



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Note: All instances of the term 'Aboriginal' are inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) is to assess, approve, monitor and guide the ethical standards of Aboriginal health research undertaken in Western Australia, and support research that benefits Aboriginal people and communities.

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1 Consider the ethical implications of all proposed research projects in Western Australia and determine whether they are acceptable on ethical grounds and sensitive to Aboriginal culture.
- 2.2 To review research needs of the Aboriginal community in conjunction with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in order to determine priorities for research.
- 2.3 To ensure that health and medical research projects involving the Aboriginal community will benefit Aboriginal people and increase scientific knowledge.
- 2.4 To provide advice and make recommendations to improve research applications to research teams.
- 2.5 Maintain a record of all research projects considered by the Committee. The applications for research projects are preserved in the form in which they are approved, including any amendments subsequent to approval.
- 2.6 In carrying out its functions, the WAAHEC shall:
 - Consider the ethical implications of all proposed research in the Aboriginal community;
 - Determine whether or not the research is acceptable on ethical grounds;
 - Ensure consideration of local circumstances and cultural sensitivities when reviewing applications;
 - Ensure that consent procedures for participants' involvement in research projects are complied with;
 - Monitor adherence to ethical standards on approved projects;



- Review the progress of research projects annually or as specified by the Committee;
- Ensure that no Member of WAAHEC adjudicates on proposals in which they have, or are perceived to have, a personal interest;
- Preserve the protocols of research proposals in the form in which they are approved; and
- Maintain confidentiality of all matters relating to proposals under consideration by the WAAHEC.

3. Membership

Membership of the Committee shall be in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025 (NS)*. The membership should comprise Aboriginal professionals and community-based members. Membership shall be limited to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, except when a position is unable to be filled accordingly.

In accordance with the NHMRC's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025 (NS), the minimum membership of an HREC is as follows:

3.1 Composition

- A Chairperson with suitable experience, including previous membership of an HREC, whose other responsibilities will not impair the WAAHEC's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement;
- Two people who bring a broad community or consumer perspective and who have no paid affiliation with the institution;
- A person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care or treatment of people, for example, a nurse, counsellor or allied health professional;
- A person who performs a pastoral care role in a community, including but not limited to, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elder or Community Leader, a Chaplain or a Minister of religion or other religious leader;
- A qualified lawyer, who may or may not be currently practising and, where possible, is not engaged to advise the institution on research-related or any other matters;
- Two people with current research experience that is relevant to the research proposal to be considered at the meetings they attend;



- A youth representative aged between 18-29 years of age who is active in the community and has an interest in health research.

4. Member Responsibilities

As noted in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NS) 5.2.21 – 5.2.24:

- 4.1 Members of WAAHEC are responsible for deciding whether a proposal submitted for their review meets the requirements of the NS and other relevant guidelines and is ethically sound.
- 4.2 In order to fulfil that responsibility, each Member should:
 - a) Undertake any induction training or process provided by the Secretariat of WAAHEC, and may from time to time be invited to attend relevant training workshops.
 - b) Become and remain familiar with the NS and consult other relevant guidelines and information relevant to the review of specific research proposals.
 - c) Prepare for and attend meetings or, if unavailable, provide comments to the Secretariat.
 - d) Attend continuing education or training programs at least every three years.
 - e) Members must be aware of and respect any institutional protocols or policies related to confidentiality in the performance of their role(s). These may be relevant to interactions with other members of the WAAHEC, with administrators or with researchers, or to the review of research proposals or any discussion occurring at a meeting, online or elsewhere, about matters within the remit of the review body.
 - f) Members must disclose any interests that may constitute an actual or potential conflict of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation that bears on any research coming before WAAHEC. This disclosure may be to the Chairperson (prior to the meeting) or declared prior to discussion of the relevant agenda item as appropriate.

5. External Professional Reviewers Panel

The WAAHEC will compile a panel of external reviewers with expertise across a diverse range of health and medical areas. When requested, these reviewers will provide specific expertise on the scientific merit of research applications.



6. Meetings of the Committee

- 7.1 The Committee will meet nine times per financial year and for as long as it needs to complete all its business.
- 7.2 As far as is practicable, each HREC meeting should be arranged to enable attendance of all members of the minimum membership categories (see 5.1.33 to 5.1.39).
- 7.3 Meeting papers should be provided sufficiently in advance (5 days) of the meeting to enable Members to be fully informed for the meeting.
- 7.4 Where there is less than full attendance of members from the minimum membership categories at a meeting, the Chairperson must be satisfied that the views of the members who are not present have been received and considered by all members of the HREC participating in the meeting, before a decision is made (5.2.5).