Scanlon Foundation Research Institute
Human Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

1. Scope of Responsibilities for Ethical Review

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute Ethics Committee (*Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee*) is responsible for the ethical review, monitoring, and oversight of human research conducted under the auspices of the Institute and research submitted for review by external applicants.

The Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee ensures that human research related to social cohesion adheres to the principles of ethical conduct outlined in the **National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025)**.

Responsibilities include:

- Reviewing research applications involving human participants that pose **greater than minimal risk** (see Appendix for risk profiles of research)
    - Research projects that are low risk will be reviewed by a single reviewer
    - Research projects that are greater than low risk will be taken to the full panel for ethical review
- Assessing research proposals for compliance with ethical guidelines and standards.
- Monitoring approved research through regular updates from researchers
- Responding to adverse event reports and research-related complaints.
- Making recommendations on whether research should proceed, require amendment, or be rejected on ethical grounds.

The Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee will meet regularly to review submissions and maintain transparency and integrity in its decision-making process.

Non-HREC review

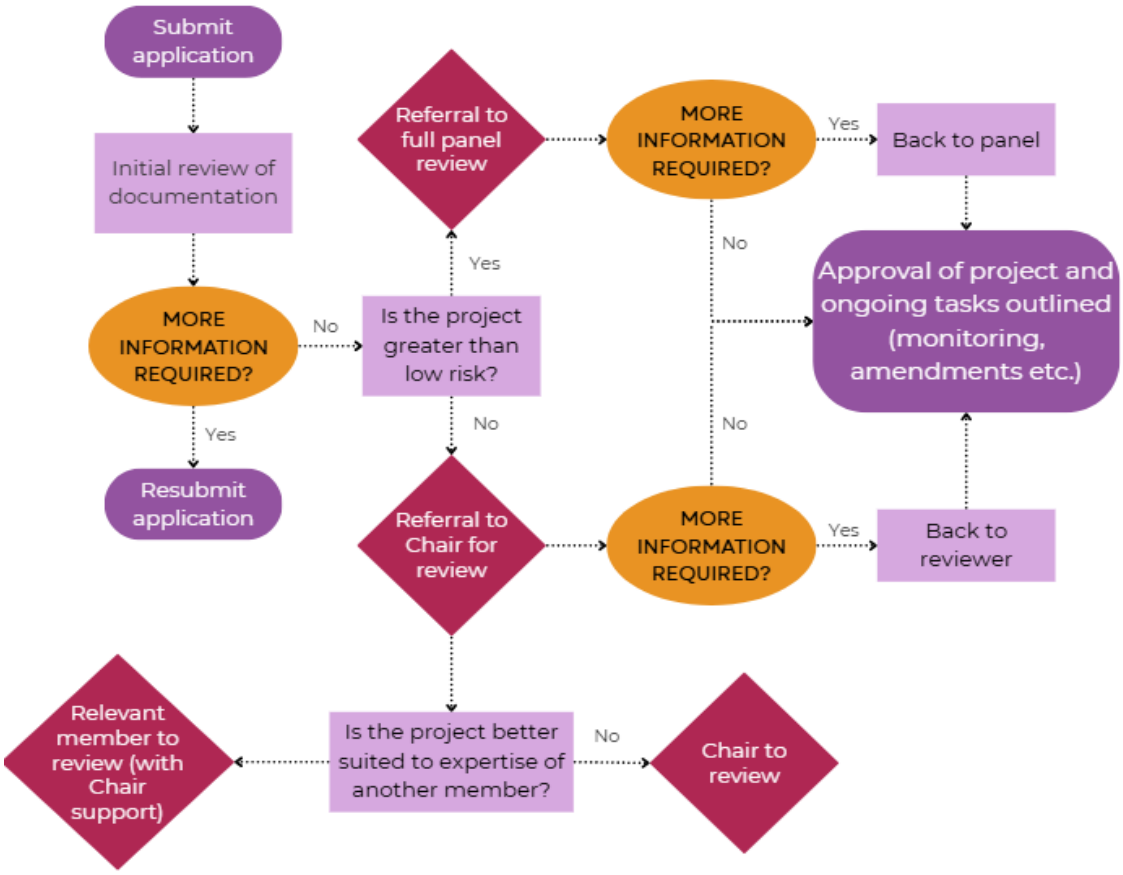
In the event that a research project is deemed low risk, the project will be sent to a single reviewer. This will always go to the Chair in the first instance. If the Chair deems the project has a specialised focus that another Committee member specialises in, the Chair may allocate that member to hold the position of reviewer for that project. For example, in the case that a project relates specifically to the provision of trauma informed care to people from refugee backgrounds, the Chair may allocate the project to be reviewed by the member with professional care experience.

In this situation, the single reviewer will always be supported by the Chair. The Chair will review any ethical decisions made and be available to assist with review if required.

All Committee members have a grounded understanding of the ethical issues that can arise with research under review, as formal training has been undertaken which focuses on the use of the National Statement in guiding ethical review procedures.

In the case that a project has been referred to non-HREC review but has been deemed greater than low risk by the single reviewer, this will be reviewed by the Chair, and if appropriate, referred to full HREC review by the Committee.

Figure 1: Review pathways



2. Relationship to Other Processes of Review of Research

The Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee operates within the Institute's broader research governance framework and complements other review processes, including:

- The Institute's internal review for determining **risk levels** (minimal vs. greater than low risk).
- The use of external expert reviewers or specialists where necessary.
- The Institute's **Research Code of Conduct**, which applies to all external consultants, collaborators and volunteers.

3. Review of Applications from Unaffiliated Researchers

The Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee may accept applications from **external or unaffiliated researchers**, particularly those conducting research in areas aligned with the Institute's mission (e.g., social cohesion in Australia).

Conditions for review include:

- The research must meet eligibility criteria set by the Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee.
    - See the Institute's Eligibility Criteria document on website for more information.
- External applicants must adhere to the same submission, ethical, and reporting standards as internal researchers.
- A **fee for service** may apply (see Schedule of Fees for Ethics Review).

4. Mechanisms for Accountability and Reporting

To ensure accountability and transparency, the HREC will:

- **Report annually** to the Institute's executive on:
    - Membership composition
    - Committee activities and meeting frequency
    - Number and outcomes of applications reviewed
    - Monitoring and complaints handled
    - Training and SOP compliance
- Maintain all documentation in accordance with ethical and legal requirements.

- Provide updates to the **National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)** as per registration obligations.
- Make key documentation (e.g., ToR, SOP, complaints process) publicly accessible via the Institute's website.

5. Categories of Appointed Members

In accordance with the NHMRC National Statement, the Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee will consist of a minimum of **eight members**, including:

- A **Chairperson** with experience in human research ethics.
- **Two community members** with no affiliation to the Institute.
- A professional with experience in **care or treatment of people** (e.g., nurse, counsellor).
- A person engaged in **pastoral care** (e.g., community elder, religious leader).
- A **lawyer**, who may or may not be currently practicing and preferably independent of the Institute's legal counsel.
- **Two researchers** with relevant expertise aligned with the Institute's research scope.

Membership diversity will reflect:

- Gender balance (at least equal numbers of men and women if no non-binary or other gender diverse people present)
- Cultural and ethnic diversity
- At least **one-third of members from outside** the Institute

6. Remuneration for Members

Members may be remunerated for their service, subject to Institute policy and available budget. Options include:

- **Honorarium per meeting** (particularly for external members)
- **In-kind benefits** such as training, professional development, or access to Institute events.

Remuneration arrangements will be communicated in writing upon appointment and reviewed periodically.

7. Role of the Secretariat

The Secretariat supports the effective operation of the Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee by:

- Coordinating meetings, distributing papers, recording minutes, and maintaining records
- Managing communication with researchers and facilitating application processing and reporting.

8. Schedule of Fees for Ethics Review

The Scanlon Institute Ethics Committee may charge fees for ethics review from **external applicants**, based on a transparent and fair fee schedule. This may include:

- **Application processing fees**
- **Review and meeting attendance charges**
- **Expedited review surcharges** (if applicable)

The current fee structure will be published on the Institute's website and reviewed annually.

9. Term of Appointment and Induction

- Members are typically appointed for a term of **three years**, with the possibility of renewal.
- A formal letter of appointment will outline responsibilities, indemnity provisions, category of membership, and remuneration (if applicable).
- All new members will undergo **mandatory training and induction** and are expected to maintain familiarity with the National Statement and Institute policies.

10. Indemnity and Legal Protection

The Institute will provide **professional indemnity insurance** for all members, ensuring legal protection for duties performed in good faith.

Appendix

Risk profiles of research

Figure 1: Risk profiles of research

Lower risk		**Higher risk** (Individual, group, community, societal or global)	
Minimal	**Low**	**Greater than low**	**High**
No risk of harm or discomfort; potential for minor burden or inconvenience*	No risk of harm; risk of discomfort (+/- foreseeable burden)	Risk of harm (+/- foreseeable burden)	Risk of significant harm (+/- foreseeable burden)

Source: NHMRC National Statement 2025

Minimal risk research may involve minor burden or inconvenience for participants, but no risk of harm or discomfort. Minor burden and inconvenience can include things such as the time sacrificed to participate in the research or costs related to travel. A minimal risk research project would therefore only ask participants questions that do not incite any feelings of discomfort but may pose a minor burden. While minimal risk projects will not require ethical review, the HREC may provide guidance to researchers whose projects do not exceed minimal risk.

Low risk research similarly poses a risk of burden, and a risk of discomfort, but not harm, to participants. An example of low risk research may involve asking questions that may incite mild anxiety in participants, such as questions around social inclusion.

Greater than low risk poses a risk for harm to participants. Low risk research could include interviewing vulnerable communities (or high-risk populations). For example, if a research project involves asking asylum seekers about experiences in their country of origin, there is increased risk of psychological harm as it may raise feelings of distress.

High risk research, where there is a risk of significant harm, is an escalation from greater than low risk research. For example, if a research project involved interviewing a group about a traumatic experience, there is a risk of the participant having an experience of re-traumatisation.

Discomfort and harm

- Discomfort is considered less serious than harm such as mild anxiety related to an interview.

- Where a person's reactions may exceed discomfort and become distress, this should be viewed as potential for harm.
- Harm can be one or multiple of the following
    - Physical harm
    - Psychological harm, such as feelings of worthlessness, distress, guilt, anger, fear or anxiety related to, for example, disclosure of sensitive information or an experience of re-traumatisation.
    - Devaluation of personal worth
    - Cultural harm
    - Social harm
    - Economic harm
    - Legal harm