# Oregon primate research centre defended amid calls for closure over crucial medical advances



The Oregon National Primate Research Center (ONPRC), operated by Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) near Hillsboro, Oregon, is currently the focus of a significant local advertising campaign calling for its closure. The campaign has sparked a strong response from scientists, clinicians, staff, and OHSU leaders who argue that the centre's work is crucial for advancing medical research and improving human health, particularly in fields where alternatives such as tissue cultures or computer simulations are insufficient.

Justin Porcano, a California resident whose 7-year-old daughter, Lia, suffers from Usher's syndrome—a rare hereditary condition causing progressive loss of hearing and eyesight—expressed concern about the potential impact of ending the research at ONPRC. Porcano and his wife, Rosalyn, founded Save Sight Now to promote research that aims to develop therapies for children like Lia. He stated, "Having a daughter with a rare disease changes your perspective," highlighting the personal stakes for families relying on medical advances derived from this research.

The ONPRC is one of seven national primate research centres and maintains a colony of approximately 5,000 nonhuman primates, including rhesus and Japanese macaques. These animals play a crucial role in a wide range of research areas such as reproductive health, genetics, vaccine development, aging, and neurodegenerative diseases. The centre's research seeks to better understand and develop treatments for conditions that significantly impact human health.

A core element of the debate has focused on the ethical treatment and care of the primates housed at the centre. Each research project undergoes rigorous evaluation by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, which includes veterinarians, scientists, ethicists, lawyers, clergy, and members of the local community. More than 500 staff members are dedicated to ensuring humane treatment of the animals, with oversight from the National Institutes of Health’s Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare. The centre also continuously works to innovate animal care practices to improve welfare and research outcomes.

Larry Sherman, Ph.D., a neuroscientist specialising in demyelinating conditions such as multiple sclerosis, emphasised the importance of animal research for medical progress. Having conducted research at the ONPRC for two decades, Sherman noted the ethical complexity but advocated for the humane use of animals to address severe diseases. "Most of us know someone who's alive today because of animal research," he said. He further stated, "I want to minimise the number of animals we use in research, but I've seen the suffering that these diseases cause in people. If we can humanely use animals to answer these questions, my feeling is that we should."

The current ONPRC director, Dr. Skip Bohm, a research veterinarian, explained the centre's commitment to both scientific advancement and animal welfare. "A lot of people are surprised when I tell them my goal is to stop the use of nonhuman primates in research," he said. "We're just not there yet." Bohm also mentioned ongoing pilot projects aimed at developing alternatives that could reduce the number of animals required, but acknowledged that replicating the biological complexity of living primates remains a significant challenge.

Research at the ONPRC has yielded critical insights that directly influence clinical care. For instance, Dr. Jamie Lo, a physician-researcher specialising in high-risk pregnancies, recently published studies demonstrating that prenatal exposure to THC—the psychoactive component in cannabis—adversely affects lung development in primate offspring. This work addresses significant gaps in human data due to ethical and practical constraints on studying such exposures in pregnant women. Dr. Lo stressed, "You can’t do that with a human study. This is the kind of information my patients need to understand the potential risks to make the best decisions for themselves and their baby." She highlighted the importance of such research for public health messaging and clinical guidance.

The ONPRC’s defenders argue that the centre’s scientific contributions are indispensable for both understanding and treating complex human diseases, and that the ethical oversight and care invested in the animals are rigorous and continually improving. The ongoing funding challenges and public debate surrounding the centre reflect broader tensions regarding the use of animals in medical research and the urgent need for breakthroughs in human health. The (Mirage News) is reporting on the unfolding developments and the array of perspectives surrounding this issue.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ohsu.edu/onprc/research-benefits> - This page details the Oregon National Primate Research Center's contributions to medical advancements, including the development of vaccines for polio, smallpox, mumps, and measles, as well as treatments for infertility, heart disease, and diabetes.
2. <https://www.ohsu.edu/onprc/about-onprc> - This page provides an overview of the ONPRC's mission and research areas, emphasizing its role in advancing human health through studies in aging, metabolic diseases, neurological functions, reproductive challenges, and emerging infectious diseases.
3. <https://www.ohsu.edu/onprc/science-onprc> - This page outlines the major research divisions at ONPRC, including Metabolic Health & Disease, Genetics, Neuroscience, Pathobiology & Immunology, and Reproductive & Developmental Sciences, highlighting the center's comprehensive approach to biomedical research.
4. <https://www.ohsu.edu/onprc/research-benefits> - This page discusses the ONPRC's commitment to humane animal care, noting that less than five percent of animals used in research are primates, and detailing the center's adherence to high standards of animal treatment.
5. <https://www.ohsu.edu/onprc/research-benefits> - This page mentions the ONPRC's efforts to develop non-invasive technologies like bone densitometry, magnetic resonance imaging, and positron emission tomography to monitor changes in cognition, sleep, behavior, and other physiological functions in primates.
6. <https://www.ohsu.edu/onprc/research-benefits> - This page highlights the ONPRC's research on rhesus macaques to explore the effects of aging, including studies on cognitive and emotional health, neuroinflammation, and diet modification to hinder age-related declines in immune function, learning, and memory.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMigwFBVV95cUxOdWxBSkp0ZVhfYlZ2T3ZtYS1lQllVZHdDb1c3YTB3QXV0azBzWTUyODIwTndYOUxDYWRFTHIwUjNvRE9adnF0ak1iMTJhUnpnckNrOHNlYThTcUt4LWFScXZ0bWFoMVBrN2VEM01uUjQzWl9tMFhXNjcxNHF2dS1lcVdMOA?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data