centered on the theme: **#HealthyPracticeStartsWithMe**

This campaign will emphasize that meaningful change begins with individual awareness and action, while also recognizing the importance of team and organizational support.

Over the course of the year, the campaign will feature rotating themes and multiple member touchpoints, including:

- Highlighting existing toolkits and practical resources
- Webinar programming tied to real-world challenges
- Practice-based challenges to encourage implementation
- Educational content across meetings, digital platforms and social media

This structured approach aligns with the committee's strategic goal of creating consistent visibility, engagement and cultural shift across the profession.

Join the movement

The work of the Healthy Practice Committee is rooted in a simple but powerful idea that when veterinarians and their teams thrive, so do horses, clients and the profession as a whole.

Whether you start by exploring an AAEP toolkit, attending a webinar or making a small change within your own practice, the invitation is the same: Healthy practice starts with you!

Drs. Whitehead and Graves are chair and vice chair, respectively, of the Healthy Practice Committee.