ISSUE SUMMARY

Animal research plays an essential and irreplaceable role in advancing biological knowledge, human health, and veterinary medicine. The AAMC and its member institutions are committed to the welfare of laboratory animals and upholding ethical and legal responsibilities when using animals in research.

Issue

Animal research has played a key role in virtually every major medical advance of the last century, to the benefit of both human and animal health. It is critical for progress in health and in discovery for scientists to be able to do research in living systems that are genetically similar to humans. Some members of the public have expressed concern about the use of animals in research—at an extreme, attempting to stop the research or cause harm to the scientists conducting the research. However, medical schools and teaching hospitals abide by comprehensive federal, state, and institutional regulations and guidelines to ensure the safety, welfare, and ethical use of laboratory animals.

Background

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Foundation for Biomedical Research note that advances such as antibiotics, blood transfusions, dialysis, organ transplantation, vaccinations, chemotherapy, bypass surgery, joint replacement, and practically every present-day protocol for the prevention, treatment, cure, or control of disease, pain, and suffering are based on knowledge attained through animal research. The National Association for Biomedical Research additionally notes that every Nobel Prize in Medicine awarded over the past 30 years has been dependent on data gathered from research in animals. Animal models continue to provide invaluable and irreplaceable insights into human systems, and they function as the basis for conducting clinical trials and translating medical discovery into treatments and cures. The essential need for animal testing and research is recognized and supported by the AAMC, NIH, and medical societies and health agencies around the world.

At the federal level, the Animal Welfare Act sets legal standards for the care and use of animals in research. Additionally, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals mandates criteria for the proper care and treatment of animals used in biomedical and behavioral research and outlines requirements for institutional programs.

Research institutions are required to establish an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), which evaluates any proposed experiments. Approval by the IACUC is a prerequisite to receiving federal funding for animal research. The IACUC also monitors the research as it progresses to make sure it continues to meet obligations of the PHS policy.

Medical schools and teaching hospitals whose faculties use animals in research also participate in the voluntary accreditation and assessment program of the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC). Institutions that earn AAALAC accreditation demonstrate their commitment to responsible animal care and use. Institutions understand that the highest quality and most rigorous science can only be achieved through meeting the highest standards in the care of laboratory animals.

AAMC Policy Recommendations

- The AAMC strongly affirms the essential and irreplaceable role of research involving live animals in advancing biological knowledge, human health, and animal welfare.
- The AAMC affirms the academic medical community's responsibility to ensure that the use of animals in laboratory research is judicious, responsible, and humane and that the care provided to these animals fully meets accreditation standards and regulatory and legislative requirements. It is the association's firm belief that further restrictions on the use of animals in biomedical and behavioral research threaten progress in health care and disease prevention.
Related Issue

- National Institutes of Health

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Web Resources

NIH’s Office of Extramural Research (OER) on Animals in Research
https://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/air

Foundation for Biomedical Research
https://fbresearch.org

National Association for Biomedical Research
http://www.nabr.org

AAALAC International
http://www.aaalac.org