

September 15, 2026

Dear National Advisory Mental Health Council members:

On behalf of Science Advancement and Outreach, a division of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, I again write to request that the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) prohibit projects using the forced swim test (FST) or tail suspension test (TST) from receiving extramural funding and end their use in intramural research; end the nonhuman primate experiments conducted in the NIMH Intramural Research Program laboratory of Dr. Elisabeth Murray; and prioritize research, training, and related programs focused exclusively on non-animal methods.

1. End the use and funding of the forced swim and tail suspension tests

In 2019, former NIMH Director Joshua Gordon said [NIMH had been discouraging the forced swim and tail suspension tests as models of depression](#). **Seven years later, global scientific and regulatory consensus has shifted substantially, but NIMH's policies have not kept pace.** The FST is now restricted in the U.K. and Ireland, major Australian research funders restrict funding for it, and the test is illegal in New South Wales and considered obsolete in New Zealand. Regulatory agencies have discouraged FST data inclusion in regulatory submissions, while 19 companies and more than 40 universities have stated they will not permit the test. Learn more on [our website](#).

NIMH is currently funding at least [6 projects](#) that include the FST and/or TST, and a PubMed search identified at least 35 more. Given NIH's commitment to prioritizing human-based methods and reducing animal use, explicitly prohibiting the FST and TST is *the least* NIMH could do to modernize mental health research.

2. Conclude the primate experiments in Dr. Murray's laboratory

For more than four decades, macaques in Dr. Murray's laboratory have been subjected to invasive surgeries, prolonged restraint, food and water deprivation, social isolation, and intentional, irreversible brain damage in an attempt to study behavioral flexibility, emotional processing, and reward learning. These experiments cause severe harm while producing results with limited to no applicability to human behavior or neuropsychiatric conditions.

These lesion experiments do not reflect the distributed, subtle neural alterations underlying human neuropsychiatric disorders or reliably translate to human clinical phenotypes. Meanwhile, human-based approaches—including MRI, fMRI, PET, EEG, MEG, TMS, and lesion-network mapping—allow researchers to study intact human neural circuits and clinical populations directly, without permanently damaging animals. These experiments must be discontinued.

3. Expand training and support for human-based mental health research

Non-animal, human-based technologies are already transforming mental health research. Brain organoids are being used to study mood disorders,¹ psychoses,² and neurodivergence,³ while *in silico* “virtual patient” models are being used to evaluate potential therapeutics for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.⁴

NIMH should create training grants for researchers using non-animal methods, support continuing education in these methodologies, and provide transition awards incentivizing replacement of animal experiments with human-based systems. Read [Research Modernization NOW](#) for more information.

Implementing these recommendations would position NIMH as a leader in advancing a predictive, efficient, and human-specific research paradigm while accelerating the development of effective treatments for people living with mental health disorders.

Thank you for considering these recommendations.

Sincerely,



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¹ Li M, Duan W, Hao X, et al. Effects of esketamine on electrophysiology and metabolic reprogramming in brain organoids: insights into antidepressant mechanisms. *Mol Psychiatry*. 2025;30(12):6107-6118. doi:10.1038/s41380-025-03198-4

² Ahn I, Chang S, Lee J, Choi SH, Han J, Kim Y. Exploration of novel biomarkers through a precision medicine approach using multi-omics and brain organoids in patients with atypical depression and psychotic symptoms. *Adv Sci (Weinh)*. 2026;13(4):e08383. doi:10.1002/advs.202508383

³ Li C, Fleck JS, Martins-Costa C, et al. Single-cell brain organoid screening identifies developmental defects in autism. *Nature*. 2023;621(7978):373-380. doi:10.1038/s41586-023-06473-y

⁴ Gutiérrez-Casares JR, Quintero J, Segú-Vergés C, et al. In silico clinical trial evaluating lisdexamfetamine's and methylphenidate's mechanism of action computational models in an attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder virtual patients' population. *Front Psychiatry*. 2023;14:939650. doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2023.939650