



Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC Research Integrity Fact Sheet Two

Concerns about research integrity arising during NHMRC peer review

This fact sheet provides advice to NHMRC's peer reviewers who are concerned about a potential research integrity issue. This could include concerns, for example, about items in a publications list, or potentially false or misleading statements, diagrams or figures. You could also have concerns about the behaviour of other peer reviewers. NHMRC has an established process for addressing these types of concerns.

The [*Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018*](#) (the Code) sets out the principles of responsible research conduct and the responsibilities of institutions and researchers. A breach of the Code is a failure to meet these principles and responsibilities. Research misconduct is a serious breach of the Code which is also intentional or reckless or negligent. A research integrity concern arises if a peer reviewer believes that a grant applicant or another peer reviewer may have potentially breached the Code.

You should read this fact sheet in conjunction with the relevant scheme-specific peer review guidelines.

What should I do if I come across something that raises concerns about research integrity while reviewing a grant for NHMRC?

You should raise your concerns with NHMRC **by contacting in confidence the secretariat of the relevant funding scheme via email**, explaining the issue you are concerned about. Where appropriate, the relevant NHMRC Director will then refer the matter to NHMRC's Ethics and Integrity section.

It is very important that you do not raise concerns about integrity in your assessment report, as part of panel discussions or in conversation with other peer reviewers. Matters that first appear to raise integrity concerns may sometimes have straightforward explanations and discussing these issues as part of your assessment, or with others, can jeopardise the fair assessment of an application and has the potential to affect the procedural fairness afforded to the person against whom allegations are being made.

Peer review comments can, and should, seek clarification on any aspect of the application, but such comments should not be couched in terms that question the integrity of the application or applicant. For example, as an assessor it would be appropriate to query statistics in an application that appear to be incorrect. However, it is not appropriate in assessment reports to suggest that an apparent error or inconsistency is suggestive of research misconduct.

What happens next?

If the scheme Director has referred the matter to NHMRC's Ethics and Integrity section, this team will consider your concerns and, where appropriate, contact the research institution involved. We may sometimes come back to you seeking further details. It is important that the concerns are documented clearly and precisely in writing as this will help us be specific with the relevant research institution. We will not disclose your identity to the institution, in order to maintain as far as possible the anonymity of the peer review process.

NHMRC does not conduct its own investigation into research integrity matters. Under the Code, this is the responsibility of the relevant institution. However, NHMRC liaises with the institution about the outcome of a preliminary assessment or investigation, and can take any necessary precautionary or consequential actions under the [NHMRC Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy](#). This policy ensures that mechanisms are in place to take into account any unresolved potential breaches of the Code or other misconduct before funding is released (e.g. a condition could be placed on a grant preventing the commencement of funding until after the resolution of the matter, with funding potentially being withheld if a breach of the Code or other misconduct is proven).

The flow chart below summarises the process used to resolve integrity concerns arising in peer review.

Can I find out the outcome of a matter?

We do not provide peer reviewers with specific feedback on the management and outcome of integrity matters. However, we are happy to answer any questions you may have about how such matters are handled. If you have questions that the information here doesn't cover, please contact the Ethics and Integrity section on integrity@nhmrc.gov.au.

What if I am still not satisfied?

If you do not believe your concerns have been adequately dealt with through this process, you can raise your concerns in the first instance with the Ethics and Integrity section by emailing integrity@nhmrc.gov.au which can provide you with further advice.

Flow chart: how concerns are addressed

