

Openness Agreement on Animal Research in Australia

Introduction

Why the Openness Agreement was developed

As Signatories and Supporters of this Openness Agreement, we acknowledge that the use of animals in research or teaching is often seen as contentious and that opinions in the broader community range from many different levels of qualified support through to strong opposition.

We respect this diversity of opinion and recognise that it can exist within our own organisations as well as among our supporters and others in the broader community.

Research in which animals are used is also often technically complex and may involve sophisticated technology, complex statistical analysis, international collaboration, and skills that can only be acquired through intense study.

Because of these considerations, and recognising legitimate community expectations for transparency, we believe openness and clarity concerning the use of animals in research and teaching is imperative to enable well-informed public discussion.

This Openness Agreement was therefore developed so organisations that conduct, fund or are otherwise associated with the use of animals in research or teaching can demonstrate a commitment to openness, and can promote awareness of the reasons why animals are used, the benefits derived, the limitations that apply, and the steps taken to minimise harm.

Outline of animal research regulations in Australia

In Australia, the use of animals in research and teaching is governed by strict legislation. Animals may not be used unless approved in advance by a body known as an Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) which must weigh the scientific justification for animal use against the impact on animals. Ongoing monitoring by an AEC is also required once a project has been approved.

AECs must have members in each of four categories: a veterinarian, a scientist, a person with a demonstrable commitment to animal welfare, and a member of the general public. Members in the last two categories must be completely independent of the institution; veterinarian members are also often independent of the institution.

Researchers, institutions and AECs must all comply with the legally binding [Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes](#) (the animal research Code).

The animal research Code's Governing Principles require respect for animals, ethical review processes, high scientific standards and application of 'the 3Rs':

- Replacement (non-animal alternatives must be used wherever possible)
- Reduction (the number of animals used must be kept to a minimum)
- Refinement (steps must be taken at all times to minimise harm)

Under the animal research Code, the definition of animal research is very broad. For example, observational or non-invasive studies in wildlife conservation, agriculture and veterinary care aimed at improving animal welfare are all required to undergo the same scrutiny as animal research designed to improve human health or investigate fundamental biological processes.

A key feature of the animal research Code is its focus on prioritising animal welfare and minimising any adverse impact on animals before, during and after studies. As a result, institutions conducting animal research employ qualified animal care staff to provide day to day animal care and expert support. They must also ensure there is access to veterinary support and many institutions employ veterinarians especially for this purpose.

How the Openness Agreement works

Participating in the Openness Agreement is entirely voluntary and independent of regulatory obligations.

Institutions may participate in one of two ways: as Signatories or as Supporters.

Signatories

Any organisation directly involved in the use of animals for research or teaching may become a Signatory. Examples include universities, medical research institutes, manufacturers of medicines or vaccines, and organisations involved in wildlife conservation research.

Signatories must pledge to meet all four Commitments in the Openness Agreement. How the Commitments are met will differ between organisations, but the fundamental goal is to demonstrate progress towards greater openness.

To document their progress, Signatories must submit an annual summary on their efforts to demonstrate greater openness. If an organisation finds that it is unable to meet its commitments, it may be required to reconsider its position as a Signatory.

Supporters

Supporters are organisations that do not conduct animal research or teaching directly but have indirect involvement in ways such as providing funding, regulatory oversight or serving as professional bodies.

Because Supporters do not conduct animal research or teaching themselves, the four Commitments of the Openness Agreement are not directly applicable. Submission of an annual report by Supporters is therefore optional rather than mandatory. Nevertheless, Supporters must demonstrate openness in their association with animal research and teaching, and must be willing to respond openly to enquiries about how and why they support animal use.

The Openness Agreement on Animal Research in Australia is coordinated by the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching ([ANZCCART](#)).

Our Commitments

Signatories to the Openness Agreement on Animal Research in Australia must meet the following four Commitments:

Commitment 1. We will be clear about our involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching.

In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:

- Ensure our communications on animal research or teaching provide accurate descriptions about the potential benefits, harms and potential limitations of that research or teaching.

- Take steps to ensure that our staff (and students, where applicable) are aware of our involvement in animal research or teaching.
- Where a Signatory is collaborating on a research project with a non-signatory organisation, be as open as possible while respecting these constraints.

Commitment 2. We will enhance our institution’s communications with the media and the public about our use of animals in research or teaching.

In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:

- Include information about our use of animals in research or teaching in communications and media releases when it has played a significant role in an aspect of our work. Where practical, this may also include images or video.
- Support discussion of our use of animals in research or teaching with the media and the local or broader communities.
- Clearly identify a point of contact for information about our organisation’s use of animals in research or teaching.

Commitment 3. We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research or teaching involving animals.

In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:

- Make a policy statement about the use of animals in research available on our own website within three months of becoming a Signatory or Supporter. This will provide clear information about our involvement with animal research and its role in the wider context of our organisation’s activities.
- Respond to all reasonable enquiries about our involvement in animal research. Where there are legitimate reasons why this is not possible, we will explain those reasons openly and respectfully.

Commitment 4. We will provide an annual summary of our efforts to improve openness in the use of animals in research or teaching.

In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:

- Provide a summary to ANZCCART each year highlighting our existing efforts and any new initiatives aimed at greater openness.
- Assist ANZCCART in addressing any enquiries that may arise internally or externally in relation to our annual summary.

List of Signatories

[Alphabetical list with logos to be added to finalised version]

List of Supporters

[Alphabetical list with logos to be added to finalised version]

How this Agreement was developed

The Openness Agreement on Animal Research in Australia was developed as an initiative of the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching ([ANZCCART](#)).

An initial draft modelled on the [Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK](#) was prepared by a Working Group with representation from:

Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes
Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching
Australian and New Zealand Laboratory Animal Association
Australian Research Council
Australian Society for Medical Research
Australian Veterinary Association
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
Medicines Australia
National Health and Medical Research Council
RSPCA Australia
Universities Australia

Feedback on the draft was obtained through public consultation. *[Further detail to be added to finalised version.]*

Further information

Further information about ANZCCART, the Openness Agreement, and animal research in Australia – including the ethical review process – can be found here *[link to openness agreement page on ANZCCART website to be added to finalised version]*.

For enquiries, please contact ANZCCART Australia at *[email address to be added to finalised version]*.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of the following organisations, both of which have led the development of openness agreements in other countries, is gratefully acknowledged:

- [Understanding Animal Research](#), UK
- [European Animal Research Association](#)