



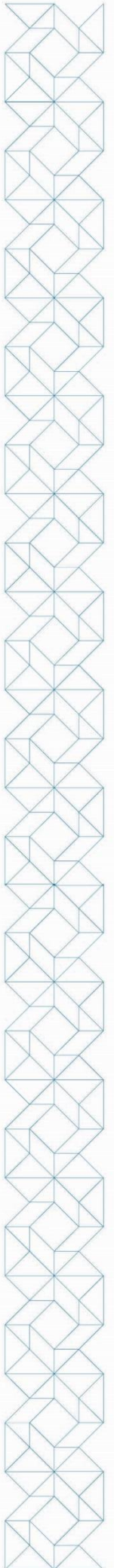
VICTORIAN INSTITUTE
OF FORENSIC MEDICINE

VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF FORENSIC MEDICINE

VIFM Human Research Ethics Committee

Terms of Reference

DATE – Version number 8





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Background

1. The *Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Act 2024* (VIFM Act) provides that the functions of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) include to conduct research and to support other entities in conducting research for the purpose consistent with the objects of the Institute (section 9(1)(o) and (p) of the VIFM Act).
2. The VIFM Board, as the governing body of the VIFM, has established the VIFM Human Research Ethics Committee ('the VIFM HREC') as an advisory committee for the purpose of reviewing all human research proposals by VIFM employees, students, affiliates and external researchers seeking data, human tissue, access to the body of a deceased person, or the involvement of live participants from the VIFM for a research proposal.
3. The VIFM HREC is a registered Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) with the National Health Medical and Research Council (NHMRC) and is required to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025 ('the National Statement'). The VIFM HREC reports annually to the NHMRC as part of the terms of its registration.

VIFM's Research Governance Framework

4. The VIFM's research governance framework requires that the VIFM approves the use of data, human tissue, access to the body of a deceased person, or the involvement of live participants, in a research proposal where a project has met all the VIFM's research governance requirements. These requirements are set out in the VIFM Research Governance Framework.
5. The VIFM Research Governance Framework requires that for all research projects:
 - the VIFM Research Advisory Committee ('RAC') reviews and, where appropriate, approves the scientific and research governance requirements of the project and endorses the project for ethical review.
 - The VIFM HREC reviews and, where appropriate, approves the ethics of a research project, in accordance with the requirements of the National Statement.
 - Researchers undertake research in accordance with the requirements of the National Statement and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research ('the Code').

Objective

6. The VIFM HREC is an advisory committee to the VIFM Board.
7. The objective of the VIFM HREC is to ensure that all human research proposals involving data or tissue held by the VIFM, access to the body of a deceased person at the VIFM, or the involvement of VIFM live participants, are reviewed, and if assessed as ethically sound in accordance with the National Statement, approved.

Terms of Reference

8. The VIFM HREC has the following functions:
- To review all applications for research, from internal or external applicants, for projects referred to it by the VIFM Research Advisory Committee involving:
 - human tissue held by the VIFM
 - access to the body of a deceased person
 - data or information held by the VIFM, and/or
 - the involvement of VIFM live participants.
 - To review all applications for research from Monash University Department of Forensic Medicine students or staff in accordance with the VIFM Monash University Research Memorandum of Understanding.
 - To consider any questions of ethics affecting the operation of the VIFM as referred by the CEO or the VIFM Board,¹ and
 - To advise the VIFM Board on the development of guidelines and policies relating to the ethical aspects of research at the VIFM.

Authority

9. The VIFM Board authorises the VIFM HREC, in performing its functions to:
- Seek out information it requires from VIFM employees. Such requests for information will be made through the executive officer of the VIFM HREC. The request may be for written information or for attendance by a VIFM employee at a VIFM HREC meeting. To facilitate this process, the VIFM Board directs the CEO and all employees to cooperate with any reasonable request of the VIFM HREC.
 - Obtain external legal or other professional advice to assist in undertaking its functions, following consultation with the Chairperson, VIFM Board.

VIFM HREC Membership

10. The VIFM HREC has a minimum membership of eight and is constituted in accordance with the National Statement².
11. Appointments to the VIFM HREC are made following an open and transparent process which also seek to ensure diversity (including gender diversity).
12. At least one third of the membership participating at each meeting must be from outside of the VIFM.
13. Members are appointed as individuals for their knowledge, qualities and experience, and not as representatives of any organisation, department or group.

¹ These matters do not include issues concerning the conduct of individual employees.

² See paragraph 5.1.30 of the National Statement



14. The minimum membership includes the following categories:
 - A chairperson with suitable experience, including previous membership of an HREC, whose other responsibilities will not impair the HREC's capacity to carry out its obligations under the National Statement
 - two people who bring a broad community or consumer perspective and who have no paid affiliation with the institution
 - a person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the professional care or treatment of people; for example, a nurse, counsellor or allied health professional
 - a person who performs a pastoral care role in a community including, but not limited to, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander elder or community leader, a chaplain or a minister of religion or another religious leader
 - a qualified lawyer, who may or may not be currently practising and, where possible, is not engaged to advise the institution on research-related or any other matters
 - two people with current research experience that is relevant to research proposals to be considered at the meetings they attend.
15. One or more of the members must be experienced in reflecting on and analysing ethical decision-making.
16. The VIFM Board appoints members to the VIFM HREC. New members are appointed for 12 months. Each VIFM HREC member can be reappointed by the VIFM Board for a further three years at the expiration of their current term.
17. The Chairperson, VIFM Board in consultation with the VIFM Board, appoints the VIFM HREC Chairperson from the membership of the Committee, for a three-year term. The appointment can be renewed by the Chairperson, VIFM Board for a further three years.
18. The Chairperson, VIFM Board must not be the VIFM HREC Chairperson.

Secretariat

19. The VIFM HREC Executive Officer provides secretariat support to the VIFM HREC.

Attendees

20. There are two ex officio attendees of the VIFM HREC, the Head of Academic Programs and the Director of Forensic Medicine, who provide information to the Committee but are not involved in the deliberations or decision-making of the Committee³.

³ See paragraph 5.1.41 of the National Statement

VIFM HREC Meetings

21. The VIFM HREC meetings are convened as determined by the VIFM HREC Chairperson. Members are expected to attend meetings in person unless they have arranged with the Chairperson or Executive Officer to attend on-line.
22. The VIFM HREC will try to reach decisions by general agreement or consensus. Where a decision is not unanimous, a dissent will be recorded in the minutes.
23. As far as practicable, all minimum membership categories are to be represented at each VIFM HREC meeting. No individual member can represent more than one category listed at an individual meeting, however, they may fill a different category at a separate meeting.
24. If a member cannot attend a meeting in person, they may provide their written comments on each research proposal listed on the agenda prior to the meeting. The VIFM HREC Chairperson will ensure that these views are considered by all VIFM HREC members participating in the meeting before a decision is made.
25. VIFM HREC members who are unable to attend a Committee meeting must advise the VIFM HREC Chairperson as soon as possible. If the VIFM HREC Chairperson is unable to attend, they must advise the Chairperson, VIFM Board.
26. The Chairperson will determine who will chair a meeting in their absence or, if such a determination has not been possible, the members present will elect one of those present to chair the meeting.
27. The VIFM HREC Executive Officer will take minutes of all VIFM HREC meetings. The minutes once approved and signed by the VIFM HREC Chairperson will be provided to the VIFM Board for noting at the next Board meeting.

Duties of VIFM HREC members

28. Each member of the VIFM HREC is responsible for deciding whether, in their judgement, a research proposal meets the requirements of the National Statement and is ethically acceptable.
29. All duties of VIFM Board members apply to VIFM HREC members, including:
 - The [Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities](#)
 - The VIFM Board policies on Conflicts of Interest and Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality
 - The duty of confidentiality – namely, a member of the VIFM HREC will not:
 - Give to any other person, whether directly or indirectly, any information acquired by reason of being a member, except where it is lawfully authorised or permitted, or
 - Improperly use their position, or any information acquired by them by reason of their position, to gain an advantage for themselves or another person or to cause detriment to the Institute.



Performance Review

30. The VIFM HREC will undertake an annual review of its own performance and provide a written report of the results of that review to Board at the end of each financial year.
31. The VIFM Board will formally review the VIFM HREC's performance and membership at least once every three years.

Review and Approval of the VIFM HREC's Terms of Reference

Date approved by the VIFM Board: 20 August 2025

Next review date: August 2028