

## **ACADEMY RESPONSE:**

# NHMRC Good Institutional Practice Guide: Consultation Draft

JULY 2024

The Academy of Health and Medical Sciences is pleased to provide feedback on the National Health and Medical Research Council's consultation draft of the Good Institutional Practice Guide.

The Academy of Health and Medical Sciences is one of Australia's five Learned Academies. Elected by their peers for outstanding achievements and exceptional contributions to the health and medical sciences, the Academy's Fellowship represents a diverse community of our nation's most distinguished experts, providing objective, non-partisan, independent and evidence-based advice on how to solve the most pressing challenges facing our healthcare and medical research sectors.



**The Academy emphasises the importance of high standards in health and medical research and supports the provision of guidelines for maintaining research integrity and quality, including mechanisms for handling misconduct.**

The NHMRC Good Institutional Practice Guide Consultation Draft offers a valuable approach for fostering a positive research culture, emphasising the importance of leadership, resources, and continuous improvement in research practices.

However, to fully support a healthy and ethical research environment, the guide should include explicit guidelines for handling breaches of research integrity and misconduct.

Addressing these omissions with clear procedures for reporting, investigating, and managing misconduct would help prevent a culture of fear and retaliation, promoting transparency and accountability.

This is crucial given the fragility of trust in medical research and the importance of maintaining it through transparent and robust systems at the institutional level.

Additional insights from organisations like the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences can provide further context and resources to enhance the Guide's effectiveness in maintaining high standards in research practices while addressing integrity breaches appropriately.

Section 2 of the guide, *Approaches: Implementing Change to Improve Institutional Research Culture* is very helpful as it provides structured approaches for implementing changes to improve research culture. However, it lacks detailed guidance on handling breaches of integrity and research misconduct. Including clear guides for reporting and investigating misconduct, as well as support systems for those involved, would enhance this section.

The information in Section 3.1 '*Modelling and Leadership*' is helpful in redefining good leadership in health and medical research. It stresses the importance of leaders who model positive behaviours and support their teams. However, it does not address how leaders should handle breaches of research integrity or misconduct. The role of leadership in maintaining research integrity and the need for systems that support honest and ethical behaviour is essential. Effective leadership should include creating a safe and transparent environment for reporting misconduct and ensuring fair investigations.

Section 3.2 of the guide, '*Institutional Resources to Support the Conduct of High-Quality Research*' is helpful as it addresses the need for adequate resources to support high-quality research, mentioning statistical advice. However, it lacks mention of other essential resources and skills such as those of health economists, implementation scientists, clinical trial experts, and computer scientists with expertise in AI. Not only are adequate resources and comprehensive support systems important in maintaining research integrity and quality, but including these additional resources would provide a more comprehensive support system

for researchers, ensuring they have access to the full range of expertise needed for high-quality research.

The *'Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting'* section of the guide is helpful as it emphasises continuous improvement through monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. However, it does not address how institutions could monitor and evaluate instances of research misconduct or breaches of integrity. Accountability and transparency in maintaining trust in medical research is crucial. Including processes for tracking and reporting incidents of misconduct, as well as clear guidelines that could be used for investigations, would enhance the effectiveness of this section.

The Good Institutional Practice Guide provides a solid foundation for fostering a positive research culture and maintaining high standards in research practices. However, it could be significantly enhanced by including detailed guidelines for handling breaches of research integrity and misconduct, expanding the range of institutional resources, and ensuring robust monitoring and evaluation processes. There is an inherent importance that these elements play in maintaining trust and integrity in medical research. Incorporating these enhancements would help create a more comprehensive and supportive research environment, ultimately leading to higher quality and more reliable research outcomes that also aid in the strengthening of trust in Australian health and medical research.