

Modernising Veterinary Regulation in India: A Framework for Establishing a National Veterinary Commission

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Abstract: *Veterinary education and professional regulation in India are currently governed by the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984, enacted under Article 252(1) of the Constitution. While the framework administered by the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) has historically ensured baseline uniformity in undergraduate veterinary education and professional registration, its inspection-centric, input-based, and structurally centralised model has become increasingly misaligned with contemporary national and global requirements. These include outcome-based competency assurance, One Health integration, zoonotic disease preparedness, antimicrobial resistance, global professional mobility, and cooperative federalism. This policy paper proposes a comprehensive restructuring of veterinary regulation through the establishment of a National Veterinary Commission (NVC). Drawing upon international best practices and reforms in professional regulation, the proposed framework introduces functional separation of regulatory roles through autonomous Boards for educational standards, accreditation, licensing and registration, and ethics and professional discipline. The model aligns veterinary education with World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Day-1 competencies, establishes transparent pathways for recognition of foreign veterinary qualifications, and strengthens continuing professional development and licensing oversight. Recognising the unique constitutional basis of veterinary regulation in India, the paper emphasises reaffirmed State consent, phased transition, and a two-tier federal representation architecture to ensure inclusivity without compromising efficiency. The proposed NVC is positioned as a future-ready Professional Standards-Setting Body capable of enhancing regulatory credibility, safeguarding public health, and strengthening India's global standing in animal health.*

Keywords: Veterinary regulation reform; National Veterinary Commission; competency based veterinary education; One Health governance; professional licensing standards

1. Introduction

Veterinary education and professional regulation occupy a strategic position at the intersection of animal health, public health, food safety, biosecurity, and rural livelihoods. In a country such as India- home to one of the world's largest livestock populations and a rapidly expanding veterinary education sector- the effectiveness of veterinary regulation has direct implications for economic sustainability, zoonotic disease control, antimicrobial stewardship, and One Health governance. Ensuring a competent, ethical, and globally comparable veterinary workforce is therefore a matter of national public interest rather than a purely professional concern.

India's veterinary regulatory framework is presently governed by the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984, administered through the Veterinary Council of India (VCI). Enacted under Article 252(1) of the Constitution, the Act provided an important foundation for standardising undergraduate veterinary education, recognising qualifications, and maintaining professional registers across States. For several decades, this framework contributed to national uniformity and institutional expansion of veterinary education.

However, the regulatory architecture has remained largely unchanged despite profound transformations in higher education governance, veterinary science, and public health priorities. The current system continues to rely predominantly on inspection-centric, input-based regulation, with limited emphasis on outcome-based competencies, continuing professional development, global equivalence, or structured

One Health integration. The concentration of standard-setting, inspection, recognition, and professional oversight within a single statutory body has further raised concerns relating to regulatory overload, transparency, and functional efficiency.

At the same time, India's federal structure and the constitutional basis of veterinary regulation impose specific constraints on reform. Veterinary practice remains closely linked to State responsibilities for animal husbandry and service delivery, necessitating any national regulatory reform to be constitutionally grounded and federally inclusive. Recent reforms in medical and allied health regulation, along with evolving international veterinary regulatory models, nevertheless provide important reference points for modernisation.

Against this backdrop, this policy paper examines the limitations of the existing veterinary regulatory framework and proposes a comprehensive restructuring through the establishment of a National Veterinary Commission (NVC), drawing upon the reform experience of the medical and allied health education sector and aligned with international veterinary regulatory best practices, including those of the **World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)**. The paper advances a future-oriented regulatory model based on functional separation, competency-based standards, cooperative federalism, and global alignment, with the objective of strengthening regulatory credibility, public trust, and India's preparedness for emerging animal and public health challenges.

2. Background and Rationale

2.1 Indian Veterinary Council Act' 1984 – Brief

The Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 is a central legislation enacted to regulate veterinary education and the practice of the veterinary profession in India. The Act ensures uniform standards of education, ethical professional conduct, and quality veterinary services across the country. The Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 forms the legal foundation of veterinary education and professional regulation in India. It ensures standardization of education, professional accountability, ethical practice, and public confidence in veterinary services, thereby supporting animal health, livestock development, and public health objectives.

2.1.1 Enactment of the IVC Act'84

In the constitution of India Animal Husbandry is a subject dealt under various items included in the list II (state list -15. Preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases; veterinary training and practice.) and in the list III (concurrent list), in the seventh schedule to the constitution of India. But profession and education are listed under list III (ie. concurrent list as item 25 and item 26). Veterinary education and veterinary practice deals with professional service delivery to all animals including, animal care, animal production, animal husbandry, animal health, veterinary medical attendance, animal related technology and community development through animal resource development.

The Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 has been framed in pursuance of clause (1) of Article 252 of the Constitution, resolutions have been initially passed by the houses of legislature of the State of Haryana, Bihar, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan to the effect that the matters under the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 should be regulated in those States by Parliament by Law. The Act has now been adopted by all the State/UT. Hence, veterinary practice and education are now being governed by a central Act viz. Indian veterinary Council Act, 1984 (52, of 1984).

2.1.2 Objectives of the Act

- To regulate veterinary education in India
- To prescribe minimum standards of veterinary education
- To recognize veterinary qualifications
- To regulate registration and professional conduct of veterinary practitioners
- To ensure availability of competent veterinary manpower

2.1.3 Veterinary Council of India (VCI)

The Act provides for the establishment of the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) as a statutory body under the Central Government responsible for regulation of veterinary education and maintenance of professional standards.

The Council consists of:

- Elected representatives from amongst the Registered Veterinary Practitioners (RVP)
- Nominees of the Central Government (Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, M/o Fisheries Animal Husbandry & Dairying; and Indian Council of Agricultural Research, M/o Agriculture)
- Representatives of veterinary educational institutions

- Representatives from the State Animal Husbandry Departments.
- Representative from State Veterinary Association and Indian Veterinary Association
- Representative from State Veterinary Council
- Ex-officio members.

The VCI is responsible for:

- Prescribing minimum standards of veterinary education
- Recognition and withdrawal of recognition of veterinary qualifications, including Letter of permission, Final recognition for new proposals of veterinary colleges and increasing the total number of admissions to under graduate programme.
- Inspection of veterinary colleges and institutions
- Maintenance of the Indian Veterinary Register
- Laying down standards of professional conduct and ethics

2.1.4 Minimum Standards of Veterinary Education (MSVE)

MSVE Regulations operationalize the Indian Veterinary Council Act by translating statutory intent into enforceable academic, infrastructural, physical facilities and clinical standards for veterinary education in India. VCI prescribes standards relating to curriculum, duration of course, faculty, infrastructure, clinical & livestock farm training, and compulsory internship to ensure uniformity across India. The Minimum Standards of Veterinary Education (MSVE) Regulations are framed under the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 to ensure uniform, high-quality veterinary education across India. The Regulations are notified by the Veterinary Council of India with approval of the Central Government and are mandatory for all veterinary colleges awarding recognized veterinary qualifications. These recognised qualifications form the basis for registration of persons possessing such qualifications by the State Veterinary Councils and subsequently in the Indian Veterinary Practitioner register by VCI.

The MSVE Regulations aim to:

- 1) Standardize curriculum, infrastructure, and training quality
- 2) Ensure adequate clinical exposure and skill development
- 3) Maintain minimum faculty strength and qualifications
- 4) Produce competent, practice-ready veterinary graduates
- 5) Link institutional capacity with educational quality
- 6) Structured the Degree Programme specifying various standard requirements for the award of a recognised veterinary qualification.
- 7) Centrally prescribed curriculum which includes
 - a) Basic sciences: Anatomy, Physiology, Biochemistry
 - b) Para-clinical subjects: Pathology, Microbiology, Pharmacology, Parasitology
 - c) Clinical subjects: Medicine, Public Health & Epidemiology, Surgery, Gynaecology, Radiology
 - d) Animal production: Animal Nutrition, Livestock Farm Management, Livestock Product Technology, Animal Breeding, Poultry, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry Extension
 - e) Public health & One Health components
 - f) Practical-oriented and skill-based training is emphasized

- 8) Faculty Norms
 - a) Minimum number of faculty prescribed department-wise
 - b) Defined teacher-student ratio
 - c) Mandatory qualifications as per VCI norms
 - d) Adequate professorial leadership in clinical and production disciplines
- 9) Set norms for Infrastructure and Facilities for Veterinary colleges which must possess:
 - a) Fully functional Veterinary Teaching Hospital
 - b) Diagnostic laboratories (pathology, microbiology, imaging, etc.)
 - c) Instructional farms (livestock, poultry, fodder)
 - d) Adequate lecture halls, laboratories, library, hostels
 - e) Teaching aids and clinical equipment as per norms
- 10) Clinical Training and Internship
 - a) Hands-on clinical exposure is compulsory
 - b) Internship includes:
 - Medicine, Surgery, Gynaecology
 - Livestock farms, diagnostic labs
 - Animal Products Technology
 - Field veterinary institutions
 - Zoo & Biological Parks, Slaughter Houses
 - Internship completion is mandatory for degree award and registration
- 11) Student Intake and Capacity
 - a) Student intake is linked to infrastructure, faculty, and clinical load
 - b) No college may admit students beyond VCI-approved capacity
 - c) Intake is reviewed through periodic inspections
- 12) Inspection and Compliance
 - a) VCI conducts statutory inspections to verify MSVE compliance
 - b) Inspection outcomes determine:
 - Continuation or withdrawal of recognition
 - Admission capacity
 - Letter of Intent/Permission, Final recognition of new colleges
 - Persistent non-compliance may lead to regulatory action
- 13) Regulatory Significance: The MSVE Regulations:
 - a) Serve as the academic quality benchmark for veterinary education
 - b) Link educational standards with professional registration
 - c) Protect public interest, animal health, and food safety
 - d) Form the backbone of national uniformity in veterinary training

2.1.5 Recognition of Veterinary Qualifications

Only qualifications recognized under the Act are valid for registration. Graduates from unrecognized institutions are not eligible to practice veterinary medicine. As such graduates

from veterinary institution, both within and without India, which are not included in the schedules to the Act'84 for the time being are not allowed to practice in India. Further, institutions outside India which are not mutually recognized under the "Scheme of Reciprocity" are also not considered for registration with state/central Council for a license to practice in India. This is also an impediment to "Trade in Services" with interested countries.

2.1.6 Registration of Veterinary Practitioners: The Act provides for:

- State Veterinary Registers maintained by State Veterinary Councils
- An Indian Veterinary Register maintained by the VCI

Only persons whose names are entered in the register are legally entitled to:

- Practice veterinary medicine
- Use professional titles such as Veterinary Surgeon or Veterinary Practitioner
- Admitted to the privileges of a veterinarian under the IVC Act'84.

2.1.7 Professional Conduct and Ethics

- The VCI prescribes standards of professional conduct, etiquette, and ethics.
- State Veterinary Councils are empowered to inquire into cases of professional misconduct.
- Disciplinary actions may include warning, suspension, or removal from the register.

2.1.8 State Veterinary Councils: State Veterinary Councils are responsible for:

- Registration of veterinary practitioners within the state
- Maintenance of State Veterinary Registers
- Enforcement of professional ethics and disciplinary control
- Implementation of directions issued by the VCI

2.1.9 Offences and Penalties

The Act prescribes penalties for:

- Practicing veterinary medicine without registration
- Falsely claiming recognized veterinary qualifications
- Improper use of veterinary professional titles
- Indulging in unethical practice by registered veterinary practitioners.

2.1.10 Rule and Regulation Making Powers

- The Central Government may make rules to carry out the provisions of the Act.
- The VCI may frame regulations with prior approval of the Central Government

2.1.11 Functional Powers: VCI vs State Veterinary Councils

Aspect / Function	Veterinary Council of India (VCI)	State Veterinary Councils (SVC's)
Statutory Basis	Central Act, 1984	Constituted under State laws
Educational Standards	Prescribes Minimum Standards of Veterinary Education (MSVE)	No mandate
Recognition of Colleges	Grants / withdrawals of recognition of veterinary qualifications. Also includes permission for admission to new colleges.	No Mandate
Number of admissions	Decides the annual number of admissions to a college.	No Mandate
Inspection of Institutions	Conducts inspections through inspectors	No Mandate
Registration	Maintains Indian Veterinary Register	Maintains State Veterinary Register – Primary
Professional Ethics	Frames standards of professional conduct	Enforces ethics and conducts disciplinary proceedings
Disciplinary Action	Lays down ethical framework	Suspension/removal of practitioners
Rule / Regulation Making	Frames regulations with Central Government approval	Frames state-level rules as per IVC Act
Jurisdiction	All-India	Within the concerned State

2.2 Limitations of the Existing Regulatory Framework under the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984

The Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984, enacted at a time when veterinary education and services in India were limited in scale and scope, provided a statutory basis for standardisation of veterinary education and maintenance of professional registers through the Veterinary Council of India (VCI). While the Act has served an important historical function, several structural and functional limitations have emerged over time, constraining its effectiveness in addressing contemporary national and global veterinary challenges.

The present regulatory system is characterised by:

- Concentration of standard-setting, inspection, recognition, and disciplinary functions within a single body
- Predominant reliance on input-based and infrastructure-centric regulation
- Limited emphasis on outcome-based competencies and continuing professional development
- Absence of an independent accreditation and assessment mechanism
- Inadequate provision for global equivalence, cross-border mobility, and recognition of foreign veterinary qualifications
- Fragmented engagement with One Health, zoonotic disease preparedness, and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) frameworks

2.2.1 Over-Centralisation of Regulatory Functions

The Act vests academic standard-setting, inspection, recognition of institutions, professional registration, and elements of disciplinary control within a single statutory body. This concentration of functions has resulted in regulatory overload, limited internal checks and balances, and blurred accountability, reducing both efficiency and transparency.

2.2.2 Inspection-Centric and Input-Based Regulation

Regulation under the Act is predominantly focused on physical infrastructure, faculty numbers, and input compliance. Educational quality, learning outcomes, graduate competencies, and societal impact receive limited systematic evaluation, leading to weak assurance of professional competence.

2.2.3 Absence of Independent Accreditation Mechanism

The Act does not distinguish between *recognition* and *accreditation*. As a result, veterinary institutions are either recognised or derecognised, with no graded quality assessment, benchmarking, or incentive for continuous improvement, contrary to modern quality assurance practices.

2.2.4 Lack of Competency-Based Licensing

The existing framework does not provide for a national licensing or exit examination to objectively assess minimum professional competence. Registration is largely qualification-based, without uniform validation of skills, clinical readiness, or professional behaviour at the point of entry into practice.

2.2.5 Weak Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework

The Act does not mandate continuing professional development or link licence validity to periodic competency renewal. In a rapidly evolving field encompassing animal health, public health, food safety, and emerging zoonoses, this results in skill stagnation and uneven professional standards. Skill development through training of registered veterinary practitioners is not mandatory, thus, enforcement of skill development is compromised.

2.2.6 Inadequate Provisions for Veterinary Public Health and One Health

Although veterinary services play a critical role in zoonotic disease control, food safety, and antimicrobial resistance, the Act does not explicitly recognise veterinary public health or One Health as regulatory priorities. Inter-sectoral coordination with human health and environmental authorities remains largely ad hoc.

2.2.7 Ambiguous or Limited Role of State Veterinary Councils

While State Veterinary Councils are responsible for registration, their statutory roles in licensing oversight, ethics enforcement, and professional discipline are not clearly delineated. This leads to variability in regulatory practice across States and weak Centre-State coordination.

2.2.8 Absence of Structured Framework for Foreign Qualifications

The Act lacks explicit provisions for recognition of foreign veterinary qualifications and licensing of foreign veterinarians. Decisions, where taken, are ad hoc, non-

transparent, and poorly aligned with global equivalence frameworks, limiting academic exchange, international collaboration, and emergency deployment of expertise.

2.2.9 Protocol for Indian students travelling abroad for foreign qualifications

Absence of any protocol which establishes a **transparent, competency-based, and student-protective framework** for Indian citizens seeking veterinary education abroad, aligned with global best practices and comparable to foreign medical education regulations puts the prospective students at a disadvantage and legal implications on return to India. A protocol which safeguards students, preserves professional standards, ensures global comparability, and protects animal and public health interests while enabling legitimate international educational mobility should be in place.

2.2.10 Limited Global Alignment

The regulatory framework does not systematically align with internationally accepted veterinary competency standards, such as those articulated by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). This constrains international recognition of Indian veterinary qualifications and professional mobility.

2.2.11 Inadequate Transparency and Digital Governance

The Act predates modern digital governance principles. Processes related to inspections, recognition, registration, and grievance redressal remain largely paper-based, with limited public disclosure, time-bound decision-making, or outcome monitoring.

2.2.12 Federal Representation and Consultative Deficit

Although veterinary education and service delivery are largely State responsibilities, the Act provides limited structured mechanisms for meaningful participation of all States in national regulatory decision-making, contributing to implementation gaps and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

2.2.13 Limited Scope of Regulation of Veterinary Education under VCI: Structural Constraints

The regulatory mandate of the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) under the *Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984* is largely confined to undergraduate veterinary education (B.V.Sc. & A.H.), primarily through the prescription of Minimum Standards of Veterinary Education (MSVE) and recognition of veterinary qualifications for registration purposes. While this framework has contributed to a degree of national uniformity in undergraduate curricula and institutional infrastructure, it suffers from a structural limitation arising from the parallel governance of postgraduate veterinary education by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Postgraduate (M.V.Sc. and Ph.D.) veterinary education is regulated through ICAR-led mechanisms, including accreditation, curriculum guidelines, faculty norms, and research prioritization under the National Agricultural Education System (NAES). This bifurcation has resulted in a fragmented regulatory ecosystem, wherein undergraduate education, professional licensure, postgraduate training, and research advancement are not governed within a unified professional framework.

Consequently, VCI has limited influence over postgraduate competency development, advanced clinical specialisation, research orientation, and faculty capacity building, despite these being critical determinants of professional standards, teaching quality, and service delivery in veterinary practice. The absence of regulatory continuity across undergraduate and postgraduate levels also weakens vertical academic integration, disrupts outcome-based professional progression, and constrains alignment with global veterinary education models, where professional councils typically regulate education across all levels.

This structural separation underscores the need for **regulatory harmonisation or functional integration** between professional standard-setting and academic accreditation systems.

The confinement of VCI's regulatory authority to undergraduate education, with postgraduate veterinary education governed separately by ICAR, has led to fragmented professional oversight, limiting holistic standard-setting and weakening vertical integration of veterinary education in India.

2.2.14 Disproportionate representation of Staes/UT in the Council body

The composition of the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) under the *Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984* does not ensure equitable and proportionate representation of all States and Union Territories within its decision-making structure. Representation is largely determined through a combination of nominated, elected, and ex-officio members, rather than through a transparent, population- or institution-linked formula, resulting in uneven participation across regions.

As a consequence, States with a large livestock population, higher density of veterinary institutions, or greater service delivery burden may not have commensurate representation in national regulatory deliberations, while smaller or administratively privileged jurisdictions may be relatively over-represented. Several Union Territories and newly created States also experience limited or inconsistent representation, weakening their voice in national standard-setting and policy formulation.

This imbalance has multiple implications:

- **Regional disparities in regulatory influence**, affecting curriculum design, inspection priorities, and institutional recognition;
- **Limited contextual sensitivity** to agro-climatic diversity, production systems, and disease epidemiology across States;
- Reduced **ownership and compliance** with national regulations at the State level;
- Weak alignment between national veterinary education standards and **state-specific service delivery realities**.

In the context of cooperative federalism, the absence of a structured, inclusive, and proportionate State/UT representation mechanism constrains the legitimacy and effectiveness of the VCI as a national professional regulator. This underscores the need for a restructured council or commission-based model with balanced State/UT

representation, potentially through zonal groupings, rotational membership, or objective representation criteria linked to livestock population and institutional capacity.

The absence of proportionate and inclusive State/UT representation within the VCI weakens federal balance, regional responsiveness, and national ownership of veterinary regulatory decisions.

2.2.15 Absence of mandate for setting Minimum Standards for Veterinary Practice and Veterinary Service Institutions

The Veterinary Council of India, under the *Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984*, is primarily mandated to regulate veterinary education and professional registration, with no explicit statutory authority to prescribe, monitor, or enforce Minimum Standards for Veterinary Practice (MSVP) or Minimum Standards for Veterinary Service Institutions (MSVSI) such as veterinary hospitals, polyclinics, dispensaries, diagnostic laboratories, and field service units.

This regulatory gap has resulted in significant variability in clinical infrastructure, service quality, biosafety practices, diagnostic capability, and ethical compliance across public and private veterinary service institutions in India. Unlike human healthcare- where professional councils and clinical establishment laws define facility-level and practice-level standards- veterinary service delivery remains largely outside a nationally enforceable professional quality framework.

The absence of defined practice and institutional standards also limits the ability to:

- Ensure **uniform quality of veterinary clinical services** across states;
- Link **professional registration and renewal** to demonstrable clinical competence and ethical practice;
- Enforce **biosecurity, animal welfare, antimicrobial stewardship, and One Health obligations**;
- Accredit **teaching hospitals and clinical training facilities** based on service delivery benchmarks.

Further, in the context of expanding private veterinary practice, corporate clinics, diagnostic chains, and para-veterinary service providers, the lack of a statutory standard-setting mechanism constrains public accountability, consumer protection, and international alignment with global veterinary regulatory systems.

This institutional vacuum highlights the need for an empowered Professional Standard-Setting Body or a restructured national veterinary regulator with explicit authority to frame, notify, and periodically update minimum standards for veterinary practice and service institutions, in alignment with One Health objectives and global best practices.

The absence of statutory authority to define minimum standards for veterinary practice and service institutions represents a critical regulatory gap, undermining quality assurance, ethical enforcement, and uniformity in veterinary service delivery in India.

As such, these limitations, taken together indicate that the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984, reflects a **legacy regulatory model** suited to an earlier phase of veterinary education development. The contemporary demands of competency assurance, One Health governance, global equivalence, transparency, and federal participation require a **structural and functional reconfiguration**, rather than incremental amendments. These constraints form the principal rationale for transitioning towards a modern regulatory architecture through the proposed National Veterinary Commission.

3. Objectives of Re-structuring

The objectives of this re-structuring should be to:

- 1) Establish a modern, transparent, and competency-based veterinary regulatory framework
- 2) Align veterinary education and practice standards with WOAH Day-1 Competencies and One Health principles
- 3) Separate standard-setting, accreditation, licensing, and disciplinary functions
- 4) Facilitate global recognition and mobility of Indian veterinary qualifications
- 5) Provide a clear framework for recognition and licensing of foreign veterinary qualifications and practitioners.
- 6) Provide a transparent protocol for students intending to travel abroad for foreign qualification and safeguarding mutual interests.
- 7) Strengthen quality assurance, ethical conduct, and professional accountability
- 8) Enhance India's preparedness in animal health emergencies, zoonoses, food safety, and biosecurity

4. Establishment of the National Veterinary Commission (NVC)

India's veterinary education and professional regulation framework, governed by the Veterinary Council of India under the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984, is increasingly misaligned with contemporary requirements of higher education governance, One Health integration, and global professional mobility. Structural concentration of powers, inspection-driven regulation, limited outcome orientation, and weak global equivalence mechanisms have constrained the system's responsiveness and credibility. This brief suggests the establishment of a National Veterinary Commission (NVC) as a statutory, autonomous Professional Body. The proposed NVC introduces functional separation through independent boards for education standards, accreditation, licensing, and professional ethics; strengthens federal representation of States; and integrates global veterinary norms articulated by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). The NVC model aims to modernise veterinary regulation in India, enhance educational quality and accountability, facilitate international recognition of qualifications, and support national priorities in public health, food safety, and One Health.

Veterinary education and professional regulation in India operate at the intersection of animal health, public health, food security, and rural livelihoods. Since its enactment, the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 has provided a statutory basis for minimum standards of veterinary education and

professional registration. However, the regulatory architecture has remained largely unchanged despite:

- Rapid expansion of veterinary institutions across States
- Increasing diversity in ownership models (public, private, PPP)
- Emergence of One Health imperatives (zoonoses, AMR, climate change)
- Globalisation of veterinary education and cross-border professional mobility
- Redefining higher education system

4.1 Rationale for a National Veterinary Commission

The proposed National Veterinary Commission (NVC) is not a nominal replacement of the VCI but a paradigm shift in regulatory philosophy, consistent with international best practices.

The NVC is envisaged as a **statutory, autonomous, professionally led commission**, operating at arm's length from Government while remaining accountable to Parliament. Its design reflects three core principles:

- **Functional separation** to avoid regulatory capture
- **Outcome-based standards** aligned with global competencies
- **Cooperative federalism** with structured State participation

4.2 Nature and Legal Status of the NVC

- Established through a **National Veterinary Commission Act**, repealing the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984
- Constituted as a **body corporate** with perpetual succession
- Empowered to frame binding regulations and codes of practice
- Subject to **Parliamentary oversight, CAG audit, and judicial review**

4.2.1 Constitution

The NVC would function as India's apex **Professional Standards-Setting and Regulatory Body** for veterinary education and practice. A National Veterinary Commission could be established as a statutory body by replacing the existing Veterinary Council of India through appropriate amendment of the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 or appropriate statutory changes in legal consultation.

4.2.2 Nature and Status

The NVC may function as an autonomous apex regulatory body under the administrative control of the Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Government of India, with clearly defined functional independence and accountability mechanisms.

5. Organisational Structure and Governance Architecture of NVC

5.1 Apex Commission

The NVC would comprise a Chairperson and Members drawn primarily from the veterinary profession, supplemented by experts in public health, education, and governance, with

limited ex-officio Government representation. This structure ensures **professional leadership with public accountability**.

The proposed restructuring represents a transformative shift in veterinary regulation in India. By establishing the National Veterinary Commission and aligning veterinary education and practice with global standards and national priorities, India will strengthen its veterinary workforce, enhance public trust, and position itself as a global leader in animal health and One Health governance.

5.1.1 Functional Boards – Regulatory Philosophy: Why Functional Separation Is Necessary

Modern professional regulation has moved away from **monolithic councils** toward **functionally disaggregated regulatory architectures**. This shift is rooted in the recognition that **concentration of powers**- standard setting, inspection, accreditation, registration, and discipline- within a single body leads to:

- Conflicts of interest
- Procedural opacity
- Regulatory capture
- Weak accountability

The existing framework under the Veterinary Council of India exemplifies these risks, as the same authority simultaneously prescribes standards, inspects institutions, grants recognition, and maintains professional registers.

The creation of four vertical Boards under the NVC is not an administrative expansion but a structural necessity. It represents a deliberate shift from centralised, inspection-driven regulation to functionally specialised, standards-based governance.

This architecture:

- Protects academic freedom
- Enhances professional accountability
- Strengthens public trust
- Future-proofs veterinary regulation in India
- Effective regulation is achieved not by concentrating power, but by designing institutions that limit it.

5.1.2 Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

Each Board performs **one core regulatory function**, eliminating situations where the same authority:

- Sets standards and certifies compliance
- Accredits institutions it has already approved
- Disciplines professionals it has licensed without independent review

5.1.3 Enhanced Accountability and Transparency

- Clear attribution of responsibility
- Measurable performance indicators for each Board
- Easier Parliamentary, audit, and judicial scrutiny

The proposed National Veterinary Commission addresses these structural deficiencies through **four vertical Boards**, each with **clearly demarcated mandates**, ensuring transparency, objectivity, and regulatory credibility.

To ensure clarity of roles and prevent conflicts of interest, the NVC would operate through independent boards. The NVC may consist of the following autonomous vertical boards:

5.2 Veterinary Education Standards Board (VESB)

5.2.1 Functions

- Prescribe minimum standards of veterinary education
- Develop competency-based curricula aligned with WOAH Day-1 Competencies
- Specify faculty qualifications, infrastructure norms, and learning outcomes
- Promote digital learning, simulation, and experiential education

5.2.2 Justification:

- Separation of “standards” from “assessment” is a core principle of outcome-based regulation.
- Curriculum design, faculty norms, and clinical exposure standards require **academic expertise**, not inspection authority.
- Allows transition from **input-based norms** (infrastructure counts) to **competency-based frameworks** (graduate outcomes, skills, ethics, One Health preparedness).

The creation of this Board encourages innovation and flexibility in curriculum delivery. It also aligns Indian veterinary education with global competency frameworks (e.g., Day-1 competencies) and protects academic autonomy while maintaining minimum national benchmarks. Without a dedicated standards board, regulation inevitably regresses to checklist-based compliance.

5.3 Veterinary Assessment & Accreditation Board (VAAB)

5.3.1 Functions

- Conduct outcome-based accreditation of veterinary colleges and institutions
- Develop graded accreditation and autonomy frameworks
- Benchmark Indian veterinary institutions against international accreditation systems
- Periodically review institutional academic and clinical performance

5.3.2 Justification:

- Accreditation is an **evaluative and evidence-based function**, not a prescriptive one.
- Separating accreditation from standard setting prevents **self-validation** by the regulator.
- Independent accreditation cycles (5–7 years) reduce inspection fatigue and political influence.

This Board will shift regulation from permission-based control to trust-based quality assurance, encourage continuous institutional improvement rather than episodic compliance and enable convergence with national accreditation systems without diluting professional specificity. Global best practice treats accreditation as an assurance function- not an extension of regulatory control.

5.4 Veterinary Practice & Registration Board (VPRB)

5.4.1 Functions

- Maintain a National Register of Veterinarians
- Grant licences to practice veterinary medicine in India
- Implement re-licensing linked to Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Facilitate interstate and international professional mobility
- Regulate recognition and licensing of foreign-qualified veterinarians

5.4.2 Justification:

- a) Registration and licensing affect **public safety, animal health, and food systems** and must be insulated from academic or institutional interests.
- b) Licensing decisions require **competency verification**, ethical screening, and examination governance.
- c) A dedicated Board enables structured pathways for:
 - Interstate mobility
 - Foreign veterinary graduates
 - National licensing examinations

The creation of this is important for establishing a single, credible National Veterinary Register; Enhance professional mobility while safeguarding public interest; and enable transparent and defensible decisions on foreign qualification recognition. Licensing is a public trust function and must be institutionally independent.

5.5 Ethics, Professional Conduct & Discipline Board (EPCDB)

5.5.1 Functions

- Frame and enforce the Code of Veterinary Ethics
- Adjudicate professional misconduct
- Address public grievances
- Coordinate disciplinary action with State Veterinary Councils

5.5.2 Justification

- Ethical regulation requires **quasi-judicial independence** and due process.
- Combining disciplinary powers with education or licensing functions risks bias and procedural unfairness.
- A dedicated ethics board ensures separation between **entry-to-practice** and **fitness-to-practise** decisions.

Creation of this Board will ensure to strengthen public confidence in the veterinary profession; Protect practitioners from arbitrary or politically influenced disciplinary action; and enable uniform ethical standards across States while respecting federal roles. Professional self-regulation is credible only when ethics enforcement is structurally independent.

6. Composition of the Apex Commission and Boards: A Federal Representation Model for the National Veterinary Commission

India's veterinary sector operates within a highly diverse federal landscape comprising **28 States and 8 Union Territories**, each characterised by distinct agro-ecological

conditions, livestock compositions, disease epidemiology, rural livelihood dependencies, and policy priorities in animal husbandry and livestock development. Any proposed governance architecture for a National Veterinary Commission (NVC) must therefore be constitutionally defensible, politically acceptable, and administratively functional across this diversity.

While there is a legitimate demand for explicit representation of all States and Union Territories in national veterinary regulation, direct inclusion of representatives from all States and UTs in the apex body would render the Commission excessively large, politically unwieldy, and operationally inefficient. International experience with large elected councils suggests a heightened risk of politicisation, decision paralysis, and dilution of technical focus. Accordingly, a **two-tier federal representation model** is proposed, balancing inclusivity with efficiency.

6.1 Two-Tier Federal Representation Architecture

The proposed governance structure rests on two complementary pillars:

- A **compact Apex Commission** with strategic and normative authority, and
- A **statutorily embedded State Representation Council (SRC)** providing structured, continuous State participation across all regulatory functions.

This model ensures that every State and Union Territory has a meaningful voice in national veterinary governance without compromising the effectiveness of the apex decision-making body.

6.2 Composition of the Apex Commission

The Apex Commission is envisaged as a **21-member body**, combining technical expertise, federal representation, and governmental accountability. It would be chaired by an eminent veterinarian or One Health expert of national standing. The Commission would include Chairpersons of the four vertical Boards, senior veterinary educationists and practitioners, public health and One Health specialists, higher-education accreditation experts, and limited Central Government representation. Legal and ethics expertise would be incorporated to strengthen professional regulation and due process.

State representation at the Commission level would be ensured through a **rotational regional model**, under which India is divided into four statutory regions- North, South, East, and West & Central. Each region would nominate one State representative to the Commission, with rotation every two years. This mechanism guarantees that all States and Union Territories are represented over a Commission term, while preventing permanent dominance by larger or politically influential States.

6.3 Statutory State Representation Council: National State Veterinary Council (NSVC)

To institutionalise continuous federal participation, a new statutory body- the **National State Veterinary Council**

(**NSVC**)- is proposed as a critical reform instrument. The NSVC would comprise one nominee from each State Veterinary Council and nominees from Union Territories with veterinary institutions. The Chairperson would be elected from among its members, with a Member-Secretary nominated by the NVC.

The NSVC would function as a **federal consultative chamber**, advising the NVC and its Boards, recommending State-specific adaptations of national standards, nominating State representatives to Boards, and reviewing implementation of national regulations at the State level. While the NSVC would not exercise direct regulatory powers, mandatory consultation with it would be statutorily required for key regulatory decisions, thereby embedding cooperative federalism into the governance framework.

6.4 Board-wise Composition with Embedded State Participation

State representation would also be systematically integrated into the composition of each vertical Board of the NVC.

6.4.1 The Veterinary Education Standards Board (VESB) would include senior veterinary academicians, curriculum and assessment experts, One Health specialists, and digital or simulation-based education experts, alongside rotational State representatives nominated by the NSVC. This ensures that national educational standards remain sensitive to regional academic and service realities. Without a dedicated standards board, regulation inevitably regresses to checklist-based compliance.

6.4.2 The Veterinary Assessment and Accreditation Board (VAAB) would bring together quality assurance professionals, veterinary education experts, and international benchmarking specialists, with limited State representation. Will periodically review institutional academic and clinical performance. This design allows States to participate in norm-setting and contextualisation of accreditation frameworks without compromising the objectivity of institutional assessments. Global best practice treats accreditation as an assurance function- not an extension of regulatory control.

6.4.3 The Veterinary Practice and Registration Board (VPRB) would include field practitioners, companion animal and public health experts, continuing professional development specialists, and representatives of State Veterinary Councils. This Board's composition directly reflects the licensing, mobility, and service-delivery realities managed at the State level. Licensing is a public trust function and must be institutionally independent.

6.4.4 The Ethics, Professional Conduct and Discipline Board (EPCDB) would be chaired by a retired judge or senior legal expert and include experienced veterinary professionals, ethics and animal welfare specialists, and a State Veterinary Council representative, ensuring fairness, credibility, and federal sensitivity in disciplinary processes. Professional self-regulation is credible only when ethics enforcement is structurally independent.

6.5 Advantages of the Proposed Model

This two-tier federal representation model offers several policy advantages. First, it ensures that **every State and Union Territory has a guaranteed voice** through the NSVC, while preserving a compact and efficient Apex Commission. Second, it respects India's constitutional and administrative realities, wherein States remain the primary implementers of veterinary education and service delivery. Third, it prevents structural dominance by larger States and reduces politicisation associated with elected mega-councils. Finally, by embedding State participation across all Boards, the model strengthens legitimacy, compliance, and cooperative federalism, making it more defensible and sustainable than conventional centralised regulatory structures.

7. Comparative Global Equivalence Framework for Veterinary Qualifications and Licensing

Globally, veterinary qualification recognition and professional licensing are governed through structured equivalence and accreditation frameworks that emphasise outcome-based education, competency standards, and independent quality assurance, rather than mere degree nomenclature. Leading jurisdictions align veterinary education with internationally accepted benchmarks articulated by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) through its *Day-1 Competency* and *Veterinary Education Core Curriculum* guidelines.

In the United States, veterinary degrees accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA-COE) are recognised for licensure across states, while foreign graduates must qualify through structured equivalence pathways such as ECFVG or PAVE, followed by state licensing examinations. The United Kingdom follows a similar model,

wherein the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) recognises domestic and selected overseas qualifications, with non-recognised graduates required to pass the RCVS Statutory Examination.

Across the European Union, veterinary qualifications are harmonised through EU Directives, ensuring mutual recognition among member states, while third-country graduates undergo national competency and language assessments. Australia and New Zealand operate under accreditation by the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC), with foreign graduates assessed through a multi-stage equivalence and licensing process.

These systems share common principles:

- Independent accreditation of veterinary education institutions
- Competency-based evaluation of graduates
- National or state-level licensing examinations
- Clear pathways for recognition of foreign qualifications

In contrast, India lacks a formal, transparent, and internationally benchmarked equivalence framework for veterinary qualifications and licensing, limiting cross-border mobility of Indian veterinarians and constraining the regulated entry of foreign-trained professionals. Establishing a comparative global equivalence framework, aligned with WOAH standards and global best practices, is therefore essential to enhance international credibility, workforce mobility, and quality assurance within India's veterinary regulatory system.

Hence, a structured global equivalence framework- anchored in WOAH competencies and international accreditation norms- is essential for transparent recognition and licensing of veterinary qualifications in an increasingly globalised professional landscape. Comparative table (USA-UK-EU-Australia-India) may be seen below:

Element	USA	UK	EU	Australia / New Zealand	India (Current)	India (Proposed NVC)
Primary education quality gate	AVMA Council on Education (COE) accredits veterinary schools; graduation from an AVMA COE-accredited school is the most straightforward path to practice.	RCVS accreditation of UK and some overseas degrees; recognized degrees allow registration.	EU Directive framework enables automatic recognition of certain professional qualifications across member states; veterinary education standards are aligned to EU requirements, with EAEVE/ESEVT as the widely used evaluation/ accreditation system in Europe.	AVBC "qualifications generally recognised" list for Australia/NZ; graduates of listed qualifications are typically eligible to apply for registration (subject to board requirements).	VCI prescribes MSVE and maintains central register; state councils register practitioners. (No standardized national equivalence pathway at scale.)	VESB sets competency-aligned standards (WOAH Day-1 mapped); VAAB provides independent outcome-based accreditation (graded).
Foreign graduate equivalence route	Two widely recognized routes: ECFVG (AVMA) and (in many jurisdictions) PAVE (AAVSB) as an alternative pathway.	If degree not recognized, overseas vets can qualify via RCVS Statutory Membership Exam (SME) route to demonstrate	Non-EU/third-country degrees generally require recognition/assessment per national competent authority rules; ESEVT/EAEVE	If qualification not recognized, foreign vets may pursue the Australasian Veterinary Examination (AVE) pathway,	Ad hoc / limited clarity; no national licensing examination and no standard "bridging +	VPRB creates structured foreign equivalence: (i) recognized qualification list, (ii) bridging modules where gaps exist, (iii) NVLE (National

		competence for UK practice.	supports comparability (not itself a license).	administered by AVBC.	competency exam" pipeline.	Veterinary Licensing Examination) for uniform competence.
Competency assessment (foreign grads)	ECFVG is a stepwise certification program for graduates of non-accredited schools, designed to meet state requirements for licensure eligibility.	SME tests whether overseas-qualified vets meet the standard for UK practice/registration.	EU model is more "system equivalence" for EU degrees; third-country assessments vary. ESEVT helps define/assess education standards.	AVE is an exam-based competency assessment; passing supports eligibility for full registration (via state/territory board).	Not standardized nationally.	NVLE and bridging ensure minimum competence and India-specific law/ethics/biosecurity readiness.
Who grants the license to practice?	State Veterinary Boards (state-based licensure; requirements vary).	RCVS register (national register for veterinary surgeons).	Member state competent authorities (national registers), with EU-wide recognition rules for EU degrees.	State/Territory Veterinary Boards (Australia) / VCNZ (NZ); AVE certificate supports eligibility to apply.	State Veterinary Councils register; VCI maintains central register.	VPRB maintains National Register + sets licensing rules; implementation through State Veterinary Councils with common digital platform.
Temporary / limited licensing	Common in some states (e.g., faculty/relief/limited license structures) but varies by state.	Structured routes exist (e.g., supervised/limited arrangements in some cases); SME is for full right to practise.	Varies by country; often project-based/temporary permissions exist under national law.	Temporary/conditional registration models exist at jurisdiction level (example policy in ACT referencing AVE).	Not uniformly codified.	Three explicit pathways: Temporary/limited (teaching/research/projects), Permanent (equivalence+NVLE), Emergency/Public-interest (outbreak response).
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Common requirement at state level (varies).	CPD expectations are well embedded in professional regulation culture (implementation specifics depend on RCVS rules).	Common within national systems; details vary by member state.	CPD is generally expected by boards (jurisdictional).	Weakly enforced / inconsistent.	Mandatory CPD-linked re-licensing under VPRB; unified CPD credit system and audit trail.
Global alignment reference points	AVMA COE standards; equivalence via ECFVG/PAVE.	RCVS accreditation standards and SME route.	EU Directive (automatic recognition for EU degrees) + ESEVT standards used for evaluation.	AVBC recognized qualifications + AVE exam route.	Limited explicit global equivalence mapping.	WOAH Day-1 competence mapping and benchmarking against AVMA-COE / RCVS / ESEVT / AVBC structures (policy alignment, not automatic acceptance).

8. Federal and Global Integration

The proposed framework strengthens State Veterinary Councils as licensing and disciplinary authorities while ensuring national coherence through model regulations and a unified register. Zonal and rotational State representation within the NVC institutionalises cooperative federalism.

Globally, the NVC aligns Indian veterinary standards with WOAH Day-1 competencies, facilitating structured equivalence, mutual recognition, and controlled licensing of foreign-qualified veterinarians- an increasingly critical requirement in a globalised workforce.

9. Policy Significance

The proposed National Veterinary Commission (NVC) framework carries significant public policy value by strengthening the credibility, coherence, and future readiness of veterinary regulation in India. By establishing nationally

consistent professional and educational standards, the NVC has the potential to improve the quality and public trustworthiness of veterinary education while enhancing the global recognition and portability of Indian veterinary qualifications. A reoriented regulatory framework can also facilitate systematic integration of *One Health* principles into veterinary curricula and professional practice, reinforcing linkages between animal health, public health, and environmental sustainability. Further, the NVC model- if grounded in transparency, accountability, and evidence-based standard setting- offers a pathway towards modern, outcome-oriented regulation aligned with contemporary governance norms. Collectively, these reforms support national priorities in food safety, zoonotic disease preparedness, public health protection, and rural and livestock-based economic development.

10. Federal and Constitutional Constraints in Veterinary Regulatory Reform

The proposed transition from the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) to a National Veterinary Commission (NVC) represents a significant regulatory reform with far-reaching constitutional, federal, and institutional implications. Unlike several other professional regulators in India, the VCI derives its legislative authority from a unique constitutional pathway, which imposes distinct constraints on any restructuring effort.

10.1 Article 252(1) and the Limits of Centralisation

The Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 was enacted by Parliament under **Article 252(1) of the Constitution of India**, following resolutions passed by consenting States. This mechanism was invoked because veterinary education and practice fall under **Entry 15 of the State List (Seventh Schedule)**. Consequently, the authority of the VCI is not that of a conventional central regulator but rather that of a body operating on delegated State consent.

Any attempt to replace the VCI with a centrally empowered National Veterinary Commission risks exceeding the original constitutional mandate unless **fresh State resolutions** are obtained. An NVC with expanded regulatory functions- such as oversight of postgraduate education, professional licensing, veterinary service institutions, or continuing professional development- would go beyond the scope of powers contemplated at the time of enactment of the IVC Act. Without renewed consent under Article 252, such expansion may be constitutionally vulnerable and susceptible to judicial challenge.

10.2 Seventh Schedule Jurisdictional Complexity

Unlike medical education, which has evolved within a broader concurrent framework, veterinary education remains predominantly a State subject. Replicating the National Medical Commission (NMC) model in the veterinary domain without constitutional recalibration risks creating jurisdictional overlap and federal friction. A strong central commission exercising operational or supervisory control over State institutions may be perceived as encroaching upon State legislative competence, thereby undermining cooperative federalism.

10.3 Legislative Continuity and Risk of Regulatory Vacuum

The IVC Act is a State-consent-based parliamentary statute rather than an ordinary central law. Repeal and replacement by an NVC Act, without carefully drafted savings and transition clauses, could result in regulatory discontinuity affecting degree recognition, practitioner registration, and institutional approvals. Such disruption would have immediate downstream consequences for students, universities, and service delivery systems. Ensuring legislative continuity while restructuring the regulator therefore constitutes a major transitional challenge.

10.4 Institutional Fate of the VCI Secretariat

The VCI Secretariat represents a permanent statutory establishment with accumulated regulatory experience, institutional memory, and operational expertise. Transitioning to an NVC raises unresolved questions regarding the absorption, redeployment, or dissolution of the existing Secretariat. Service-law protections relating to tenure, seniority, pay scales, and pensionary benefits must be explicitly addressed to avoid administrative litigation and morale erosion. Failure to secure institutional continuity could weaken regulatory capacity during the transition phase.

10.5 Interface with State Veterinary Councils

State Veterinary Councils (SVCs) function as statutory bodies under the existing legal framework, particularly in matters of registration, discipline, and professional conduct. An NVC with enhanced supervisory or appellate authority may be perceived as diluting State autonomy. Without clearly delineated roles and formal State concurrence, the NVC-SVC relationship risks becoming adversarial, thereby impairing effective regulation and enforcement.

10.6 Asymmetric Adoption and Fragmentation Risk

Article 252 permits States to adopt or withdraw from parliamentary legislation at different times. In the absence of uniform re-adoption, the transition to an NVC could lead to asymmetric regulatory regimes across States. Such fragmentation may undermine national portability of veterinary qualifications, create uncertainty in professional mobility, and weaken the coherence of veterinary education standards.

10.7 Implications

The transition from VCI to NVC cannot be treated as a purely administrative reform. It requires a **constitutionally informed, State-consensual, and institutionally sensitive approach**. From a policy perspective, a phased transition-possibly repositioning the reformed body as a **Professional Standard-Setting Body (PSSB)** with limited but robust normative functions- may offer a legally sustainable pathway. Explicit transition provisions safeguarding existing institutions, personnel, and regulatory outputs are essential to ensure continuity and legitimacy.

11. Probable Policy Solutions for a Constitutionally Sustainable Transition from VCI to NVC

The transition from the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) to a proposed National Veterinary Commission (NVC) presents complex constitutional, federal, and institutional challenges, largely arising from the unique legislative basis of the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 under Article 252(1) of the Constitution of India. Addressing these challenges requires a calibrated, legally robust, and cooperative federal approach rather than a wholesale transplantation of regulatory models from other professional domains.

11.1 Reaffirmation of State Consent through Article 252

A foundational solution lies in explicitly reaffirming State consent. Any new NVC legislation should be enacted only after fresh or reaffirmed resolutions by State Legislatures under Article 252, clearly defining the scope of powers delegated to the proposed Commission. This approach preserves constitutional legitimacy while preventing future legal vulnerability. Phased adoption by States may be accommodated, but the core regulatory framework must transparently acknowledge differential federal participation.

11.2 Repositioning the NVC as a Professional Standard-Setting Body

Rather than functioning as an intrusive central regulator, the NVC may be positioned primarily as a **Professional Standard-Setting Body (PSSB)**. Limiting its mandate to framing minimum standards of veterinary education, professional ethics, curriculum benchmarks, and national competency outcomes would remain consistent with constitutional boundaries while aligning with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 vision. Operational control over institutions and service delivery should continue to reside with States.

11.3 Phased and Protected Institutional Transition

A phased transition mechanism, supported by detailed transition and savings provisions, can mitigate the risk of regulatory vacuum. Interim continuation of existing regulatory functions, automatic carryover of recognitions and registrations, and time-bound constitution of NVC Boards would ensure continuity. Such an approach reduces uncertainty for students, institutions, and practitioners during the reform period.

11.4 Safeguarding the VCI Secretariat and Institutional Memory

An explicit statutory provision for absorption or redeployment of the VCI Secretariat into the NVC framework is critical. Protection of service conditions, seniority, and pensionary benefits not only ensures administrative continuity but also preserves institutional memory essential for effective regulation. This measure also minimizes service-law disputes that could otherwise stall implementation.

11.5 Strengthening Cooperative Federalism with State Veterinary Councils

Clearly demarcated functional boundaries between the NVC and State Veterinary Councils (SVCs) are essential. The NVC may exercise normative, advisory, and appellate roles, while primary licensing, discipline, and enforcement functions remain with SVCs. Structured consultation mechanisms and representation of States within the NVC architecture can further enhance trust and ownership.

11.6 Managing Asymmetric Adoption through Harmonisation Instruments

Given the possibility of staggered State adoption, harmonisation tools such as model regulations, nationally agreed minimum standards, and mutual recognition mechanisms can help maintain coherence. These instruments allow functional uniformity without coercive centralisation.

11.7 Implications

A successful transition from VCI to NVC depends less on structural overhaul and more on **constitutional fidelity, phased implementation, and cooperative federalism**. By anchoring the reform within Article 252, limiting regulatory overreach, and safeguarding institutional continuity, the proposed NVC can emerge as a credible and sustainable national body that strengthens veterinary education and professional standards without undermining State autonomy.

12. Conclusion

This policy paper argues that the existing veterinary regulatory framework in India, anchored in the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984, represents a legacy model that has reached the limits of its institutional and constitutional efficacy. While the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) has historically played a vital role in standardising undergraduate veterinary education and maintaining professional registers, its inspection-centric, input-driven, and structurally centralised architecture is increasingly misaligned with contemporary demands of competency assurance, One Health governance, global professional mobility, and cooperative federalism.

The proposed transition towards a National Veterinary Commission (NVC) is therefore not a nominal institutional substitution but a **paradigmatic regulatory reform**. By introducing functional separation of standard-setting, accreditation, licensing, and ethical oversight through autonomous Boards, the NVC framework addresses long-standing concerns of regulatory overload, conflict of interest, and procedural opacity. Alignment with internationally accepted benchmarks- particularly the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Day-1 competencies- positions Indian veterinary education and practice within a globally comparable, outcome-oriented regulatory ecosystem.

At the same time, the paper underscores that such reform must remain **constitutionally grounded and federally sensitive**. Given that the Indian Veterinary Council Act was enacted under Article 252(1) of the Constitution, any restructuring must respect the principle of State consent and avoid excessive centralisation. The proposed two-tier federal representation model- combining a compact Apex Commission with a statutory National State Veterinary Council- offers a balanced solution that preserves operational efficiency while ensuring inclusive and continuous State participation in national regulatory decision-making.

Equally critical is the need for a **phased and legally protected transition**, supported by robust transition and savings provisions. Safeguarding the continuity of recognised

qualifications, professional registrations, and institutional approvals, along with statutory protection of the VCI Secretariat and its institutional memory, is essential to prevent regulatory vacuum and administrative disruption. The success of reform will depend as much on transitional governance as on the design of the new regulatory architecture.

In policy terms, the NVC framework offers a forward-looking pathway to strengthen public trust in veterinary regulation, enhance India's preparedness for zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistance, and align veterinary education with national priorities in food safety, public health, and rural development. If implemented through cooperative federalism, constitutional fidelity, and outcome-based regulation, the National Veterinary Commission can emerge as a credible, future-ready Professional Standards-Setting Body- capable of supporting India's expanding veterinary workforce while reinforcing its global standing in animal health and One Health governance.

13. Summary

This policy paper examines the limitations of India's existing veterinary regulatory framework under the Indian Veterinary Council Act, 1984 and proposes a comprehensive restructuring through the establishment of a National Veterinary Commission (NVC). While the Veterinary Council of India (VCI) has historically contributed to standardisation of undergraduate veterinary education and professional registration, its inspection-centric, input-based, and centralised model is increasingly inadequate to address contemporary challenges such as competency-based education, global professional mobility, One Health integration, zoonotic disease preparedness, and antimicrobial resistance.

The paper argues that effective reform requires a paradigm shift rather than incremental amendments. It proposes a functionally disaggregated regulatory architecture under the NVC, with independent Boards for education standards, accreditation, licensing and registration, and ethics and professional discipline. This separation of functions is intended to enhance transparency, accountability, and regulatory credibility, while aligning Indian veterinary education with internationally accepted benchmarks, particularly WOAH Day-1 competencies.

Given the unique constitutional basis of the IVC Act under Article 252(1), the paper emphasises the necessity of reaffirmed State consent, cooperative federalism, and a carefully phased transition. A two-tier federal representation model- combining a compact Apex Commission with a statutory National State Veterinary Council- is proposed to ensure inclusive State participation without compromising efficiency. Overall, the NVC framework is positioned as a future-ready Professional Standards-Setting Body capable of strengthening veterinary education, safeguarding public health, and enhancing India's global standing in animal health and One Health governance

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