

About the Whitepaper, Recommendations for the Management of Legacy Anatomical Collections

What is the American Association for Anatomy's (AAA) Recommendations for the Management of Legacy Anatomical Collections (LAC)?

"Recommendations for the Management of Legacy Anatomical Collections" is a whitepaper, created by AAA to represent current best practices to guide researchers, teachers, and museum associates as they consider the future of legacy anatomical collections in their care.

What prompted the creation of this paper?

Collections of human remains in scientific and private institutions have a long tradition, and expectations about the ethical treatment of these tissues have changed over time. Historically these remains were often collected with no consent and with little knowledge about the individual or their respective culture and practices surrounding death and postmortem treatment. In recent years, there has been an increased awareness of the disproportionate representation of marginalized populations in these collections. As the standards for appropriate use of skeletal remains continue to evolve, many custodians of legacy anatomical collections are motivated to treat the collections ethically but are struggling to determine exactly what that entails.

What was the process for creating the document?

September 2021

AAA Past-President Dr. Valerie DeLeon convened a robust taskforce representing professionals from a broad set of disciplines around the world, including bioethics experts and scientists working with human remains, to develop a framework for the ethical treatment of legacy anatomical collections.

October 2023

A draft of the whitepaper "Recommendations for the Management of Legacy Anatomical Collections LAC Recommendations" (with a foundation in the [LAC Policy](#)) was presented to the entire membership for comment. The taskforce revised the document, incorporating input gathered from the Board and dozens of members.

March 2022

AAA adopted a statement, created by the taskforce, outlining expectations for members' use of legacy collections. This statement is known as the [LAC Policy](#).

December 2023

AAA adopted and revised recommendations.

Who was involved in the creation of the whitepaper?

Composed of bioethics experts and professionals who work with skeletal remains, the LAC task force developed the framework articulated in the whitepaper. The feedback of dozens of AAA members is incorporated in the paper.

The members of the taskforce and authors of the document are:

- Valerie B. DeLeon, Taskforce Chair
Department of Anthropology, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA
- Jon Cornwall
Centre for Early Learning in Medicine, Otago Medical School, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
- Thomas H. Champney
Department of Cell Biology, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, Florida, USA
- Carlina de la Cova
Department of Anthropology, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, USA
- Dominic Hall
Manager, Curation and Stewardship, Anatomy and Artifact Collections, Center for the History of Medicine at the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- Sabine Hildebrandt
Division of General Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics, Boston Children's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- Jason C. Mussell
Department of Cell Biology & Anatomy, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
- Andreas Winkelmann
Institute of Anatomy, Medical School Brandenburg Theodor Fontane, Neuruppin, Germany

How is the paper meant to be used?

With a focus on both ethical and practical considerations, this paper provides guidance – tailored to various scenarios – for establishing appropriate management and oversight, investigating provenance, and engaging with communities of care. Specifically, the document provides recommendations for each aspect of inventory, use, and potential disposition.

What is the future of the whitepaper?

The paper is to be considered a living document with guidance that will evolve over time – in line with the advancement of ethical principles concerning human tissue and with the benefit of a continually broadening set of voices and perspectives. AAA is organizing regular meetings with various stakeholder groups for continued input. Additionally, the association invites your comments and reactions to this document [here](#).