

How to choose a vet

What a consultation should cost, the honest questions about treatment, and how veterinary registration works in Tasmania

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A vet is the one health professional on this list whose registration works differently, and the one where you most often have to make a fast, expensive decision with no time to shop around. Knowing what a fair price is, and having a practice you already trust, is what stops a crisis becoming a blank cheque.

What it should cost

A standard consultation is usually about \$70 to \$110. Vaccinations commonly run \$90 to \$160 depending on the vaccine and the animal. Desexing is roughly \$200 to \$400 for a cat and \$350 to \$700 for a dog depending on size and sex. Dental work under anaesthetic typically runs \$400 to \$1,200, and most of the cost is the anaesthetic and monitoring rather than the scaling itself.

Emergency and after-hours care carries a large surcharge, and major surgery or hospitalisation can run into thousands. Ask any practice you use regularly what their after-hours arrangement is and who covers it - some rotate with other clinics and some refer you to a single emergency hospital, often in Hobart or Launceston.

What the law requires

Unlike the other professions here, veterinary practitioners are not registered through AHPRA. Veterinary registration is a state matter, and in Tasmania it is governed by Tasmanian legislation rather than the national scheme. Before publication, confirm the exact Act, the registering body and how to check a vet's registration, because the rules differ from state to state.

A vet must be registered to practise and to prescribe and dispense restricted veterinary medicines. If you are unsure about a practitioner's standing, ask the practice directly and, where a register exists, check it. Unregistered practice and the grey market in cheap medicines are real risks in regional areas.

Red flags

A large estimate given verbally, with no written breakdown.

Pressure to decide on expensive treatment in the moment, with no time to consider alternatives.

No mention of euthanasia or palliative options where the prognosis is poor.

Reluctance to say what the practice cannot do and why a referral is needed.

An after-hours arrangement that is unclear or that leaves you with no cover.

No estimate of costs before treatment starts.

What good looks like

A written estimate that distinguishes the low and high end, and is updated as things change.

They present the full range of options including doing less, and let you choose.

They are honest about prognosis and about when referral to a specialist is worth it.

The after-hours arrangement is stated clearly, with a named provider.

They discuss preventive care and cost planning before a crisis, not during one.

What to ask

- "What is the diagnosis, and what are all the treatment options with their costs?"
- "What does the most expensive option buy me that the basic one does not?"
- "What is the prognosis, honestly, and what would you do if it were your animal?"
- "Is there an after-hours arrangement, and who covers it?"
- "What is included in the figure you have given me - is it an estimate or a cap?"
- "What can wait until morning, and what cannot?"
- "Should I consider pet insurance, and what does it typically not cover?"

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