



Report



Chimpanzees in Biomedical and Behavioral Research: Assessing the Necessity

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Activity: The Use of Chimpanzees in Biomedical and Behavioral Research

Board: Board on Health Sciences Policy

For many years, experiments using chimpanzees have been instrumental in advancing scientific knowledge and have led to new medicines to prevent life-threatening and debilitating diseases. However, recent advances in alternate research tools have rendered chimpanzees largely unnecessary as research subjects. At the request of the NIH and in response to congressional inquiry, the IOM, in collaboration with the National Research Council, conducted an in-depth analysis of the scientific necessity of chimpanzees for NIH-funded biomedical and behavioral research. The committee evaluated ongoing biomedical and behavioral research to determine whether chimpanzees are necessary for research discoveries. The committee described chimpanzees' unique attributes in order to determine when to use chimpanzees in biomedical and behavioral research.

This report does not endorse an outright ban on chimpanzee research. Rather, it establishes a set of uniform criteria for determining when, if ever, current and future research use of chimpanzees is necessary to treat, prevent or control public health challenges.

To illustrate how these criteria could be applied to existing research using chimpanzees, numerous case studies – including research on and development of monoclonal antibodies, research on Hepatitis C therapies and vaccines, and research on cognition – were analyzed for whether chimpanzees are necessary or could be replaced by new or alternative research methods. The committee concludes that while the chimpanzee has been a valuable animal model in the past, most current biomedical research use of chimpanzees is not necessary, though made clear that it is impossible to predict whether research on emerging or new diseases may necessitate chimpanzees in the future.

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