**Veterinary Authority**

Date Adopted: June 11, 2024

**I. Purpose**

To establish and define limitations regarding the authority of the Attending Veterinarian (AV) regarding the care and use of vertebrate animals used for research, teaching, training, testing, and related activities at the University of Montana.

**II. Policy**

It is LAR's policy to meet or exceed all federal, state, and local regulations and guidelines and to comply with all institutional policies and procedures as they apply to the use of animals in research.  Personnel must attend any applicable training in animal care and use, occupational health and safety, equipment operation, and SOPs before performing activities outlined in this SOP or working under the direct supervision of trained personnel.

**III. Background**

Adequate and appropriate veterinary medical care is essential to support a comprehensive animal care and use program that ensures the health and well-being of animals. The University of MontanaI is committed to observing Federal and State policies and regulations and AAALAC standards for the humane care and use of animals.

The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) regulations state, “Each research facility shall assure that the attending veterinarian has appropriate authority to ensure the provision of adequate veterinary care and to oversee the adequacy of other aspects of animal care and use.”

The Guide states, “The institution must provide the [Attending Veterinarian] with sufficient authority, including access to all animals, and resources to manage the program of veterinary care” and “there should be a timely and accurate method for communication of any abnormalities in or concerns about animal health, behavior, and well-being to the veterinarian or the veterinarian’s designee…. For animals on research protocols, the veterinarian or veterinarian’s designee should make every effort to discuss any problems with the principal investigator or project director to jointly determine the most appropriate course of treatment or action.”

The Guide also states “…if the investigator and veterinary staff cannot reach consensus on treatment, the veterinarian must have the authority, delegated by senior administration and the IACUC, to treat the animal, remove it from the experiment, institute appropriate measures to relieve severe pain or distress, or perform euthanasia if necessary.”

A position statement from the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine (ACLAM), endorsed by PHS and AAALAC, includes the following statement: “The veterinarian must have the responsibility and authority to assure that handling, restraint, anesthesia, analgesia, and euthanasia are administered as required to relieve pain and such suffering in research animals, provided such intervention is not specifically precluded in protocols reviewed and approved by the IACUC. The veterinarian must exercise good professional judgment to select the most appropriate pharmacologic agent(s) and methods to relieve animal pain or distress to assure humane treatment of animals while avoiding undue interference with goals of the experiment.”

**IV. Veterinary Authority Policy**

The University of Montana (UM) has empowered the Attending Veterinarian (AV) with full authority to provide veterinary medical care or euthanasia, at their discretion, to animals utilized on research protocols approved by the UM Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). The duties of the AV may be delegated to other veterinarians in cases where the AV is unavailable (emergency back-up veterinarian(s)), but ensuring program compliance with federal regulations and institutional policy remains the responsibility of the AV.

The AV (or authorized designee) has unrestricted access to all areas where animals are used or housed, including any satellite or laboratory-managed facilities. In the event of an immediate animal health, welfare, or safety concern, the AV has the authority to temporarily halt an activity or a portion of any activity pending notification and action by the IACUC.

Regarding the provision of clinical care and research support: the AV (or authorized designee) will make every reasonable attempt to consult with the Principal Investigator (PI), or a representative of the PI, before implementing veterinary care actions. However, in emergencies, the veterinarian is not required to obtain approval from the PI or other parties to provide appropriate care in an expedited fashion if such actions are deemed necessary to protect the interests of the animal or the integrity of the University’s animal care program. In such cases, the veterinarian will notify the PI as soon as reasonably practical.

In most instances, treatment decisions and plans should be a collaboration between the veterinarian and the PI to balance animal welfare and research outcomes. *It is the expectation that recommendations for treatment made by veterinarians are followed unless an alternate plan is suggested and agreed upon by both parties.*

If the PI (or delegated responsible research staff member) and the AV (or authorized designee) cannot ultimately reach an agreement regarding the need for medical treatment or euthanasia, the AV (or authorized designee) has the authority to act to protect the health and well-being of the animal and will make the final decision based on their medical judgment.

The AV (or authorized designee) has the authority to implement modified husbandry practices, provision of enrichment, or social status based on the clinical needs of animals. These requests should be made in collaboration with the leadership of the department/group to minimize the overall impact on the animal(s). Such requests will be communicated to appropriate individuals using established procedures.

In rare cases, it may be determined in the best interest of an animal to be housed in caging that does not meet federal regulations or guidelines (e.g., incubator housing for neonatal or debilitated animals or housing without perches for animals recovering from injury). When these conditions are anticipated, exceptions to cage size requirements will normally be reviewed by the IACUC at regularly convened meetings before implementation. In the event of emergent or unanticipated situations, the AV may authorize a temporary exception pending IACUC review. If the AV exercises this authority, the AV must promptly notify the IACUC Chair, and the IACUC review of the exception must be completed as soon as reasonably possible.

**References**

1. Animal Welfare Act Regulations. [Animal Welfare Act](https://nal.usda.gov/awic/animal-welfare-act)
2. Institute for laboratory Animal Research. *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, 8th ed. (National Academies Press, 2011).ACLAM. (2016).
3. ACLAM position statement on adequate veterinary care. PDF file. National Institutes of Health. [Adequate Veterinary Care (PDF)](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/ACLAM_Adequate_Vet_Care.pdf)
4. Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching (Ag Guide), 4th ed. – [Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching (PDF)](https://www.asas.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/agguide_4th.pdf?sfvrsn=56b44ed1_2)