Conflicts of Interest

This document provides information on what a conflict of interest is and how to declare and manage it effectively in the context of human research ethics application to the SAC HREC.

Background:

Under chapter 5.4 of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated 2018), the SAC HREC has a responsibility to ensure that Conflicts of Interest (COIs) are declared and managed appropriately.

A Conflict of Interest exists when it appears likely that you could be influenced, or where it could be perceived that you are influenced, by a personal interest with your responsibilities as a listed researcher in your research project.

Conflict of interests may be actual, perceived or potential:

- Actual: employee is in a position to be influenced by their private interest(s) when doing their job.
- Perceived: employee is in a position to appear to be influenced by their private interest(s) when doing their job.
- Potential: employee is in a position where they may be influenced in the future by their private interest(s) when doing their job whether or not this is in fact the case.

Examples of private interests that could create pecuniary and non-pecuniary conflicts of interest include:

- Financial and economic interests (such as shares, assets or debts)
- Family or private business(es)
- Affiliations with for-profit and not-for-profit organisations and associations
- Involvement in secondary employment that potentially conflicts with an official’s public duties (e.g. private practice, private consultancy, academic appointment or business owner)
- Undertakings and relationships (such as obligations to professional, community, ethnic, family or religious groups in a personal or professional capacity or relationships to people living in the same household)
- Enmity towards, or competition with, another person or group
- Significant family or other relationships (e.g. clients, contractors or other staff working in the same or a related organisation)
- Provision of specialist skills (e.g. if practitioners are in short supply)
- Future employment prospects or plans.

Disclosing conflicts of interest

All actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest relating to research studies under review by the SAC HREC must be disclosed by the researchers. This should occur in the Human Research Ethics Application section Q1.10. The nature and extent of the interest(s) and to whom they apply should be explained. The steps to manage these interests should be outlined.
Managing conflicts of interest

Actual, potential or perceived COIs must be managed appropriately by:

- Restricting your involvement in the matters associated with the conflict;
- Removing yourself from any involvement in the matters associated with the conflict;
- Relinquishing your private interest so that the conflict no longer arises.

The SAC HREC will review the declared COI, to ensure that measures have been adopted to manage the COI. These measures may include the following (or other measures as may be appropriate in the circumstances):

- The information be disclosed to research participants;
- A person other than the researcher make the initial approach to participants;
- The information be disclosed in any report of the research;
- The research be conducted by another researcher; and/or
- The research not to be conducted.

The COI will also need to be registered with the appropriate institution. The SAC HREC will require a copy of the registration provided as part of your ethics application. They may also require evidence from your organisation to confirm that the COI is being managed.

SALHN staff:
The Conflict of Interest page on the intranet provides resources for researchers and staff, to assist in identifying and registering a COI, including a checklist, FAQ and reporting form:


Flinders University –
The COI webpage provides resources for researchers and staff, including the university policy and information on how to register and manage the COI.

Other researchers:
Please refer to your organisation for initial guidance as most entities have a COI policy.

Further reading/guidance:

- National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research – sections 5.4
- The Australian Code for Responsible Research- section 7

For more information

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If you do not speak English, request an interpreter from SA Health and the department will make every effort to provide you with an interpreter in your language.