

SPECIAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

DISCUSSIONS AND REVIEW OF DOCUMENTATION

Animal welfare concerns were raised in a Post-Media article published on August 7, 2025, regarding dog research carried out at St. Joseph's Health Care, London. The Lawson Research Institute (Lawson) senior administrators announced on August 11 that they would cease research studies involving dogs. At the time of the announcement, eight dogs were housed at the animal facility. In a community update on September 10, Lawson confirmed that six of the eight dogs used in heart attack research were sent to "a trusted and fully accredited organization" to begin the adoption process, while the remaining two would follow shortly. In response to these allegations, Western's Animal Care Committee initiated its own investigation by generating a concern report based on the procedure for investigating concern reports outlined in Proc-004 and in Western University's policy POL-004. At the time of the special visit, no research activities involving dogs were ongoing in the facility; however, two dogs were still present, awaiting completion of the adoption process.

The findings, based on discussions and observations conducted at the University of Western Ontario and the Lawson Research Institute, as well as the documents provided, are summarized below.

The CCAC Associate Director of Assessment did not identify any issues related to animal care and use or infrastructure. Animal care, husbandry, and research procedures, as well as the facility, complied with CCAC Standards and institutional requirements, as also noted in the CCAC Interim assessment report from the November 2024 visit.

However, deficiencies were noted in the communication processes between Lawson and Western, as well as between Lawson and the Animal Care Committee. Lawson did not effectively communicate with the other constituents and participants in the ethical care and use program, the CCAC, and with the public regarding the event. In addition, Lawson did not comply with CCAC and institutional policies regarding the authority of the Animal Care Committee, as decisions regarding the use and fate of the dogs were made without consulting the committee. Communications between the program components and participants can be refined to enhance the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all participants, facilitate discussions and decisions among all parties involved, improve the program's functioning, and ensure compliance with CCAC standards.

The Associate Director of Assessment noted that the structure of the program and the roles and responsibilities of each institution were not well understood. In complex, integrated ethical animal care and use programs, such as the one at Western and Lawson, two or more institutions share elements of the program. Although all institutions are distinct legal entities with their own CCAC certificate and their own senior administrator, one senior administrator (usually from the larger institution, in this case, Western) is designated as the individual responsible for the ethical animal care and use program for all locations. This administrator coordinates efforts and ensures that all organizational/institutional responsibilities are met. Institutions sharing elements of their program are expected to have a formal agreement signed by both parties, which describes the roles and responsibilities of each institution and details which institution and which senior administrator are responsible for which elements of the ethical animal care and use program. Elements that should be detailed in the agreement includes, but is not limited to, animal care committee, scientific merit review, pedagogical merit review, veterinary services, provision of continuing education program for the veterinarians and animal care staff, training program for researchers and instructors, post-approval monitoring, crisis management program, occupational health and safety program, management, maintenance, and staffing of animal facilities, and management of documentations such as standard operating procedures, policies and integration of CCAC guidelines. Clear lines of authority and communication must also be described and established. The agreement

between Western and Lawson should be reviewed, updated if necessary, and reinvigorated to ensure all relevant parties are informed of their roles and responsibilities.

The Associate Director of Assessment also noted that the role and responsibilities of the animal care committee were not well understood by Lawson's administrators. The animal care committee is the keystone of any ethical animal care and use program and the primary compliance body for animal care and use. It is responsible for overseeing all animal care and use undertaken by members of the institution and ensuring compliance with institutional and CCAC standards. Regardless of the structure of the animal care and use program, the animal care committee must remain at the centre of the program and play an active role in ensuring that animal use in practice takes place as approved in principle. To act as strong and visible advocates for the ethical and humane treatment of animals, the animal care committee requires the support of the senior administration, enabling them to fulfill their responsibilities and ensure animal welfare effectively. The senior administration must work with the animal care committee to ensure that all animal users and caregivers are informed of, understand, and comply with institutional animal care and use policies and procedures. Collaborative discussion is required to ensure that all parties (senior administration of all institutions, the animal care committee, and veterinary and animal care staff) understand their roles and responsibilities. This discussion will also facilitate the implementation of the decision-making process, as well as the development and implementation of efficient processes that serve the needs of the animal care committee, the research community, and protect animal welfare, thereby ensuring the integrity of the oversight process. A sound ethical animal care and use program should foster good communication among administrators, the animal care committee, veterinary and animal care staff, and animal users and will contribute to the respect and recognition of the animal care committee.

Communication with the public and the general institutional personnel should also be refined. The use of animals in science is the subject of external questions and concerns from the public, as well as internal ones, particularly among members of the institution who do not use animals. The structure that institutions establish to ensure appropriate animal care and use, including the animal care committee and qualified veterinary and animal care staff, enables institutions to demonstrate that they are taking their responsibility to meet national standards on animal care and use seriously. The Associate Director of Assessment noted that the crisis management plan can be refined to ensure it comprehensively addresses all categories of potential crises and includes a detailed communication plan for addressing public and media inquiries about animal use. The plans should be readily available to all who may need them.

It was also discussed that this event is an opportunity to review and refine the institutional transparency plan. Western has started working on a plan that does not include Lawson. The CCAC encourages certified institutions to make a concerted effort to increase transparency and engage the public and other institutions regarding their animal-based scientific activities. [Resources](#) are available on the CCAC website to help institutions develop their transparency plan.

The internal process for reporting animal welfare concerns was also discussed, as one employee had raised concerns regarding dog husbandry in November 2023. A follow-up was conducted by some Animal Care Committee members, and the employee was invited to submit a formal concern report; however, they did not do so. The importance of ensuring that all concerns and questions are satisfactorily answered and changes, if needed, are implemented was emphasized. The process should also facilitate safe reporting of concerns and provide an option for anonymous reporting.

SITE ASSESSMENT: LAWSON RESEARCH INSTITUTE ANIMAL FACILITY

The Lawson Research Institute's animal facility is situated within the St. Joseph's Health Care London building. The dog housing rooms, outdoor kennels, procedure rooms, and the receiving area, where animals entered the facility, were visited. The facility was clean and well-maintained. The two dogs still

housed in the facility appeared in good condition. Records were kept in proximity to the housing room, including for enrichment provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SERIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Due Date: February 17, 2026

- 1. That the Lawson Research Institute senior administration work with the University of Western Ontario to ensure the authority of the Animal Care Committee is respected and understood by all participants in the program, including administrators and members of all partner institutions.**

Relevant policies and guidelines can be found in:

- The [CCAC policy statement for: senior administrators responsible for animal care and use programs](#)
- The [CCAC policy statement on: terms of reference for animal care committees](#)

- 2. That the Lawson Research Institute senior administration, working with the University of Western Ontario, take the necessary measures to ensure that individuals engaged in the ethical animal care and use program, including the senior administrators of all partner institutions, are informed of, and adhere to, CCAC policies and guidelines, institutional policies and procedures, and understand their roles and responsibilities.**

Relevant policies and guidelines can be found in:

- The [CCAC policy statement for: senior administrators responsible for animal care and use programs](#)
- The [CCAC policy statement on: terms of reference for animal care committees](#)

REGULAR RECOMMENDATION

Due Date: May 15, 2026

- 1. That the University of Western Ontario senior administration, working with its affiliate institutions, and the Animal Care Committee, refine the process for follow-ups of concerns to animal welfare.**

Relevant policies and guidelines can be found in:

- The [CCAC policy statement for: senior administrators responsible for animal care and use programs](#)
- The [CCAC policy statement on: terms of reference for animal care committees](#)