



# Joining a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

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The University of Wollongong has two HRECs: a Health and Medical HREC, and a Social Sciences HREC. **Both HRECs are accredited by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).**

## WHAT DOES AN HREC DO?

The primary objective of HRECs is to protect the rights, dignity and safety of participants in research. To this end, HRECs review research proposals in accordance with the national guidelines on ethical human research and monitor approved research. The national guidelines on ethical human research are outlined in the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023](#).

The National Statement sets out the membership of HRECs; committees must include members with specialist knowledge (e.g. clinical, research) which is relevant to the types of research being regularly reviewed. Membership also includes professional carers, lawyers, community members, and at least one person who holds a pastoral care position in the community. The aim is to ensure that when making decisions, HRECs are well informed about the potential benefits, the risks or demands on the participants, and whether the research is acceptable to the community.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO HRECS?

The **Health and Medical HREC** primarily reviews:

- Clinical research (including clinical psychology research undertaken through Northfields Clinic and clinical trials of drugs, surgical trials or trials of therapeutic goods)
- Research that has as its primary focus understanding of human physiological processes, the efficacy of medicines and human health
- Research involving the administration of any substance or agent to participants (e.g. research involving administration of approved drugs, research involving alcohol or special diets or food supplements)
- Research involving the collection of body tissues or fluid samples (e. g. blood or urine samples)
- Physical procedures that involve risk of pain or discomfort for participants (including human movement research, research involving strenuous or repetitive exercise).

The **Social Sciences HREC** primarily reviews:

- Research to be analysed through the methods of the social sciences, humanities and behavioural science research
- Research involving focus groups or interviews
- Research involving access to private papers concerning public figures, political movements, historical events, artistic practice, educational policy, etc.
- Interviews and surveys of community members about social practices and attitudes, public policies, marketing strategies, etc.
- Educational research.

Some areas of research can be appropriately reviewed by either HREC, e.g. psychology.

## WHAT HAPPENS AT A MEETING?

Meeting papers are distributed via email approximately two weeks before meetings. In the meeting, two members are asked to speak to each application by providing a detailed review of any ethical issues with the proposal. All members are expected to read all papers in order to contribute to discussion of any issues.

**Prospective members are invited to observe a meeting before committing to join an HREC.**

## WHAT TRAINING IS PROVIDED?

A member of the University of Wollongong Ethics Unit provides new committee members with an introduction to key guidelines, policies and legislation, and an experienced member of the HREC is appointed as a mentor to support new members as they settle in. Formal training on ethical review is provided at least once a year, organised by the UOW Ethics team.

## FULL HREC MEETINGS

Each Committee holds 11 meetings each year; one in each month except January, when the Committee breaks for the summer. Meetings commence at 12.30pm and run for approximately 3-4 hours, depending on the number of proposals being reviewed. Meetings are held in a hybrid format on the UOW main campus, with the option to attend via Zoom in situations where members are unable to attend in person; in person attendance is strongly encouraged.

<b>Health and Medical Full HREC 2024 Meeting Dates</b>	<b>Social Sciences Full HREC 2024 Meeting Dates</b>
Tuesday 6 February 2024	Thursday 15 February 2024
Tuesday 5 March 2024	Thursday 14 March 2024
Tuesday 2 April 2024	Thursday 11 April 2024
Tuesday 7 May 2024	Thursday 16 May 2024
Tuesday 4 June 2024	Thursday 20 June 2024
Tuesday 2 July 2024	Thursday 18 July 2024
Tuesday 6 August 2024	Thursday 15 August 2024
Tuesday 3 September 2024	Thursday 12 September 2024
Tuesday 1 October 2024	Thursday 10 October 2024
Tuesday 5 November 2024	Thursday 14 November 2024
Tuesday 3 December 2024	Thursday 12 December 2024

