

Higher Degree Research (HDR) Ethics Policy

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Responsible Officer	Associate Dean, Research and Scholarship
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Related Documents	HDR Supervision Policy HDR Examination Policy HDR Responsible Conduct of Research Policy HDR Candidature Policy Academic Integrity Policy HDR Guide for Ethical Use of GenAI HDR GenAI Policy
HESF (Threshold Standards) 2021	4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.1.4; 4.2.3; 6.2.1; 6.2.2; 7.2.1.
Policy Visibility	Public

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the ethical principles, governance structures and procedural requirements for research involving human participants conducted by, in, or under the auspices of the Institute. It ensures that all research upholds the values of respect, beneficence, justice and academic integrity outlined in national and international standards.

2. Principles

- Compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, updated 2018) and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018).
- Respect for the dignity, privacy and cultural heritage of all research participants and communities.
- Proportional ethical review based on the foreseeable level of risk.

- Transparency, accountability and independence in ethical decision-making.
- Ongoing monitoring of approved projects and prompt management of complaints or adverse events.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all AIH staff, students, visiting researchers, partners, and contractors who design, conduct, supervise, or disseminate approved low-risk research projects undertaken at any Institute location or on Institute-endorsed online platforms.

Research activities assessed as higher than low risk are outside the scope of this policy and are not permitted for AIH students, staff, or affiliates.

4. Definitions

Key terms used in this policy are consistent with the NHMRC, including:

- Human research
- Negligible risk
- Low risk
- Higher than low risk
- Research Ethics Committee (REC)

5. Policy Details

5.1 Ethical Governance Structure

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) is a standing sub-committee of the Academic Board responsible for the ethical review of research that is more than low risk.

The REC, chaired by the Head of Research, reviews and approves negligible- and low-risk projects and reports bi-annually to the Academic Board.

The REC oversees strategic alignment of research activities and ensures adequate resources and training for ethics compliance.

All higher-than-low-risk projects will be referred to the Academic Board.

5.2 Risk Categories and Review Pathways

Risk is assessed on a continuum:

Negligible risk - no foreseeable harm or discomfort (e.g., anonymous surveys of non-sensitive topics). Exempt from full committee review; approval may be granted by the REC Chair.

Low risk - foreseeable risk is no greater than minor discomfort (e.g., non-anonymous interviews on non-sensitive topics). Requires expedited review by the REC.

Higher than low risk – projects involving any possibility of harm (physical, psychological, social, legal, economic, or cultural) fall into this category. AIH staff, students, visiting researchers, partners, or contractors are not permitted to conduct research in this category.

5.3 Ethics Application and Approval Process

Researchers must complete the Institute Ethics Application Form and obtain supervisor endorsement (for student research) before submission.

Applications must include project rationale, methodology, participant information sheet, consent form, data management plan and risk assessment.

No recruitment or data collection may commence until written ethics approval is issued.

Substantial amendments to an approved protocol require prior ethical approval.

5.4 Monitoring, Reporting and Record Keeping

Annual progress reports are required for all active projects; final reports are submitted on completion.

Researchers must immediately report any adverse event, unexpected risk or protocol deviation to the Head of Research or delegate.

The Head of Research maintains a secure register of applications, approvals, amendments, complaints and monitoring outcomes for a minimum of five years post-completion.

AIH provides secure storage for research data in accordance with the Australian Code.

5.5 Complaints, Appeals and Misconduct

Participant complaints regarding ethical conduct are directed to the Director of Research and considered by the REC.

Researchers may appeal REC decisions in writing to the Chair, Academic Board.

Allegations of research misconduct are managed under the Responsible Conduct Policy and, where relevant, the Academic Integrity Policy.

6. Legislation & Standards

This policy aligns with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2018), the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018), and the NHMRC 'Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities' (2018).

7. Version Control

Version	Authored by	Brief description of change	Date Approved	Effective Date
2025.1	Dean	Initial release of HDR Ethics Policy.	06 August 2025	07 August 2025