

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2013-14, 5/6 & 7 June 2013

Question: E13-104

OUTCOME: 1 – Population Health

Topic: Primates

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Rhiannon

Question:

- a) How much money has been granted in the last five years for primate based medical and scientific research?
- b) How much government funding is provided for each of the three breeding colonies - the baboon colony in Sydney, and the marmoset and macaque colonies in Churchill Victoria?
- c) What government departments including military establishments and other government bodies, including CSIRO, Department of Defence use primates and for what purposes?
- d) How many have these organisations have reported to the NHMRC on the number of animals they use?
- e) Why are these organisations exempt from reporting their statistics publicly?
- f) Given there is an international shift away from the use of non-human primates in scientific research purely on ethical grounds, what consideration has the Australian Government given to driving this change among Australian research bodies?
- g) What happens to primates that have been used for medical and scientific research when they are no longer required for such research?
- h) Has the government given consideration to providing a refuge or retirement facility for primates that have been used in research? If not, why not?
- i) Does the government accept that it has a duty of care to primate animals that have been used for medical and scientific research when they are no longer required for such research?
- j) What life-saving medical breakthroughs have been achieved by subjecting primates to experimentation over the last 10 years? Is there any centralised database collating this information?
- k) If there isn't, how can an Ethics Committee or the NHMRC know that proposed primate experimentation has not already been duplicated elsewhere?
 - i) Is this an ethical approach?
 - ii) Where is the data that allows informed debate, validation or value of such experiments?
- l) Have there been any discussions about setting up a centralised database?
 - i) Would NHMRC support setting up one? If not why not?
- m) Before approving experimentation on primates what consideration is given to the impact the experiments will have on the animals?
 - i) What are the limits in terms of physical or mental harm or stress allowed to be perpetrated on primates in experiments?
- n) Is the publishing of peer-reviewed outcomes a requirement of research in Australia using primates? If not, why not?

Answer:

- a) In the last five years a total of \$37.5 million has been provided by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to 46 grants for primate based medical and scientific research.
- b) The NHMRC will have provided the following amounts to support the management and operation of primate breeding colonies:
- National Baboon Colony \$1,086,480
 - National Non-Human Primate Breeding and Research Facility (macaques and marmosets) \$4,021,025.

See part a) for information on primate based medical research funded by NHMRC.

- c) The NHMRC can only provide information that it has access to regarding funds it provides to its Administering Institutions. Although the CSIRO is an Administering Institution for receipt of funds, these funds do not involve projects using non-human primates.
- d) Refer to response provided to part c).
- e) Refer to response provided to part c).
- f) Under the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (the Code), non-human primates may be used only when necessary and only when there is no valid alternative.
- g) Under the current regulatory framework, an institutional animal ethics committee (AEC) must approve what happens to non-human primates that have been used for medical and scientific research when they are no longer required for research. This information must be outlined in the project application to the AEC and must be approved by the AEC before the research commences. The fate of the animals is usually determined by the nature of the research.
- h) Yes. The NHMRC *Policy on the care and use of non-human primates for scientific purposes* requires the long-term welfare of non-human primates to be taken into account when deciding the fate of the animals. Retirement at the national breeding colonies is an option when the health and temperament of the animal are considered suitable.
- i) Under the current regulatory framework, researchers have personal responsibility for all matters related to the welfare of the animals they use and must act in accordance with all requirements of the Code and state/territory legislation. This responsibility begins when an animal is allocated to a project and ends with its fate at the completion of the project.
- j) The NHMRC is not aware of a centralised database for the collation of information on the outcomes of research involving non-human primates. However, NHMRC requires that any publications arising from an NHMRC supported research project must be deposited into an open access institutional repository within a 12 month period from the date of publication. (See also response provided to part n) for information on dissemination of outcomes.)

- k) Under the current regulatory framework, researchers must satisfy the AEC that:
- the proposed work is essential and justified, and
 - the work is not a repeat of an earlier work, and if so, the reason why repetition is necessary.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain access to all relevant data and information to ensure that the work is not being repeated.

The NHMRC's process for peer review of applications for NHMRC funds involves the assessment of scientific or technical merit of applications by individuals (peers) with knowledge and expertise equivalent to that of the individuals whose applications they are reviewing. This would include assessment of the relevance of the work and the capacity for generation of new knowledge.

The NHMRC's policy on open access to publications that report outcomes of NHMRC-funded research facilitates rapid dissemination of this information.

- l) The function of the NHMRC is to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia, to foster the development of consistent health standards between the various states and territories, to foster medical research and training and public health research and training throughout Australia, and to foster consideration of ethical issues relating to health.

The NHMRC cannot comment on a hypothetical situation.

- m) Under the current regulatory framework, an AEC must approve any research involving non-human primates before it commences. The researcher must satisfy the AEC that:
- that the use of non-human primates is justified;
 - there is no alternative to the use of non-human primates;
 - the minimum numbers of non-human primates are used; and
 - adverse impact on the non-human primates is minimised.

Under the Code, and state and territory legislation, there are specific requirements related to the minimisation of harm, including pain and distress to animals that are used. In addition, the researcher must provide particular justification for the use of non-human primates.

Projects using animals, including non-human primates may commence only after a decision has been made that they are justified, weighing the predicted scientific or educational value of the projects against the potential effects on the welfare of the animals. However, the ultimate decision regarding the type of study that is ethically acceptable rests with the individual AEC.

- n) A requirement for all institutions receiving funding from NHMRC is adherence to the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*. This Code (Section 4.4) states that "*Researchers have a responsibility to their colleagues and the wider community to disseminate a full account of their research as broadly as possible*". This requirement applies to all research, including that involving non-human primates.