



VICTORIA POLICE

# **Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee**

## **Terms of Reference**

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## Introduction

The Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee (VPHREC / the Committee) was established in April 2005, and registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council in March 2010. The establishment of the VPHREC acknowledges Victoria Police's responsibility for the quality, safety and ethical acceptability of research carried out with its support.

This document outlines the terms of reference for which the Committee operates and is governed. This document should be read in conjunction with the following VPHREC reference materials.

- [VPHREC Application form](#) and [VPHREC Application form Guidelines](#)
- [Victoria Police Research Protocols for External Researchers](#)
- [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2007\)](#)
- [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2007\)](#)

## Ethical Review by Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee (VPHREC)

### **Role of the Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee (VPHREC)**

The role of the VPHREC is to consider the ethical implications of all research referred to the Committee by Victoria Police, including research that is conducted by Victoria Police personnel, or research that affects or concerns Victoria Police personnel or information. In its deliberations, the VPHREC will (a) consider the broad cultural and social context in which the research is conducted and (b) ensure appropriate procedures are observed to obtain informed consent from research participants.

The role of the VPHREC is not to undertake a full evaluation of the design of the proposed research. However, the Committee reserves the right to consider the appropriateness of the study design if it is judged to have the potential to adversely affect participants in any way.

The VPHREC is registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and conducts all of its activities under the provisions of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* (the National Statement).

### **Victoria Police and the VPHREC**

Victoria Police will refer research, whether conducted by Victoria Police personnel or external researchers, to the VPHREC in accordance with the relevant Victoria Police policies and procedures.

Victoria Police supports the functioning of the VPHREC through the provision of secretariat services to support the Committee. The VPHREC Secretariat is hosted by the National Liaison and Research Unit within the Corporate Strategy and Governance Department of Victoria Police.

The Secretariat is responsible for

- Managing the relationship between Victoria Police and the VPHREC
- Administering Victoria Police policies and procedures related to the VPHREC
- Providing administrative and secretariat support to VPHREC
- Managing correspondence between the VPHREC and researchers
- Reporting on VPHREC activities to relevant organisations

## **Human Research**

The VPHREC uses the definition of “human research” provided in the National Statement as outlined in the Victoria Police Research Protocols for Internal Researchers and Victoria Police Research Protocols for External Researchers

## **Ethical Principles**

The VPHREC exists to ensure that research complies with ethical principles including:

- Respect for persons
- Avoidance of harm to participants
- Informed consent
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Security and integrity of data
- Academic and scientific standards.

The aforementioned principles are explained further in the National Statement.

## **Level of Review**

Applications to the VPHREC may require:

- Full Review by the VPHREC
- Expedited Review by the VPHREC (subject to the discretion of the Chair);
- Streamlined Review – with the Department of Justice Human Research Ethics Committee ([JHREC](#))
- No review (exempted activities)

All applications will be subject to a Full Review by VPHREC, unless a more appropriate level of review is determined by the VPHREC Secretariat in accordance with the [Victoria Police Protocols for External Researchers](#) and in consultation with the VPHREC Chair.

## **Procedures**

Applications are received and examined by the Secretariat, following which they are circulated to the Chair who allocates two Committee members to be ‘Lead Reviewers’. Lead Reviewers and the Chair prepare reports on applications which are presented to all other members for consideration and decision.

The VPHREC Secretariat may, in consultation with the VPHREC Chair, submit applications to the VPHREC for an out-of-session ‘Full Review’, or an Expedited Review. Such applications are circulated to members electronically following which the Secretariat collates responses and, in consultation with the Chair, reaches a decision.

Where applications for research relate both to Victoria Police and other Department of Justice portfolio agencies, the VPHREC Secretariat may, in consultation with the JHREC Secretariat and VPHREC Chair, recommend a streamlined process of review. Streamlined applications will be considered at a JHREC meeting with up to two VPHREC representatives in attendance.

### **Approval types**

The VPHREC may grant:

- full approval;
- conditional approval: (subject to changes and/or conditions);
- provisional approval / in-principle support of the application (may involve a request for further information); or
- no approval.

### **Review of research proposals from 'non-affiliated' organisations**

The VPHREC may occasionally be approached by non-affiliated organisations wishing the VPHREC to conduct ethical review of their research activities. The decision concerning whether VPHREC undertakes review of the project will be at the discretion of the Chair.

Examples of 'non-affiliated' research may include:

- A project that does not involve Victoria Police personnel, data, information and resources,
- A more suitable human research ethics committee (HREC) is not apparent,
- The research organisation may be using its own information, or collecting information via surveys/interviews of the public and does not have an established HREC within its organisation.

The decision concerning whether VPHREC should undertake review of the project is at the discretion of the Chair, but the VPHREC would only undertake review in such circumstances in exceptional cases.

### **Communicating with researchers**

The VPHREC recognises that sound ethical review requires open communication between the Committee and researchers and that there should be a shared commitment to this process.

Applicants will be informed of the Committee's decision in writing within 14 days of the date of meeting at which the decision was taken.

## **The Committee**

### **Minimum Composition**

Consistent with the National Statement, the minimum composition of the VPHREC is eight members, including:

- a chairperson, with suitable experience, whose other responsibilities will not impair the HREC's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement;
- at least two lay people, one man and one woman, who have no affiliation with the institution and do not currently engage in medical, scientific, legal or academic work;
- at least one person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care, counselling or treatment of people; for example, a nurse or allied health professional;
- at least one person who performs a pastoral care role in a community, for example an Aboriginal elder, a minister of religion;
- at least one lawyer, where possible one who is not engaged to advise the institution; and

- at least two people with current research experience that is relevant to research proposals to be considered at the meetings they attend. These two members may be selected, according to need, from an established pool of inducted members with relevant expertise.

The Committee will also, wherever possible ensure that:

1. there are equal numbers of men and women and
2. at least one third of the members should be from outside Victoria Police

The appointment of members outside of the minimum composition may occur as necessary, consistent with National Statement and endorsed by the Director, Corporate Strategy and Governance Department.

### **Invitation and Appointment of Committee Members**

The Victoria Police Director, Corporate Strategy and Governance Department, acting on advice from the Chair and Secretariat, will be responsible for formally inviting and appointing new members to join the VPHREC.

Committee members will normally hold their position for three years from their date of appointment (or commencement in the absence of a formal appointment).

Appointments may be renewed by the agreement of the Chair and the responsible Director.

Committee members are required to sign a Deed of Confidentiality which is specific to their membership of the VPHREC.

### **Remuneration of External Independent Committee Members**

External independent members of the VPHREC who provide services and expertise to the Committee on a voluntary basis are remunerated a fee set by the State Services Authority to recognise their contributions and the costs associated with their work on the Committee. External independent members can elect not to be remunerated.

### **Managing conflicts of interest**

Where the Committee or Secretariat identifies the presence of a conflict of interest involving Victoria Police, the Secretariat will notify the Director, Corporate Strategy and Governance Department. Any Committee member who has a real or potential conflict of interest in any application is required to report that conflict of interest to the Committee. Where a member of the Committee reports a conflict of interest, that member will be excluded from all the Committee's deliberations regarding the particular application.

## **Meetings**

### **Frequency of Meetings**

Scheduled VPHREC meetings are held at the Victoria Police Centre three times per year (typically May, August and November), unless otherwise specified by the VPHREC Chair or Manager of the National Liaison and Research Unit (NLRU).

### **Quorum**

A meeting shall be deemed quorate when half of the minimum composition of the Committee (as set out in section 5.1.29/30 of the National Statement) is present.

Members unable to attend shall be encouraged to submit their views prior to the meeting for consideration during the meeting.

### **Minutes**

Minutes shall be recorded of all scheduled meetings and confirmed at subsequent meetings.

## **Reporting**

### **Reporting by researchers**

Researchers of all VPHREC approved projects are required to adhere to the terms of 'Declaration by researcher(s)' set out in the VPHREC application form which include the following requirements:

- To provide progress reports to VPHREC annually (by 31 December) for the duration of the research project;
- To provide a final report and a copy of any published material at the end of the research project, and
- To notify VPHREC in writing immediately if any change to the project is proposed and await approval before proceeding with the proposed change.
- To notify the VPHREC in writing immediately if any adverse event occurs after the approval of the Committee has been obtained.
- To agree to an audit, if requested.
- To maintain security procedures to ensure the confidentiality of any data.

### **VPHREC contributions to NHMRC Annual Reporting**

In accordance with the National Statement, the VPHREC will submit an annual report to the National Health & Medical Research Council which assists the NHMRC to (a) ascertain the Committee's compliance with the National Statement and relevant privacy legislation and to (b) collect descriptive information. The Secretariat compiles this report with input from the Committee, which is required to be endorsed by the VPHREC Chair and the Chief Commissioner of Police (as the head of the host organisation).

### **VPHREC contributions to the Victoria Police Annual Report**

In addition to reporting to the NHMRC, the VPHREC may be required to submit a summary report containing the number of VPHREC research applications received and approved in a given financial year for contribution to the additional information contained in the organisation's annual report. The Secretariat will be responsible for compiling this report with such input as is necessary from members of the Committee.

## **Victoria Police Processes for Research Review**

In addition to the process of ethical review undertaken by the VPHREC, there are a number of related review processes that may be applicable to research proposals involving Victoria Police.

### **Victoria Police Research Coordinating Committee (RCC)**

The role of the Research Coordinating Committee (RCC) is to assess and provide organisational oversight of research proposals from external researchers seeking to conduct research involving police personnel, data or other resources. Victoria Police employees conducting research for the purpose of gaining academic qualifications

are also categorised as external researchers and their proposals are subject to RCC review.

The RCC review applications for proposed research projects against a number of criteria including:

- The potential application of results to police work
- The utility and validity of the research
- Privacy, confidentiality and data security compliance
- The impact that the project demands may have on police resources and
- The alignment of the research with the Victoria Police Research Agenda.

RCC approval is conditional upon:

- The external researcher and his/her institution signing a legal agreement which outlines conditions of the approved research
- Approval may also be conditional on the external researcher providing Victoria Police with evidence of having completed a security check t their own expense and
- Any other conditions stipulated by the RCC, including ethics approval.

External researchers are required to seek organisational approval from the RCC in the first instance. Where the research project involves 'human research', external researchers are then required to seek approval of the VPHREC.

Victoria Police research applications that involve 'human research' are not required to obtain approval from the RCC, therefore can submit an application to the VPHREC at any time.

### **Victoria Police Census Steering Committee (CSC)**

Where a VPHREC application involves a Victoria Police survey of the public or its employees, the research proposal may require oversight by the Census Steering Committee (CSC)..

## **Complaints**

Participants of VPHREC approved research projects can contact the VPHREC Secretary (or another appropriate body) if they wish to make a complaint concerning the manner in which the research is/was conducted.

The contact details for the VPHREC Secretary are as follows:  
Secretariat, Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee  
Corporate Strategy and Governance Department  
Level 5, Tower 1  
Victoria Police Centre  
637 Flinders Street  
Docklands VIC 3008

Tel: +61 3 9247 6756

Fax: +61 3 9247 6712

Email: [ethics.committee@police.vic.gov.au](mailto:ethics.committee@police.vic.gov.au)

Approval of applications by the VPHREC is conditional upon the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form clearly stating the process for lodging a complaint.



Complaints from researchers about the consideration of their application by the VPHREC will be referred to the Chair.

The Chair shall be notified of all complaints as soon as possible and may authorise immediate action to resolve the complaint.

The Committee must be notified of the complaint at the next meeting and may authorise further action.

Where a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the matter will be referred to the Director, Corporate Strategy and Governance Department, Victoria Police.

## Contact the VPHREC

More information on the Victoria Police Human Research Ethics Committee including application forms and guidance materials can be found on the Victoria Police Research website [http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document\\_ID=16549](http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=16549) or by contacting the VPHREC Secretary on 9246 6756 or [ethics.committee@police.vic.gov.au](mailto:ethics.committee@police.vic.gov.au) (external) / RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE-MGR (Internal).

## Reference Materials

### Victoria Police Guidance Materials and Forms

- [VPHREC Application form](#) and [VPHREC Application form Guidelines](#)
- [Victoria Police Research Protocols for External Researchers](#) or the [Victoria Police Research Protocols for Internal Researchers](#)

### External Guidelines

- [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2007\)](#)
- [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2007\)](#)
- [Guidelines Under Section 95 of the Privacy Act 1988 \(2011\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Ethical Research In Australian Indigenous Studies \(2011\)](#)
- [Data Matching in the Public Interest: A guide for the Victorian public sector \(2009\)](#)

### Useful Links

- [Victoria Police Research website](#)
- [Department of Justice Human Research Ethics Committee \(JHREC\) website](#)