

# AAVC/AAVMC VETERINARY FACULTY BENEFITS STUDY

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## OVERVIEW

Recent analysis of the academic veterinary workforce indicates an overall position vacancy rate of about 10%, with the rate likely to be considerably higher in clinical faculty.<sup>1</sup> In the face of this remarkable shortage, recruitment and retention of faculty in an extremely competitive labor market become issues of paramount importance and impact. For this reason, the AAVC and the AAVMC jointly commissioned an analysis of benefits packages currently provided as part of total compensation for veterinary clinical faculty.

## METHODS

During fall of 2023, all AAVMC member institutions in the US were included in a survey to determine the range of benefits being offered to academic clinicians. Initially, each institution's AAVC point-of-contact was emailed a survey link with a request to forward to their respective HR director. The HR directors were then asked to provide their institution's responses to the associated questionnaire. As follow-up, the Deans from non-responding institutions were subsequently contacted and asked to work with their HR directors to complete the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

Overall, 32 of 33 US institutions initiated a response to the survey (97%). Of the 32 respondents, 26 (81%) completed the entire questionnaire. One respondent completed 88% of the questionnaire and five completed 5% or less.

With the questionnaire titled "Health & Welfare Benefits", participants were asked to identify all benefits plans offered or made available by their institution to entry-level, full-time clinical specialists. Full results are presented in the Appendix.

## DISCUSSION

In reviewing the spectrum of benefits available to veterinary clinical-specialist faculty, two important over-arching areas of emphasis emerge:

- personal health and wellbeing, and
- professional growth and development

Consideration of each of these follows:

### Personal Health and Wellbeing

Specific work roles and responsibilities notwithstanding, employee health and wellbeing can be enhanced in a myriad of ways, across a spectrum of potential benefits. To provide a useful structure for analysis, this spectrum can be compartmentalized as support of physical and mental health, work/life balance, financial security (both during and beyond the period of employment), and other quality of life benefits.

Support for physical and mental health is the foundation of most employee benefit programs. For professional employees such as veterinary clinical-specialist faculty, health insurance is a common, perhaps almost ubiquitous, employment benefit. In this context, current survey results are not surprising in that 100% of respondents reported the availability of medical/hospitalization, prescription, and dental insurance and 93% reported the availability of vision insurance to employees, their spouses, and their children. Similarly, 100% of respondents reported the availability of healthcare savings accounts.

However, beyond this base, a number of noteworthy items related to physical and mental health emerged from the responses:

- A majority of respondents provide access to at least one form of health insurance for domestic partners (63% medical/hospitalization, 71% prescription, 63% dental, and 59% vision). In fact, over half (52%) provide access for domestic partners to all four.
- Employee assistance programs are provided by 96% of responding institutions.
- Sick leave is available at 96% of reporting institutions, ranging from a minimum of 10 days to a maximum of 180 days (mean = 37.4, median = 12.5). Of note, the remaining 4% provide personal time off (PTO) which can be used in case of illness.
- Access to fitness/recreation centers is a common benefit.
  - On-site access is available at 89% of responding institutions.
  - Discounted/reimbursed fees are reported by 56% of respondents.

- Employee-only access is available at 63% of responding institutions. However, family access is also available at 56%.

As with health insurance, a certain amount of paid time off is expected for professional employees toward providing opportunity for work/life balance. Not surprisingly, the survey results indicate that 100% of respondents provide paid vacation and paid holidays. However, a thorough review of the results suggests the depth of academic employers' commitment to personal health and wellbeing in relation to time away from the workplace. These include:

- The number of paid holidays, which ranges from 6 to 22 (mean = 12, median = 11).
- Personal time off (aka vacation), which varies from a low of 12 days to the high end of 26 (mean = 23, median = 22).
- Maternity leave is provided by 93% of respondents, with a range of 15 to 180 days (mean = 80, median = 60). Paid maternity leave is provided by 81% of respondents, with a range of 15 to 120 days (mean = 46, median = 40).
- Spousal/partner family leave is provided by 85% of respondents, with a range of 10 to 180 days (mean = 61, median = 60). Paid spousal/partner family leave is provided by 58% of respondents, with a range of 10 to 180 days (mean = 42, median = 30).
- Other options for paid time off were also reported, in several different contexts.
  - Bereavement leave was reported by 81% of respondents, with a range of 2 to 10 days (mean = 5, median = 5).
  - Jury duty/court appearances are eligible for compensation at 93% of responding institutions, with a range of 1 to 365 days (mean = 70, median = 14).
  - Organ donation leave was reported by 44% of institutions, with a range of 5 to 30 days (mean = 28, median = 30).

After health insurance and paid time off, probably the next rung on the ladder of personal health and wellbeing employment benefits lies with financial security for employee and family both during and beyond the period of employment. In this context, a variety of noteworthy items were identified across responding institutions.

- Compensation in addition to base pay is available at 69% of reporting institutions.
  - Opportunity for annual salary bonus is offered at 42% of responding institutions.
  - Production-based compensation is available from 31% of respondents.

- Other forms of bonus or additional compensation are available at 30% of responding institutions. These include merit-based bonus options throughout the year, payment for emergency duty, clinical overload pay, extra teaching compensation, longevity pay, and incentive pay for research productivity.

Competitiveness of academic salaries can be enhanced through these commonly available bonuses and production-based compensation.

- Retirement savings
  - Most respondents (78%) offer a mandatory retirement savings program. Of those with such programs, 81% reported that their institution provides an employer match, ranging from 3% to 23% (mean = 10%, median = 10%).
  - An even greater proportion of responding institutions (93%) offer a supplemental retirement savings program. Of these, 24% reported an employer match.
  - A majority of responding institutions (59%) offer a pension plan.
- Life insurance – Employer-paid life insurance was reported by 93% of respondents. In addition, some respondents’ institutions also paid for life insurance for the employee’s family (26% for spouses, 15% for domestic partners, and 22% for children).
- Disability insurance – Overall, 89% of respondents reported offering either short- or long-term disability insurance, and 48% offer both.

In addition to these notable employment benefits, most U.S. colleges and schools of veterinary medicine qualify as non-profit employers in the context of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. As such, faculty employees may well meet the program’s criteria for student loan forgiveness, which could represent a very significant added boost for financial security.

Other quality of life benefits were reported as well. In general, these are less common and perhaps increasingly unique to academia, including:

- Adoption assistance is provided by 22% of responding institutions, with amounts ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 (mean = \$5,700, median = \$5,000).
- Childcare assistance is available for employees at 41% of responding institutions – 33% provide childcare on-site, 22% provide subsidized childcare, and 15% provide both.
- Tuition benefits were found to be quite common. Across responding institutions, 89% reported tuition assistance for the employee and 52% for the employee’s dependents.

- Legal assistance was reported as a benefit at 70% of responding institutions.

Within the sphere of benefits supporting personal health and wellbeing, a certain degree of variability was identified across and between responding institutions. Without question, a degree of enhancement might be desirable in certain areas or/and by certain institutions. As a whole, however, the breadth and depth of the benefits identified in this study speaks clearly to the collective commitment of AAVMC member institutions (in the U.S.) to faculty welfare.

Professional Growth and Development. Similar to personal health and wellbeing, some specific employment benefits are generally expected to support professional growth and development of employees such as veterinary clinical-specialist faculty. Typically, these items have a pre-determined dollar limit, and include specific professional membership dues, licenses, liability insurance, and professional development expenses. Although specific amounts and items were found to vary by employer, this general group of benefits is quite prevalent across career pathways in the veterinary medical profession. However, certain benefits that promote professional growth and development are, for the most part, unique to academic employment settings. These include:

- The opportunity to earn sabbatical leave, as reported by 92% of responding institutions.
- The possibility of earning tenure, which is available at 96% of reporting institutions.
- The opportunity to negotiate clinical release time, which is available for
  - Research at 96% of reporting institutions
  - Preparing teaching materials at 77% of responding institutions, and
  - Committee work at 85% of respondents’ institutions.

As with employment benefits related to personal health and wellbeing, those identified in this project related to professional growth and development varied somewhat across and between responding institutions. And again, certain enhancements might make sense in at specific institutions or/and in specific benefits. But overall, employer support of professional growth and development in academic veterinary medicine is unlikely to be paralleled in non-academic settings. Opportunities for sabbatical leave, to earn tenure, to conduct research, to teach, and to engage in committee work are limited to non-existent outside the academy.

## General Comparison to Industry.

Although data does not exist related to employee benefits provided to veterinary specialists outside academia, a recent report from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) provides such data for associate and self-employed veterinarians (private practice) along with those employed in public practice.<sup>2</sup> Results from that report for benefits that are directly comparable to results obtained in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Percent of employers providing specific employment benefits to veterinarians in private practice,<sup>2</sup> public practice,<sup>2</sup> and academic clinical specialty practice settings.

EMPLOYMENT BENEFIT	PRIVATE PRACTICE <sup>2</sup>	PUBLIC PRACTICE <sup>2</sup>	ACADEMIC SPECIALIST
Medical/hospitalization insurance	60.6%	80.7%	100%
Dental insurance	44.9%	75.6%	100%
Vision insurance	31.9%	58.5%	92.6%
Life insurance	32.9%	60.2%	92.6%
Tax-deferred retirement plan	61.9%	69.8%	77.8%
Pension plan	1.2%	22.6%	59.3%
Disability insurance	35.9%	56.3%	88.9%
Paid legal holidays	42.2%	67.6%	100%
Paid vacation leave (PTO)	72.0%	81.9%	81.5%
Paid sick leave	51.8%	73.1%	96.3%
Paid parental/maternity leave	12.4%	31.6%	81.0%
Childcare	0.9%	1.8%	40.7%
Employee assistance program	12.8%	34.1%	96.3%
Fitness/recreation center	n.a.	n.a.	88.9%
Gym membership	3.5%	8.6%	n.a.
Professional liability insurance	72.8%	38.4%	88.9%
Professional association dues	75.0%	55.0%	59.3%
License fees	83.6%	59.1%	63.0%
Professional development expenses	84.3%	67.8%	87.5%
Professional development leave	63.1%	56.3%	85.2%
Clothing/uniforms/scrubs	48.2%	19.5%	73.1%
Opportunities for additional compensation	n.a.	n.a.	69.2%
Informal profit-sharing plan	4.7%	3.7%	n.a.
No benefits provided	4.4%	4.7%	0.0%

Additional employment benefits were included in the AVMA study that were not a part of the current study of academic specialist positions and vice versa. Two specific areas were included in both studies but in slightly different formats. Because of their similarities, they were included in Table 1 for sake of comparison in that context. Specific items included:

- Fitness/recreation center (current study) vs gym membership (AVMA study).
- Opportunities for additional compensation (current study) vs informal profit-sharing plan (AVMA study).

For those benefits that were included in both studies and presented in Table 1, the likelihood of a particular benefit being available is higher in academic specialist employment in every case except three:

- Paid vacation leave (PTO) – At 81.5%, academic specialist positions were slightly less likely than public practice positions (81.9%) to provide this benefit. However, the difference is so small that it can be considered negligible.
- Professional association dues – At 59.3%, the likelihood of this benefit being provided to academic specialists fell between that of public practice (55.0%) and private practice (75.0%). Although this finding is somewhat of an outlier compared to the rest of the benefits, it is an important difference to note, nonetheless.
- License fees – Similar to professional association dues, the likelihood of this license fees being provided to academic specialists (63.0%) fell between that of public practice (59.1%) and private practice (83.6%). A key difference with this benefit, however, lies in the fact that academic specialists are afforded an academic license to practice in many states, making an individual license unnecessary. In these states, there would be no need to provide license fees as an employment benefit to academic clinicians.

Differences in employment context between private practice, public practice, and academic specialty practice notwithstanding, the consistent pattern that emerges from Table 1 is noteworthy.

## SUMMARY

Colleges and schools of veterinary medicine are facing a critical workforce shortage, especially with clinical faculty. Recruitment and retention of clinical specialists is particularly challenging due to the plethora of attractive employment opportunities that exist in private practice. In this extremely competitive labor market, where academic budgets are generally not deep enough to enable institutions to match private-sector salaries dollar-for-dollar, employment benefits emerge as issues of paramount importance and impact. This study has clearly demonstrated the overall commitment to faculty welfare that exists at U.S. colleges and schools of veterinary medicine, with particular emphasis on physical and mental health, work/life balance, financial security (both during and beyond the period of employment), and other quality of life benefits.

In short, the depth and breadth of benefits packages available for veterinary clinical-specialist faculty were found to be robust with regard to both *personal health and wellbeing* and *professional growth and development*. Although many of the benefits identified are certainly available in the private sector, it is likely that at least some aren't available at the levels identified in this study or in the broad, collective groupings that were discovered. Other benefits offered by academic institutions just don't exist in non-academic employment settings.

As academic veterinary medicine contemplates potential solutions to the faculty shortage, the rich benefits packages available with academic employment are an asset to be recognized, highlighted, and leveraged.

## REFERENCES

1. American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges. Internal data. 2024.
2. Doherty C, Ouedraogo F, Hansen C. 2024 AVMA Report on the Economic State of the Veterinary Profession. Veterinary Economics Division, AVMA, Schaumburg, IL, April 2024, 62 pp.

## APPENDIX

### AAVC/AAVMC Veterinary Faculty Benefits Study

#### Full Survey Results

With the questionnaire titled "Health & Welfare Benefits", participants were asked to identify all benefits plans offered or made available by their institution to entry-level, full-time clinical specialists. Full results follow:

	# of responses	% Yes
<b>• Medical/hospitalization insurance</b>		
◦ Employee	32	100
◦ Employee's spouse	32	100
◦ Employee's domestic partner	32	62.5
◦ Employee's children	32	100
◦ Medical insurance type		
• PPO	27	96.3
• HMO	22	50.0
• Other Comments: HDHP, Consumer Driven Health Plan, Open access plan, ACO, HAS	12	66.7
◦ Average monthly premium paid by employee		
• Lowest Range: \$0 to \$350 Mean: \$89 Median: \$66	24	
• Highest Range: \$105 to \$927 Mean: \$427 Median: \$392		
<b>• Dental insurance</b>		
◦ Employee	27	100
◦ Monthly premium paid by employee (employee only)		
• Lowest Range: \$0 to \$130 Mean: \$16 Median: \$9	24	
• Highest Range: \$0 to \$130 Mean: \$29 Median: \$22		
◦ Spouse	27	100
◦ Domestic partner	27	63.0
◦ Children	27	100
◦ Monthly premium paid by employee (family)		
• Lowest Range: \$0 to \$285 Mean: \$54 Median: \$34	25	
• Highest Range: \$0 to \$500 Mean: \$120 Median: \$96		

	# of responses	% Yes
<b>• Vision insurance</b>		
◦ Employee	27	92.6
◦ Monthly premium paid by employee (employee only)		
• Lowest Range: \$0 to \$150 Mean: \$11 Median: \$5.50	22	
• Highest Range: \$0 to \$150 Mean: \$15 Median: \$6		
◦ Spouse	27	92.6
◦ Domestic partner	27	59.3
◦ Children	27	92.6
◦ Monthly premium paid by employee (family)		
• Lowest Range: \$0 to \$321 Mean: \$26 Median: \$15	23	
• Highest Range: \$0 to \$448 Mean: \$37 Median: \$19		
<b>• Prescription coverage</b>		
◦ Employee	24	100
◦ Spouse	24	100
◦ Domestic partner	24	70.8
◦ Children	24	100
<b>• Life insurance – employer paid</b>		
◦ Employee	27	92.6
◦ Spouse	27	25.9
◦ Domestic partner	27	14.8
◦ Children	27	22.2
◦ Monthly premium paid by employee		
• Lowest Range: \$0 to \$56 Mean: \$7 Median: \$0	16	
• Highest Range: \$0 to \$500 Mean: \$120 Median: \$96		
<b>• Life insurance – optional/additional</b>		
◦ Employee	27	96.3
◦ Spouse	27	88.9
◦ Domestic partner	27	63.0
◦ Children	27	85.2

	# of responses	% Yes
<b>• Retirement savings (e.g., 403b, 401k, 401a)</b>		
◦ Mandatory savings	27	77.8
• Employee Range: 0% to 14% Mean: 6.8% Median: 6.5%	18	
• Employer match Range: 3% to 23% Mean: 10% Median: 10%	17	
◦ Supplemental retirement savings (e.g., 457)	27	92.6
◦ Supplemental retirement – employer match	25	24.0
◦ Pension plan	27	59.3
<b>• Flexible spending accounts</b>		
◦ Healthcare	27	100
◦ Dependent care	27	92.6
◦ Other Comments: Limited Purpose FSA, Transit, \$500 annual Lifestyle Account, HSA with employee contribution, Parking	26	23.1
<b>• Employer-paid disability insurance</b>		
◦ Short term	27	51.9
◦ Long term	27	85.2
• Either	27	88.9
• Both	27	48.1
<b>• Paid holidays</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>
◦ Annual total number of days? Range: 6 to 22 Mean: 12 Median: 11	26	
<b>• Personal leave (PTO)</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>81.5</b>
◦ Annual total number of days? Range: 12 to 26 Mean: 23 Median: 22	20	
<b>• Sick leave</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>96.3</b>
◦ Annual total number of days? Range: 10 to 180 Mean: 37 Median: 12.5	22	
<b>• Paid bereavement leave</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>81.5</b>
◦ Total number of days? Range: 2 to 10 Mean: 5 Median: 5	20	



	# of responses	% Yes
<b>• Paid jury duty/court appearance</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>92.6</b>
◦ Total number of days? Range: 1 to 365 Mean: 70 Median: 14	15	
<b>• Organ donation leave</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>44.4</b>
◦ Total number of days? Range: 5 to 30 Mean: 28 Median: 30	10	
<b>• Adoption Assistance</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22.2</b>
◦ Total amount Range: \$1,500 to \$10,000 Mean: \$5,700 Median: \$5,000	5	
<b>• Maternity leave</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>92.6</b>
◦ Total number of days? Range: 15 to 180 Mean: 80 Median: 60	23	
◦ Number of leave days paid by employer Range: 0 to 120 Mean: 37 Median: 30	21	
• Number > 0	17	81.0
<b>• Spousal/partner family leave</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>85.2</b>
◦ Total number of days? Range: 10 to 180 Mean: 61 Median: 60	20	
◦ Number of leave days paid by employer Range: 0 to 180 Mean: 24 Median: 12	18	
<b>• Childcare</b>		
◦ Subsidized	27	22.2
◦ On-site	27	33.3
• Either	27	40.7
• Both	27	14.8
<b>• Military leave</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>• Tuition benefit</b>		
◦ Employee	27	88.9
◦ Dependents	27	51.9

	# of responses	% Yes
• <b>Pet daycare on-site</b>	27	11.1
• <b>Employee assistance program</b>	27	96.3
• <b>Fitness Centers/Recreation Centers</b>		
◦ Onsite	27	88.9
◦ Discounted/reimbursed fees	27	55.6
◦ Employee only	27	63.0
◦ Family access	27	55.6
• <b>Discounted Community/Corporate Services (e.g., car rentals, etc.)</b>	27	77.8
• <b>Professional liability insurance</b>	27	88.9
• <b>Professional association dues</b>	27	59.3
◦ Annual dollar amount maximum Range: \$0 to \$4,000 Mean: \$1,730 Median: \$2,000	10	
• <b>License fees</b>	27	63.0
• <b>Specialty college dues</b>	26	42.3
• <b>Legal assistance/access</b>	27	70.4
• <b>Professional development expenses</b>	24	87.5
◦ Annual dollar amount maximum Range: \$450 to \$6,500 Mean: \$2,639 Median: \$2,000	14	
• <b>Professional development leave</b>	27	85.2
◦ Annual number of days maximum Range: 0 to 365 Mean: 40 Median: 10 (Note: one response was "as needed")	15	
• <b>Eligibility to earn sabbatical leave</b>	26	92.3
• <b>Eligibility to earn tenure</b>	26	96.2
• <b>Opportunity for outside consulting</b>	26	84.6

	# of responses	% Yes
<b>• Clothing/Uniforms/Scrubs</b>		
◦ Employer paid/Reimbursed	26	73.1
◦ Discounted	26	15.4
<b>• Negotiated clinical release time for</b>		
◦ Research	26	96.2
◦ Preparing teaching materials	26	76.9
◦ Committee work	26	84.6
<b>• Additional compensation</b>		
◦ Opportunity for annual salary bonus	26	42.3
◦ Opportunity for production-based compensation	26	34.6
• Either	26	69.2
• Both	26	11.5
◦ Other Comments: Merit based bonus options throughout the year; Research Additional Compensation/Bonus; emergency pay, clinical overload pay, extra teaching; longevity pay \$100/year service; Incentive pay for research productivity	23	30.4