

# UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee

## Terms of Reference

### 1. Purpose

The UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (Committee) will review research applications involving human participants for all social non-clinical research conducted by or in UnitingCare Queensland services to ensure that they are ethically acceptable and in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines, including those in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement).

The Committee must consider the following values and the principles that apply for each, which are set out in the National Statement and be satisfied that research applications address and reflect them:

- Respect
- Research merit and integrity
- Justice
- Beneficence.

The National Statement sets out the relevant ethical principles and values by which research should be designed and conducted and the Committee will refer to these when reviewing research applications.

The Committee will review research applications from researchers affiliated with Uniting Care Queensland (UCQ) and from non-affiliated researchers (5.1.27(c)).

The Committee will also review research applications for research involving human participants to be conducted by or in Wesley Mission Queensland.

### 2. Responsibilities (5.1.27(a))

#### 2.1 Member responsibilities

Each member of the Committee is responsible for deciding whether, in his or her judgement, a research application submitted to the Committee meets the requirements of the National Statement and is ethically acceptable (5.2.2).

To fulfil that responsibility, each member of the Committee will (5.2.3):

- Become familiar with the National Statement, and consult other guidelines relevant to the review of specific research applications
- Prepare for and attend scheduled meetings of the Committee or, if unavailable, provide opinions on the ethical acceptability of research proposals before meetings
- Attend continuing education or training programs in research ethics at least every three years
- Disclose any actual or perceived conflict of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation relating to a research application under consideration (5.2.4).

Further participation by the member in discussion and decision-making in relation to the application will be guided by the Chair, with reference to Chapter 5.4 of the National Statement

- Maintain confidentiality of the content of applications and the deliberations of the Committee (5.1.37(t)).

## **2.2 Committee responsibilities**

The Committee will:

- Assess research applications and decide whether to grant or decline ethics approval for research applications before the Committee.
- Identify whether further information is needed, or changes are required to a research application, before the Committee can fully assess and make a decision on whether to grant or decline ethics approval.
- Comply with guidelines and policies relevant to the review of research proposals and the operation of the Committee.

## **3. Authority and Governance**

The Committee is directly accountable to the UCQ Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (5.1.27 (d)).

The Committee has the authority to carry out its responsibilities as outlined above. Policies relating to the work of the Committee will be developed as required and will be approved by the CEO.

## **4. Membership**

### **4.1 Membership categories**

The Committee will have a minimum membership of eight (5.1.27(f) and 5.1.29).

As far as possible, the Committee will comprise equal numbers of men and women, at least one third of members will be from outside of UCQ and one or more of the members should be experienced in reflecting on and analysing ethical decision-making (5.1.29, 5.1.32).

The minimum membership, in accordance with the National Statement, (5.1.30) consists of:

- a) A chairperson, with suitable experience, whose other responsibilities will not impair the Committee's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement;
- b) At least two lay people, one man and one woman who have no affiliation with UCQ and do not currently engage in medical, scientific, legal or academic work (consumer representatives);
- c) At least one person with knowledge of, and current expertise in, the professional care, counselling or treatment of people; for example, a nurse or allied health professional;
- d) At least one person who performs a pastoral care role in a community for example, an Aboriginal elder, a minister of religion;
- e) At least one lawyer, where possible one who is not engaged to advise UCQ; and

- f) At least two people with current research experience that is relevant to research proposals to be considered at the meetings they attend. These two members may be selected, according to need, from an established pool of inducted members with relevant expertise.

No member may be appointed in more than one of the categories listed above.

Due to the nature of research considered by the Committee, at least one member from each of the categories below will be appointed:

- g) A social worker, psychologist or human service professional with experience in community sector service provision;
- h) A nurse, preferably with experience in aged care service provision; and
- i) A person with experience in disability service provision.

Categories g-i may be represented from within any of the membership categories set out in a-f.

The secretariat will also attend meetings. The secretariat includes the Coordinator UCQ HREC and relevant manager, who can provide procedural advice to the Chair and Committee and link the Committee and the UCQ Research Approval Group (RAG).

#### **4.2 Appointment of members**

Committee members are recruited by direct approach, nomination or by advertisement through an open and transparent selection process (5.1.34). Nominees are required to submit a statement outlining their relevant experience and/or expertise and their resume (5.1.28(a)).

Members will be appointed as individuals for their knowledge, qualities and experience, and not as representatives of any organisations, group or opinion (5.1.35).

The Chair of the Committee will be appointed by the CEO. Committee members will be recommended by the Chair for approval by the CEO.

Members will be appointed for a term of three years, commencing from the date of the letter notifying their appointment (5.1.36). After serving three terms, members must stand down for at least one year before being eligible for re-appointment.

New members will be provided with induction, in accordance with the HREC Induction Checklist (5.1.28(b)(i)).

A review of membership will be carried out at least every three years (5.1.34).

#### **4.3 Remuneration**

Committee members are not remunerated and undertake their role in a voluntary capacity (5.1.27(g)).

#### **4.4 Legal Protection**

Committee members will receive legal protection for liabilities that arise in the course of bona fide conduct of their duties related to the ethical review of research (5.1.9).

#### **4.5 Expert advice**

The Committee may seek expert advice to help in considering a research application. Where a research application involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people expert advice will be sought.

Experts will be bound by the same confidentiality requirements as Committee members and conflicts of interest must be disclosed and managed (5.2.19).

### **5. Operation of the Committee (5.1.37)**

#### **5.1 Chair**

The Chair is responsible for running meetings and approving Committee documents prior to their circulation to members.

The Chair will:

- Ensure that decisions are transparent, consistent and promptly communicated (5.1.28(e))
- Monitor any ethical issues identified in the approval process
- Request and review regular reports from researchers
- Comply with the reporting requirements outlined below.

The Committee will appoint a Deputy Chair. If the Chair is not available or if they have an interest in a matter under consideration the Deputy Chair will fulfil the Chair's function.

If the Chair and Deputy Chair are not available or have an interest in a matter under consideration the committee members present may appoint an alternative Chair for the meeting, or item under consideration.

#### **5.2 Secretariat**

Secretariat support will be provided by the Coordinator UCQ HREC, including organising the venue for meetings, coordinating the agenda and papers, taking and circulating minutes of meetings and storage of records relating to all research applications received and reviewed and the operation of the Committee (5.2.24).

Committee meeting agendas, minutes and other documents, excluding research applications, will be approved by the relevant manager (who attends Committee meetings) and Chair before they are circulated to members.

#### **5.3 Meetings**

The Committee will meet monthly if research applications have been submitted. The Chair may cancel a meeting if no applications are received for consideration at that month's meeting by the deadline date, or if the applications have been considered by expedited review.

Meeting papers will be provided one week in advance of meetings to enable members to be fully informed (5.2.28).

#### **5.4 Decision making**

Decisions by the Committee about whether a research application meets the requirements of the National Statement must be informed by an exchange of opinions from each of those who constitute the minimum membership (5.2.29).

In accordance with the National Statement, the Chair should be satisfied that decisions are informed by the views of at least one member from each of the minimum membership categories (5.2.30).

The Committee will endeavour to reach decisions by general agreement. This need not involve unanimity (5.2.31).

#### **5.5 Communicating decisions to researchers**

The Committee will communicate its decision to approve or reject a research application to the researcher in writing (5.2.22).

Where an application is:

- approved, advice should include a statement that the proposal meets the requirements of the National Statement (5.2.22(a))
- rejected, advice should include reasons linked to the National Statement (5.2.22(c)).

Where amendments are requested, communication may be written or informal and reasons should be given for the requested amendments (5.2.22(b)).

#### **5.6 Communicating decisions to the UCQ Research Approval Group (RAG)**

The RAG considers the service impact of proposed research and the value of the research to UCQ in deciding whether the research can proceed. If approved by the RAG research applications are progressed to the Committee for ethics approval.

The Committee will communicate decisions about research applications to the RAG following each Committee meeting. This will include applications that are considered by expedited review.

#### **5.7 Reporting and review of the Committee (5.1.27 (d)(e))**

The Committee will:

- report annually to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) through the CEO.
- perform an annual evaluation of its performance, including how it is operating in accordance with the National Statement, and provide details to the CEO (5.1.25)
- review the Terms of Reference at least every three years. The CEO will approve any proposed changes to the Terms of Reference.

#### **5.8 Monitoring research**

The Committee will review the six monthly reports provided by researchers at Committee meetings. Any ethical issues raised will be advised to the RAG for consideration.

## **5.9 Guiding documents and policies**

See the UCQ Human Research Ethics Committee – Resource Guide for a full list of guiding documents and policies related to the work of the Committee.

Note: Numerical references throughout the Terms of Reference are from the National Statement