



TRANSPARENCY AND THE CCAC

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TRANSPARENCY AND CONFIDENTIALITY TASK FORCE

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, the world has seen a growing call to action for the scientific community to speak more openly about its animal-based programs and increase transparency within its 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. Some countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland) currently have active transparency agreements for their animal-based scientific activities.

Based on these developments, the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) examined the level of transparency and confidentiality regarding its processes, messaging, and reporting. Since the 1970s, the CCAC has made public aggregated annual information on: the number and types of assessment visits it conducted; 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.

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TASK FORCE REPORT

The CCAC Transparency and Confidentiality Task Force submitted its recommendations to the CCAC Board of Directors for discussion in 2021. Based on results from the Spring 2020 survey to senior administrators, the task force created and evaluated potential activities to increase the CCAC's level of transparency.

Benefits

The task force is pleased to present these recommendations to the board, as it recognizes the benefits of greater transparency within the CCAC. The task force believes that these recommendations will assist the CCAC in its responses to media, the public, and whistleblowers, as well as with the revision of its confidentiality policy. These steps also ensure that the CCAC continues to meet its responsibilities to the Canadian public, to whom it is accountable.

After our survey to senior administrators within CCAC-certified institutions, the task force gathered the following perceived benefits to this initiative:

- Maintaining transparency and disclosing high standards of animal care and welfare
- Denoting institutions that hold a GAP Certificate
- Acting as benchmark data for institutions to better understand where they stand within the larger Canadian framework, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for advancement of their animal care programs
- Public accountability
- Added scrutiny of animal use in CCAC certified institutions should help support the message that the CCAC and certified institutions promote the ethical and humane use of animals
- Sharing of information among institutions about issues to help prevent others
- The overall benefit to our industry in maintaining transparency and disclosing high standards of care and welfare is critical to reversing stigma associated with animal use

Risks

The task force recommends that the Board and the Secretariat consider the perceived risks that many certified institutions may feel in the implementation of these changes. While the recommendations below will not require process changes on the part of certified institutions, program participants must have the time to prepare and create a fulsome response plan to any perceived reputational risk. This will include plans for communications, crisis and risk management, requests for information, etc. This will undoubtedly be time consuming for most institutions and the CCAC may receive push back on its transparency efforts. The Secretariat should also take the time it needs to prepare its own communication and change management plan to meet these challenges.

Implementation

The task force recommends that the CCAC take a gradual approach over several years to implement these changes. The implementation should be preceded by a short consultation period during which the CCAC can ensure feedback is garnered from all of its stakeholder groups, ensure that questions are answered, and address feedback and concerns.

It is also recommended that each phase be accompanied by robust change management and communication plans to ensure that certified institutions understand the reason for the changes and how they may be impacted.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Already in place

- Pooled annual information on the number and type (regular, interim, special) of assessments
- Anonymized annual summary of category of certificates
- Names of most certified institutions on the CCAC website (voluntary)

Phase 1 – Immediate implementation

- Names of all certified institutions on the CCAC website (mandatory)
- Pooled annual numbers of recommendations, divided by type: major, serious, regular (accompanied by detailed definitions)
- Anonymized annual summary of frequent serious and regular recommendations (accompanied by detailed definitions)

Phase 2 – Gradual implementation

- Year and “type” of assessment visit (regular, interim, special) to each certified institution
- Category of certificate of each certified institution
- Outcome of an inquiry related to an animal welfare concern at an institution
- Assessment and implementation report for each institution, and certification letter
- Anonymized annual summary of reportable animal welfare incidents

Phase 3 – To be implemented at a later date

- AUDF of each certified institution
- Reportable animal welfare incidents for each certified institution