

EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE: Do I need ethics? (CNIN July 2010)

We collect data for all sorts of reasons. Hospitals collect patient details and clinical information as part of the normal care processes. Government departments review the number of treatments and costs of treatments across Australia. However, when people agree to participate as subjects in a research study, steps are taken to protect their rights and welfare.

Why do we need ethics committees?

Ethics approval helps to ensure that research complies with established guidelines such as the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) and the [Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes](#). Ethics Committees independently review and assess the proposed conduct of research projects.



Regulatory involvement in human research has resulted from various historical research events. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) provides an overview of [the History of ethics and the ethical review of human research in Australia](#).

Ethics approval is normally required from the organisations that are responsible for the participants in a study. Applications for ethics approval usually include a well developed research protocol outlining methodology, participant issues, data collection, analysis and details of any ethical considerations.

Working with Ethics Committees

It is important to allow sufficient time when planning research in palliative care to prepare for, and receive, ethics approval. The processes of ethics approval may take some time especially in multi-site research, where each site may have its own procedures.

Ethics Review Boards and Hospital Research Ethics Committees can be cautious when reviewing ethics applications for studies using palliative populations. When seeking ethics approval outline the patient benefits as well as any possible burdens and ensure that ethical considerations are clearly explained to assist the reviewers.

Finding out more

The Centre for Health Services Development has produced a document [Ethical research in palliative care](#) which may help in developing an ethics proposal.

CareSearch is an online resource funded by the Department of Health and Ageing to help clinicians and consumers find relevant evidence about palliative care. Available now at www.caresearch.com.au