

**Response to the
National Health and Medical Research Council
Ethical Issues in Research into Alcohol and Other Drugs: An Issues Paper Exploring
the Need for a Guidance Framework**

16 December 2011

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**ADCA Submission to National Health and Medical Research Council
Ethical Issues in Research into Alcohol and Other Drugs: An Issues Paper Exploring
the Need for a Guidance Framework**

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment on the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) *Ethical Issues in Research into Alcohol and Other Drugs: An Issues Paper Exploring the Need for a Guidance Framework*. The Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) Board discussed its response to the issues paper at its recent meeting in November 2011. ADCA is pleased to support and provide further comment to the submission by Associate Professor Alison Ritter from the Drug Policy and Modelling Program at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC).

ADCA is the national peak body representing the interests of the Australian non-government sector for alcohol and other drugs. It works collaboratively with the government, non-government, business and community sectors to promote evidence-based, socially just approaches aimed at preventing or reducing the health, economic and social harm caused by alcohol and other drugs to individuals, families, communities and the nation.

ADCA has had a long interest in ethics and frameworks in the AOD sector. In 2007 ADCA published *Making Values and Ethics Explicit: A new code of ethics for the Australian alcohol and other drug field* by Craig Fry which updates a much earlier document. While the Issues Paper explores the need for a guidance framework in the research environment, this document addresses the complex ethical character of AOD service delivery and continues to draw interest amongst the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) sector today.

Drawing upon the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Human Research (2007)* (the National Statement) that establishes strict ethical practice, ADCA does not believe it is necessary to create a tailored ethics framework for the AOD sector. The National Statement is strongly supported in the sector and the development of a specific guideline may unintentionally increase stigma within the sector, for both researchers and those who seek services. Furthermore, developing an additional guideline would likely contribute to the already burdensome nature of AOD research.

While the ethical issues identified in the consultation paper are relevant to AOD research, they are no more complex or dissimilar to other research fields. A strong research proposal, developed in conjunction with the existing National Statement will embody such ethical intricacies within its design. The concerns mentioned within the NHMRC consultation document does not transpire a need for a specific ethical framework above and beyond what is currently prescribed.

ADCA supports Associate Professor Ritter's comments that there are no particular attributes in the AOD research sector that warrant a distinctive ethical framework. A specific AOD guide would likely delay the commencement of research which is a necessary component of the AOD field in achieving harm minimisation.

ADCA encourages all research bodies to practice and promote high ethical standards and believes this already exists within the workforce under the guide of the National Statement.

ADCA would be pleased to discuss ADCA's response in more detail. Please contact Lucy Barnard at lucy.barnard@adca.org.au or on 02 6215 9814.



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