

IGC Statement on Animals in Research

Biomedical research, whether fundamental or applied, has contributed to improving health and wellbeing of humans and animals.

In its goal to carry out research of excellence, with impact on society, research at the IGC combines different models, systems and techniques. This includes studies on human volunteers, tissue culture, computer modelling, and model organisms, such as vertebrate and invertebrate animals.

Since all living species descend from a common ancestor, thus sharing many biological characteristics, the use of model organisms, and animal models in particular, enables understanding of human biology and the underlying molecular mechanisms. The use of model organisms and more specifically, of animals, has allowed discoveries and breakthroughs that are on the basis of many treatments available today, including those for heart disease, cancer, polio, and neurological disorders among others. Therefore, the IGC accepts the use of animal models, and of other model organisms, whenever their use is justified on scientific, ethical and legal grounds.

We acknowledge that it is not yet possible to completely replace the use of animals in research. However, the IGC strongly endorses and encourages the application of the 3Rs principle: replacement of animals by alternative non-animal methods whenever possible, reduction of the number of animals used, and refinement of procedures to improve animal welfare.

Animals, in particular vertebrates, deserve special care to ensure their welfare. All research conducted at the IGC that involves the use of vertebrate animals follows the Portuguese (Decreto-Lei 113/2013), and European laws (Directive 2010/63/EU) that rule the use of animals in research.

Research proposals that involve the use of vertebrate animals, are reviewed by the IGC Animal Welfare Body (in Portuguese: ORBEA – Órgão Responsável pelo Bem-Estar Animal), and by the National Authority (Direção Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária – DGAV) prior to the beginning of research. The reviewing process addresses: a) a harm-benefit analysis; b) the importance of animal use for the proposed research, and whether alternative methods have been considered; c) the justification of species/strains as well as the number of animals involved; d) procedures to be performed, level of suffering and measures to minimise it, humane endpoints; and e) husbandry conditions.

The IGC Animal Facilities are regularly inspected by the DGAV. Facilities have a consulting veterinary surgeon, highly trained technicians and an Animal Welfare Officer that work together to provide the best possible health and welfare conditions to resident animals.

All scientists carrying out research that entails the use of animals have to take certified courses on laboratory animal sciences, developed along guidelines established by the Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (FELASA).

In 2018, the IGC signed the Transparency Agreement on Animal Research in Portugal, an initiative supported by the Portuguese scientific community in collaboration with the European Animal Research Association to promote precise information about the use of animals in fundamental and biomedical research. More info - <https://www.eara.eu/post/transparency-agreement-on-animal-research-in-portugal>