

Statement on Plain Language
by the Human Research Ethics Committee
at The Royal Children's Hospital

The Human Research Ethics Committee at The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) believes that plain language communication plays a key role in ethical and respectful research. Plain language is essential to ensure that people understand the details and risks of a project, enabling them to make an informed decision about participation.

The ethics committee expects that all materials provided to RCH research participants are written in plain language. This means the materials need to be written clearly and succinctly, with a lay audience in mind. The materials should be aimed at a reading age of 13 years old, or grade seven.

The Research Ethics and Governance pages on the RCH website provide various resources to help researchers write in plain language. These include writing guidelines, templates, and example information and consent forms and letters. The ethics committee endorses these resources. It expects that all materials for research participants are written to the standard set out in these resources.

If researchers require further assistance to write in plain language, the ethics committee encourages them to contact the Plain Language Adviser (PLA) for help. The PLA is based in Research Ethics and Governance and can provide plain language advice to researchers about their materials for participants. The PLA will be of particular assistance to new researchers. However, experienced researchers may also wish to seek assistance from time to time.

If the ethics committee receives materials for research participants that are poorly written, it can withhold approval for the research project. In these circumstances, the committee may instruct the PLA to review the materials and provide advice to the researchers. The committee expects that the researchers will then revise the materials in light of the PLA's advice.

The ethics committee endorses the PLA's plain language advice. It also grants the PLA the authority to endorse the plain language advice of other RCH staff who are proficient at writing in plain language.