

SA Department for Health and Wellbeing (DHW) Human Research Ethics Committee Peer Review

What is Peer Review for Research Applicants?

Peer review is a system for impartial and independent assessment of research by researchers working in a similar or a related field. An adequate peer review will cover the expectations outlined in the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

- Independent: The reviewer should be independent of the project, may not be internal and may not be a member of the same department i.e. as investigators or members of the research team.
- Expert: has an understanding of the research methodology and relevant research expertise
- Documented: clear, written evidence of the review

Why is Peer Review encouraged?

It is a recommendation of the SA Health HREC that each project undergoes peer review in accordance with the expectations outlined in the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The purpose of the peer review is to determine if the proposed research has merit, that projects are designed to both answer the research question and to safeguard the wellbeing of its participants. The Committee takes the peer review into account in its assessment of the scientific merit of the study.

Aims of the SA Health HREC Peer Review Policy:

1. To set out peer review requirements consistent with the intentions of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research;
2. Encourage researchers to design rigorous and ethically sound research projects;
3. Encourage departments and institutions to play an active role in the research design process through peer review; and
4. Ensure that all projects are endorsed by appropriate peer reviewers/peer review panels as having research merit.

Expectations:

Research departments and institutions are expected to design and implement procedures for peer review of all research projects that will be submitted to HREC for ethical review. If a formal peer review is provided, the reviewer's recommendations must then be addressed appropriately and a copy of the report submitted with the HREC application.

Please note that the HREC reserves the right to require a peer review as part of its own review process.

When should Peer Review take place?

Peer review should occur once a protocol has been developed. Researchers submitting their peer review documentation for HREC consideration should allow sufficient time to find a reviewer, allow the reviewer/s to conduct the review and then adequately address the reviewer's recommendations.

The recommended format for documentation of the review

Peer reviewers must provide the following information in their report:

1. Their name, title, organisation and contact details;
2. Title and investigator/s of the reviewed project;

3. A clear statement that they do not have a conflict of interest with either the research or the researchers;
4. An outline of their relevant expertise and the way in which this renders them an appropriate peer reviewer for this proposal. Citation of relevant publications is accepted;
5. Acknowledgement that they have reviewed the project proposal in full;
6. Comment on the scientific merit of the protocol, addressing key issues including, where relevant:
 - a. the significance of the research and the importance of the outcomes it will produce; and
 - b. the capacity of the proposed research design and methodology to address the research aims/objectives. Including, where relevant, an assessment of the sampling and recruitment methods, data collection instruments and proposed strategies for data analysis; and
7. Comment on the feasibility of the research including the resources required, whether the proposed budget is likely to be sufficient to support the project, and the research team's capability and experience to conduct the research as proposed.

A peer review template is available to assist researchers and reviewers to demonstrate independent review. Use of this template is not mandatory.