



**ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL**  
MELBOURNE

A FACILITY OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA

**RESEARCH GOVERNANCE UNIT**  
St. Vincent's Hospital (Melbourne)  
Caritas Christi Hospice  
St. George's Health Service  
Prague House

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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### Statement of Intent and Outcomes

The St Vincent's Hospital (Melbourne) Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) is committed to fulfilling the governing principles of the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (2013), by ensuring that all members declare any potential conflicts of interest and that such conflicts are managed appropriately and do not impact the quality of review.

### Definitions

**Conflict of interest:** a situation in which a person's individual interests or responsibilities have the potential to influence the carrying out of his or her institutional role or professional obligations, or where an institution's interests or responsibilities have the potential to influence the carrying out of its obligations

### Procedure

A conflict of interest may relate to financial interests, as well as other private, professional or institutional benefits or advantages that depend significantly on the research outcomes. A conflict of interest may compromise the research process itself and/or the institutional processes governing research, and may lead researchers or institutions to base decisions about the research on factors outside the research requirements. A perception that a conflict of interest exists can be as serious as an actual conflict, raising concerns about an individual's integrity or an institution's management practices.

To ensure management of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest that may arise there are procedures for declarations of interests and management of perceived or actual conflicts of interest involving AEC members, and experts whose advice is sought by the AEC. People with a conflict of interest must remove themselves from the AEC's decision making on matters that relate to conflicts of interest.

For decision making, members with a conflict of interest must withdraw from the meeting. Once such members have withdrawn, the remaining members must constitute a quorum as defined in the Code, that is, one member from each of the membership categories A, B, C and D, with Categories C and D together representing at least one-third of members present.

All members of the AEC must disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation that bears on any research under review, prior to the commencement of review. 'Conflicts of Interest' is a permanent agenda item at the commencement of each AEC meeting which provides members with an opportunity to declare any such interests.

Once a conflict has been disclosed, the member may remain in the room during discussion but must leave the room during the decision making process of that project or amendment. If the conflict relates to an annual report or other submission they may remain present but must remain silent during the item for which a conflict of interest has been declared. All conflicts of interest may be managed using the Chair's discretion.

All conflicts of interest that are formally declared at the meeting must be documented within the minutes; both within the conflicts of interest section, and again at the beginning of the item for which the conflict was declared. The minutes must state the name of the member who has declared the conflict and what action was taken during the review process to minimise the impact of the conflict (i.e. whether the member was asked to leave the room during discussion, or whether the member remained present, but did not contribute to the review and/or decision making process).

Intentional failure to declare such conflicts will be treated seriously and actioned by the Chair and / or Executive Officer Research, with additional support from the Director of Research and Human Resources as required.

To ensure all members are aware of their obligations in terms of declaring conflicts of interest, a "Member's Agreement" formal declaration must be signed by all members on an annual basis and will be filed in the AEC membership folder within the Research Governance Unit. Members may be provided with a copy of this document for their records; if requested.

In order to capture any potential conflicts of interest of investigators, the AEC Project Application form requests the declaration of any actual or potential interest, including any financial interest or other relationship or affiliation, that may affect judgements and decisions regarding the wellbeing of animals involved in the project. This must be assessed by the AEC during ethical review to ensure the impact of any conflicts are minimised. All such discussions must also be formally documented within the minutes.

#### **Associated Procedures/Instructions**

4.3 – Induction of New Members

4.7 – Making and Communicating Decisions

#### **Reference Documents**

- Australian for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (2013)
- Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)

Authorized by:



Dr Megan Robertson  
Director of Research

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