

PART A: INTRODUCTION

I BACKGROUND

ROLE OF THE NHMRC

- 1.1 These guidelines (*Ethical Guidelines on the Use of Assisted Reproductive Technology in Clinical Practice and Research, 2004*) are issued in accordance with the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act). Under part 2, section 7(1)(a) of the NHMRC Act, the functions of the NHMRC include:

To inquire into, issue guidelines on and advise the community on matters relating to:

- (i) the improvement of health; and
- (ii) the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease; and
- (iii) the provision of health care; and
- (iv) public health and medical research; and
- (v) ethical issues relating to health.

- 1.2 The NHMRC Act also establishes the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC) as a principal committee of the NHMRC (the Council). Part 2, section 8 of the NHMRC Act ('Ethics guidelines') states that:

the Council must issue guidelines ... for the conduct of medical research involving humans

and that the guidelines

must be issued precisely as developed by the principal committee known as AHEC and provided to the Council for the purpose.

- 1.3 Part 5 of the NHMRC Act establishes AHEC and provides its categories of membership and its terms of reference as:
- (a) to advise the Council on ethical issues relating to health; and
 - (b) to develop and give the Council guidelines for the conduct of medical research involving humans; and
 - (c) such other functions as the minister from time to time determines.