

# Anglicare Victoria's Research Ethics Committee

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AVREC  
GUIDELINES AND PROCESSES  
OF ETHICAL REVIEW

THIS DOCUMENT IS  
INTENDED TO PROVIDE  
RESEARCHERS WITH A GUIDE  
TO THE PROCESS OF ETHICAL  
APPROVAL UNDERTAKEN  
BY THE **ANGLICARE**  
**VICTORIA RESEARCH ETHICS**  
**COMMITTEE (AVREC)**

## Anglicare Victoria Research Ethics Committee (AVREC)

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Anglicare Victoria's Research Ethics Committee (AVREC) was established in 2002. It is recognised and constituted as an independent review body under the National Health and Medical Research Council, and as such it functions in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (March, 2007). AVREC Terms of Reference are available on the Anglicare Victoria website.

## Standards of ethical conduct

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AVREC provides ethics approval for both internal and external research proposals. All research proposals reviewed by AVREC are evaluated against the four core values and principles of ethical conduct in research, as outlined in the National Statement – research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence and respect.

## What to do before applying for ethical clearance

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It is recommended that all researchers familiarise themselves with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (March 2014 updated version) prior to applying for ethical review. The National Statement can be found [here](#).

### **General**

Before submitting an ethics application to AVREC researchers must complete a Research Risk Assessment form. This allows the committee to determine whether the project is 'low risk' and therefore eligible for an expedited, out-of-session review, or whether it is moderate/high risk, and therefore requires a full review. AVREC's Research Risk Assessment form can be found on the Anglicare Victoria website or obtained from the AVREC secretariat.

Researchers should allow sufficient time for the process of ethical review. Unless a project is deemed 'low risk' (see below) all applications must be reviewed by the full committee at one of its monthly meetings. Feedback is then communicated to researchers, and in most instances amendments to the original application are required. Only once the amendments have been received and full approval granted can data collection commence. Depending on the nature of the project and the quality of the application, this process may take several months.

Finally, researchers should note that ethics approval cannot be granted retrospectively. Unless a project is deemed to pose a 'negligible risk' to participants, some type of ethical review must be undertaken prior to data collection.

### **Research involving Anglicare Victoria staff, clients and/or data**

Researchers wishing to access Anglicare Victoria clients, staff and/or data must first obtain the Agency's support for their project. Generally, this will involve approaching/contacting senior management to discuss the project and whether there is capacity for the Agency to facilitate access to staff/clients/data. If there is 'in-principle' support, researchers then complete an Executive Approval form, which is reviewed by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will determine whether the benefits of the proposed research are realistic and manageable given other priorities across the Agency, and whether the focus of the research aligns with the values and mission of Anglicare Victoria. If the project is approved, researchers can then submit an ethics application as per the normal process.

Projects involving Anglicare Victoria staff/clients/data must be reviewed by AVREC, even if they have been reviewed and/or approved by another Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). However, to avoid unnecessary duplication AVREC will accept and review application forms from other HRECs.

A copy of the Executive Approval form can be found on the Anglicare Victoria website, or obtained from the AVREC secretariat. Generally, researchers should allow two weeks for Anglicare Victoria's Executive Committee to review the Research Risk Assessment and Executive Approval forms.

### **Research not involving Anglicare Victoria staff, clients and/or data**

Projects not involving Anglicare Victoria staff/clients/data do not require Executive Approval. Researchers should first contact the AVREC secretariat to discuss the nature of the project, to determine whether it fits within the scope of research that can be evaluated by AVREC and is consistent with the mission and values of Anglicare Victoria. If the project is deemed appropriate, researchers can begin the process of applying for ethics, as detailed in the Process of Ethics Review diagram, found at the end of this document.

## Review of “low risk” proposals

Research that constitutes a ‘negligible risk’ does not require ethical review of any kind. ‘Negligible risk’ projects are those where “there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort; and any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience” (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2007, p. 16).

In contrast, low risk research is defined as “research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. Research in which the risk for participants is more serious than discomfort is not low risk” (NHMRC, 2007: p. 16). Researchers are directed to chapter 2.1 of the National Statement for a fuller discussion of what constitutes ‘discomfort’ and how this is differentiated from harm and inconvenience.

Decisions about the level of risk associated with a project are informed by the responses provided in the Research Risk Assessment Form. The final decision as to whether a project is defined as low or moderate/high risk sits with the AVREC Chairperson.

Projects that are defined as low risk are reviewed through an expedited process, involving the AVREC Chairperson and two other members of the committee. An application form is still required, but the project is reviewed out of session and therefore does not require documents to be submitted at specific dates to coincide with AVREC meetings.

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## Review of moderate and high risk proposals

All moderate and high risk projects are reviewed by the full ethics committee. The process of this review is described in the Process of Ethics Review flow-chart found at the end of this document.

To be considered at an AVREC meeting, researchers must provide a completed Research Risk Assessment Form, an Application Form, and any supporting documentation for the project, including Plain Language Statements/ Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms, questionnaires/interview schedules, and any recruitment/advertising material that will be used as part of the project.

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## Quality assurance, evaluations and research - is ethical review a requirement?

The NHMRC has recently release a set of [guidelines](#) relating to ethical review and oversight of quality assurance activities and program evaluations. Researchers are encouraged to consult this document for further information about the ethical requirements associated with these types of projects.

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## Access to forms

All forms referred to in this document can be found on the Anglicare Victoria website. Alternatively, they can be accessed by contacting the AVREC secretariat at [avrec.secretariat@anglicarevic.org.au](mailto:avrec.secretariat@anglicarevic.org.au)

**AVREC meeting dates and administrative deadlines**

AVREC meets on a monthly basis, provided there are sufficient applications to review. Researchers must ensure that the full application and all necessary documentation (i.e., Plain Language Statements, Consent Forms, questionnaires/interview schedules etc) is submitted to the AVREC secretariat 10 business days prior to the scheduled meeting. Submission and meeting dates for 2015.

2015	
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Wednesday 28th January	Wednesday 11th February
Wednesday 25th February	Wednesday 11th March
Wednesday 25th March	Wednesday 8th April
Wednesday 29th April	Wednesday 13th May
Wednesday 27th May	Wednesday 10th June
Wednesday 24th June	Wednesday 8th July
Wednesday 29th July	Wednesday 12th August
Wednesday 26th August	Wednesday 9th September
Wednesday 30th September	Wednesday 14th October
Wednesday 28th October	Wednesday 11th November
Wednesday 25th November	Wednesday 9th December

AVREC will review up to a maximum of four projects per meeting. In situations where more than four projects are submitted for review priority will be given to applications initiated by Anglicare Victoria. All other projects will be reviewed in the order in which they were received by the AVREC secretariat.

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**Access to forms**

AVREC regularly considers externally initiated proposals which do not involve Anglicare Victoria staff, clients and/or data. These projects are reviewed for a fee based on a two-tier structure. Low risk projects are reviewed for a fee of \$350 (including GST), while all moderate and high risk projects are reviewed for a fee of \$750 (including GST). Fees do not apply for external research that involves Anglicare Victoria staff, clients and/or data.

Application fees are used to cover administrative overheads associated with the operation of AVREC. Fees are payable in full upon receipt of all project material, and are non-refundable after the AVREC review has taken place.

## FORMS

### Executive approval

All research that involves Anglicare Victoria staff, clients and/or data must first be approved by the Executive Committee. Applicants should provide a clear rationale for their project, clearly explain the methodology that will be employed, identify the recruitment strategy (where applicable), and specify how the project will benefit staff and/or clients and the Agency.

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### Research risk assessment

All researchers must complete the Research Risk Assessment form prior to proceeding with their application. This form allows AVREC to determine whether the project will be reviewed through an expedited process, or whether it requires a full review.

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### Application form

In most instances researchers will have to complete and submit an AVREC application form. When completing this form, applicants should include sufficiently detailed and clear explanations that will allow AVREC to determine the relative risks and benefits of the project. The onus is on applicants to clearly explain and justify how the project meets the ethical requirements and guidelines set out in the National Statement. Applications must also include Plain Language Statements/ Participant Information Sheets, consent forms (where applicable), questionnaires/interview schedules/surveys and any participant recruitment material that will be utilised. These should be as complete as possible, to give AVREC sufficient information to determine the ethical implications of the proposed study.

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### Request for amendment

Researchers should lodge a Request for Amendment form if any aspect of the project methodology and/or design changes following ethics approval. A request for amendment should also be lodged if the project cannot be completed within the period of ethical clearance.

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### Progress report(s)

For projects that extend beyond 12 months, researchers must provide annual progress reports. The progress report should contain information relating to:

- Data storage during and following the collection period;
- Compliance with approved consent procedures
- Compliance with any special conditions imposed by AVREC

In addition to the Progress Report form, researchers must advise AVREC in writing if a project is discontinued at any stage following ethics approval. The letter should detail why the research has not been completed and how any outstanding matters, such as communication with participants, will be addressed.

## Final report

Researchers must submit a Final Report form within two months of a project's completion. The final report should provide information on:

- Security of data/records
- Compliance with approved consent procedures
- Compliance with any special conditions imposed by AVREC

Any publications that arise from the project should also be made available to AVREC, either electronically or in hard-copy.

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## After the review process

The review process can result in one of three possible outcomes:

- 1) The project is given full approval
- 2) The project is approved subject to minor amendments (conditional approval)
- 3) The project is not approved but the researcher is asked to resubmit after addressing the feedback provided by AVREC.

Researchers will be provided with written feedback within two weeks of their project being reviewed. If a project has received conditional approval, the amendments will be reviewed by the Chairperson and the Principal Researcher at Anglicare Victoria. Once amendments are reviewed, applicants will either be granted full approval, or will be asked to clarify any issues that have not been clearly addressed.

Applications not approved at the initial review will need to be resubmitted and re-reviewed by the full committee.

Once a project has been cleared by AVREC researchers receive a letter of full approval which must be signed and returned to the AVREC secretariat within 12 days. Data collection can only commence once the signed letter of approval has been received by the AVREC secretariat.

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## Monitoring of approved projects

AVREC has responsibility to ensure that approved research projects are carried out in accordance with the standards of ethical conduct in human research. It is therefore a condition of AVREC that researchers immediately report any matter that might affect the ethical conduct of a project, including, but not limited to:

- Changes to any aspect of the proposal, including methodology and design
- Unforeseen circumstances or events that may have an impact on participants or the ethical conduct of the research
- Serious or unexpected adverse events that have impacted, or have the potential to impact the physical, emotional and psychological welfare of participants.

The above information must be provided to AVREC through the Request for Amendment form. Please contact the AVREC secretariat immediately upon becoming aware of any of these issues.

## Complaints procedures

AVREC provides a confidential mechanisms for receiving complaints about the process and/or conduct of research projects. Research participants who have any concerns about the ethical conduct of a project are advised to contact the AVREC chairperson, who will investigate any concerns raised, and will provide a written response to participants within 21 days. Researchers have an obligation to respond to any queries that arise during the investigation.

Researchers must also provide support and/or assistance to participants who are experiencing distress as a result of their involvement in a research project.

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## Research rejected by AVREC

Where an application is not approved, the reasons for rejecting the application will be documented and the researcher will be advised. Applicants will be given the opportunity to discuss the decision with the AVREC Chairperson and Anglicare Victoria's Principal Researcher. If the applicant is still unhappy with AVREC's decision he/she may direct any grievance, in writing, to the Chairperson of AVREC (c/- PO Box 45, Abbotsford, VIC 3067). Researchers will be provided with a written response from the Chairperson within 21 days.

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## Appeals

Where an application is not approved and following discussion with AVREC the applicant still disagrees with the outcome, an appeal for revision may be lodged. This appeal will be reviewed by the ethics commit of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

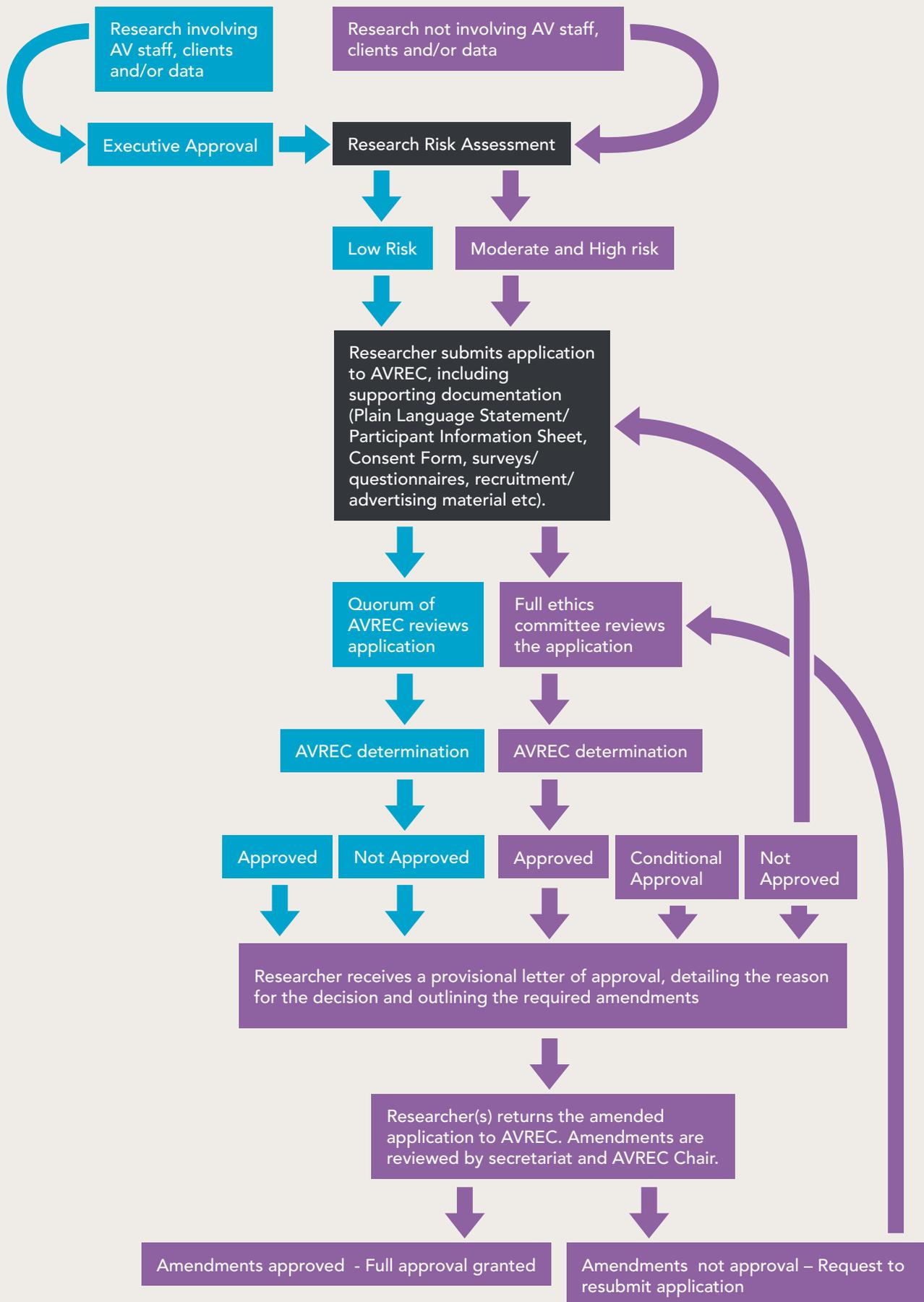
# CONTACTING AVREC

ANGLICARE VICTORIA RESEARCH ETHICS  
COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT  
PO BOX 45 ABBOTSFORD VIC 3067

[avrec.secretariat@anglicarevic.org.au](mailto:avrec.secretariat@anglicarevic.org.au)

This policy became effective at: October 2014  
This policy was last amended: October 2013  
This policy is due to be reviewed: October 2017  
Queries about this policy should be directed to:  
Dr Tatiana Corrales, Policy Research and Innovation  
(03) 9412 6105 or [Tatiana.Corrales@anglicarevic.org.au](mailto:Tatiana.Corrales@anglicarevic.org.au)

# PROCESS OF ETHICS





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