

# SOUTH AFRICAN ETHICS IN HEALTH RESEARCH GUIDELINES:

*Principles, Processes, and  
Structures*

2024 Third Edition  
Chapter One

T: +27 51 401 9111 | E: [info@ufs.ac.za](mailto:info@ufs.ac.za) | [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)

*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives  
through quality, impact, and care.*

VISION **130**  
*Renew and Reimagine  
for 2034*

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE  
VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA  
FREISTATA



# Chapter 1: Research in ethics

1.1 Introduction

1.2 NHREC as regulatory authority

1.3 The research context

1.4 Research involving human participants

1.5 Care and use of animals for scientific purposes

1.6 Ethical research review

1.7 Purpose and status of these guidelines

1.8 Structure of these guidelines

# Introduction to research ethics in South Africa

South Africa's Constitution promotes human dignity, equality, and human rights.

The National Health Act (NHA) governs health research and sets up research ethics infrastructure.

**Health research** is broadly defined, including biological, clinical, psychological, and social processes, and more.

# Core ethical principles

- Guidelines are inclusive, covering research involving human participants and animals.
- Ethical principles prioritise the safety, welfare, and health of both humans and animals.
- Research involving human biological material or data from deceased persons is also covered.
- Observational research in public spaces may not require formal ethics review under certain conditions.

# National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC)



Established under the NHA to regulate health research ethics.



Sets norms and standards, registers and audits research ethics committees (RECs), and adjudicates complaints.



Promotes ethical research practices that reflect values such as respect, compassion, and integrity.



Researchers must be familiar with relevant legislation and ethical guidelines.

# Research context in South Africa

South Africa is a key site for diverse health research due to its advanced infrastructure and high disease burden.

Research must comply with ethical standards to protect participants, animals, and researchers.

The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) regulates personal data in research, emphasising privacy and informed consent.

# Research involving human participants



Organisations must have access to a registered Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for health research involving humans.



Protocols must undergo independent ethics review before research begins.

# Use of animals in research

---

Organisations must have access to a registered Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC) for research involving animals.

---

Ethics review is required for protocols involving animals to ensure adherence to ethical standards.

# Ethics review process

- Research protocols must be prospectively reviewed by a registered REC.
- Review ensures protection of participants, animals, and societal interests by balancing risks and benefits.
- Ethics review is not meant to obstruct research but to ensure ethical conduct and safety.

# Purpose and status of guidelines

- These guidelines set the minimum national benchmark for responsible and ethical research.
- They are legally binding under the NHA and apply broadly to health and health-related research.
- The guidelines address research involving humans, animals, and the impact of research on the environment.
- They promote ethical standards across all disciplines and methodologies, ensuring the highest standards of research conduct.

# THANK YOU!

National Health Research Ethics Council (2024). South African Ethics in Health Research Guidelines: Principles, Processes and Structures, 2024, 3rd ed. National Department of Health of the Republic Of South Africa. Pretoria: NDOH.

Available from: [HTTPS://WWW.HEALTH.GOV.ZA/NHREC-HOME/](https://www.health.gov.za/nhrec-home/)