

Western Australian Aboriginal Health Information And Ethics Committee (WAAHIEC) Guidelines

Ethical Considerations for Health-Related Research involving Aboriginal People.

The Office of Aboriginal Health (OAH) of the Health Department of Western Australia in partnership with the Western Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (WAACCHO)¹ established the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Information and Ethics Committee (WAAHIEC) in August 1996.

WAAHIEC is a 'properly constituted' Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) registered under the auspices of the National Health and Medical Research Council's peak ethics body the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC).

The AHEC functions under the National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992. One of its four statutory obligations is to foster consideration of ethical issues relating to health.

Health-related research projects involving Aboriginal people or communities in Western Australia need to be submitted to the WAAHIEC even if approval has been or will be obtained from other institutions. The WAAHIEC exists to promote and support good ethically based research, which will benefit Aboriginal people.

You are welcome to discuss your research ideas or project with this Office, at any stage.

Should I submit my project to WAAHIEC?

Proponents should submit projects to WAAHIEC for approval if one or more of the following apply:

- Aboriginality is a key determinant;
- Data collection is explicitly directed at Aboriginal peoples;
- Aboriginal peoples, as a group, will be examined in the results;
- The information has an impact on one or more Aboriginal communities;
- Aboriginal health funds are a source of funding.

Approval for Research

Formal, written recommendation to conduct health related research with Aboriginal people is required from the WAAHIEC prior to any such research in Western Australia, even if ethical approval has already been obtained from other sources. Proposals are itemised to the WAAHIEC agenda on receipt and will not be dealt with until future meetings. That recommendation however

¹ WAACCHO is now the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA)

may be subject to the final decision of the particular Aboriginal community(ies) involved.

Correspondence:

WAAHIEC Secretariat
Office of Aboriginal Health
189 Royal Street
East Perth WA 6004

Internet: Meeting dates, Terms of Reference, application and monitoring forms.

<http://www.aboriginal.health.wa.gov.au/healthinfo/index.cfm> - WAAHIEC

A Brief Checklist for Researchers

The WAAHIEC recommends that applicants follow the guidelines in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* developed jointly by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (endorsed March 2007).

Guidelines

Research merit and integrity

(4.7.1) The researcher should ensure that research methods are respectful and acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or groups participating in the research – including national or multi-centre research.

(4.7.2) There should be evidence of support for the research project from relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or groups and the research methodology should engage with their social and cultural practices.

(4.7.3) The researcher should ensure that research methods provide for mutually agreed mechanisms for such matters as:

- (a) appropriate recruitment techniques;
- (b) suitable information about the research;
- (c) notification of participants' consent and of research progress; and
- (d) final reporting.

(4.7.4) The researcher should seek to identify any potential negative consequences of the proposed research, to design processes to monitor them, and to advise steps for minimising them.

Justice

(4.7.5) The research methods and processes should provide opportunities to develop trust and a sense of equal research partnerships.

(4.7.6) Where:

- (a) the geographic location of the research is such that a significant number of the population are likely to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and/or
- (b) the research is focused on a topic or disease/health burden identified as being of specific concern to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the population base has a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the research should provide fair opportunity for involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the guidelines in this chapter apply to those participants.

Beneficence

(4.7.7) The benefits from research should include the enhancement or establishment of capabilities, opportunities or research outcomes that advance the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

(4.7.8) The described benefits from research should have been discussed with and agreed to by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander research stakeholders.

(4.7.9) The realisable benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants from the research processes, outcomes and outputs should be distributed in a way that is agreed to and considered fair by these participants.

Respect

(4.7.10) The research proposal should demonstrate evidence of respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Depending on the circumstances, this might require letters of support from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community Councils or other organisations accepted by the participating communities (see *Chapter 2.1: Risk and benefit* and *Chapter 2.2: General requirements for consent*, especially paragraph 2.2.13, page 21). The research processes should foster respectful, ethical research relationships that affirm the right of people to have different values, norms and aspirations.

(4.7.11) The research approach should value and create opportunities to draw on the knowledge and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples by their active engagement in the research processes, including the interpretation of the research data.

(4.7.12) National or multi-centre researchers should take care to gain local level support for research methods that risk not respecting cultural and language protocols.

Conducting the research project

NHMRC Values and Ethics guidelines on ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research came into force on 1 January 2004 and it is expected that all new research projects adhere to these.

The values that are documented as the basis for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research include:

- Spirit and Integrity
- Reciprocity
- Respect
- Equality
- Responsibility
- Survival and Protection

The document layout includes:

- An overall defining statement of the value
- Descriptive statement of how values are demonstrated in the research context
- Components of value
- Issues that Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider during the research process
- Aligned national statement requirements

Publications

For a free copy of *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* please contact the National Health and Medical Research Council on:
Phone: Toll Free 13 000 NHMRC (13 000 64672 or (02) 6217 9000

To access a copy of the National Statement:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/e72.pdf

To access a copy of the Values and Ethics guidelines:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/ethics/human/conduct/guidelines/_files/e52.pdf