

What are Research Ethics?

'Research Ethics' are a set of research standards designed to protect the people participating in the research, and the researchers. Research Ethics are important because research can be harmful if not conducted properly. Ethics are about making sure you understand the risks involved in your research and are managing these. What these risks are depends on the type of research.

For example, if you are interviewing people about their drug use, the main ethical issues would include making sure:

- the research itself is safe;
- that participants know why you're doing the research, are aware of any risks involved, and consent to participating;
- you explain how the interview data will be collected, analysed and stored;
- privacy and confidentiality for participants is protected .

Ethical approval for human research is granted by a Human Research Ethics Committee. This is a group of experts who look at your proposed research, consider the risks involved and assess your plan for managing them.

Research with human participants must have ethics approval **before** it can commence. That means you **cannot** recruit research participants or collect or analyse any data until you have obtained ethics approval.

Do I need ethics approval for my project?

Australia's [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) defines human research as:

Research conducted with or about people, or their data or tissue. Human participation in research is therefore to be understood broadly, to include the involvement of human beings through:

- *taking part in surveys, interviews or focus groups;*
- *undergoing psychological, physiological or medical testing or treatment;*
- *being observed by researchers;*
- *researchers having access to their personal documents or other materials;*
- *the collection and use of their body organs, tissues or fluids (e.g. skin, blood, urine, saliva, hair, bones, tumour and other biopsy specimens) or their exhaled breath;*
- *access to their information (in individually identifiable, re-identifiable or non-identifiable form) as part of an existing published or unpublished source or database.*

If your project involves any of the activities or data collection methods listed above, then you need ethics approval. If in doubt on whether or not you need ethics approval, seek expert advice.

Be aware, the process of obtaining research ethics approval can take considerable time (minimum 2-3 months). Begin your ethics application early.

How do I get ethics approval?

The process for obtaining ethics approval for research involves:

- A researcher submitting an application for ethics approval to a Human Research Ethics Committee. This application outlines the proposed research and describes how risks will be managed.
- The Committee reviews the application and makes recommendations. These might include better data storage or making sure the information provided to potential participants is communicated in plain language.
- The researcher updates their application based on the recommendations and re-submits it to the Committee.
- If the Committee is satisfied with the changes, they approve the application and research can begin.

Please note: This is a brief summary of the ethics approval process. Some research projects undergo multiple reviews by an ethics committee before obtaining approval.

You will also need to include details of your HREC application in your ADRIA grant application.

How do I access a Human Research Ethics Committee?

Most universities and research bodies have their own Human research Ethics Committees. If your research involves partnering with an academic or research institute, you will likely access their Committee.

If you do not have access to a Human Research Ethics Committee, there are several options available to you:

- Conduct research that does not need ethics approval (i.e. does not involve collecting data from humans);
- Seek out a partnership with an organisation that does have access to an Human Research Ethics Committee;
- You can submit an application for ethics approval to a publicly accessible HREC. (**Note:** the HREC must be registered with the National Health and Medical Research Centre).

The Brotherhood of St Lawrence have a publicly accessible Human Research Ethics Committee registered with the NHMRC. Details are available on their website:

<https://www.bsl.org.au/research/our-research-ethics/>

The Brotherhood's Human research Ethics Committee is registered with the NHMRC. Submitting an application incurs a \$250 fee (this should be budgeted for in your application).