

# Research Ethics Policy

## Fact box

- **Policy owner:** Chair, Research Committee
- **Policy category:** Academic: Research
- **Policy status:** Approved
- **Approval body:** Council
- **Endorsement body:** Academic Board
- **Related policies:**
  - [Higher Degree Research Candidature Policy](#)
- **Last amended:** 13th Jan. 2025
- **Relevant HESF:** 4.1.1.a

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide principles and procedures regarding the ethical standards for research conducted by, in or under the auspices of Alphacrucis University College (AC).

## Scope

All faculty and students, full time, part time, casual or adjunct, associated with any AC campus, who host, conduct, participate in or disseminate the results of research involving human subjects. Visitors to AC who engage in research are also covered by this policy.

## Policy

AC is committed to compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, and legislative frameworks that apply to research.

## Definitions

Human research is research conducted with or about people, including surveys, interviews or observations, medical or psychological testing, or accessing personal documents, data or biological specimens or tissue.

## Principles

AC's principles of human research ethics are:

- human research is justified by its potential benefits to knowledge and understanding, to improved social welfare and individual wellbeing, and by its alignment to the [Code of Conduct Policy](#);
- human research is conducted in ways where any risks of harm are minimised and participants are informed of the potential risks and benefits; in which participants make their own decisions about their involvement;
- human research with minors is conducted with the approval of the participants and with the approval of their guardians. Utmost care is taken to avoid any risks of harm, and the rights, dignity, health, safety and privacy of the participants are respected, as outlined in the [Child and Young Person Protection Policy](#);

- human research is conducted in ways which involve respect for the welfare, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural and religious heritage of individuals and communities, and people's right to privacy and confidentiality are respected;
- human research is assessed by the supervisor or adviser, in consultation with the Chair of AC Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) as to the foreseeable level of physical, psychological, social, economic or legal harm or discomfort.

Risk in research exists on a continuum. Hence, risk categories are useful.

**Negligible risk research** may be exempted from ethical review.

**Lower-risk research** is research in which the only foreseeable risk is inconvenience (**minimal risk**) or discomfort (**low risk**). An ethics application must still be submitted but may be expedited by the HREC Chair.

**Higher-risk research** refers to research in which the risk for participants or others is greater than inconvenience or discomfort, as it may carry some risk of harm. **Higher-risk research requires review by the full HREC.**

#### Overview of research risk profiles

1. Negligible Risk	2. Lower Risk		3. Higher Risk
	(i) Inconvenience (minimal risk)	(ii) Discomfort (low risk)	
e.g., database research; Internal reviews	e.g., time to participate; travel time and cost to participate	e.g., mild unease about participating in an interview	e.g., possibility of anxiety or distress arising in or from an interview
Exempted from HREC review	Ethics application must be submitted but may be expedited by the HREC Chair		Ethics application must be submitted; full HREC review

NB: Examples shown are indicative, illustrative, and not exhaustive

#### Categories of Risk

**1. Negligible risk research:** Research is of 'negligible risk' where there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort. Research involving the use of existing collections of data or records that contain only non-identifiable data about human beings is of negligible risk. Such research is exempted from ethical review. Research which is internal to an organisation and only used within an organisation in the course of

educational planning and review, such as student feedback surveys and reviews, is considered to be of negligible risk and does not require ethical review

**2. Lower risk research:** Research falls in this category where the only foreseeable risk is one of (i) inconvenience (minimal risk) OR (ii) discomfort (low risk). If there is any possibility of harm, either physical, psychological, social, economic or legal, or where there could be a devaluation of personal wealth through the research, research is not lower risk. Ethics applications for 'lower risk' research must still be submitted but may be expedited. Human research is likely to fall in this category where the following descriptors are all true.

**a. Participants** are healthy, adult (aged 18 years or older) members of an Australian community, tertiary institution, employees, or adult members of a specific community group, club or association who are not in an unequal power relationship with the researcher (such as being students of teacher or members of a congregation in which the research is a pastor).

**b. People are invited** to participate in the research through some publicly visible way, such as a public advertisement, or because they have a public position, which does not violate privacy legislation or compromise the voluntary choice of the person in involvement.

**c. The researchers use procedures** which involve the collection of non-identifiable data such as through anonymous questionnaires or interviews in which no personal data is gathered.

**d. The research deals with** non-sensitive issues that are unlikely to cause distress and which do not involve the gathering of personal information.

**e. The research does not specifically include** First Nations communities, people living outside of Australia, or people who are part of marginalised communities.

**3. Higher risk research:** All research that is not negligible or lower risk research is referred to HREC for a full committee review.

The terms of reference of HREC are outlined in the [Academic Board Terms of Reference Policy](#). HREC is a standing committee accountable to Academic Board for the ethical evaluation of human research projects at AC and shall report annually to Academic Board. Members of HREC are not paid, but non-institutional members shall be given an annual honorarium. The committee operates according to the protocols in the *AC Research Ethics Handbook* and evaluates research projects in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*.

Responsible for implementation

Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Key stakeholders

All research active staff and students

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## Procedures

### Ethics Clearance Procedure

1. The AC Ethics Application Form for any proposed human research project for which AC has responsibility and the proponent's supervisor, lecturer or other adviser has endorsed as being of 'low risk' is submitted to the Chair of HREC or equivalent for review before the project may commence.
2. Any proposed human research project for which AC has responsibility and proponent's supervisor, lecturer, Chair of HREC or other adviser has not

endorsed as being of 'negligible' or 'low risk' is submitted to HREC for scrutiny and approval of 'ethics clearance' before the project may commence.

3. Any complaints by participants in research regards to the ethics of the research should be addressed to the Secretary, HREC. (Emails may be addressed ([secretary.HREC@ac.edu.au](mailto:secretary.HREC@ac.edu.au)). They will be considered by HREC and complainants will be informed as to the result.
  4. Complaints by researchers in relation to HREC may be addressed to the Vice President Academic and will abide by the [Complaint and Grievance Resolution Policy](#).
  5. Ethical misconduct can be reported by staff to HREC which, upon investigation, may withdraw its approval for a project. Illegal activities in the context of research must be reported to the police.
  6. Where projects have been approved by HREC, researchers must inform HREC of any major change to their research which may impact on ethical approval.
  7. Information and/or evidence regarding alleged academic misconduct in research or in the publication of findings must be reported to the Vice President Academic who will act according to the [Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy](#).
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