Introductory and historical context information

Once the public consultation period has finished and the committee consideration processes have been completed, the final guidelines will be released. At this time, it is proposed that some introductory, historical and contextual information that was previously provided in the guidelines will be placed on NHMRC’s website. This information was not included in the revised drafts in the interests of reducing overall volume. Instead, placing this information on NHMRC’s website will ensure that all users have access to it.

This information will include the historical context of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the conduct of research; guidance on how to use the revised drafts; the development of the revised drafts; and links to further resources. The draft content is provided below as background material for this public consultation.

Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities

This section will be completed after public consultation and will include introductory information about both documents.

Historical context

The history of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the conduct of research provides an important context for both the Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders and its companion document, Keeping research on track II.

How people see the world is generally informed by their own cultural experiences, values, norms and learning. From the earliest periods of colonisation, views about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and social organisation (including their values and mores) were based on ill-informed perceptions and assumptions. These perceptions arose from inappropriate comparisons of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world to the spiritual, social, political and economic perspectives of European colonisers.

Colonists viewed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies through their own cultural lenses and judged these attributes by the degree to which they perceived them conforming to European customs and norms. Not surprisingly, the early colonisers knew nothing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their cultures. The substantial errors of judgement and the misconceptions that followed have had a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ever since. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are then considered to be the most researched peoples in the world. Despite this, they have received very little perceivable benefit.
However, contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies continue to draw their strength and cultural continuity from the body of knowledge, values and wisdom that has emerged from contact with their traditions, historical events and wisdom and stories of the Elders.

In 2007, after more than 20 years of negotiations at the United Nations level, Indigenous peoples globally welcomed the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Australia endorsed in 2009. In order to address their human rights and cultural recognition, Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have advocated for the articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to be integrated throughout policies and programs. The right to self-determination means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the freedom to live well and to live according to their values and beliefs. There are four ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples exercise self-determination:

1. Having a choice in determining how their lives are governed and their development paths.
2. Participating in decisions that affect their lives.
3. Having control over their lives and future including economic, social and cultural development.
4. Having the means by which every person might achieve their full potential.

When determining outcomes and making value judgments about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Australian society and its public institutions must acknowledge the extensive and rich history, heritage, culture and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Further, diversity of cultural attitudes must be respected to ensure that any policies, interactions and initiatives are informed, respectful and ethically sound.

How to use these documents

This section will be completed after public consultation and will explain how the documents work together.
Development of the guidelines and resources

Previous guidelines

*Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research 2003* (Values and Ethics) was developed primarily for researchers and Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) to inform them of the considerations necessary in designing and conducting appropriate research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. *Keeping Research on Track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics 2005* (Keeping Research on Track) was the translation of this guideline into concrete expectations, actions and outcomes for all involved in research.

The figure below shows how all of the relevant research guidelines in Australia are linked and provide a good framework for how researchers and participants should be working together on research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007 (NHMRC, ARC and UA)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (NHMRC, ARC and UA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders (currently under development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping research on track II (currently under development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research 2003 (NHMRC) (to be rescinded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Research on Track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics 2005 (NHMRC) (to be rescinded)</td>
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Evaluation of previous guidelines
In 2013, NHMRC commissioned an evaluation of Values and Ethics and Keeping Research on Track to inform their future revision. This evaluation was undertaken on behalf of NHMRC by the Lowitja Institute, in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. The evaluation was conducted from July to October 2013, and included extensive consumer engagement via consultation and workshops held in all states and territories. The evaluation produced a report and accompanying literature review that included various recommendations for the revision of the two guidelines. The report and literature review are available on NHMRC’s website.

Further information and resources
This section will be completed after public consultation.