Corrective Services Ethics Committee (CSEC)

Guidelines for Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms

Version: November 2023

The following guidelines have been developed in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Any research involving data collection activities conducted with human participants (e.g. interviews, focus groups, yarnings, surveys, medical examinations and treatments) requires two related standard documents for each participant group that should be attached to the CSEC ethics application. The Participant Information Sheet (PIS) outlines the research project, demands and ethical implications and participants agree to these conditions in the related Consent Form (CF). Both documents together, usually referred to as PISCF, constitute informed consent as participants have to know exactly what they are consenting to. A waiver of informed consent requires additional approval from an NHMRC registered Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), if health information is involved

CSEC acknowledges that both documents are project specific. The guidelines outline general requirements that should be adjusted to the specific objectives and implications of your project. Typical variations include implied consent for surveys or using the PISCF for verbal consent. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form should be separate documents printed on the letterhead of your institution. Please ensure that the wording of both documents is concise, consistent and accessible to the participant. If the project involves research with offenders, the documents must use plain and inclusive English at reading level 2 to allow for any participants with limited literacy and numeracy skills or from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to understand the project. Consent Forms should be saved on a password protected secure server or locked cabinet separate from all other research materials to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Participant Information Sheet

Each investigator is required to prepare a simple written statement describing the project and details about participation. A copy of this statement should be made available to potential participants. The statement should include the following (if applicable to the specific project):

- A plain language explanation, so that the participant understands the purpose of the project, its ethical implications, demands and procedures to be followed.
- A description of any potential harm, distress, discomfort and/or risk to the participant. Including information about how distress will be addressed during and after the data collection and what support services participants can access. Please note that offenders in custody can usually only access Justice Health and CSNSW staff at their centres or may use the Common Audio Dial List (CADL) that provides mental health services.
- A plain language explanation of each research component the participant is going to be engaged in, including an indication of how much time will be needed to complete and any additional demand (e.g. travel).

- If required, a formal request to the participant for permission to release information contained on CSNSW or medical records. Please explain in plain language what this information will contain and why it is required.
- Confirmation that participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Participants will not be identifiable in any report, publication or presentation of findings. Explain how you will de-identify participants.
- Confirmation that the participant is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time. The withdrawal process should be as easy and accessible as possible, e.g. by calling or emailing the researchers or using a separate withdrawal form.
- Confirmation that there will be no penalty or prejudice of any kind for not participating in the project. Participating, withdrawing or not participating in research will not change the participant's relationship to CSNSW and services.
- Confirmation that, if there are any particular questions the participant does not wish to answer, they do not have to.
- Participants must be informed that researchers may be obliged by law to inform authorities if participants disclose any offence for which they or any other person have not previously been apprehended, prosecuted or convicted (see question 28 of the ethics application).
- Explain how the information provided by participants will be used, disseminated and published (e.g. individual quotes or aggregated information only) through reports, articles, multimedia or other outlets. You may provide them with a final report.
- Outline any benefits for participants, including details about incentives (see CSEC incentives guidelines).
- An offer to answer any questions the participant may have about the project and procedures, including contact details. Please note that inmates may not be able to contact researchers directly. In this case prisoners may reach out to Wing Officers, Service and Program Officers (SAPOs) or Research Liaison Officers.
- Insert the HREC and/or CSEC approval number once obtained. The CSEC approval number has the generic format "Dyear/XXXXXXX" and can be found at the top of the CSNSW Commissioner's approval letter.
- Provide contact details for complaints. This must be a contact outside the research team. Please note that complaints are usually managed by the responsible HREC to avoid conflicts of interest. If no other HREC is involved, please use CSEC contact information:

  Dr Marc Torka
  Information and Ethics Officer
  Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics
  Corrective Services NSW
  GPO Box 31
  SYDNEY NSW 2000

  Email: marc.torka@dcj.nsw.gov.au
  Phone: (02) 8346 1254

Consent Form

A consent form is a formal agreement in which participants agree to the conditions of participating in a research project. As such, the consent form should list all relevant non-negotiable conditions outlined in the PIS in a clear plain language statement. If participants have a choice to opt-in or out, please provide a checkbox for optional research components (examples provided).

The consent form should be printed on the letterhead of your institution and contain the following information:

Project: *insert project title*
Institution: *insert name of your institution*
Chief Investigator: *insert name, title and contact details*
Co-Investigator(s): *insert name, title and contact details*

Although the consent form is project specific, some of the following standard statements may be applicable:

I …… agree to participate in the study (*insert title*) and understand that (*list all non-negotiable conditions*):

- The research will look at (*insert describer*)
- I will participate in (*name and list all relevant research activities, e.g. interview, focus group, yarning circle, survey, assessment, medical examination*):
- The (*name of research activity*) will take about xx minutes to complete but I can stop sooner if I want to.
- The interview / focus group / yarning will be audio-recorded and transcribed without my name on it.
- I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to.
- I know that no-one will mind if I decide that I do or do not want to take part in the study.
- I can pull out of the study at any time.
- The researchers will not tell anyone my name or any other personal details.
- Results will be published in a format that will not identify me.
- If I have any questions about this study I can speak to the research team. Add contact details.
- If I have any complaint about this study I can contact the (insert name and contact details of the responsible ethics committee).
- If I discuss an offence for which I or any other person have not been charged or convicted for, the researcher may be legally obliged to report it to the authorities.

Examples optional components:

☐ It is OK for the researchers to look in my medical / CSNSW records (*please specify*).

☐ I agree to be video-recorded.

☐ I would like to review my interview transcript.

☐ Please send me a summary of the study results to this email / postal address:

☐ I agree to show my works at an exhibition.

☐ I wish to have my drawings / other contributions to the study acknowledged.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (or someone has read it to me in a language I understand) and I agree with it.

PARTICIPANT: …… **DATE** ……
(signature)

WITNESS*: ……..**DATE** ……
(signature)

* Please note, in accordance with sections 3.1.25 and 4.5.5 – 4.5.10 of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, a witness is only required to ensure informed consent if there is a risk that participants may not have the capacity to understand the merits, risks and procedures of the research (e.g. cognitive impairment, the nature of the research or excessive incentives). In this case a witness should understand the implications of the research, be independent of the research team and, where possible, knows the participant and is familiar with his or her condition.