

What does it mean to be an ‘Investigator’ on a research project?

Purpose

This document outlines definitions and expectations regarding Investigators on health research projects (noting that health includes social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of individuals and communities). It is intended to be used by anyone involved in health research in the Kimberley, including Aboriginal community members, health service staff, and academic researchers.

What does it mean to be an Investigator on a research project?

When a research project is being planned to start, applications need to be submitted for ethics approval. Before this, often an application will be submitted for funding. As part of this, there needs to be a list of people who will work on the project. This work could involve advising about how to do the project, collecting data (e.g. conducting interviews with research participants), analysing qualitative or quantitative data, writing up the project results, feeding back the results to the community, and ensuring practical outcomes from the research. These people are the “Investigators” on a research project. Investigators are considered researchers for that project, even though they might not do research as a career.

Sometimes, in the past, there was an idea that researchers need to be separate from or independent of what is being researched. In Aboriginal health research in the Kimberley, this is definitely not the case. Local knowledge and cultural expertise is a crucial requirement of all research projects conducted in the Kimberley, and is the only way research can be done properly here.

The benefit of being an Investigator is that you are able to influence how the project is done and help ensure it has the best outcomes. It can also be useful for career opportunities. Investigators often end up as authors on publications about the project (see below).

Investigators are all accountable for how the project is conducted on the ground and reported to the community. The organisation of the Investigator is also listed, so Investigators are also representing their organisation. Therefore, it is important that local Investigator names are not just added onto a project in order to gain support for the project within a specific community or region.

Agreeing to be listed as an Investigator on a research project shows that you are supportive of the project aims, methods, and intended outcomes. As such, all Investigators should review and approve the project protocol being submitted as part of a funding and/or ethics application. When the project is underway, all Investigators should be kept informed about how the project is progressing and any changes to the project plans. It is not right to list a Kimberley-based Investigator on a project and keep using their name without involving them in the project the whole way along. Investigators can ask for their name to be taken off projects.

The person with most accountability is the **Principal Investigator/Lead Investigator/Chief Investigator* A**: This person has overall responsibility for the project. This means they are responsible for:

- submitting ethics applications;
- submitting progress reports to ethics committees and any other bodies required to meet local governance requirements (including the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum Research Subcommittee);
- submitting a final report to ethics committees and any other bodies required to meet local governance requirements, when the research project is finished;
- ensuring that findings are given back to the communities and organisations involved; and
- ensuring that the other project Investigators are kept up to date with the project and are able to provide input into any proposed changes to project plans and how the project findings are written up or spoken about.

*Sometimes the term “Chief Investigator” is used to mean lead Investigator, and sometimes it is used to refer to any researcher listed on a project. In grant applications, other terms such as ‘Associate Investigator’ and ‘Partner Investigator’ may also be used. The Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee does not distinguish between Associate Investigators, Partner Investigators, and other Investigators.

What does it mean to be an author on a research publication?

In the Kimberley, it is expected that all local Aboriginal Investigators who are listed on a project will have the opportunity to be an author on any presentations and publications that come out of the project (e.g. academic journal articles and reports) and will be placed in prominent positions in the author order.

It is important that all authors are familiar with what is in the paper that is being submitted for publication, and are happy to have their name associated with it.

The “corresponding author” is responsible for submitting the paper. After the paper has been “peer-reviewed”, the corresponding author is responsible for revising the manuscript. They should do this in consultation with the other authors.

For more information about conducting health research in the Kimberley, please go to the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum (KAHPF) Research Subcommittee website:

<https://kahpf.org.au/research-subcommittee>