

Helping Students Explore Veterinary Medicine

A guidance counsellor resource from the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association

For students who dream of becoming veterinarians, the journey begins well before veterinary college. After high school, students enter an undergraduate program where they complete the required university courses while developing the knowledge, experience and personal skills needed for the profession. Guidance counsellors can play an important role by helping students understand this pathway, recognize their strengths and identify meaningful next steps.

The education pathway in Ontario

Stage	What students should understand
1. High school	Build a strong base in science, mathematics, English and communication. Choose Grade 12 courses required for the undergraduate programs the student is considering.
2. Undergraduate study	Complete at least four full-time university semesters and the eight OVC prerequisite courses. There is no required undergraduate major; prerequisites may be completed within a degree program in any field.
3. DVM program	Apply to the four-year Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program. Admission is highly competitive and considers academic performance, a situational judgement test, experiences, essays, referees and an interview.
4. Licensure	After earning an accredited veterinary degree, graduates must meet the registration requirements of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario before practising in Ontario.

High school course planning

High school courses are not the OVC prerequisites. They determine which undergraduate programs a student can enter. Biology, chemistry and senior mathematics are usually useful preparation, but counsellors should check the admission requirements for each undergraduate program rather than steering every student to one particular degree.

What to notice in a prospective student

Quality	What it may look like
Academic readiness	Interest and ability in science, willingness to ask questions, steady study habits and the capacity to manage a demanding workload.
Communication and empathy	Comfort listening to people, explaining ideas clearly and responding respectfully when someone is worried, upset or uncertain.
Initiative and reflection	A pattern of seeking information, learning from experience and explaining how an activity changed their understanding.

Quality	What it may look like
Responsibility and integrity	Reliability, sound judgement, care with details and willingness to acknowledge limits or mistakes.
Teamwork and community involvement	Evidence that the student can work with others and contribute beyond activities connected to animals.
Resilience and self-regulation	Healthy ways of managing setbacks, competing responsibilities, stress and long-term goals.

How counsellors can guide students

- Help the student compare undergraduate programs by course requirements, cost, location, available supports and whether the program offers room for the OVC prerequisites.
- Encourage breadth. Veterinary medicine includes companion-animal and large-animal practice, public health, government, industry, research, teaching and other roles.
- Help the student seek experiences that build understanding rather than collect impressive-sounding hours. OVC currently sets no minimum number of veterinary, animal or extracurricular hours.
- Encourage the student to keep a simple experience log with dates, supervisor names, responsibilities, hours and short reflections about what they learned.
- Remind students that veterinarians work extensively with people. Employment, community service, sports, arts, caregiving and leadership can all build relevant skills.
- Advise the student to revisit requirements during university. Admission policies can change, and students are responsible for checking current OVC information.

Ideas when veterinary clinic access is limited

A student can begin exploring the field before securing formal veterinary experience. Useful options include:

- Requesting a short informational interview with a veterinarian or another veterinary professional.
- Volunteering or working with a shelter, farm, stable, wildlife rehabilitation organization, animal-care business or community program where appropriate opportunities exist.
- Joining or starting a science, agriculture, environment or animal-welfare club at school.
- Exploring One Health topics that connect animal, human and environmental health.
- Taking part in community service, paid work, team activities or leadership roles that strengthen communication and responsibility.
- Attending an OVC tour, open house or admissions information session when available.

Questions that help students think more deeply

- What have you learned about veterinary medicine beyond treating pets?
- Which parts of the work interest you, and which parts might be difficult for you?
- What experience could help you test whether this career fits your interests and strengths?
- What barriers could affect your path, and what support or funding might help?
- What have your jobs, activities or responsibilities taught you about working with people?
- If a clinic placement is not available, what is one realistic next step you can take?

Using the OVMA Future Veterinarian Bursary

OVMA offers three \$1,000 bursaries for Ontario high school students who aspire to become veterinarians and who meet the bursary eligibility requirements. Guidance counsellors can help identify students who may not see themselves represented in the profession, share the opportunity, and help students think about a specific use of the funds that would broaden their exposure to veterinary medicine. Examples may include a program or course, travel to a learning or volunteer opportunity, educational resources or required equipment.

Current official information

OVC DVM admissions and requirements uoguelph.ca/ovc/dvm-program-application

OVC program and career overview uoguelph.ca/programs/doctor-veterinary-medicine

OVC tours and open houses uoguelph.ca/ovc/dvm/tours-and-open-houses

Ontario veterinary registration cvo.org

Information checked September 2026. Admission and licensing requirements may change. Students should confirm current requirements directly with OVC and the College of Veterinarians of Ontario.