



WAAHEC Position Statement on the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025)*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing Research in Western Australia

Effective 2026

Purpose

This Position Statement sets out the formal position of the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) in response to changes introduced in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025).

The 2025 National Statement provides guidance to researchers, institutional Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs), and funding bodies regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research conducted in Western Australia.

Background

The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025)* permits institutional HRECs to establish alternative ethics review pathways, including processes for determining whether research may be classified as *low risk* or *lower risk* and, where applicable, assessed outside full HREC pathways.

Prior to the 2025 National Statement, Aboriginal health and wellbeing research was always reviewed through full HREC processes, regardless of how low the risk was considered. In Western Australia, that meant submitting to WAAHEC as the Aboriginal-specific ethics committee.

The 2025 National Statement now allows institutional HRECs to assess some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research through different internal review processes. This does not change the requirement for WAAHEC review in Western Australia.

WAAHEC Position

Notwithstanding these provisions, WAAHEC affirms that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research conducted in Western Australia must be submitted to WAAHEC for review and written approval prior to commencement, irrespective of:

- any *low risk* or *lower risk* classification applied by an institutional HREC
- the review pathway used by an institutional HREC, including assessment outside full HREC pathways
- whether the research has been reviewed or approved by another HREC



This position reflects WAAHEC's role as the Aboriginal-specific Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) in Western Australia, with responsibility for independently assessing both individual and collective risks in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research through Aboriginal-led ethical processes.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Western Australia, ethical risk cannot be fully evaluated outside this framework.

Scope of Application

This requirement applies to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research conducted in Western Australia, including, but not limited to:

- projects classified as research under the National Statement
- projects classified by institutional HRECs as *low risk* or *lower risk*
- projects reviewed by institutional HRECs outside full HREC pathways

WAAHEC does not review applications outside its established HREC review process, irrespective of the pathway used by any other ethics review body to which a project may also be submitted.

Researchers are required to incorporate this requirement into their research design, planning, timelines, and governance arrangements.

Non-Research Activities and Data Governance

Projects not classified as research, but which involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health data, including quality improvement activities, audits, evaluations, data linkage, modelling, or similar activities, are subject to Aboriginal governance requirements.

Such activities must comply with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data governance frameworks, including WA Health's Aboriginal Data Governance Policy (MP 0190/25), and may require review or guidance through Aboriginal-led governance processes.

Ethical Rationale

Risks in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research may range from minor and self-resolving impacts to significant collective risks, including harms arising from the misrepresentation, misuse, or misinterpretation of data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

These risks may arise where research approaches do not adequately reflect Aboriginal priorities, self-determination, and community control. Such risks necessitate careful, independent assessment and reinforce the requirement for review through WAAHEC's Aboriginal-led ethical processes.



Sector Engagement

WAAHEC is engaging with institutional HRECs, funding bodies, and other key stakeholders across Western Australia to communicate this position for 2026 and to support consistent advice, governance, and application across the research sector.

Conclusion

WAAHEC reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding the rights, interests, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Western Australia.

All proposals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research conducted in Western Australia must be submitted to WAAHEC for ethical review and written approval prior to commencement.