



Guidelines on Veterinary Care

The Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 8th Edition 2013 (updated 2021) (the Code) defines a **program of veterinary care as a** “*system for the provision of veterinary care and advice. Elements of the program should include, where appropriate, animal clinical care; emergency care; preventive medicine; anaesthesia, analgesia, and surgery; and animal quarantine.*”

Responsibilities for Animal Users:

The Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8th Edition 2013 (updated 2021) (the Code) states

2.5.5 Animal carers must:

(iv) take prompt actions based on the monitoring and assessment of animal wellbeing and in response to unexpected adverse events and emergencies, including liaising with investigators and seeking veterinary advice.

2.5.17 When animals for which they are responsible are ill or injured, or show unexpected abnormalities, the facility manager must: (i) ensure provision of prompt diagnosis and treatment under direct veterinary supervision and control.

3.3.8 The use of local and general anaesthetics, analgesics and sedatives must be considered as part of a plan to manage pain and distress, and such use should at least parallel their use in current veterinary or medical practice.

Responsibilities of Institutions:

2.1.5 Institutions must promote compliance with the Code by:

(vi) ensuring availability and access to veterinary advice for the management and oversight of a program of veterinary care, quality management and project design to safeguard animal wellbeing

2.1.8 Institutions must ensure all people understand their responsibilities by:

(vi) ensuring availability and access to appropriate veterinary and diagnostic services so that a health status of the animals is maintained that safeguards animal wellbeing and meets the requirements of their proposed use.

Some considerations when proposing a program of veterinary care to the AEC:

- Veterinarians providing the veterinary care program must be named and aware of their responsibilities under the code. The experience of the named veterinarians in treatment of the animal species used, and their availabilities for the duration of the project, should be considered.
- Contingencies need to be in place where the named Veterinarian may not be contactable and available (i.e., after hours, unavailable due to other commitments, weekends, if on leave). Identify and make a list of local veterinarians (private vet clinics) within a reasonable

distance of the project site who would be willing to act as backups for contingencies (might be challenging if the project doesn't have sufficient funds to pay for such services).

- Ensure monitoring is undertaken with appropriate care and diligence to ensure early signs of animal problems/deviation from normal health are detected. Although we may think that sudden death is a common occurrence, it is often not the case. More often, not enough close observation has occurred and hence euthanasia or treatment at an appropriate stage was not undertaken.
- The Code is clear that suffering should be minimised, and it is imperative that an animal is not allowed to die slowly without Veterinary oversight. Veterinarians must be alerted of a potential issue at the initial stages of sighting the problem by the researcher/caretaker.
- Veterinarians are obligated to examine the animal in many cases, and this cannot be done adequately remotely. The phone call to seek advice for minor issues may complement the protocol, but this does not replace a complete clinical examination, as this directly impacts the diagnostic process and hence intervention points and humane endpoints.
- Although virtual contact is not ideal it may be an absolute necessity at times (i.e., due to distance, or an immediate catastrophic event to the animal). Consider use of chat applications by the research group like WhatsApp, Messenger etc where immediate communication with photo and video options are available to share the condition of an affected animal in case of an emergency.
- Animals impacted by a foreshadowed adverse event approved by the AEC require prompt veterinary care as outlined above and stipulated in the Code.

Please note the veterinarian listed should be a registered veterinarian with the relevant State Veterinary Practitioners Board (VPB).

