

AAALAC POSITION STATEMENTS

Culture of Care

A Culture of Care may be defined as both a mindset and a holistic approach to caring for and working with research animals within an institution. It is exemplified by an organizational culture that starts with the commitment to go beyond compliance with minimum standards of local, regional or national regulatory requirements. A Culture of Care is demonstrated by promoting caring and respectful behavior towards animals and personnel, as well as instilling a sense of responsibility for sustaining processes of improvement. When implemented, a Culture of Care will ensure ongoing programmatic improvements. As such, the concept of Culture of Care is consistent with AAALAC's mission to continuously improve animal welfare in science and education.

Culture of Care is not a recent concept. The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (NRC; 2011) states that *"the implementation of a humane care program, and creation of a laboratory environment in which humane care and respect for animals are valued and encouraged, underlies the core requirements of the Guide and the system of self-regulation it supports"*. Moreover, processes such as post-approval monitoring *"should support a Culture of Care focusing on the animals' well-being"*.

The key components of Culture of Care include thoughtful consideration and active implementation of beneficial animal welfare and 3Rs practices for all species being maintained and worked with; promoting well-being of those caring for and working with research animals, an institutional emphasis on excellence in research integrity, quality and reproducibility, and the presence of mechanisms that foster institutional transparency and societal openness.

Animal care and use programs are encouraged to promote a Culture of Care. The Council on Accreditation may recognize evidence of an effective Culture of Care through commendations. Examples of Culture of Care may include:

- Definition of institutional values and policies concerning animal care and use encouraged and fostered through internal communication. Information provided to new staff is important for the future consolidation of these values at the institution.
- Coordination and cooperation between senior management and the IACUC or equivalent Oversight Body (IACUC/OB) for commitment to and implementation of Culture of Care across the whole program. Open discussion between all of the members of the animal care and use program is essential for achieving a successful and effective Culture of Care program.
- Active consideration of the wellbeing of personnel, especially those performing tasks associated with increased risk of inducing stress and compassion fatigue, as there is no Culture of Care for animals without Culture of Care for people.
- Effective education and training programs to ensure that facility personnel working with animals are skilled, competent and aware of the institutional Culture of Care. This facilitates empathy towards animals and reduction of animal stress and enhances personnel confidence and satisfaction, contributing to high quality, reproducible research data.

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- Active involvement of the IACUC/OB in continuous improvement of the animal care and use program. This can be achieved by periodic review and evaluation of the program, ensuring that continuing education opportunities are available to the IACUC/OB members and those working with animals, as well as through retrospective review with researchers and facility personnel.
- Empowerment and encouragement of all personnel participating in research program support.
- Active promotion of 3Rs approaches when caring for and working with research animals. Recognizing and rewarding 3Rs achievements by animal care and research personnel may be a practical way to encourage improvements in this area.
- Clear and open communication to the public on how, when and why animals are worked with in science, which helps to maintain the societal trust.

Supporting Documents:

1. Robinson S, Sparrow S, Williams B, Decelle T, Bertelsen T, Reid K, Chlebus M. The European Federation of the Pharmaceutical Industry and Associations' Research and Animal Welfare Group: Assessing and benchmarking 'Culture of Care' in the context of using animals for scientific purpose. *Lab Anim*. 2019 Nov 19;54(5):23677219887998. doi: 10.1177/0023677219887998. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 31744380; PMCID: PMC7564339.
2. Brown MJ, Symonowicz C, Medina LV, Bratcher NA, Buckmaster CA, Klein H, Anderson LC. Culture of Care: Organizational Responsibilities. In: Weichbrod RH, Thompson GA, Norton JN, editors. *Management of Animal Care and Use Programs in Research, Education, and Testing*. 2nd ed. Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2018. Chapter PMID: 29787190.
3. Klein HJ, Bayne KA. Establishing a culture of care, conscience, and responsibility: addressing the improvement of scientific discovery and animal welfare through science-based performance standards. *ILAR J*. 2007;48(1):3-11. doi: 10.1093/ilar.48.1.3. PMID: 17170491.