

# The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research

The point of commonality  
between researchers  
and the Human Research  
Ethics Committee



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## Ethical Futures

[www.ethicalfutures.com.au](http://www.ethicalfutures.com.au)

Ethical Futures provides training advice and support for HREC members, researchers, research students and supervisors



## Australasian Human Research Ethics Consultancy Services

AHRECS develops ethical institutional policies and resource material



Queensland University of Technology  
Faculty of Law

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Relational effects on consent for clinical research

# What the National Statement is NOT

*This National Statement does not exhaust the  
ethical discussion of human research –p2*

The National Statement is not law,  
it is not enforceable,  
it is not set in stone.



# What is the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research?

The National Statement is an agreed set of principles and guidelines that provide a common reference for decisions about the ethical nature of human research.

**National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research**  
[www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72)



# Who wrote the National Statement?

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)

Australian Research Council (ARC)

Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC)

This is a living document and the standard  
for all human research within the Government  
and University sectors.

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# Why a National Statement?

*The relationship between researchers and research participants is the ground on which human research is conducted. The values set out in this section – respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence – help to shape that relationship as one of trust, mutual responsibility and ethical equality.*

– National Statement p11

The National Statement is a declaration of intent - that research in this country will be conducted ethically and in accordance with community expectations.

# Foundational Principles

## Section 1: Values and Principles of Ethical Conduct

Research merit and integrity

Justice

Respect

Beneficence

# Research merit and integrity

Research without merit is not research at all.

Research has to be worth doing.

It has to justify the resources used.

It has to be conducted by researchers with integrity and have outcomes that display scientific validity.



# Justice

Justice as fairness

Distributive justice

Procedural justice

Do the benefits go to those who bear the risk?

Is the recruitment fair?

Is the methodology unbiased?

# Respect

Respect for personal autonomy

Respect for families

Respect for communities

Respect for culture

Respect for fellow researchers

# Beneficence

At the end of the research, is it likely that there will be a nett benefit outcome?

*It is more than simply justifying the risks.*

Being a participant in human research - regardless of the risks - is an act of altruism.

*Does this research respect that?*



# The National Statement

## What's Not to Love About it?

### **The Good**

There is a great deal to recommend the principlist view of bioethics

- Encourages dialogue
- Respects the individual
- Participants vs Subjects
- Promotes Informed decision-making
- Does not prescribe behaviour

### **The Not-Quite-As-Good**

There are some distinct flaws with this approach.

- Strong focus on medical research
- Qualitative research can be hard to justify
- Can be seen as too restrictive
- Does not prescribe behaviour

# The National Statement

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Research ethics is a discussion. The National Statement acts as the conduit for that discussion, nothing more. It guides us in areas that are difficult, or likely to be contentious, but it does not provide a checkbox.

Approving human research is more than enquiring into the legality of the application or the capacity of the research team. Ethics approval indicates not just that a piece of research could be done, but that it ought to be done.

By approving a project, you are endorsing that project as being ethical research.

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