

Research Ethics position statement

February 2020



Context

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and the National Boards (the Boards) are committed to the ethical conduct of all research conducted by and on behalf of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme). Ethical conduct also applies to research using the National Scheme data or information.

Purpose

The purpose of this position statement is to:

- formally adopt the National Health and Medical Research Council's (the NHMRC) Australia Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code), the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (the National Statement) and other NHMRC research integrity principles to guide all research at AHPRA, and
- clarify Ahpra's and the Boards' expectations of researchers conducting research on behalf of Ahpra and the National Boards.

Scope

This position statement applies to Ahpra staff, officers, National Board members and externally contracted researchers and consultants who conduct research on behalf of Ahpra and the Boards.

This position statement also applies to any external researchers requesting research data from Ahpra. Please refer to the [External Research Data Policy](#) for more information.

Rationale

Research forms a critical part of health regulation as it helps assure policies, standards and decisions are based on contemporary evidence to help keep the public safe. As Ahpra moves towards enhancing its international profile as a respected and recognised health practitioner regulator, a commitment to credible, fair and accountable research must be defined. This position statement outlines our commitment to ethical conduct in research.

Definition

Research	The concept of research is broad and includes the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate novel concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it is new and creative.
Researcher	An individual who contributes to the design, execution, analysis and/or communication of research.
Research output	Research output includes, but is not exclusive to, reports, journal articles, conference abstracts, presentations, newsletters and computer algorithms.
Evaluation	Encompasses the systematic collection and analysis of information to provide evidence to support judgements or decision-making, about the effectiveness, efficiency and/or appropriateness of an activity.
Quality assurance	An activity where the primary purpose is to monitor or improve the quality of service delivered by an individual or an organisation. In this document, quality assurance includes: peer review, quality assurance, quality improvement, quality activities, quality studies and audit.

Ethical conduct of research

Under section 38(a)(iii) of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Regulation (the National Law Regulation)², the Privacy Act does not apply to making guidelines about medical research, health information and genetic information for the National Scheme. However, Ahpra is committed to good research principles and standards, and formally adopts the Code and the National Statement.^{3,4} The Code and the National Statement outline the highest national standards for ethical and responsible conduct in research in Australia.

Ahpra expects all research conducted by and for Ahpra and the Boards to comply with the Code and the National Statement.

Ethical oversight for research

Ahpra staff conducting research on behalf of Ahpra or the Boards will be expected to follow internal research ethics processes prior to commencing any research. External researchers contracted by Ahpra are responsible for ensuring appropriate ethics review is completed by an NHMRC-registered human research ethics committee (HREC)⁴ prior to commencing any research on behalf of Ahpra or the Boards.

Ahpra staff conducting research on behalf of Ahpra or Boards and external researchers contracted by Ahpra are expected to abide by NHMRC defined principles for research involving Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

Ethical requirements for quality assurance and evaluation activities may differ from those for research. Please refer to relevant supporting documents.

Implementation, monitoring and compliance

This position statement is the foundation document to guide the establishment of a research ethics policy structure that governs all research undertaken at, and for, Ahpra and the Boards. Ahpra is committed to developing a research policy structure which ensures all researchers and research output comply with the Code and the National Statement.

The research ethics policy structure will safeguard, monitor and guarantee compliance to the continual development of an ethical and responsible research culture at Ahpra.

Associated documents

Relevant documents that support this position statement include:

1. [Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act](#), as enacted in each state and territory
2. [National Practitioner Regulation National Law Regulation](#)
3. [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) (NHMRC)
4. [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) (NHMRC)
5. [Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders](#) (NHMRC)
6. [Ethical Considerations in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Activities](#) (NHMRC)
7. [A Research Framework for the National Scheme: Optimising our investment in research](#) (Ahpra)