CCDR Research & Policy Fact Sheet Series

CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH

E Engage

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ETHICS AND PATIENT CONSENT

Fact Sheet 002

Research ethics

Research that involves people raises unique and complex ethical, legal and social issues. Research ethics allows us to analyse ethical issues that are raised when people are involved as participants in research.

There are three main objectives in conducting an ethical review of research. The first is to protect participants. The second is to make sure that the research being conducted serves interests of patients, groups and/or society as a whole. The third objective is to examine specific research activities and look at issues such as the management of risk, protection of privacy and confidentiality and the process of informed consent.

Informed consent

If you are considering participation in a research study, you will be asked to give informed consent. Informed consent is a process, not just a form.

At a minimum, this should include receiving both an information sheet and a consent form, however the researcher should also take the time to explain the research to you and answer any of your questions.

The information provided should be given without undue inducement or any element of force, fraud, duress or any other form of constraint or coercion. Participants should always be given adequate information on both the possible risks and the potential benefits of their involvement to allow them to make informed decisions about whether or not to participate in the research.

Human Research Ethics Committees

Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) operate in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007. When a researcher wants to conduct a study involving humans, they submit an application to one of the 200+ HRECs in Australia for ethical review. HRECs are required to have a minimum membership which includes a Chairperson with suitable experience, at least two lay people, at least one person with knowledge of and current experience in the professional care, treatment or counselling of people, e.g. a nurse, doctor or allied health professional, at least one person who performs a pastoral care role in a community, e.g. an Aboriginal elder or minister of religion and at least one lawyer.

If you are a participant in a research study and have a concern about the conduct of a research, you can raise your concern with the researcher responsible for the project, however if you are not comfortable discussing your concern with the researcher or are not satisfied with the response, you can contact the HREC that approved the research project. The contact details for the HREC will have been given to you on either the written information sheet or consent form.

Next fact sheet in series: Clinical trials