

# Human Research Ethics Committee

Ethics Approval for Research Involving Humans

**Guidelines & Protocol for Conducting Telephone Interviews**

**GUIDELINES**

Telephone interviews are an intrusive research tool and therefore the Committee must be satisfied that the use of telephone interviews is a necessary component of the research. The researcher should provide responses to the following in their application *(Question E1 for HREC E1 and E2 applications; Q1.2 for HREA applications)*:

* Why telephone interviews are the preferred method of surveying and why the researchers could not obtain the information by less intrusive means, e.g. self-administered questionnaires.
* If questions are of a sensitive nature, how do the researchers intend to minimise the potential for psychological harm to their participants? What referral protocol exists for people who experience emotional distress resulting from the interview, or the request to be interviewed?

Telephone interviews are permissible under the following circumstances and are explained in greater detail below:

1. Where the telephone number is obtained directly from the participant (e.g. through an earlier phase of the research project, where the participant was also provided with the *Information Sheet for Participants (ISP)*);
2. Where the participants email address was obtained publicly (e.g. from a website) and communication was commenced prior to telephone interview;
3. ‘Cold call’ where telephone details are obtained from public databases (e.g. White Pages).

**1) & 2) – Telephone number obtained directly from the participant / contact details obtained publicly and communication commenced prior to the telephone call**

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| **HREC Question**  **Number** | **HREA Question**  **Number** | **Explanation required** |
| **E3.3** | **Q2.1.1** | How names, addresses and telephone numbers of the target population were obtained. |
| **E3.3** | **Q2.2.1** | The desired interviewee and why this person was chosen. |
| **E1** | **Q1.2** | The reasons for obtaining information via a telephone interview. |
| **E3.6** | **Q2.1.1** | When the interview will take place and the time required. |
| **E5.2 & Included on the telephone script** | **Included on the telephone script** | An example of the nature of the questions they will be asked. |
| **Reflected on the ISP** | **Reflected on the ISP** | How the potential participants may prevent telephone contact. |
| **Please note:** The responses you provide in your application form, in relation to telephone interviews, **must be** reflected in your ISP and telephone interview script. | | |

**3) - ‘Cold Call’ where telephone number is obtained from public database**

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| **HREC Question**  **Number** | **HREA Question**  **Number** | **Explanation required** |
| **Reflected on the ISP/telephone script** | **Reflected on the ISP/telephone script** | Who the researchers are. |
| **Reflected on the ISP/telephone script** | **Reflected on the ISP/telephone script** | Why the research is being conducted. |
| **E3.3** | **Q2.1.1** | How names and telephone numbers of the target population were obtained. |
| **E3.3** | **Q2.1.1** | The desired interviewee and why this person was chosen (the interviewee must be 18 years of age or older). |
| **E1** | **Q1.2** | The reasons for obtaining information via a telephone interview. |
| **E3.6** | **Q2.1.1** | When the interview will take place and the time required. |
| **E5.2 & Included on the telephone script** | **Included on the telephone script** | An example of the nature of the questions they will be asked. |
| **Reflected on the ISP** | **Reflected on the ISP** | How the potential participants may prevent telephone contact. |

In addition to the above requirements, the *ISP* must include and be read out to participants so that each participant is aware of:

* What will be done with the results of the research
* How to contact the researchers
* How to withdraw consent
* From where the project has received approval
* Who to contact if upsetting issues arise
* Who to complain to if the participants are not happy with the research
* How the data will be stored and when it will be destroyed
* Where the information will be published
* Who will have access to the data whilst the information is stored at UNE
* What will happen to the material once the 5 years (minimum) storage period has expired
* That the researchers are subject to strict confidentiality obligations when collecting data

The researchers must also offer to provide the participants with a copy of the *ISP* – this can be via post, email or through a webpage which contains the *ISP*.

The researchers must then obtain consent from the participant – which is obtained by reading out the standard consent form. This method is called *Recorded Informed Consent.* Typically, the researcher would record the whole telephone interview (with participant consent at the commencement of the interview), but at a minimum the consent process must be recorded.

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| **Please note:** The responses you provide in your application form, in relation to telephone interviews, **must be** reflected in your ISP and telephone interview script. |

**A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW SCRIPT, WHICH INCLUDES THE ABOVE INFORMATION, MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH YOUR APPLICATION (see template provided below).**





**PROTOCOLS**

The following protocols should be followed for all telephone interviews.

1. If the person who answers the phone is not the intended interviewee, you should not disclose the specific nature of the call to the third party you are speaking to. For example:

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| **PERMISSIBLE** | **NOT PERMISSIBLE** |
| “I would like to speak to …. regarding a letter we sent to him/her about mental health”. | “I would like to speak to …… regarding a letter we sent to him/her about how often he/she sees a therapist.” |

1. The interview cannot proceed until such time as the participant has been provided with, or had read to them, the *Information Sheet for Participants*, and then provided their Consent.

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| **EXAMPLE** | **LEVEL OF CONSENT REQUIRED** |
| The information being collected has no identifying details and no parties to the conversation will ever be traceable or identifiable by people accessing the primary data. | The privacy concerns are low and consent can be of a general nature. |
| Identifying information is going to be collected and then removed from the information before being distributed. | Privacy concerns are high.  Consideration must be given to: how the primary data (with the identifying details) will be securely stored; how access will be limited to that data and any system which could allow the primary data and the aggregate data to be matched.  Consent from the participant will be needed to allow: retention of the identifying data and future access to it. |

1. Before the interview commences, you must ensure that your participants have read or been read the Information Sheet for Participants.
2. Whether or not identifying data is to be recorded, the researchers involved in collecting the data will inevitably hear information that may be regarded as private or confidential. If there is not already a confidentiality agreement in place to cover the work of the researchers, they should also sign a confidentiality undertaking that relates to the project.

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| **STATE AND FEDERAL LAWS CONCERNING THE RECORDING OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS** |
| There is strict legislation regarding research published from telephone interviews and as these laws protect privacy, the courts will apply them firmly. This legislation requires that you obtain consent from all participants prior to publishing your results. Consent obtained from participants should be specific, and identify exactly how the information will be stored, used and distributed. The level of detail in the *Consent Form* will depend on the amount of personally identifying information that is collected, stored and accessed on an ongoing basis.  The recording of telephone conversations is prohibited except where all parties to the conversation provide consent.  **RELEVANT LINKS**  • [Telecommunications Act 1997 (CTH)](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00357) • [Telemarketing and Research Calls Industry Standard: What’s New?](https://www.acma.gov.au/Citizen/Phones/Landlines/Reduce-unwanted-calls/tris-2017-what-is-new)  • [Listening Devices Act 1984 (NSW)](https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1984/69/full) • [National Industry Standard for Telemarketing and Research Calls](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2017L00323) |

By taking the above steps, the researchers ensure that the participants understand the exact nature of the project and have given their fully informed consent for the use of the information collected from the telephone interview.

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|  | **Telephone Interview Script**  **SAMPLE** |

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is ……………. I am a researcher from the University of New England and I’m conducting a study on ……… Your telephone number was sourced through a public database.

Would you be the best person in the household to talk to? [Repeat intro if required; arrange call back time.]

May I check that you are over 18 years old? [If not, ask to speak to someone else in the household.]

Is now a convenient time to ask you some questions? This should take about ……. minutes.

[If the participant does not agree to continue at this time, either make a new time for the interview or thank them for their time and hang up.]

Do I have your permission to make an audio recording of this conversation/interview to ensure that I accurately recall the information you provide? Any personal information you provide will be confidential and you will not be identified by name in any publication of the results. If you agree, I would also like to quote some of your responses. This will be done in a way that ensures you are unidentifiable and all names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

The questions I will ask you are not of a sensitive nature, rather they are general, aiming to enable you to enhance my knowledge of …………………………….

I will use this information from the study as part of my doctoral thesis which I expect to complete in ……………… The information collected may also be used in academic journals and at conference presentations. The data from the study will be kept for a minimum of five years at the University of New England. After five years it will be destroyed.

The questions are not of a sensitive nature, however if they do raise upsetting issues you may wish to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England. The approval number is ………….. and it is valid to …/…./……. Should you have any complaints about the manner in which the research is conducted, please contact Jo Sozou who is the Research Ethics Officer at UNE, on 6773 3449 or via email at [ethics@une.edu.au](mailto:ethics@une.edu.au).

If you have any other questions my number is …………………… (REMINDER FOR RESEARCHERS: this should not be your personal mobile telephone number or landline number) or you can contact my supervisors at UNE on ……………………..

Would you like to view the full *Information Sheet for Participants*? I would be happy to email or post this to you?

Before we can go any further I will need to get your consent to proceed. Please answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the following questions:

* Have you been read the *Information Sheet for Participants* and any questions you may have, have been answered.
* Do you agree to participate in this phone interview, realising that you can withdraw at any time.
* Do you agree to have the telephone interview audio recorded and transcribed?
* Are you older than 18 years of age?
* Do you agree that you may be quoted using a pseudonym?

[If the participant does not agree with any of the statements, thank them for their time and hang up.]

[If the participant does agree to continue with the telephone interview, proceed with the following steps:

* Before you get started with the interview, ask your participant if they have any questions in relation to the study.
* Give the interview.
* Thank your participant for their time, letting them know that you appreciate their contribution to your study. Give your name and contact phone number again before finishing the call.]