



TRANSPARENCY IN ANIMAL-BASED SCIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that transparency, open dialogue, and clear communication regarding the ethical use of animals in research, teaching, and testing are vital to achieving better public understanding, increased public trust, and improved animal welfare. According to a number of studies (please consult the *Related Publications* section), openness demonstrates an appreciation and commitment to the notion that animals used in scientific activities are owed concern about their welfare, and that animal welfare is central to institutional animal care and use programs.

The sharing of information with other institutions regarding scientific activities also enables more informed choices and strategies, and encourages a culture of learning, innovation, and better animal welfare. By openly exchanging information and experiences, institutions can foster a more collaborative and flexible environment.

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, the world has seen a growing call to action for the scientific community to speak more openly about their animal-based programs and increase transparency within their institutions, practices, and regulatory bodies. In Canada, the Chief Science Advisor released the [Roadmap for Open Science](#) in February 2020 that outlines a set of overarching principles and recommendations to make federal science open and available to all Canadians, including the development of departmental open science action plans.

Australia, New Zealand, and eight European countries – United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland – currently have active transparency agreements for their animal-based scientific activities. The United States is now working with transparency experts to do the same.

Based on these global developments and on the Government of Canada's Roadmap for Open Science, the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) examined the levels of transparency and confidentiality regarding its processes, messaging, and reporting. For decades, the CCAC has made public aggregated annual information on: the number and types of assessment visits it conducts; the number of preliminary, probationary, and regular certificates held by its certified institutions; institutional animal use data; and the name of most certified institutions.

In 2018, the CCAC requested recommendations from a volunteer-based Transparency and Confidentiality Task Force comprised of CCAC Board of Directors members and volunteers from CCAC-certified institutions, all of whom would also be involved in the day-to-day implementation of a transparency initiative within their own institutions. When the task force submitted its recommendations, it included a plan for the CCAC to disclose individual institutional information including assessment and implementation reports, certification letters, reportable animal welfare

incidents, etc. After initial consideration and consultation, the CCAC determined that disclosing most institution-specific information would be left to the discretion of each certified institution, under their own commitment to institutional transparency or within a Canadian transparency agreement.

The CCAC then put together a draft plan that would make more information publicly available while encouraging certified institutions to become more open and transparent regarding their animal-based scientific activities.

CONSULTATIONS

The CCAC's Public Affairs and Communications Committee was given the task of formulating the plan. This volunteer committee is made up of a veterinarian, a senior administrator, researchers, and communications specialists from CCAC-certified institutions. Together, they created the three-phase plan as well as an outline of several guidance materials, to support certified institutions throughout the entirety of the initiative.

The board provided comments and made a number of recommendations which were then incorporated. Once the board had approved the initial outline, the Secretariat reached out to its granting agencies, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, both of which received a synopsis of the initiative.

In May 2023, the CCAC presented its transparency plan for discussion with its 23 member organization representatives at the annual Town Hall meeting. Changes were made over the course of this consultation that further refined the plan.

The CCAC Secretariat then held individual meetings with members of the Alliance of Canadian Comprehensive Research Universities, the U15, and Colleges and Institutes Canada, all of whom provided important feedback, which was incorporated into the plan.

In October 2023, the CCAC presented three webinars to discuss the latest draft of its transparency initiative to more than 200 people from CCAC-certified institutions. A survey was then conducted with all who registered, and the results were then incorporated into both the plan and the upcoming support materials.

The CCAC anticipates further small changes and adjustments over the course of the four-year plan, as circumstances may shift and as discussions with certified institutions continue. Should the CCAC propose larger changes, it will work with all program participants to ensure its feasibility and sound implementation.

The CCAC would like to offer its sincere thanks to all who participated in the discussions and invite you to continue to do so over the course of the initiative. Your feedback, comments, and ideas will help to refine the plan and ensure its success.

CCAC-LED TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE

According to research data and international best practices, transparency and open dialogue are the best methods of demonstrating an institution's commitment to the ethical care and use of animals in science. While the initiatives within the following three phases will not require large-scale process changes on the part of certified institutions, they may initially receive more inquiries from the media and public, necessitating more work on behalf of animal care committees, veterinarians, communications experts, and senior administrators. As a result, the CCAC will implement these phases gradually, giving certified institutions the time to familiarize themselves

with the plan, provide their input and suggestions, and prepare their staff. The CCAC will publish the following information, in three distinct phases:



Most of the information to be released by the CCAC in the plan above will be annual, aggregated national data, with the exception of the last assessment date and the certificate status for each certified institution. While the CCAC fully supports open communication regarding animal-based science, disclosing any other institution-specific information is at the discretion of each certified institution.

Many of the comments received from the certified institution survey on transparency in October 2023 pertained to the aggregated CCAC reportable animal welfare incidents report and whether the CCAC and program participants were ready to begin collecting reliable data on the topic. The CCAC is committed to improving its reportable animal welfare incidents process as well as the training opportunities for program participants and the breadth of its discussions regarding reportable animal welfare incidents. The CCAC will therefore take a step back on this aspect of Phase 2 and postpone the reportable animal welfare incidents report to a later date, when the system has been refined.

Examples of Aggregated Reports

These reports will be similar in style to the current *CCAC Annual Animal Use Data Report*. In the past, the CCAC has also created a bi-annual *Summary of CCAC Reportable Animal Welfare Incidents*, which was made available to veterinarians, animal care committee chairs, and senior administrators. This report showed the total number of reportable animal welfare incidents by animal type (e.g., rodents, fish, livestock) as well as by broad primary reasons for the incidents (e.g., administration of substances, supplier or transport, equipment). At the end of the report, key takeaways were provided, including best practices to avoid the most common incidents. The CCAC plans to keep this report consistent with past iterations; however, small changes may be made.

The reports on the number of assessment visit recommendations by type (major, serious, regular, commendations), as well as the summary of frequent assessment visit recommendations will follow much the same model.

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSPARENCY

Openness and continuous dialogue are the best methods of demonstrating an institution's commitment to the ethical care and use of animals in science. The CCAC has, therefore, included an overarching, **voluntary** phase within the plan to support program participants in their own internal and external communications activities regarding the use of animals.

The CCAC encourages institutions to make a concerted effort to increase transparency as well as engage the public and other institutions regarding animal-based scientific activities. By doing so, organizations can inspire openness among other organizations, promote best practices in processes, activities, and Three Rs implementation, and increase public trust.

Furthermore, the CCAC encourages institutions to develop a formal transparency initiative amongst themselves, similar to [transparency agreements seen in research-intensive countries](#) where animal welfare is also prioritized, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand. Within these transparency agreements, institutions typically publish written statements about their commitment to transparency in animal-based science on their websites. This can be accompanied by other activities, such as publishing institutional animal use data, virtual tours of animal facilities, highlighting advancements and the use of the Three Rs, standard operating procedures, etc.

Should institutions wish to create a formal transparency initiative, the CCAC will provide external resources to do so. While it is not the CCAC's role to create such an agreement, it fully supports organizations who wish to make strides in this direction.

The CCAC's role in this initiative is to advocate for increased transparency in animal-based science, lay the groundwork by providing the necessary tools for widespread adoption, encourage and support institutions, and recognize those who make strides toward transparency. Not participating in this initiative will in no way affect an institution's certification status.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The gradual implementation of the transparency initiative will allow the CCAC to create several educational opportunities geared to the public and the media. Several program participants requested additional information on the CCAC's communication plan as there may be more attention and questions from the media and the public.

The CCAC is committed to providing guidance, training materials, and timely information throughout all phases of this initiative to assist certified institutions in answering questions and in improving transparency within their processes, communications, and policies. Through its website, digital communications, and social media channels, the CCAC will regularly disseminate information to inform the public regarding the various phases of the initiative and its components. From reportable animal welfare incidents to the assessment and certification process to assessment report recommendations, the CCAC will ensure that robust information is disseminated broadly to correct any misinformation.

A dedicated transparency section on the CCAC website will contain resources and training from both external sources and the CCAC. Information sheets and frequently asked questions will be created and certified institutions will be free to use the material, make it their own, or direct stakeholders to the CCAC website. The website will also include benefits of transparency, examples of transparency globally, communications guides for institutional animal care and use

programs, etc. Virtual CCAC conferences, in-person workshop sessions, and other meetings will also enable participants to discuss their progress and concerns and create a framework for how their institutions can move forward. A dedicated [CCAC Secretariat contact, Ms. Sandra MacInnis](#), will be happy to directly answer any questions.

SUPPORT, FEEDBACK, AND ONGOING DISCUSSIONS

The CCAC will continue to support and encourage certified institutions throughout this move toward increased transparency. Regarding institutional transparency, the goal is for institutions to make a commitment to continuous improvement toward better transparency in animal-based science. Every institution will start from a different place and perspective, as it is dependent on comfort level, capacity, and experience.

Every year, a survey will be sent to all certified institutions to garner their feedback which will be used to adjust and improve the CCAC's plan and help certified institutions better meet their transparency goals. The CCAC will also host webinars on topics raised in the feedback to support participants regarding various transparency topics.

For those institutions wishing to work together and create a national transparency agreement, the CCAC will provide guidance and introduce them to potential international partners, such as the [European Animal Research Association](#), which has shepherded several countries through the establishment of their own transparency agreements.

The CCAC is available to discuss any comments, suggestions, or feedback you may have on the transparency plan; please do not hesitate to contact [Ms. Sandra MacInnis](#), Director of Public Affairs and Communications.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Brunt M.W. and Chatigny F. (2022) [*Talking things out: How institutional transparency could improve animal research*](#). *The Conversation* (accessed on 2024-01-29).

Brunt M.W., Kreiberg H. and von Keyserlingk M.A.G. (2022) [*Invertebrate research without ethical or regulatory oversight reduces public confidence and trust*](#). *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9, Article number: 250 (accessed on 2024-01-29).

Brunt M.W. and Weary D.M. (2021) [*Public consultation in the evaluation of animal research protocols*](#). *PLoS ONE* 16(12):e0260114 (accessed on 2024-01-29).

Brunt M.W. and Weary D.M. (2021) [*Perceptions of laboratory animal facility managers regarding institutional transparency*](#). *PLoS ONE* 16(7):e0254279 (accessed on 2024-01-29).

Brunt M.W. and Weary D.M. (2023) [*Perceptions of laboratory animal veterinarians regarding institutional transparency*](#). *Animal Welfare* 32(e32):1-8 (accessed on 2024-01-29).

McLeod C. and Hobson-West P. (2016) [*Opening up animal research and science–society relations? A thematic analysis of transparency discourses in the United Kingdom*](#). *Public Understanding of Science* 25(7):791-806 (accessed on 2024-01-29).

Mills K.E., Han Z., Robbins J.A. and Weary D.M. (2018) [*Institutional transparency improves public perception of lab animal technicians and support for animal research*](#). *PLoS ONE* 13(2):e0193262 (accessed on 2024-01-29).

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Robbins J.A., Franks B., Weary D.M. and von Keyserlingk M.A.G. (2016) [*Awareness of ag-gag laws erodes trust in farmers and increases support for animal welfare regulations*](#). *Food Policy* 61:121-125 (accessed on 2024-01-29).