



Call for formal medical ethics committee

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Governments should consider establishing a formal registration and complaints system for ethics committees empowered to approve research on humans, a report has found.

The federal government on Friday released a report by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) on challenging ethical issues in contemporary research on human beings.

The report found that Australia's 250 Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECS), based mainly in universities and hospitals, gave careful and rigorous consideration to research proposals.

However, the report said that only ethics committees registered with the NHMRC were subject to formal reporting and this took the form of an annual questionnaire on compliance with the national Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

NHMRC chief executive Warwick Anderson noted in the report that there was no formal complaint system at either the state or federal level for ethics committees.

Professor Anderson suggested consideration be given to; Mandatory registration and accreditation or credentialling of HRECs, a reliable method of monitoring compliance by researchers and HRECs with the National Statement and related guidelines, and a formal complaints process.

Prof Anderson also said requirements for multiple ethics committees to approve research conducted in several centres, or across state, territory or international boundaries, were delaying projects.

"This situation is becoming untenable, creating inefficiency in the system, delays in approving and commencing research, and most of all increased work for researchers and HRECs alike," he said.

Mr Anderson said the NHMRC was working towards the development of a national system of ethics review based on mutual recognition.



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