

Appendix 4: Ethics Committees in New Zealand

The following ethics committees have a role in the health and disability support sector:

- health and disability ethics committees
- Health Research Council Ethics Committee
- National Ethics Advisory Committee
- National Ethics Committee on Assisted Human Reproduction
- Standing Committee on Clinical Trials
- Gene Technology Advisory Committee
- Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council.

Following is a short description of the role of each committee.

Health and disability ethics committees

The primary role of a health and disability ethics committee (HDEC) is to provide independent ethical review of innovative practice and health research that will be conducted in their designated region of authority. HDECs may also provide advice on service delivery issues.

In undertaking this role, HDECs will:

- i. safeguard the rights, health and wellbeing of consumers and research participants and, in particular, those persons with diminished autonomy
- ii. foster an awareness of ethical principles and practices in the health and disability sector and research community
- iii. facilitate excellence in health research and innovative practice for the wellbeing of society
- iv. give due consideration to local community views
- v. ensure that the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, particularly the principles of participation, partnership, and protection, are incorporated in the proceedings and processes and outcomes of committees
- vi. operate in accordance with the *Operational Standard for Health and Disability Ethics Committees*
- vii. operate in accordance with any guidelines issued or approved by the National Advisory Committee for Health and Disability Support Services Ethics.

Accredited ethics review committees at tertiary educational institutions (referred to as institutional ethics committees) and one ethics committee in the private sector also carry out ethical review in accordance with the above principles.

Health Research Council Ethics Committee (HRCEC)

The HRCEC considers and makes recommendations to the Health Research Council (HRC) on ethical issues in relation to health research, especially those emerging through the development of new areas of health research.

In respect of each application submitted to the HRC for a grant for the purposes of health research, the HRCEC is empowered to ensure that an independent ethical assessment of the proposed health research is made either by itself or by a committee approved by the HRCEC.

In relation to ethics committees established by other bodies, the HRCEC has the function of giving advice on:

- the membership of those committees
- the procedures to be adopted, and the standards to be observed, by those committees.

National Ethics Advisory Committee (NEAC)

NEAC was established under the New Zealand Health and Disability Act 2000. NEAC's functions are to:

- provide advice to the Minister of Health on ethical issues of national significance in respect of any health and disability matters (including research and health services)
- determine nationally consistent ethical standards across the health and disability sector and provide scrutiny for national health research and health services.

National Ethics Committee on Assisted Human Reproduction (NECAHR)

NECAHR was established under the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000. NECAHR's functions are to:

- i. review assisted human reproductive proposals (including health research and innovative treatment) to determine whether they are ethical and, in particular, to determine whether:
 - a. the rights of the people involved will be protected
 - b. proper account will be taken of the ethical perspectives of Māori, and other cultural ethnic, religious, and social groups in New Zealand
- ii. develop for providers protocols and guidelines relating to the ethical issues involved with aspects of assisted human reproduction
- iii. advise the Minister of Health on ethical issues relating to assisted human reproduction
- iv. consider any matters relating to assisted human reproduction the Minister of Health from time to time determines.

Standing Committee on Therapeutic Trials

SCOTT is a committee of the Health Research Council (HRC). It is convened to provide recommendations to the Director-General of Health on the scientific validity of applications for clinical trials on new medicines. All clinical trials involving pre-registration medicines need to have the approval of SCOTT to proceed. Section 30 of the Medicines Act 1981 empowers the Director-General of Health on the advice of the HRC to permit the use of medicines that have not received marketing consent to be used in clinical trials for the purpose of obtaining clinical and scientific information.

Gene Technology Advisory Committee

GTAC is a standing committee of the HRC. The function of GTAC is to review, for the purposes of seeking an exemption under section 30 of the Medicines Act 1981 or as required by the HRC, any of the HRC's committees or an ethics committee's proposals for clinical trials:

- i. that include the introduction of nucleic acids (genetically manipulated or synthesised in the laboratory) or genetically manipulated micro-organisms, viruses or cells into human participants for the purpose of gene therapy or cell marking
- ii. in which the introduction of nucleic acids (genetically manipulated or synthesised in the laboratory), or genetically manipulated micro-organisms, viruses or cells is designed to stimulate an immune response against the participant's own cells, as in the treatment of certain cancers
- iii. in which nucleic acids either from or within cells from animal species are transferred into human participants for the purposes of disease treatment (xenotransplantation)
- iv. in which human nucleic acids have been introduced into the genome of an animal species, including genetically manipulated micro-organisms, for the purpose of developing products to be used for either disease prevention or treatment in human participants
- v. involving vaccines in which nucleic acids (genetically manipulated or synthesised in the laboratory) or genetically manipulated micro-organisms, viruses or cells have been introduced to stimulate an immune response to antigenic determinants of an infectious agent.

Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council

The goal of the Bioethics Council is to enhance New Zealand's understanding of the cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects of biotechnology and ensure that the use of biotechnology has regard for the values held by New Zealanders. The Bioethics Council is a ministerial advisory committee set up to:

- provide independent advice to government on biotechnological issues involving significant cultural, ethical and spiritual dimensions
- promote and participate in public dialogue on cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects of biotechnology, and enable public participation in the Council's activities
- provide information on the cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects of biotechnology.