

**Department:** UAMS Institutional Review Board  
**Policy Number:** 17.9  
**Section:** Special Populations  
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**SUBJECT: Prisoners in Research**

The special vulnerability of prisoners makes consideration of involving them as research subjects particularly important. Prisoners may be under constraints because of their incarceration, which could affect their ability to make a truly voluntary and uncoerced decision whether or not to participate as subjects in research. To safeguard their interests and to protect them from harm, special ethical and regulatory considerations apply for reviewing research involving prisoners.

Therefore, if a protocol involves the use of prisoners as subjects, or a subject becomes incarcerated after enrollment, both the general IRB Policies apply and the special ones outlined in this Policy apply. The IRB may approve research involving prisoners only if these special provisions are met.

**Expedited Review of Research Involving Prisoners Not Allowed.** The full IRB Committee must review research involving prisoners as human subjects.

**Exemption from Review of Research Involving Prisoners Not Allowed.** Research that would otherwise be exempt from the requirement that it receive IRB approval is not exempt when the research involves prisoners.

**Applicability of Policy Providing Special Protections for Prisoners.** This policy applies to anyone using the UAMS IRB as the IRB of record and any personnel subject to UAMS oversight in research involving prisoners.

**Composition of IRB When Prisoners Are Involved**

1. To review a protocol involving prisoners as subjects:
  - a. A majority of the IRB Committee (exclusive of prisoner members) shall have no association with the prison(s) involved, apart from their membership on the IRB; and
  - b. At least one member of the IRB Committee shall be a prisoner, or a prisoner representative with appropriate background and experience to serve in that capacity.
2. The IRB must meet the special composition requirements for all types of review of the protocol: initial review, continuing review, protocol amendments, and reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects.

## **Definitions:**

**Minimal Risk.** For research involving prisoners, the definition of minimal risk differs from the definition of minimal risk in the Common Rule. As used in this policy only, "Minimal risk" is defined as the probability and magnitude of physical or psychological harm that is normally encountered in the daily lives of the prisoners, or in the routine medical, dental, or psychological examination of healthy persons.

**Prisoner.** As used in this policy "Prisoner" means any individual involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution. The term is intended to encompass individuals sentenced to such an institution under a criminal or civil statute, individuals, including juveniles, detained in other facilities by virtue of statutes or commitment procedures which provide alternatives to criminal prosecution or incarceration in a penal institution, and individuals detained pending arraignment, trial, or sentencing. When a prisoner is also a minor, such as an adolescent detained in a juvenile detention facility, IRB policy 17.1 regarding Children in Research will also apply. Note that minors who participate in mental health treatment in a residential facility are not prisoners, even if they have been charged with a crime. The residential treatment facility is not a stand-in for a penal institution.

**Permitted Research Involving Prisoners.** For research conducted or supported by HHS to involve prisoners, two actions must occur: (1) the IRB must certify to OHRP that it has reviewed and approved the research under the federal regulations; and (2) OHRP must determine that the proposed research falls within one of the categories of permissible research described below.

If an investigator wishes to engage in non-HHS-supported research, OHRP certification is not required. However, the IRB will still apply the standards of this policy and the federal regulations in reviewing the research.

Should the research (i) involve conditions particularly affecting prisoners as a class, or (ii) not satisfy the stipulations below, the research should proceed only after the IRB has consulted with appropriate experts, as determined by the IRB.

### **Seven additional specific findings the IRB is required to make in order to approve research under this policy.**

1. The research under review represents one of the following **four categories of research**:
  - a. A study of the possible causes, effects, and processes of incarceration, and of criminal behavior, provided that the study presents no more than minimal risk and no more than inconvenience to the subjects;
  - b. A study of prisons as institutional structures or of prisoners as incarcerated persons, provided that the study presents no more than minimal risk and no more than inconvenience to the subjects;

- c. Research on conditions particularly affecting prisoners as a class (for example, vaccine trials and other research on hepatitis which is much more prevalent in prisons than elsewhere; and research on social and psychological problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and sexual assaults); or
- d. Research on practices, both innovative and accepted, which have the intent and reasonable probability of improving the health or well being of the subject;

If the research project does not fall under one of the above four categories (a – d), then any subject who becomes incarcerated must be discontinued from the study unless the Investigator can justify why it is in the subject's best interest to stay in the study.

- 2. Any possible advantages accruing to the prisoner through his or her participation in the research, when compared to the general living conditions, medical care, quality of food, amenities and opportunity for earnings in the prison, are not of such a magnitude that his or her ability to weigh the risks of the research against the value of such advantages in the limited choice environment of the prison is impaired;
- 3. The risks involved in the research are commensurate with risks that would be accepted by nonprisoner volunteers;
- 4. Procedures for the selection of subjects within the prison are fair to all prisoners and immune from arbitrary intervention by prison authorities or prisoners. Unless the principal investigator provides to the IRB justification in writing for following some other procedures, control subjects must be selected randomly from the group of available prisoners who meet the characteristics needed for that particular research project;
- 5. The information is presented in language, which is understandable to the subject population;
- 6. Adequate assurance exists that the Post Prison Transfer Board will not take into account a prisoner's participation in the research in making decisions regarding transfer to community supervision, and each prisoner is clearly informed in advance that participation in the research will have no effect on his or her sentence; and
- 7. Where the IRB finds there may be a need for follow-up examination or care of participants after the end of their participation, adequate provision has been made for such examination or care, taking into account the varying lengths of individual prisoners' sentences, and for informing participants of this fact.

**Procedure for studies planning to enroll Prisoners or at risk populations:**

**1. Investigators must:**

1.1 Carefully consider the attributes of the population prior to submission to the IRB. If the investigator anticipates that potential subjects are likely to be incarcerated during the trial, the IRB suggests that the consent form clearly state the possibility of being dropped from the study or postponing research interactions until after release from incarceration.

1.2 Submit a cover letter, protocol and consent addressing each of the 7 required elements in addition to the standard requirements for submission.

## 2. IRB will

2.1 When approving a protocol involving prisoners the minutes must document that the Committee made the findings required above. The IRB must classify research involving prisoners into one of the four categories described in 1a – 1d above and document their discussions of each of the 7 elements above. For studies funded by DHHS, the IRB must also certify to OHRP that the review was conducted according to the appropriate regulations and prior to granting final approval for the use of prisoners in the study, OHRP must respond and approve.

**Procedure when subjects become Prisoners during a research protocol.** This Policy applies whenever any human subject in a research protocol becomes a prisoner at any time during the protocol, *e.g.*, after the research has commenced. This is necessary because it is unlikely that review of the research and the consent document contemplated the constraints imposed by the possible future incarceration of the subject

If a subject becomes a prisoner after enrollment in research:

The Investigator will:

Reporting in writing this situation to the IRB immediately and cease all research interactions and interventions with, and obtaining identifiable private information about, the now-incarcerated prisoner-subject until the IRB has re-reviewed the study under the requirements above. The Investigator if s/he feels it is in the best interests of the subject to remain in the research study while incarcerated should provide the Chair with this request and justification.

Provide a cover letter addressing all of the elements above if s/he wishes to continue interactions with this prisoner-subject or any future subjects that may become incarcerated.

The IRB will:

As applicable, determine whether any subjects may continue to participate in the research until the requirements of subpart C are satisfied.

At the earliest opportunity after receiving the Principal Investigator's notice or otherwise becoming aware of the prisoner status of a subject, review the protocol again with a prisoner representative present, and make the determinations listed above.

**Federal Bureau of Prisons.** The Federal Bureau of Prisons places special restrictions on research that takes place within the Bureau of Prisons. The IRB should review the regulations at 28CFR512 when considering such research.