



Curtin University

Payments to participants in research

Human Research Ethics Office

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1. Introduction

The aim of this document is to give guidance to researchers about appropriate reimbursements to participants involved in research.

Reimbursement for participation in research is not mandatory, but neither is appropriate reimbursement discouraged.

This document is not exhaustive and does not provide examples for all situations.

This document is a guide. Ultimately the Human Research Ethics Committee (“HREC”) makes the decision whether reimbursement to a participant is appropriate.

It is the researcher’s responsibility to present a cogent case to the HREC to support the level and form of reimbursement provided to participants. Evidence to support such a case should be consistent with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s The National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) (“**National Statement**”).

This guide is not to be used a reference in the justification of reimbursements.

2. The National Statement

The National Statement gives guidance to researchers about reimbursing participants in research studies.

Section 2.2.10 states:

“It is generally appropriate to reimburse the costs to participants of taking part in research, including costs such as travel, accommodation and parking. Sometimes participants may also be paid for time involved. However, payment that is disproportionate to the time involved, or any other inducement that is likely to encourage participants to take risks, is ethically unacceptable.”

The National Statement also gives reference to reimbursement for specific groups of participants.

Section 2.2.11 states:

“Decisions about payment or reimbursement in kind, whether to participants or their community, should take into account the customs and practices of the community in which the research is to be conducted.”

Section 3.3.18 of the National Statement states:

“Human Research Ethics Committee needs to be satisfied that:

- *payment in money or incentives of any kind, whether to researchers or participants, does not result in pressure on individuals to consent to participate (see paragraphs 2.2.10, and 2.2.11);*
- *research participants are adequately informed of the funding arrangements of the research and given the option of knowing the details of any capitation payments to researchers or clinicians; and*
- *it has been made clear to participants whether they will have continued access after the trial to treatments they have received during the trial, and on what terms.”*

3. Reimbursing participants

The HREC needs to be satisfied that payments to participants in research should be in the form of reimbursement and not been viewed as an incentive.

“The ethical issue does not arise where payment is no more than reimbursement of documented out-of-pocket expenses. It does arise, however, where payment other than reimbursement may be considered compensation for involvement or an inducement to be involved.

Respect requires recognition of the intrinsic worth or value of the person, including their body and hence their safety. It also includes recognition that participation in research is voluntary and based on sufficient information about, and adequate understanding of, both the proposed research and the implications of participation in it. Where the promise of payment of compensation for taking a risk leads to a decision that is motivated by that promise of payment, a participant’s decision would not meet that requirement of respect.

Beneficence requires that the potential benefits of the research must justify any risks for participants. Where there are no likely benefits to participants, the risks should be lower than where there are such benefits. The promise of payment can lead participants to accept risks that exceed this level of ethical acceptability, especially in early phase clinical trials.”¹

It is not mandatory to reimburse participants for their participation in research, but neither is appropriate reimbursement discouraged. Participation in research should be voluntary and only in cases where it is justified should reimbursement occur.

There are ethical concerns on both sides of this issue. Clearly there are concerns where reimbursement may be considered disproportionately large in terms of research participant’s costs in taking part in research, and there should be no incentive to offset risks for research participation. However, on the other side, representatives of researched communities have expressed the view that not providing adequate reimbursement to research participants risks them feeling undervalued, insulted or exploited. This can be a barrier to research participation, particularly for already stigmatised or marginalised groups, and exclude their experience being reflected in research results and any revisions to policy or practice that may flow from these.

The amount of reimbursement should be appropriate to the burden of participation such as the time, effort and inconvenience associated with study visits and procedures.

It is the researcher’s responsibility to present a cogent case to the HREC to support the level and form of reimbursement provided to participants. Evidence to support such a case should be consistent with the National Statement and could include, but not be limited to:

- Estimates of the costs (monetary and, where appropriate, the time, effort, and inconvenience) to participants of participation;
- Statements from researched communities regarding what is considered appropriate reimbursement;
- Established practices of reimbursement within a particular research field or context;
- Consideration of the published scholarly literature on the ethics and effects of participant reimbursement in research.

¹Using the National Statement 1: Payments to participants in research, particularly clinical trials.
https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/file/health_ethics/hrecs/reference/using_the_national_statement.pdf

4. Value of reimbursements

Section 2.2.10 of The National Statement gives guidance as to what constitutes a reimbursement.

Cash or a gift equivalent can be given to participants to reimburse for:

- Travel
- Accommodation
- Parking
- Time

Reimbursement for travel should be realistic. For example, a three zone adult public transport fare is \$5.20 one way². A three zone adult public transport fare extends north to Joondalup, east to Midland, and south to Armadale. Therefore cash or a gift voucher between the value of \$10 and \$20 may be acceptable.

Parking at Curtin costs \$3.40 per hour³. Parking should be calculated for the time the participant is involved in the research, but a minimum of two hours. Therefore cash or a gift voucher between the value of \$10 and \$30 may be acceptable.

Reimbursement of travel costs for participants who live outside the metropolitan area or outside the three zone public transport maps may have a higher reimbursement rate. Travel may also involve airfare, accommodation and/or taxi vouchers for regional participants. In all cases the reimbursement must be justified.

The National Statement also makes reference to paying participants for time involved. However, it must be noted that in these cases the payment must not be disproportionate to the reasonable costs to participants of participating in the research and should be equal to all participants in the study. The minimum wage in Australia is \$16.87 per hour⁴. Therefore cash or a gift voucher with a value of \$20 for each hour it is anticipated the person will participate in the research may be acceptable. Reimbursements for specific groups are discussed in section seven. The time allocation should also take into account the time of travelling to and from a research interview or other research commitments.

Consistent with Section 2.2.11 of the National Statement, another consideration is the established practices and conventions with respect to re-imbursement of participants in particular research fields or contexts. These have often been developed over many years and in consultation with both members of studied communities and reviewed by ethics committees nationally and internationally. Such precedents can be considered by the HREC in determining the appropriateness of proposed reimbursements.

The above are recommendations as to what would be considered appropriate reimbursements. Any reimbursement above this may be considered an incentive.

In all cases of reimbursement the value of the reimbursement must be justified to the HREC.

²<http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au/tickets-fares/fares>

³<http://properties.curtin.edu.au/gettingaround/parkingzones.cfm>

⁴<http://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/policies-and-guides/fact-sheets/minimum-workplace-entitlements/minimum-wages>

5. Advertisement of reimbursements

Advertisements of reimbursements on recruitment material must not be viewed as an incentive to participate.

In some contexts it may be appropriate that statements in advertising or recruitment material regarding reimbursement should be kept general^{5,6}, such as:

- You will be reimbursed for your time
- You will be reimbursed for parking expenses
- You will be reimbursed for travel costs
- You will receive a Coles/Myer voucher as a reimbursement for your time for participating
- You may be eligible to enter a prize draw to receive a thank you for participating in this research

Researchers are encouraged not to include a dollar value on recruitment material as this may be viewed as an incentive. However, if researchers decide to include the dollar value of any reimbursement in their participant recruitment or advertising materials they should justify this choice.

If the reimbursement is not a prize draw, a description of the reimbursement may be included in the information statement. This description should include the dollar value of the reimbursement, the type of reimbursement (e.g. Coles/Myer gift voucher, iTunes voucher), when they will receive the reimbursement (e.g. at the start of the study, at the end of the study, at different stages of the study) and what will be required of the participant to receive the reimbursement (e.g. do all visits need to be attended).

If the reimbursement is a prize draw, a description of the reimbursement must be included in the information statement. Please refer to section 8.3 for further guidelines around prize draws.

⁵Dickert N, Emanuel E, Grady C. 2002. Paying Research Subjects: An analysis of current policies. *Ann Intern Med*; 136:368-373

⁶Fry CL, Hall W, Ritter A, Jenkinson. 2006. The Ethics of Paying Drug Users Who Participate in Research: A Review and Practical Recommendations. *J Empir Res Hum Res*; 1: 21-36.

6. Reimbursement for types of research

6.1. Online and telephone data collection

For questionnaires, interviews or surveys that are conducted online or by phone where there is no travel involved for the participant, the reimbursement for the participant must be appropriate for the time taken to complete the questionnaire or survey. In some cases reimbursement for participating in online questionnaires and surveys may be in the form of a prize draw. Please refer to sections 5 and 8.3 for further guidelines on prize draws.

6.2. Data collection involving participant travel

For research where the participant is required to come to the researcher or meet at some agreed public location, it may be appropriate to reimburse the participant for parking, travel and/or time involved.

6.3. Data collection not involving participant travel

For research where the researcher goes to the participant, for example a questionnaire and survey that is conducted in a public area, hospital or other residential service, it may be appropriate to reimburse participant for their time involved, but not for travel.

6.4. Clinical trials

Participants involved in clinical trials often undergo lengthy and complex study visits and are exposed to a higher level of risk. However, reimbursement to these participants must not encourage participants to take risks.

Extended access to trial treatments participants have received during the trial are not usually considered reimbursement or incentive. If the clinical trial involves a drug it must be clearly stated in the information statement if participants will or will not receive continued access to trial treatments and for what duration.

If the clinical trial involves another form of intervention, for example an exercise intervention for three months, it may be appropriate to offer gym membership for 3 months. Or, for example, an intervention which involved participants were randomised to an ergonomic work station review and refurbishment, it may be appropriate to offer a review and refurbishment to those not randomised to the review trial arm.

6.5. Other

In some studies where devices may be used to record results for the study, it may be appropriate for the study participant to keep the device. However, this must be clearly stated in the ethics application and the value of the device must be stated and justified.

For example, if a thermometer was used to take a daily temperature it may be appropriate for the participant to keep the thermometer at the end of the study.

For example, if a pedometer was used to record daily steps it may be appropriate for the participant to keep the pedometer at the end of the study.

7. Reimbursement for specific groups

7.1. Participants in paid employment who are participating in research in their professional capacity

If the participant in a research study is contributing to research in their professional capacity it may be appropriate to reimburse the participant for their time at the standard industry pay rate.

There may be tax implications for payment of professionals for their engagement in research. Please contact the Australian Tax Office for further information.

However, if the research study is recruiting participants from a community cohort it is not acceptable to offer different rates of reimbursement for participants of different employment, ethnicity, gender, social status, etc.

7.2. Children

Where the parent accompanies a child to study visit it may be appropriate to reimburse the parent for their time, parking and or travel costs.

Where the child (a participant under the age of 18 years) attends a study visit on their own, and depending on the age of the child, it may be appropriate to reimburse the participant for their time and associated travel costs.

7.3. Participants in other countries

Reimbursements to participants in other countries must be culturally sensitive and an appropriate reimbursement for that country. Even though the research occurs in a country other than Australia, the National Statement still applies.

7.4. University Students

Reimbursements to university students may be in the form of student credit points, or any of the reimbursement modes discussed in section 8.

7.5. Other specific groups

If your research study recruits participants from a culturally or socially specific group, it may be appropriate to reimburse those participants at a rate and in a way that is culturally and socially acceptable. Conventions that have been established in similar research with such groups may be one indicator as to what is appropriate in such cases.

In all cases it is important that customs and practices of the community in which the research is to be conducted are considered, and reimbursement within a study is equitable.

7.6. Reimbursement rates for recruitment of different groups in one research study

In some cases your study may be recruiting different participants groups. In some cases it may be reasonable to offer different reimbursements for different groups, however in all cases the reimbursement must be equitable to all participants. In this case the reason for

offering a different reimbursement and an explanation of how the different reimbursements are equitable and fair to both groups needs to be explained in the ethics application form.

Information about the different reimbursements for different groups must be explained in the information statement so it is clear to the different groups what they will be reimbursed for by participating in research.

For example, if you are recruiting university students and other members of the public it may be reasonable to offer university student credit points, but other members of the public another reimbursement for participating.

8. Acceptable types of reimbursement

8.1. Cash

Cash is an acceptable form of reimbursement for participants. Please refer to section 4 for guides on how much cash should be offered as a reimbursement.

8.2. Vouchers

Vouchers are an acceptable form of reimbursement for participants. Please refer to section 4 for guides on how much value the voucher should be as an offer of reimbursement.

Vouchers must be appropriate to the type of study and participants. It is not appropriate to offer liquor vouchers as a reimbursement.

However, reimbursements must not be offered that require the respondent to spend any money. Thus, respondents should not be offered price discounts as incentives because claiming the incentive would involve the respondent paying the balance after discount.

8.3. Prize draws

There is a concern that where prize draws are offered as re-imbusement for research participation that this could be viewed as inequitable or unreasonable and could constitute an inducement to participate in the research.

In the ethics application the researcher must justify why reimbursement of individual participants cannot be considered instead of the prize draw. The researcher must also justify why a prize draw is the best form of reimbursement and how this is equitable to all participants.

Refer to the Competitions Toolkit for information regarding legislation and Curtin Policy regarding competitions that involve a game of chance or prize draws and how to organise these at Curtin.

The total prize value for a prize draw should be no more than \$1500.

Failure to fully complete the interview or questionnaire should not disqualify a respondent from entry to the prize draw. You need to make it clear that potential participants can enter the prize draw even if they don't answer the questions.

Closing date of entry should be fixed. You cannot extend it simply because you haven't yet had the number of responses that you hoped for. You must make the closing date clear at enrolment.

Reimbursements must not be offered that require the respondent to spend any money. Thus, respondents should not be offered price discounts as incentives because claiming the incentive would involve the respondent paying the balance after discount. However the offer of monetary vouchers is permissible.

The information statement must contain the following:

- Closing date for receipt of entry
- Nature and value of the prize/prizes
- How and when winners will be notified of results
- How and when winners and results will be announced

- Participants should be informed about their chance of winning
- Where the eligibility for prizes is dependent on the promptness of the respondent's response, all entry deadlines and the consequences of failing to meet them must be clearly stated

8.4. Other

In some cases it may be acceptable for participants to keep devices used in the study. Please refer to section 6.5.

9. Document Control

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1	06/OCT/2015	Original document	C Gangell