



Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

Report on ethical dilemmas that confront HRECs and researchers.

In June 2005, the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, asked the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC) to prepare a report on ethical dilemmas that confront HRECs and researchers in the consideration and conduct of health and medical research.

Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) play a central role in the Australian system of ethical oversight of research involving humans. HRECs review research proposals involving human participants to ensure that they are ethically acceptable and in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines. HRECs are usually established by organisations (public, not-for-profit or private) which conduct research involving humans. Universities and hospitals are the most common of these organisations. The quality of Australia's health and medical research effort is recognised worldwide. Human Research Ethics Committees continue to play a key role in ensuring that such research meets the highest ethical standards.

Research often generates ethical dilemmas in which it is difficult to reach agreement on what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. The report illustrates these complexities through examining ten specific research proposals, and the discussions and considerations that led to a decision on whether or not the research proposals should proceed.

The major ethical dilemmas faced by committee members continue to centre on issues of consent, patient safety and welfare, privacy and disclosure, and the scientific merit of research proposals. The issues are getting more complex as medical science opens up possibilities that have not previously existed, and the breadth of research widens to include more behavioural, attitudinal and sociological components.

» [Download Report: Challenging Ethical Issues in Contemporary Research on Human Beings \(PDF, 986kb\)](#) 

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