



Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

Media Release

Summary Media Release information:

Description: The Commonwealth Government has released a report—*Challenging Ethical Issues in Contemporary Research on Human Beings*. The report includes ten case studies based on ethical issues considered by Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC).

Type: Ministerial Media Release

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NHMRC Ethics Report

The Commonwealth Government has released a report on ethical issues arising from consideration of health and medical research involving humans by Human Research Ethics Committees.

In Australia, all health and medical research projects involving humans must be approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee. Of the 230 committees across the nation, most are based in universities and hospitals.

In considering research proposals, Human Research Ethics Committees refer to the guidance developed by the Australian Health Ethics Committee, a principal committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council on best-practice standards of ethical conduct for research involving humans.

At the NHMRC's National Ethics Conference in May 2005, I asked the Australian Health Ethics Committee to prepare a report that illustrates the "challenging and interesting" issues that arise.

Human Research Ethics Committees tackle complex and sensitive issues such as participant consent, patient safety and welfare, privacy and disclosure, and the scientific merit of research proposals.

Issues that need to be considered are increasing in complexity because medical science is opening up possibilities that have not previously existed. Details of the kinds of dilemmas faced are contained in the ten case studies included in the report.

The work of the Committees involves volunteered time by hundreds of members including counsellors, lawyers, Ministers of religion and members of the public. The system would not work without the significant commitment and contributions of members.

The quality of Australia's health and medical research effort is recognised worldwide. The public interest is well served by Human Research Ethics Committees which continue to play a key role in ensuring that such research meets the highest ethical standards.

I look forward to public comment on this document and on the quality of the Ethics Committees' work. Depending on the level of public interest, the CEO will consider a regular report along similar lines.

» View the Report on ethical dilemmas that confront HRECs and researchers.

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