

Ethics

This information sheet may be useful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations who are interested in research, thinking about being involved in research or have recently become involved in research.

What are ethics and ethical research?



Ethics often refers to how people should live in relation to other people, animals and the environment. In research this means treating people fairly and with dignity.¹

Ethical research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities should do three things:

1 Improve the way all researchers work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.

2 Develop and/or strengthen research capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.

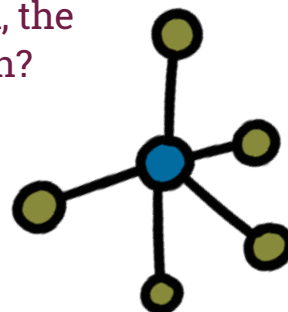
3 Enhance the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as researchers, research partners, collaborators and participants in research.

≧ ENGAGE WITH RESEARCH ≦

What does ethical research look like if I, my organisation, the wider community, and our leaders participate in research?

In practice, ethics means that researchers should¹:

- respect people's individual wishes
- make sure no one is harmed by research
- only do research that will benefit the people or community being researched
- ensure people are fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research
- keep people informed about the methods and the research processes being used
- ensure confidentiality of individuals and communities
- negotiate ownership of data
- be concerned about the way the outcomes of the research may affect individuals or the community.



Why is it important to know about ethics in research?

Ethics is an important way to ensure that:

- research is designed and carried out in ways that respect and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- offer meaningful benefits for the people and communities involved in any research project.

UNDERSTAND RESEARCH & LANGUAGE USED

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My view of ethics is ensuring that a research project is conducted in a way that is designed for participants and with participants... ensuring that it is done in a way that fits communities. It is never a one size fits all scenario....The key factor is ensuring that we do no harm and there is a benefit from the learnings to the participants and the communities....positive outcomes associated with why you are actually doing it, because we don't do research for just the sake of it. We do it for improving the health and wellbeing for our mob.

Paul Stewart, Deputy CEO, Lowitja Institute, Taungurung

It is essential that all researchers, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous, engage in respectful and meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultation, engagement and co-design that is culturally safe and ongoing throughout the project¹.



Ethics ensures our rights as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are respected, including our Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights, culture and heritage². Before engaging in research, it is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities are aware of these rights.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, good ethical practice should result in us feeling supported to undertake research in a way that values our knowledges and perspectives and recognises and respects our own personal ethics and cultural obligations.

The [Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property \(ICIP\)](#) factsheet explains more about what ICIP is and how to respect it. See the [Data Governance and Sovereignty](#) factsheet for a description of these two terms in a research context.



How do I know that the research I am participating in or leading is meeting ethical guidelines?

There are **four guidelines** that outline good ethical research when participating and leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities

This National Health Medical Research Council (NHMRC) resource provides clear guidelines for researchers, communities, human research ethics committees and other stakeholders on conducting ethical research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples¹.

Keeping Research on Track II: A Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about Health Research Ethics

This NHMRC guideline primarily aims to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to get the most out of research projects, to know their rights and responsibilities and a checklist of what some important considerations may be. It also explains researchers' responsibilities and guides ethical communication between researchers and communities/organisations through an eight-step research process¹.

Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research

This Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) guideline outlines the practices that ensure research with and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples follows a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher(s) and involved individuals and/or communities.

Guide to Applying the AIATSIS code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research

This AIATSIS guide provides advice for researchers in applying the principles in the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research.

SELF-DETERMINATION

In 2019, Lowitja Institute awarded the Tarrn doon nonin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics Project Award to the [Growing up children in two worlds: Building Yolngu skills, knowledge and priorities into early childhood assessment and support project](#). It is an excellent example of good ethical practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.



Want to learn more:

In addition to the resources mentioned above, you can visit:

- Chapter 2: Principles in Indigenous health research in Laycock, A. with Walker, D., Harrison, N. & Brands, J. 2011, [Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers](#), The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.
- The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW has developed a tool to help organisations and communities assess research requests, [AH&MRC research assessment tools: tools for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to support decision making about research requests](#).

REFERENCES

1. Lowitja Institute 2021, [EthicsHub, FAQs](#).
2. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) 2020, [A Guide to applying The AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#), AIATSIS, Canberra.
3. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 2018, [Keeping Research on Track II: A companion document to Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders](#), NHMRC, Canberra.
4. Lowitja Institute 2015, [Next Steps for Aboriginal Health Research, Ethics Case Study](#), The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.
5. Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW (AH&MRC) 2015, [AH&MRC research assessment tools: tools for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to support decision making about research requests](#), AH&MRC, Sydney.

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