



RESPONSE TO THE NHMRC CONSULTATION ON THE AUSTRALIAN CODE FOR THE RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH (2018)

Guide on Research Supervision to support the Code, May 2019

The Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences' (AAHMS) mission is to advance health and medical research in Australia and its translation into benefits for all, by fostering leadership within our sector, providing expert advice to decision makers, and engaging patients and the public. The Academy is the impartial, authoritative, cross-sector voice of health and medical science in Australia. We are an independent, interdisciplinary body of 357 Fellows – elected by their peers for their distinguished achievements and exceptional contributions to health and medical science in Australia. Responsible conduct and research integrity are fundamental to research excellence and must be maintained to advance Australia's world-leading health and medical research. Research supervision – at all levels – must set the right tone in these endeavours and we therefore welcome the publication of this draft guide, and the opportunity to comment on it.

We agree with the guide's initial statement that supervision plays a critical role in the responsible conduct of research. The guide begins (in section 2) by outlining the general responsibilities of supervisors in promoting the responsible conduct of research, identifying a number of important domains. We would like to see the guide also stress here the important role that supervisors play in setting the highest standards in research design and methodology. Increasingly, research integrity is discussed not only in the context of misconduct, but also regarding the need for robust research practices that deliver reliable and reproducible research findings. We believe that section 2 of the guide should refer to this specifically. Supervision at all levels is critical to ensuring that research work performed meets appropriate quality standards (although we note that the guide particularly targets supervision of early career researchers, Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and other research trainees) – the supervisor is an important source of building good research practice.

We suggest that this principle be stated clearly at the outset because it underpins all responsibilities then articulated throughout the guide. For instance, institutions play a vital role in setting the right tone and environment; while researchers under supervision should work consistently with the standards set, but must also have adequate opportunity to raise concerns in an appropriate manner, should they need to.

We are grateful to the Fellows who contributed to this response.

For further information about this response, please contact Katrin Forslund, Policy and Projects Officer at the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Science (katrin.forslund@ahms.org).