

Draft Quality Standards for Human Research Ethics Committees and their Host Institutions

Trust and confidence in ethics review

17. Can you suggest any other ways to build trust among accredited HRECs and host institutions and improve reciprocal confidence in ethics reviews?

Building trust between accredited HRECs and host institutions is vital for credible ethics review. This can be supported through standardized training, transparent decision-making, regular audits, peer review, and stakeholder engagement. Independent oversight and shared expertise in complex areas like biobanking can further strengthen consistency, accountability, and public confidence.

Paying external HREC members for their time

18. What do you think about paying external HREC members for their contribution to the HREC, beyond reimbursement for expenses such as parking?

Agree

19. Why/why not?

Paying external HREC members for their contributions beyond expense reimbursement is a recognition of their expertise and commitment. Offering payment can attract qualified individuals to serve on HRECs and encourage their continued participation whilst recognizing the time and expertise that external members bring to the committee can enhance the quality of reviews and decision-making.

20. If external HREC members were to be paid, should it be by a standard amount or at the institution's discretion?

Not sure

21. Are there any other issues associated with paying external HREC members?

Budget constraints, equity amongst the members, transparency on communicating the compensation structure.

HREC members' conflicts of interest

22. For HRECs seeking accreditation, do you think that a national conflict of interest policy or additional guidance is needed to aid in the identification and management of members' conflicts of interest?

Agree

23. Why/why not?

Implementing a national policy would standardize practices and reinforce the ethical foundation of HRECs. A policy like this would promote consistency, provide clear guidelines and support ethical decision-making

24. Should institutions seeking accreditation be required to provide training to HREC members about identifying and managing conflicts of interest?

Strongly agree

25. Please provide a reason for your answer.

Providing training on identifying and managing conflicts of interest is crucial. It equips members with the knowledge to recognize and address potential conflicts, ensuring ethical decision-making. Ensures consistency and promotes accountability by encouraging members to take responsibility for declaring and managing conflicts.

Institutional conflicts of interest

26. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about institutional conflicts of interest for HRECs and their host institutions that are seeking accreditation.

The existing requirements in the National Statement are sufficient to address potential institutional conflicts of interest on HRECs.

Agree

For accreditation, institutions should be required to appoint an independent chairperson to the HREC.

Agree

Accredited HRECs should be required to have a greater proportion of members from outside the host institution.

Agree

Cultural safety

27. Do you think that institutions should be required to provide mandatory training in cultural safety and unconscious bias to their researchers, HREC members and administrative staff involved in ethics review?

Strongly agree

28. How should institutions evaluate the effectiveness of their cultural safety training?

Through Surveys and collecting feedback from participants to assess the relevance and impact of the training. Observing changes in behavior and practices that reflect cultural safety principles and monitoring participant engagement and satisfaction.

Design of the accreditation scheme

29. Who do you think would be a suitable accrediting body? Please provide a reason for your answer

A suitable accrediting body would be an independent, national organization with expertise in research ethics and accreditation processes

30. Should accreditation visits be scheduled, to give the HREC and institution time to prepare, or should they be conducted at short notice (e.g. 24-48 hours notice)?

Scheduled

31. Please provide a reason for your answer.

Scheduled accreditation visits allow HRECs and host institutions to prepare documentation, staff, and records appropriately, leading to a more comprehensive and accurate representation of their practices and systems

32. How long do you think an HREC's or an institution's accreditation status should be valid for?

1 year 2 years **3 years** 5 years More than 5 years

Incorporating external feedback into the accreditation scheme

33. What do you think prospective research participants would want to know about the HREC that reviewed the research project?

That the HREC is independent and its primary goal is protecting their rights and welfare. That they follow national ethical guidelines

34. What else do you think that participants expect from the ethics review process?

Consumers would expect that the review process will ensure the research is ethical, respectful and designed with minimal risk and appropriate informed consent procedures and that the ethical review processes are underpinned by consumer/participant input and perspectives

35. Can you suggest any other ways that feedback from participants, researchers or the community could be incorporated into the proposed accreditation scheme?

Post-study participant surveys, researcher feedback forms, reporting channels for participants or researchers to raise ethical concerns.

Transparency

36. Should it be a requirement for accreditation that each HREC and its host institution make their contact details publicly available?

Agree

37. Some HRECs publish details about their individual members, while others do not provide this information, citing privacy concerns. Do you think that transparency about the HREC's membership has any influence on its perceived quality?

Yes, promoting accountability and demonstrating that diverse, qualified individuals are involved in the review process. Individual names may not necessarily be published but general information such as qualifications and expertise can help assure the public of the HREC's validity.

Evaluation

38. Do you believe that the proposed Quality Standards address the relevant issues adequately?

Agree

39. Please give a reason for your answer.

We believe that the proposed standards comprehensively address key areas. These include governance, transparency, conflict of interest, and cultural safety. Improving HREC through accreditation also assists to reduce the administrative burden and delay experienced by

researchers, particularly those engaged in multi-jurisdictional activities. However, ongoing consultation with stakeholders, including participants and community members is critical to refining the framework over time.

40. How strongly do you agree with these statements?

Accreditation of an HREC and its host institution to the Quality Standards will increase my level of trust and confidence in their ethics reviews.

Agree

The proposed Quality Standards will lead to improvements in the ethics review process in Australia.

Agree

The proposed Quality Standards will lead to improvements in the conduct of human research in Australia.

Agree

Implementation of the proposed Quality Standards is likely to face challenges.

Agree

41. How likely are you to recommend the adoption of the proposed Quality Standards to others?

Very likely

42. Why/why not?

The proposed Quality Standards provide a clear, consistent framework that ensures high ethical conduct in research, promoting accountability, cultural safety, and community engagement.

43. Have you ever taken part in a health or medical research study?

Yes

44. Which of the following best describes where you are located?

Metropolitan

45. In which state or territory are you based?

ACT NSW NT QLD SA TAS **VIC**? WA

46. If you have any additional feedback on the Quality Standards or the accreditation scheme, please provide it here. The information you have provided through this survey will help to improve the quality of ethics reviews in Australia, and improve their acceptability among institutions and HRECs.

The development of national accreditation standards is a timely and necessary initiative that will elevate the quality and consistency of ethics review processes in Australia. To ensure effective implementation, it must be supported by appropriate resources, training, and opportunities for public and community input. While the proposed program is necessarily human-centered,

consideration should also be given to the future integration of automated, data- and system-enabled tools—such as centralized software or automated review components—to help avoid increasing the administrative burden on HRECs.