Research at UnitingCare Community

Applying to do research with UnitingCare Community staff or clients

Step 1: Discuss your project with the relevant service area

Before commencing the formal approval process, it is important to contact the service area in which you hope to locate your research. Talk to management and staff at the service so that you have an accurate and thorough understanding of the service they deliver and the nature and availability of clients and staff as potential research participants. Use this information to prepare a tailored response to Question 7 in the application form.

An overview of UnitingCare Community services is available on our website www.uccommunity.org.au

If your project will involve multiple service areas or you are not sure which staff members to talk to, contact us on 07 32534509 or research@uccommunity.org.au for assistance.

Step 2: Submit an application to the Research Approval Group (RAG)

Formal applications to conduct research at UnitingCare Community must be submitted using the Combined RAG/HREC Application form, which can also be found on the UnitingCare Community website and UnitingCare Queensland website. Detailed instructions are included with the form, but if you have any questions contact us on 07 32534509 or research@uccommunity.org.au for clarification.

Please note: the form has two parts: the RAG Section and the HREC section. Only the RAG section needs to be submitted at this point in the process, however, you may complete and submit both sections if you wish. This may help to streamline the approval process by saving time after you receive RAG approval.

Submit your application to the UnitingCare Community Principal Researcher on research@uccommunity.org.au. Please provide the name of the staff member/s you have liaised with in Step 1. The Principal Researcher will review the application and consider whether any further information is needed before the application is forwarded to the RAG. This is to ensure that the RAG is able to make a decision and avoid the application being returned for clarification.

The RAG meets monthly and an application must reach the RAG at least two weeks prior to the meeting at which it will be considered. To allow time for the application to be checked and forwarded to the RAG, applications should reach the Principal Researcher *at least three weeks prior to the RAG meeting* at which you wish your application to be considered.

Step 3: Submit an ethics application to the UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (UCQ HREC)

The UCQ HREC meets on the second Tuesday of each month and applications must be received approximately two weeks prior to the meeting date. More information about the HREC, including dates and deadlines, can be found here. Applications should be submitted to HREC@ucareqld.com.au. Applications need to include:

- The complete RAG/HREC application form (both sections, including signed RAG approval);
- Copies of all data collection materials (e.g., questionnaires, interview questions);
- All consent materials (participant information sheets and consent forms).

All research conducted at UnitingCare Queensland is governed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), which you should read before preparing your application. Projects that are consistent with the NHMRC definition of low or negligible risk can be reviewed by a subcommittee of the UCQ HREC outside of the monthly meeting, which will speed up the process. It is important to consider this issue carefully, with regard to the definitions provided in the NHMRC National Statement (2007).

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the RAG consider in making its decision?
The RAG will consider each application with regard to the following questions:
- Does the research topic fit with UnitingCare Community's strategic objectives and research priorities?
- What are the potential benefits of the project?
- Does the project plan make sense with regard to:
  o The proposed participant group (e.g. client type, numbers and access);
  o Compliance with legislation and/or standards of care practice;
  o The practicalities of undertaking the proposed research activities, including the actual or potential impacts of the project on UnitingCare Community's services (e.g. staff time and organisational resources);
  o Any other activities that are occurring in the proposed service area and/or at individual facilities at the same time (such as other research projects and system rollouts) which together may result in an unreasonable additional burden or workload for staff.

What do you mean by benefits for UnitingCare Community?
All research conducted within UnitingCare Community has resource implications for the organisation and it is important that our participation in research is shown to have clearly defined benefits *for the organisation*. This is different to academic research, in which the only benefit might be contribution to knowledge.

Research will only be approved if it has the potential to contribute to at least one of the following outcomes:
- Improved outcomes for clients;
- Enhanced service provision;
- More efficient working practices within UnitingCare Community;

- Benefits for UnitingCare Community staff;
- Meeting of knowledge needs within UnitingCare Community;
- Contribution to ongoing evaluation of effectiveness of services and practices;
- Contribution to enhanced practice within the sector.

It is important that your application clearly explains how your research will contribute to these outcomes. If you are not sure whether your research meets these requirements, contact us on 07 32534509 or research@uccommunity.org.au prior to writing your application.

What does the HREC consider in making its decision?
The HREC will consider the following questions when making its decision:
- Is this research of use to the organisation or the broader community at this time?
- Does the organisation have the resources to support the research at this time?
- Does the research meet the ethical standards of good research?
- Is it likely that the benefits of the research will outweigh any risks?

Answering the first two questions is generally the responsibility of the RAG and organisational managers. However, they will also be considered by the HREC in addressing the second two questions, which are predominately the domain of the ethics committee.

It is essential that you demonstrate how the project conforms to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), particularly in relation to the most vulnerable clients, or clients with particular cultural needs and sensitivities in research. This includes young people, clients from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. For more information, please review the UnitingCare Queensland policy for Vulnerable Clients/Residents involved in Research Activities.