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Australia's ethical framework for when animals are used for scientific purposes

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Abstract

The basic tenet of the Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (the Code) is that there is an ethical imperative in our decisions as to if and how animals are used in these circumstances. The Code provides a framework for ethical review which incorporates a set of guiding principles and establishes institutional Animal Ethics Committees with responsibilities for oversight of these activities; the nexus between animal welfare and scientific outcomes and the recognition that such ethical decisions are not matters for the scientific community alone but must involve the wider community are notions central to the effective implementation of the Code. The Code identifies the responsibilities of the parties involved such that arrangements within which individuals exercise their responsibilities are clarified and processes for accountability are transparent. First published in 1969 as an initiative of the scientific community under the auspices of the National Health and Medical Research Council, the seventh edition of the Code was published in 2004. The Code is a living document with changing community views and scientific developments reflected in each revision. The time course of the development of the Code provides a background to examine the way in which policies governing the use of animals for scientific purposes have evolved in Australia. This paper will provide an overview of these developments and discuss the influences which have shaped the key elements of this approach.

Keywords: animal research, animal welfare, ethical framework, ethics committees, public participation, research governance