



# NAVTA's Scope of Practice Report



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In the past several years, concerns about unclear or inconsistent scope of practice (SOP) laws have been voiced repeatedly by credentialed professionals, educators, and employers. To address these concerns in a systematic way, NAVTA's Veterinary Nurse Initiative Practice and Standards Committee initiated a multipart project: (1) a comprehensive review of U.S. state and territory veterinary practice acts and board rules; (2) a national survey of veterinary professionals on SOP enforcement, recognition, and impact on career sustainability; and (3) the drafting of recommendations for positive change in laws.

## Why Scope of Practice Laws Matter

SOP laws define the tasks and procedures veterinary professionals are legally allowed to perform. For credentialed veterinary nurses/technicians who have completed an approved program and passed a standardized exam, these laws should clarify which medical and nursing responsibilities require formal education and licensure. For veterinary assistants, who are noncredentialed individuals who support clinical care, SOP laws should specify the extent of their responsibilities, ideally ensuring that more advanced or invasive tasks are delegated only to those who have completed the necessary education.

Clear SOP laws serve 3 critical functions in veterinary practice:

- **They protect patient safety** by ensuring that complex or high-risk procedures are only performed by qualified individuals.
- **They reinforce professional accountability** by aligning task delegation with legal responsibility and credentialing standards.
- **They support workforce sustainability** by incentivizing credentialing, preventing burnout, and promoting appropriate utilization.

Despite the importance of SOP laws, there is no national standard for veterinary team members. Each state sets its own rules. In many cases, states fail to set them at all. Some states provide detailed lists of permitted tasks and supervision requirements, while other states rely on broad descriptions or entirely omit veterinary nurses/technicians and veterinary assistants from regulation. The result is a fragmented and often confusing regulatory environment that leaves veterinary professionals unsure of their legal standing and undermines the development of consistent standards of care.

## Methodology of Analysis

To understand the current regulatory landscape for veterinary team members, NAVTA conducted a comprehensive review of the United States jurisdictions' veterinary practice acts and associated veterinary medical board rules. The goal was to identify how each jurisdiction defines, or fails to define, the roles and



responsibilities of veterinary nurses/technicians and veterinary assistants, particularly in relation to task delegation and legal limitations.

The review was completed in 2024, using all publicly available statutes and administrative rules. Individuals seeking up-to-date guidance should refer to their state's or territory's veterinary medical board. Despite the evolving nature of regulations, the underlying findings and conclusions in this report remain relevant and valid, reflecting persistent national trends in regulation and ongoing concerns.

To ensure consistent interpretation and comparison across all jurisdictions, NAVTA developed and implemented a standardized framework to evaluate each jurisdiction's language and classify it into 4 key areas:

1. **Veterinary nurse/technician SOP definition.** This categorized how each jurisdiction defined the SOP for veterinary nurses/technicians by an itemized list, a general description, or no defined scope.
2. **Veterinary assistant SOP definition.** This categorized how each jurisdiction defined the SOP for veterinary assistants by an itemized list, a general description, or no defined scope.
3. **Restriction of tasks to veterinary nurses/technicians.** This categorized if tasks were legally restricted to veterinary nurses/technicians as fully restricted, partially restricted, inexplicit, or no restriction.
4. **Supervision levels.** This categorized if jurisdictions defined levels of veterinary supervision as immediate, direct, or indirect as defined by the AAVSB; direct or indirect as defined by the AVMA; general supervision; or no definition.

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### Key Findings and Data Highlights

The review of veterinary practice acts and board rules across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands revealed a wide variation in how governing documents (statutes or rules) define and regulate SOP. The findings highlight the need for greater clarity, consistency, and protection.

- **Veterinary nurse/technician SOP**
  - 25 jurisdictions provide an itemized list of allowable tasks in at least 1 governing document.
  - 9 jurisdictions offer a general description without task-specific detail in at least 1 governing document.
  - 19 jurisdictions provide no defined SOP in either governing document. Despite having regulations, 12 of these jurisdictions have no defined SOP.
- **Veterinary assistant SOP**
  - 14 jurisdictions provide an itemized list of allowable tasks in at least 1 governing document.
  - 10 jurisdictions offer a general description without task-specific detail in at least 1 governing document.
  - 29 jurisdictions provide no defined SOP in either governing document.
- **Veterinary nurse/technician task restriction**
  - In 3 jurisdictions, certain tasks are fully restricted to these roles.



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- In 7 jurisdictions, tasks are partially restricted to these roles, often in unclear or inconsistent ways.
- In 12 jurisdictions, SOP language is inexplicit about whether veterinary assistants are not allowed to do what veterinary nurses/technicians are allowed to perform.
- In 31 jurisdictions, there is no legal language restricting tasks to veterinary nurses/technicians, creating full overlap in what veterinary assistants and veterinary nurses/technicians are allowed to do.
- **Supervision levels**
  - 18 jurisdictions define tiered supervision levels (immediate, direct, and indirect), similar to AAVSB guidance.
  - 10 jurisdictions define 2 levels of supervision (direct and indirect), similar to AVMA guidance.
  - 9 jurisdictions use general supervision with generic terms like “supervision” without defining levels.
  - 6 jurisdictions provide no definition with no supervision guidance for veterinary team members at all.
  - The remaining 10 jurisdictions use terms like “direct only” or “general and indirect” inconsistently, suggesting a lack of standardized definitions.

### Patterns, Gaps, and Implications

The current landscape of SOP laws across the United States paints a picture of inconsistency and underregulation, with only a handful of jurisdictions taking meaningful steps to define and protect the roles of veterinary team members.

A major gap exposed by this review is the disconnect between the process of credentialing and the legal protection of those credentialed. While most jurisdictions require veterinary nurses/technicians to graduate from an accredited program and pass the Veterinary Technician National Exam, the majority do not legally restrict any tasks to credentialed individuals.

This fragmented legal landscape leaves veterinary professionals navigating inconsistent expectations, unclear delegation boundaries, and limited protection for their credentials. In jurisdictions with strong SOP regulations, veterinary teams can operate with clarity and structure. In other jurisdictions, vague or absent laws blur the lines between credentialed staff and noncredentialed staff, impacting patient safety, job satisfaction, and career longevity.

### The Real Impact

While SOP laws are written in statutes and regulations, their real impact is felt on the clinic floor by the individuals providing hands-on care, training new team members, and navigating unclear lines of responsibility. To understand how these laws play out in practice, NAVTA conducted a national survey to capture the lived experiences of those most affected by SOP decisions.

More than 1000 veterinary professionals responded, offering a broad and deeply personal look at how regulation, or the lack of it, shapes their day-to-day work and long-term career decisions. Their insights reveal a profession that is highly capable and deeply invested, but often operating in environments that fail to fully recognize, protect, or leverage their skills. The findings from this survey not only



validate the inconsistencies uncovered in NAVTA's review of U.S. laws but also show how these gaps are felt day-to-day through voices that speak to frustration, pride, burnout, and hope.

Despite existing laws and internal protocols, many veterinary professionals reported that SOP regulations are inconsistently applied, or simply unknown, in their workplaces. When asked whether their primary place of work follows SOP laws consistently, only 56.6% of respondents indicated that their workplace does so. This means nearly half of respondents experience unclear or unreliable enforcement of delegation boundaries and supervision standards.

In jurisdictions with strong SOP regulations, veterinary teams have a more substantial foundation to work with clarity and structure. However, inconsistency in enforcing SOP shows up across all types of clinics and job roles. This mismatch between regulation and reality contributes to widespread uncertainty among veterinary team members. It undermines professional confidence, creates tension over task delegation, and increases the risk of inappropriate or unsafe care delivery. Respondents shared experiences of being asked to perform tasks they were unsure they were legally permitted to do, or being denied opportunities for which they were qualified because their role was misunderstood.

### **Undermining Credentialing**

The survey also revealed a widespread belief among veterinary professionals, especially veterinary nurses/technicians, that their formal training and credentials are not adequately recognized or protected under current laws. When asked whether their state restricts noncredentialed individuals (e.g., veterinary assistants) from performing certain tasks, only 32.1% of respondents answered "yes." A majority (51.6%) said their state does not impose any such restrictions, while 16.3% were unsure. This high degree of uncertainty reflects inconsistent legislation across states and a lack of communication or clarity about existing regulations.

### **Impact on Morale**

Beyond regulatory gaps and task ambiguity, the absence of developed SOP laws is damaging the morale and motivation of veterinary team members. This issue surfaced repeatedly in the survey through responses and open-ended comments detailing how unclear or unenforced standards contribute to burnout, disillusionment, and stalled professional growth.

The lack of differentiation between credentialed and noncredentialed team members creates both structural and emotional strain. Professionally, it stunts clinical growth. Veterinary nurses/technicians are often passed over for advanced roles not because they lack ability but because there's no legal or operational pathway to support it. Culturally, it flattens the value of credentialing. When anyone can legally perform the same tasks, recognition for formal training diminishes. Emotionally, it drives frustration and attrition. Many respondents described no longer recommending veterinary nursing/technology as a career path, citing lack of upward mobility and respect.

### **A Profession in Limbo**

The NAVTA survey paints a picture of a profession replete with skilled, passionate,



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Report.



and dedicated individuals—people who care deeply about patient care, team dynamics, and doing their jobs well. However, it also reveals a system that, in many places, fails to support them.

Veterinary professionals across the country are working in a regulatory gray zone. In some jurisdictions, their roles are clearly defined and protected. In others, the lines are blurred or nonexistent. Even in places with formal laws, inconsistent enforcement and a lack of clinic-level clarity make it difficult for veterinary team members to know what they're allowed to do or what they're legally responsible for. The result is a workforce stuck between what they're trained to do and what they're legally empowered to do.

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### Recommendations for Positive Change

1. **Define SOP in all jurisdictions.** The 19 jurisdictions that do not define the SOP for veterinary nurses/technicians should enact clear SOP laws. Jurisdictions without credentialing should establish licensure for these positions and define their SOP.
2. **Use itemized SOP lists aligned with highest-level utilization.** Jurisdictions that do not already use itemized SOP lists for veterinary nurses/technicians should adopt them, ensuring they reflect the highest level of safe and effective utilization. NAVTA recommends aligning with the standards set forth in the AAVSB Model Regulations for Veterinary Technician Scope of Practice.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Adopt a dual-list model for veterinary nurses/technicians and veterinary assistants.** Jurisdictions should establish veterinary nurse/technician SOP as a clearly defined list of authorized and exclusive tasks, paired with a veterinary assistant SOP articulated as a defined set of prohibited tasks corresponding to veterinary nurses/technician-exclusive functions.
4. **Expand the range of clearly defined supportive tasks for veterinary assistants.** Jurisdictions should explicitly authorize veterinary assistants to perform a defined set of low-risk, supportive tasks that do not require the education and clinical judgment of a veterinary nurse/technician. These tasks should be itemized in law or rule and tied to the appropriate level of supervision.
5. **Define and standardize supervision levels.** Jurisdictions should adopt and clearly define a standardized 3-tier supervision model (e.g., immediate, direct, indirect) and clearly link these definitions to the specific tasks that may be delegated under each level.
6. **Strengthen SOP knowledge, application, and implementation.** Jurisdictions and practices should adopt a unified approach to ensuring that all veterinary team members understand and correctly apply SOP laws. **TVN**

### Reference

1. Model regulations: scope of practice for veterinary technicians and veterinary technologists. AAVSB. 2020. Accessed January 8, 2026. <https://www.aavsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2024-Model-Documents-Model-Regulations-Scope-of-Practice-updated-intro.pdf>