Animal Welfare Assessment Program

Administrative Information

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Purpose
To outline the process for conducting an animal welfare assessment.

Policy
In accordance with the 2021 CCAC guidelines on animal welfare assessment, this program is designed to regular check and assess the welfare, condition and health of research animals at CBU.

Responsibility
ACC, consulting veterinarian, Principal Investigator (PI) and their research staff are responsible for animal welfare assessments, specifically:

- The ACC is responsible for overseeing the implementation of welfare assessments, but the assessments themselves should be completed by a team involving protocol authors and their staff, veterinarians, and animal care personnel.
- It is the responsibility of the animal using researcher to integrate this assessment program into the regular husbandry activities, as well as before and after any experimental procedures.
- Animal care research staff should perform assessments on periodic intervals or after any significant event or change to protocol and procedures.
- It's the responsibility of the animal users and veterinarian conducting welfare assessments to report any issues or concerns discovered during the assessment to the ACC.

Process

Ensuring the welfare of research animals is paramount to the responsibilities of the ACC and animal users. Welfare assessments applies not only to monitoring animals for signs of pain, suffering and distress associated with procedures, but also to the routine assessment of all animals to check for any health or welfare problems. The use of the animal welfare assessment form, essential for conducting the welfare assessment, is detailed below.

- Currently, CBU only has one lab and one type of animal being used in research at CBU.
- Only one animal welfare assessment form has been produced, specifically for assessing the welfare of small warm water fish (Feather Tailed Knifefish). A copy of the welfare assessment form can be found as appendix 1 of this SOP.
- If new or different animals begin to be researched at CBU, new welfare assessment forms will be produced for the specific animal.

Using the Animal Welfare Assessment Form

- The animal welfare assessment form is divided into 4 welfare categories: Physical, Behavioural, Experimental Procedures and Environmental.
- Welfare categories are further broken down into specific assessments. The form provides observable criteria to guide the welfare assessor through assessment observations. The observable criteria include details and specific measures for the assessor to evaluate.
- Observable criteria are broken down into 4 categories: Acceptable, mild to moderate welfare concern, severe welfare concerns, and unacceptable welfare status.
- Detailed descriptions of the observable criteria allow the assessor to score each assessment categories based on what is obversed, and the severity of welfare concerns. The assessor marks on the chart within the form, where each assessment category falls on the observable criteria table, as well as provide notes about any concerns or issues they discover.
- Animal using staff and researchers are to use this assessment to discover and address any welfare concerns or issues present within their animal population.

Reporting Adverse Welfare Conditions

- If several issues or more severe issues are discovered, it must be reported to the ACC. The ACC will work with in the lab and study PI to address the welfare concerns and decide upon future actions to prevent further welfare concerns.
- Animal welfare records should be kept and maintained by the PI. Records can be examined to assess if improvement in animal welfare are required and will target specific areas where improvement needs to be implemented.