# Family Planning NSW Scientific Advisory Group
# Terms of Reference

## 1. Statement of principle

1.1. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Clinical Research (2007) identifies research merit and integrity as fundamental to ethical practice. This involves an assessment of factors including the appropriateness of methodology, thoroughness of literature review, expertise of researchers or research supervisors, validity of study design and adherence to the principles of research conduct.

1.2. The Family Planning NSW (FPNSW) Ethics Committee assesses each application in accordance with the NH&MRC *National Statement*. The FPNSW Ethics Committee must ensure that it is sufficiently informed on all aspects of a research protocol, including its scientific validity, in order to make an ethical assessment of a proposal.

1.3. The NSW Supplement to the National Statement requires that all clinical trials are scientifically reviewed in accordance with minimum standards, evidenced by completion of an Assessment Checklist and Certification of Scientific Review. This review may be delegated to an expert sub-group of the committee with an option to refer to an external expert or Group of experts as required.

## 2. Objectives

2.1. The objective of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group is to provide advice to the FPNSW Ethics Committee on the scientific rigour of research proposals submitted to it for approval as required by the Chair of the Family Planning NSW Ethics Committee. Specifically, this Group provides advice regarding scientific questions for study proposals, considers matters pertaining to the clinical management of the condition under study and ensures the quality of processes for data collection, analysis and oversight of research.

2.2. This provision is in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 5.1.33:

> *2.2.1. The institution should ensure that the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has access to the expertise necessary to enable it to address the ethical issues arising from the categories of research it is likely to consider. This may necessitate going outside the HREC membership.*

## 3. Functions

The functions of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group are to:

3.1. Provide independent, competent and timely review of research proposals submitted to it for approval with respect to their scientific validity;

3.2. Provide clear and specific advice to the FPNSW Ethics Committee as to whether the research is scientifically valid or whether amendments are required.

## 4. Scope of responsibility

4.1. In general the composition of the FPNSW Ethics Committee comprises sufficient expertise to assess the scientific validity of research proposals submitted. In some instances however it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive scientific review of proposals, with specific expertise required including but not limited to analysis of trial design, oversight, statistical calculations and matters pertaining to the clinical management of the condition under study.

4.2. The scope of this responsibility is in accordance with the guidelines on research merit and integrity outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 1.1 (b), 1.1 (c), 1.1 (e) and 1.1 (f)

*4.2.1. Research that has merit is:*

*4.2.1.1. Designed or developed using methods appropriate for achieving the aims of the proposal;*

*4.2.1.2. Based on a thorough study of the current literature, as well as previous studies. This does not exclude the possibility of novel research for which there is little or no literature available, or research requiring a quick response to an unforseen situation;*

*4.2.1.3. Conducted or supervised by persons or teams with experience, qualifications and competence that are appropriate for the research; and*

*4.2.1.4. Conducted using facilities and resources appropriate for the research.*

4.3. Research proposals will be referred to a member or members of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group in instances where the expertise of the FPNSW Ethics Committee is insufficient to appraise the scientific validity of a study.

4.4. Matters referred to the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group may include questions regarding research design, such as whether the research question is credible, the clinical relevance of the participant population, validity and

reliability of primary outcome measures, and whether control arms accord with accepted standards of patient care.

4.5. The communication of potential adverse events and or potential drug interaction issues to trial participants on patient information and consent forms may also be referred to the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group.

4.6. Matters of statistical analysis may also be referred to the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group for advice on the validity of statistical analysis, questions regarding the appropriateness of sample size and whether power calculations are adequate.

4.7. Matters of oversight, such as whether safety and adverse events are adequately monitored and whether appropriate arrangements are in place for an independent Data and Safety Monitoring Board are in place, may also be referred to the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group.

## 5. Membership & process of consultation

5.1. Composition:

The composition of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group shall include members with expertise in specific areas. These shall include:

*5.1.1. A member or members with expertise in the clinical management of conditions represented in research proposals;*

*5.1.2. A members or members with expertise in qualitative health research;*

*5.1.3. A member or members with expertise in quantitative health research;*

*5.1.4. A member or members with expertise in clinical trial design;*

*5.1.5. A member or members with expertise in statistical analysis;*

*5.1.6. A member or members with expertise in pharmacokinetics.*

5.2. The FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group is not required to meet as a group. Members could be consulted individually on matters relating to their specific area of expertise or could be consulted as a group. Research proposals will be distributed to member/s with specific expertise by the Ethics Executive Officer. If required, FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group members may consult one another or engage directly with the relevant Chief Investigator if the proposal warrants discussion. FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group members will provide documentary advice to the FPNSW Ethics Committee regarding the scientific validity of proposals reviewed.

5.3. All members must be independent of FP NSW and institutions sponsoring or conducting the research under review.

## 6. Appointment

6.1. The FPNSW Board shall appoint members to the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group, in consultation with the Chair of the FPNSW Ethics Committee, and other senior organisational officers, as appropriate.

6.2. Prospective members may be recruited by direct approach, nomination or by advertisement, or by other means as deemed appropriate.

6.3. A selection committee, consisting of the Chair of the FPNSW Ethics Committee, the Ethics Executive Officer and any other interested FPNSW Ethics Committee member shall interview prospective applicants, consult with the FPNSW Ethics Committee members and make a recommendation to the FPNSW Board.

6.4. Appointments will allow for continuity, the development of expertise within the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group, and the regular input of fresh ideas and approaches.

## 7. Term of Appointment

7.1. Membership will be reviewed every third calendar year, regardless of the fraction of the term already served by each member.

7.2. Reappointment of FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group members will be by application to the Chair of the FPNSW Ethics Committee

7.3. A member may resign from the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group at any time upon giving notice in writing to the Chair of the FPNSW Ethics Committee. Steps shall be taken to fill the vacancy of the former member.

7.4. The FPNSW Board may terminate the appointment of any member of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group member if the FPNSW Board is of the opinion that:

*7.4.1. It is necessary for the proper and effective functioning of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group;*

*7.4.2. The person is not a fit and proper person to serve on an FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group;*

*7.4.3. The person has failed to carry out their duties as an FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group member.*

7.5. Members will be provided with a letter of appointment which will include date of appointment, length of tenure, assurance that indemnity will be provided in respect of liabilities that may arise in the course of bona fide conduct of their duties as a FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group member.

## 8. Conditions of appointment

8.1. Members must agree to their name and profession being made available to the public, including being published on the website.

8.2. Members are not offered remuneration.

8.3. Members will be required to sign a statement undertaking:

*8.3.1. That all matters of which he/she becomes aware during the course of his/her work on the Scientific Advisory Group member will be kept confidential;*

*8.3.2. That any conflicts of interest, which exist or may arise during his/her tenure on the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group member will be declared; and*

*8.3.3. That he/she has not been subject to any criminal conviction or disciplinary action which may prejudice his/her standing as a FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group member.*

## 9. Conduct of business

**Procedures**

9.1. A sub-group of the FPNSW Ethics Committee comprising those occupying the researcher and health professional roles will be formed to assess integrity and rigour of research proposals submitted. The group will be called the Ethics Scientific Sub Committee (ESSC). The ESSC will be selected by the FPNSW Ethics Committee members.

9.2. Assessment Checklists (Appendix 1) for each new proposal submitted will be distributed to ESSC members three weeks prior to the FPNSW Ethics Committee Meeting.

9.3. ESSC member/s will have seven days from receipt of papers to confer with each other by telephone or email to complete the Assessment Checklist.

9.4. The checklist may be completed jointly or separately by ESSC members.

9.5. Every item on the Assessment Checklist must be satisfactorily answered to proceed to Scientific Review Certification.

9.6. If any item is incomplete or if there is any disagreement among ESSC members as to whether a study meets the standards stipulated in the Assessment Checklist, the research proposal must be referred to the Ethics Executive Officer.

9.7. The Ethics Executive Officer will delegate review of proposals with incomplete or inconclusive Assessment Checklists to a member or members of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group.

9.8. If the Assessment Checklist is satisfactorily completed by the ESSC, a delegate of the ESSC will inform the Ethics Executive Officer and the Certification of Scientific Review (Appendix 2) may be signed by a delegate of the ESSC immediately prior to the FPNSW Ethics Committee meeting.

9.9. Only proposals that have a signed Certification of Scientific Review will be reviewed at the Ethics Committee meeting.

9.10. In instances where the ESSC cannot sign the Certification of Scientific Review, research proposals will be referred to the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group.

9.11. Any gaps or inconsistencies in the Assessment Checklist, together with advice from the ESSC, will be used to determine which expert FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group member or members will provide scientific review of the proposal.

9.12. Research proposals are sent to the member or members of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group with an Assessment Checklist and Certification of Scientific Review for completion.

9.13. The member or members of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group will review the study and apply the Assessment Checklist.

9.14. The member or members of the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group is encouraged to seek clarification of research details from the Chief Investigator as necessary.

9.15. FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group members may confer with one another as necessary regarding the rigour of research proposals.

9.16. FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group members may seek amendments from the Chief Investigator of the research proposal.

9.17. If such amendments are received four days prior to the FPNSW Ethics Committee Meeting, the amended proposal from the Chief Investigator may be reviewed at that meeting.

9.18. Proposals with scientific amendments to be reviewed by the FPNSW Ethics Committee will have new versions tabled at the meeting, along with the Certification of Scientific Review documenting correct version numbers of papers.

9.19. If amendments required by the FPNSW Scientific Advisory Group are not received four days prior to the next FPNSW Ethics Committee Meeting, the proposal will be deferred to a subsequent meeting.

**Appendix A**

# Assessment Checklist – Scientific Review of Clinical Trials

| | |
|---|---|
| **Clinical Trial Name:** | |
| **Protocol Reference:**<br>*[including version number and date]* | |
| **Investigator's Brochure:***<br>*[including version number and date]* | |
| **Where product information other than Investigator's Brochure has been provided, please specify.* | |
| **Patient Information Sheet:**<br>*[including version number and date]* | |
| **Other documents reviewed:**<br>*[DSMB Charter, etc]* | |
| **This trial is being conducted through:** | |
| ❑ CTN<br>❑ CTX *(Section entitled 'Investigational Product Information' may be omitted)*<br>❑ Other (please specify): | |
| **Aims of the proposed study:** | |

| **Research question and experimental design:** | **Yes** | **No** | **N/A** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Is there a credible research question? | | | |
| 2. Is there a clear description of the intervention and observation to be conducted? | | | |
| 3. Is there a sound experimental design, including:<br>i. Clearly defined and clinically relevant patient population? | | | |
| ii. Appropriate inclusion/exclusion criteria? | | | |
| iii. Reliable and valid primary outcome measures? | | | |
| 4. Does the control treatment arm accord with current standards of patient care? | | | |
| 5. Is there a valid statistical analysis, including appropriate sample size and power calculations? | | | |
| 6. Where relevant, has adequate justification been provided for hybrid study design (e.g. Phase 1/2 or Phase 3/4 studies)? | | | |

| **Investigational product information:** *(This section may be omitted for studies being conducted through the CTX Scheme)* | **Yes** | **No** | **N/A** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. Have acceptable manufacturing standards been described for the investigational product? | | | |
| 8. Have animal/disease models been investigated that are likely to be predictive of effects in humans? | | | |
| 9. Is the investigational product thought to be immunogenic? | | | |
| 10. Is there evidence suggestive of toxicities that may be clinically significant, including carcinogenesis and teratogenesis?<br>*(If so, please specify):* | | | |
| 11. Is there a need for contraceptive or barrier precautions? | | | |
| 12. Are there sufficient safety data available to justify the proposed usage of the investigational product, including duration of usage? | | | |
| 13. Are there any safety signals that suggest either that it may be unsafe to undertake the study or to justify special safety monitoring? | | | |
| 14. Where relevant, is there adequate evidence of potential efficacy? | | | |
| ***The following questions 15 to 17 should be answered for clinical drug trials only*** | | | |
| 15. Is the proposed dosing schedule commensurate with the known pharmacokinetics and mechanism of action of the investigational product? | | | |
| 16. Have the issues of metabolism and renal clearance been accommodated in the experimental design? | | | |
| 17. Are relevant warnings or exclusions in place for drug interactions of likely relevance to the proposed clinical use? | | | |
| **Oversight of the study:** | | | |
| 18. Is there adequate monitoring for safety and adverse events? | | | |
| 19. Is there a Data Safety Monitoring Board? | | | |
| 20. If so, is it independent? | | | |
| **Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form:** | | | |
| 18 Does the Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form contain appropriate information, including possible side effects, possible drug interactions; administration; dosage and timing; whether the medication may cause drowsiness; what to do if a dose is missed; and important toxicological findings? | | | |

| **Further comments:** | |
|---|---|
| Have any issues been identified in relation to the scientific validity of this study that are not noted above? | |
| Are specific hospital facilities required for administration of the investigational product or other agents being used in the study (for example hospital facilities in case of anaphylactic shock)? | |

**Recommendations:**

The scientific methods employed in this study are:

❑ Sound
❑ Unsound
❑ Require review with respect to the following:

The proposed mechanisms for monitoring the progress and safety of the study are:

❑ Adequate
❑ Inadequate
❑ Require review with respect to the following:

The potential risks to study participants are:

❑ Acceptable
❑ Unacceptable
❑ Should be minimised through the following:

| Signed by: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| In the capacity of: | ❑ Chair/Deputy Chair of HREC which undertook a scientific review<br>❑ Expert reviewer from the Scientific Advisory Group | | |
| Name: | | Date: | |

**This Assessment Checklist must be completed for all clinical trials reviewed by FPNSW Ethics Committees. Components of the Assessment Checklist may be completed by the Scientific Sub-committee of the Ethics Committee or expert reviewer/s of the Scientific Advisory Group). However, all relevant sections of the Assessment Checklist must be addressed prior to completion of a Certification of Scientific Review.**

## Appendix B

# Certification of Scientific Review

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Clinical Trial Name:** | | | |
| **Protocol Reference:**<br>*[including version number and date]* | | | |
| **Investigator's Brochure:***<br>*[including version number and date]* | | | |
| **Where product information other than Investigator's Brochure has been provided, please specify.* | | | |
| **Patient Information Sheet:**<br>*[including version number and date]* | | | |
| **In accordance with the completed Assessment Checklist and (for First Time in Human Clinical Drug Trials only) the Review by Clinical Pharmacologist, including all follow-up on issues raised, this study is:**<br>❑ Recommended as scientifically sound<br>❑ Recommended as scientifically sound, subject to the following:<br><br>❑ Not recommended as scientifically sound, for the following reasons: | | | |
| Signed by: | | | |
| In the capacity of: | ❑ Chair/Deputy Chair of HREC which undertook a scientific review<br>❑ Expert reviewer from the Scientific Advisory Group | | |
| Name: | | Date: | |