

Animal Wellness Groups Urge NIH to Defund Primate Research Centers and Redirect Billions in Savings to Better Science

Primate use is enormously expensive and discredited as a reliable model for human disease

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Today, the Center for a Humane Economy and Animal Wellness Action sent a letter to the National Institutes of Health Director Jay Bhattacharya, M.D., applauding his plan to favor human-based research technologies and urging him to wind down federal spending at the National Primate Research Centers (NPRCs) and related operations. Funding for invasive testing on primates should be redirected to more promising human-relevant approaches and coordinated through the new Office of Research Innovation, Validation and Application (ORIVA).



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Wayne Pacelle, president of the Center for a Humane Economy

The full text of the [letter to Dr. Bhattacharya can be found here.](#)

The recently announced NIH plan to curb animal testing is aligned with the FDA Roadmap made public just weeks ago by Commissioner Marty Makary, M.D., to phase out animal testing in 3 to 5 years. Dr. Makary declared that animal testing will be the exception rather than the norm in the agency’s collaborative work with drug developers.

“With April announcements from FDA and NIH to wind down animal testing, the Trump Administration is promising to shed the inhumane, inefficient, and archaic

model of animal testing and to substitute a new era characterized by human-relevant science

and personalized medicine,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. “A logical step would be for the NIH to wind down funding of the government-funded regional primate centers. The federal government spends a fortune on invasive testing on these animals even though, as Dr. Makary and Dr. Bhattacharya noted, their scientific value is dubious and their moral worth undeniable.”

Oregon Governor Tina Kotek has publicly advocated for the closure of the Oregon National Primate Research Center (ONPRC), operated by Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU). In late March 2025, her office confirmed that she urged OHSU leadership to complete their current research obligations and move toward shutting down the center in a humane and responsible manner, like Harvard University's closure of its primate research facility in 2015.

“After 60 years of failure and billions in taxpayer funding, it’s time to redirect funding to the qualification and development of New Approach Methodologies (NAMs),” said Tamara Drake, director of research and regulatory policy for the Center for a Humane Economy. “The seven NPRCs receive approximately \$100 million a year in base funding from the government, and we’ve heard from the new leaders of the FDA and the NIH that investing in primate research won’t get the job done in the drug development and basic research space. The high cost and complex ethical considerations of NHP research can divert funding and focus from more scientifically promising and ethically sound alternatives.”

On top of base grants of nearly \$100 million, the NPRCs receive millions in additional government funding for pilot programs and other primate research. A rundown of [NPRCs and related facilities can be found here](#).

“We have examined the issue of NHPs use in medical research and testing from several angles, and we conclude that the continued use of primates is wasteful, dead-end and even a dangerous strategy,” said Dr. Zaher Nahle, chief scientific advisor for the Center for a Humane Economy. “The phase out of animal testing under the FDA Roadmap is 3-5 years and continuing investment in primate centers and related infrastructures would be a waste of taxpayer dollars and represents an opportunity cost that those billions of dollars could be spent on more reliable research and testing practices.”

Primate smuggling from Cambodia and Vietnam to the United States for biomedical research has been a growing concern due to its implications for animal welfare, conservation, and public health. Wild long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) are often captured illegally in Cambodia and Vietnam. Despite being listed under CITES Appendix II, which regulates international trade, smuggling persists through fraudulent paperwork and bribery. Smugglers often label wild-caught macaques as “captive-bred” to bypass export restrictions.

The ORIVA plan and the FDA Roadmap were enabled by the work of the Center and Animal Wellness Action through their successful legislative campaign to eliminate an animal-testing mandate for new drug development that had been in place since enactment of the Food, Drug

and Cosmetics Act of 1938. Congress, led by Senators Rand Paul, R-Ky., Cory Booker, D-N.J., and Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., enacted that measure in December 2022.

The Center for a Humane Economy and Animal Wellness Action launched the FDA Modernization Act in 2021 to eliminate the animal testing mandate for new drugs — by far the biggest category of animal testing – and worked with Republicans and Democrats to pass that legislation just 20 months later as the FDA Modernization Act 2.0. The groups continue to push for robust implementation of the new law through the FDA Modernization Act 3.0, S. 355, H.R. 2821, led by Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., and Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., and Reps. Buddy Carter, R-Ga., and Nanette Barragán, D-Calif.

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