

Go8 STATEMENT ON THE USE OF ANIMALS IN RESEARCH

BACKGROUND

The Group of Eight (Go8) represents the coalition of research-intensive universities in Australia and all of the Go8 universities have strong health, biological and biomedical research programs that sometimes require the use of animals.

Cures for chronic diseases, vaccines for debilitating infections, and tests for improved disease detection are all areas that are easy to highlight and provide clear evidence of the impact of health and medical research. Most people will have friends or family members who have directly benefited from the outcomes of health and medical research, and may well have benefited themselves.

The Go8 acknowledges that there are some in the community with firmly-held views about the use of animals in research. The Go8 also acknowledges that the use of animals in research, the detailed ethical deliberations that precede that research, and the nature of scientific investigation are, in many cases, confidential and not accessible to the public.

Animals have been and will continue to be useful models for research

In addition to benefiting human and animal health, animal research has furthered our understanding of the natural world, from electrical currents to the management of native ecosystems.

Many of the commonplace treatments in use today have their foundations in research that used animals. The Research Design Service (RDS) in the UK and the Coalition for Medical Progress published a detailed report, Medical Advances and Animal Research (available at <http://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/resources/document-library>) on how animal research has supported human health discoveries and the role that animal research continues to play in important human health initiatives.

The Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Animals

The Go8 universities take their obligations to conduct ethical research seriously and they rigorously assess any research that involves the use of animals. All research involving animals in Australia is subject to the Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purpose as well as by other national, state and regional codes of practice. All research involving animals is subject to strict ethical guidelines and monitoring by the Animal Care and Ethics Committees at each University.

The Animal Care and Ethics Committees are constituted with a mix of scientific, veterinarian, lay and animal advocate members and the committees bring a careful balance between the potential value of the research and the impact on the animals.

Research is often incremental

Research is iterative and generally occurs incrementally. Small discoveries typically build on previous results and over time a more complete picture is revealed. It is rare to find discoveries that result in new treatments or cures in isolation or as the result of a single experiment. For this reason, characterizing some research projects as having 'minor or uncertain' benefit is always risky. The Go8 universities value basic or fundamental research - individual research projects are often part of a larger program and do not necessarily need to have an immediate or directly applicable outcome in order to be significant.

Non-animal alternatives

There are now many non-animal alternatives to the use of animals in research, for example, in vitro models, or "cell cultures". Universities are active in the development, assessment and use of these alternative models. In most cases, the non-animal models are complementary to animal models. However, particularly for immunological research or in development of new treatments and therapies, it is still necessary to study the way in which a whole organism responds.

At this point in time there are few non-animal models that are sophisticated or complex enough to replace the animal equivalent.

The Group of Eight
Group of Eight House
Level 2, 101 Northbourne Avenue
Turner ACT 2612
www.go8.edu.au