



# White Paper: PEER Animal Research Hill Day 2025

Advocating for Effective Biomedical Research on Capitol Hill

*“Animal research is indispensable and driven by compassion.”*

Coordinated by the People for Effective & Ethical Research (PEER) Coalition

October 14, 2025 | Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.

**PEER is an advocacy coalition** dedicated to changing the conversation around animal research in the United States. The coalition is made up of a variety of institutions and individuals from the biomedical research sector, including veterinarians, academic and clinical institutions, biotech, biopharma, and nonprofit organizations. PEER is working to develop innovative strategies for all people who care about animal research.

## Northwest Delegation:

- **Cindy Buckmaster**, PhD | Director of Operations, Washington National Primate Research Center
- **Sally Thompson-Iritani**, DVM, PhD, DACLAM | Assistant Vice Provost, Office of Research, University of Washington
- **Charlotte Shupert**, PhD | Retired, Former Neuroscientist at Legacy Health Systems and Associate Director for Human and Animal Subjects Protections at OHSU and the Oregon National Primate Research Center | Board of Directors, NW Association for Biomedical Research
- **Melissa Tribelhorn**, MPA | CEO, NW Association for Biomedical Research
- **Andrew Herrin** | Senior Legislative Analyst, Association of American Medical Colleges

---

## Purpose and Context

The 2025 PEER Animal Research Hill Day brought together a cross-section of researchers, veterinarians, and science advocates to engage with policymakers in Washington, D.C. The Northwest delegation represented leading Oregon and Washington biomedical research institutions with a unified goal: to educate congressional offices on the essential role of animal research in advancing human and animal health, the ethical systems that underpin this work, and the risks of federal disinvestment.

[NWABR.org](https://www.nwabr.org) | 206-957-3337 | [melissa@nwabr.org](mailto:melissa@nwabr.org)

Published by Melissa Tribelhorn | October 2025



As research funding faces real-time pressures from NIH and NSF budget cuts, and public narratives around animal research grow increasingly polarized, this Hill Day provided an important opportunity to reinforce that animal research and innovative non-animal methods are complementary—not competitive—tools for discovery.

## The Northwest as a Model for Responsible Research

Seattle, Portland, and Spokane form a unique regional ecosystem where collaboration across universities, hospitals, and primate research centers accelerates innovation while maintaining public accountability. Institutions such as UW, Fred Hutch, Seattle Children’s, OHSU, and ONPRC have established global standards for transparency and humane care, and their collective voice carries significant weight in national science policy discussions.

## Key Meetings on Capitol Hill

The delegation met with multiple congressional offices representing Washington and Oregon to provide local perspectives and scientific grounding.

TIME	OFFICE	CONGRESSIONAL STAFF PRESENT
10:00 AM	Rep. Baumgartner (R-WA-05)	Jane Scarborough, Foreign Policy & Ag Advisor
11:00 AM	Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR)	Sydney Beasley, Policy Advisor (Animal Rights)
11:30 AM	Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA)	May Tran, Legislative Correspondent (Health, Grants)
1:30 PM	Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)	Shauna Rust, Health Policy Advisor; Tara Hartnett, Legislative Aide
2:30 PM	Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)	Nate Sansone, Legislative Correspondent (Education & Science)

3:30 PM	Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA-07)	Kenny Mok, Counsel (Science & Animal Rights)
4:45 PM	Rep. Maxine Dexter (D-OR-03)	Rep. Dexter & Grace Banfield, Deputy COS

Each meeting centered on how well-regulated animal research and strong federal investment drive scientific progress and public health. Delegates emphasized that ethical oversight, transparency, and continued access to all research tools—including both animal and non-animal models—are essential to maintaining public trust and advancing lifesaving discoveries.

---

## Core Messages Delivered

### 1. Animals Remain Essential for Foundational Science

The delegation underscored that understanding complex biological systems still requires living models. Nonhuman primate (NHP) studies continue to be indispensable for fields like aging, HIV prevention, infectious disease, and developmental biology—areas where computational or cell-based models cannot replicate full-system responses.

At the University of Washington, for example, ongoing work in HIV vaccine and microbicide development has relied on NHP models to safely test efficacy before advancing to human trials—a process impossible to replicate ethically in humans.

### 2. Animal Care Is Integral to Good Science

Every participant emphasized that ethical care and scientific integrity are inseparable. Modern animal research programs operate under rigorous oversight—via Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs), NIH’s Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW), and AAALAC accreditation systems. Legislators were encouraged to visit facilities firsthand to see the professionalism and compassion that define animal care teams.

### 3. Alternative Models Are Valuable but Not Universally Applicable

Delegates discussed the promise and limits of “NAMs”—*New Approach Methods* or *Non-Animal Models*—including AI simulations, organ-on-chip technologies, and cell-based

systems. These tools enhance understanding but cannot yet replicate whole-organism physiology, immune interactions, or developmental processes. The most effective research ecosystem is *integrative*, combining NAMs and animal models to cross-validate results.

## 4. Ethical Oversight and Transparency

The group reaffirmed that all federally funded animal research must comply with strict ethical standards, emphasizing multilayered oversight and the commitment to continuous improvement in welfare and transparency. Delegates also invited staffers to tour local facilities in Washington and Oregon to witness the humane conditions and meet the professionals responsible for animal care.

## 5. Federal Investment Benefits Everyone

Delegates conveyed that biomedical research with animals drives innovation, public health, and veterinary care alike. Over 95% of studies rely on rodents, zebrafish, and other small species—but rare, carefully reviewed studies with primates, dogs, or cats remain essential for certain reproductive, cardiovascular, neurological, and immune system discoveries. By supporting this research, Congress advances both human medicine and animal health.

---

## Policy Themes and Concerns Raised

- **Research Funding Cuts:** Members were briefed on how reduced NIH and NSF budgets constrain early-stage discoveries, limit support for graduate researchers, and threaten U.S. leadership in biomedical science. With many labs already facing shortfalls, delegates urged Congress to protect forward funding and ensure continued support for basic science.
- **Rebuilding Public Trust in Science:** Participants discussed how specific misinformation campaigns by orgs like PCRM, PETA, and White Coat Waste have distorted public understanding of animal research. PEER and NWABR called for stronger partnerships between institutions, policymakers, and the public to restore confidence through storytelling, transparency, and facility engagement.
  - Delegates emphasized that public trust in medicine—from vaccines to new treatments—depends on trust in the research process itself. When the

public understands how discoveries are made, why animal research is sometimes necessary, and the ethical safeguards in place, confidence in medical advances grows. The misinformation that undermines vaccines and public health programs often stems from broader confusion about how biomedical research works. By being transparent about the continuum of research—from early animal studies to human trials—scientists can help communities see that every vaccine, therapy, and diagnostic tool is built on a foundation of compassion, care, and rigorous oversight. Strengthening communication and education around this connection is essential for both public health resilience and long-term scientific progress.

- Protecting U.S. Leadership in Biomedical Research: Delegates voiced growing concern that the United States is at risk of losing its competitive edge in biomedical innovation. As federal research budgets shrink and public pressure mounts against essential animal studies, many promising scientists—especially early-career investigators—are moving to better funded international institutions where research is more fully supported and less politicized. This “brain drain” threatens to erode decades of U.S. leadership in medical discovery. Maintaining a robust, balanced federal investment in foundational and translational research, including ethically conducted animal studies, is critical to keeping the U.S. at the forefront of global science and ensuring future breakthroughs happen here at home.

---

## Outcomes and Next Steps

The most striking takeaway from Hill Day was not resistance, but a profound lack of awareness. Many congressional staffers—and, by extension, the legislators they advise—had little understanding of what animal research actually entails or how it fits within the broader bench-to-bedside continuum that transforms discoveries into cures. In the absence of accurate, science-based voices, anti-research groups have filled that void, shaping perceptions through emotionally charged but misleading narratives.

What became clear in most meetings is that most policymakers don’t outright oppose animal research—they simply haven’t been shown the evidence, the safeguards, or the human and animal care stories behind it. Hearing directly from researchers and veterinarians was often their first window into the rigor, compassion, and necessity of this



work. This underscores an urgent need for sustained engagement and storytelling from the research community—not just in moments of crisis, but as an ongoing effort to ensure that science, not misinformation, drives policy.

- Staff Engagement: Congressional staff expressed some interest in facility tours and follow-up briefings on specific research areas (HIV, Valley Fever). PEER and NWABR have committed to continue building relationships with Congressional offices and their staffers.
- Annual Animal Research Hill Day: The Hill Day strengthened inter-institutional coordination among NWABR, PEER, and regional research centers—laying the groundwork for an annual national coalition presence advocating for animal research as an integral part to the full spectrum of biomedical research advances.
- Educational Materials: The Northwest delegation now has a better idea of the *lack* of education around animal research, and NWABR will adapt these Hill Day themes into public-facing resources for teachers, students, and community partners under its “Trusting the Science” and Discover–Connect–Act frameworks.

---

## Conclusion

The 2025 PEER Animal Research Hill Day demonstrated that animal research is not only defensible—it’s *indispensable and driven by compassion*. By combining science, compassion, and transparency, the Northwest delegation exemplified what it means to conduct *effective and ethical research* that serves both people and animals.

Through continued collaboration, education, and advocacy, NWABR and its partners are helping ensure that policy decisions reflect scientific reality and humane values—keeping the U.S. at the forefront of biomedical discovery.

---

## About NWABR

The Northwest Association for Biomedical Research (NWABR) is a nonprofit consortium advancing the public’s trust in research through education, dialogue, and professional development. Its members include leading research institutions, universities, hospitals, and biotech companies across the Northwest.

