

# Neami Research and Evaluation Framework

Service Development  
May 2014

## Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

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Neami is committed to providing recovery orientated, evidence-based psychosocial rehabilitation services to people with a severe mental illness and enduring disability. Neami believes that focused research enquiry and knowledge sharing is necessary to provide high quality consumer focused mental health services. If research is going to improve outcomes and experiences for consumers it must begin with a common vision, be guided by values and principles, and identify clear priorities.

Research is concerned with the creation of new knowledge and is central to the provision of effective mental health services. However, research is often undertaken without adequate consideration of how the findings may be practically applied. As such this Framework is intended to ensure that Neami research and evaluation activities are both ethical and sensitive to consumer needs, and are practically relevant to staff in their work.

The terms evaluation and research are often terms that are used interchangeably. Although in many cases the two forms of inquiry use the same data collection and analysis methods, they have several key differences. Evaluation and research projects tend to have different purposes, pose different kinds of questions and have the findings communicated in different ways to different groups. Research generates new knowledge which can lead to new and innovative ways of solving problems. Evaluation is however used to assess the effectiveness of a particular program or initiative in achieving its objectives. Evaluations are aimed at program improvement by identifying where changes could be made.

The Framework aims to assist staff in developing their knowledge and skills. Neami hopes an increased emphasis on research activities will build a stronger foundation for delivering evidence-based psychosocial rehabilitation services to Neami consumers.

This document will be reviewed annually.

# Research and Evaluation Framework Aims & Objectives

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This Research and Evaluation Framework contributes to the growing evidence-base for recovery-oriented psychosocial rehabilitation. It provides opportunities for staff, consumers and other service providers to investigate, reflect and improve on our practice, and to also build research skills which will further contribute to sector reform.

## Aims

The development of this Research and Evaluation Framework has taken into account four identified organisational aims:

- To ensure continued delivery of quality mental health services during periods of organisational growth and expansion.
- To increase Neami's research capacity and profile
- To continually refine Neami service provision in a way which reflects the changing needs of consumers
- To further develop and implement evidence-based practices within the Mental Health sector

The purpose of the Framework is to provide information, resources and strategies to support Neami in developing its research capacity. The Framework is a guiding document that applies to all organisational research and evaluation activities. It outlines the rationale for research and evaluation, details the key principles underpinning our research activity, clearly states the processes Neami uses and sets strategic directions and priorities related to our research agenda. The Framework is intended to provide consumers, staff and other service providers with a clear understanding of the how, what and why of research and evaluation at Neami.

## Objectives

The primary objectives of developing and implementing the Neami Research and Evaluation Framework are to:

- Promote Neami as a leading organisation in the provision of recovery focused evidence-based research and evaluation
- Develop a standard of excellence for research and evaluation in the community-based mental health field
- Optimise the translation of research findings into Neami practice and policy
- Use research and evaluation to address priority issues for Neami consumers
- Strengthen existing research partnerships and build new partnerships
- Assist Neami staff to remain informed about the latest mental health research developments and evidence
- Develop and formalise research procedures within Neami and support staff in undertaking research and evaluation activities

# Neami Research and Evaluation Committee

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Neami has a Research and Evaluation Committee to oversee and support its research and evaluation activities. The Research and Evaluation Committee is a sub-committee of the National Leadership Team. This Committee ensures all research is conducted in accordance with Neami values and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines for ethical human research and consumer participation research. The Committee also makes certain that completed research is aligned with current organisational directions that lead to direct consumer benefits. The Committee provides a vital function in ensuring quality and consistency is reflected in research and evaluation through the coordination, monitoring and provision of overall management of Neami research and evaluation activities.

## Statement of purpose

The Neami Research and Evaluation Committee oversees and supports Neami's research and evaluation agenda, ensuring safe, ethical, and beneficial projects are undertaken in a manner which is respectful and considerate of consumers at all times.

## Aims

- Identify and consider potential projects and assist in determining priority areas for research and evaluation
- Ensure the safe and ethical treatment of all participants involved in research conducted by Neami
- Ensure research undertaken is likely to have a direct, measureable impact on service delivery activities
- Provide a forum in which to discuss and debate the value of a particular research or evaluation project
- Ensure accepted research and evaluation projects can be effectively implemented and has sufficient available resources to be completed
- Ensure that research and evaluation projects conducted within Neami are undertaken in partnership with consumers

## Committee Objectives

To fulfil these aims, the following Neami Research and Evaluation Committee objectives are in place:

Objective	Task
<p><b>Objective 1</b></p> <p>To take responsibility for the development and review of research infrastructure and standards across Neami.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To review, develop and disseminate research policies across Neami.</li> <li>▪ To develop guidelines for the dissemination of research findings to staff, consumers, and key stakeholders.</li> <li>▪ To encourage staff involvement in Neami research activity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 2</b></p> <p>To oversee existing research and evaluation projects within Neami and review requests for new projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review the status of current research and evaluation projects.</li> <li>▪ Scope potential new projects.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing review of projects.</li> <li>▪ Assist in decision making process related to requests Neami receives for involvement in research and evaluation projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 3</b></p> <p>To develop specific research and evaluation priorities and projects in line with Neami strategic planning priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify research gaps and develop potential research and evaluation projects accordingly.</li> <li>▪ Identify and develop partnerships with key research agencies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 4</b></p> <p>To promote the importance of consumer participation in research and evaluation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ensure opportunities for “wide” consumer participation in the implementation of existing and proposed projects<sup>1</sup> by:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collaborating with consumers to identify research areas</li> <li>○ Collaborating with consumers about how the research is conducted</li> <li>○ Providing consumers with avenues to develop research skills</li> <li>○ Ensuring consumer research positions are created where appropriate-</li> <li>○ Reviewing research proposals to ensure that they are aligned with values of consumer participation</li> <li>○ Ensuring the outcomes of the research are accessible to consumers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> “Wider participation also encompasses consumers’ research, that is research undertaken from the consumer perspective, by or with consumers, arising out of consumers’ needs” NHMRC Statement on Consumer and Community Participation in Research, 2002.

The Research and Evaluation Committee is accountable to the Neami Board of Directors through the National Leadership Team and the Chief Executive Officer. The Committee is comprised of selected representatives who possess relevant knowledge and experience in research methodologies, research dissemination, and/or mental health and psychosocial rehabilitation, and are fully aware of the ethical principles involved in research. To ensure there is a balanced approach to determining Neami research priorities, committee representatives are recruited from a variety of backgrounds with varying levels of research experience.

As part of our commitment to ensuring various consumer participation processes are in place within Neami, a quorum cannot be reached if there is no consumer representative present at a Research and Evaluation Committee meeting.

The minimum acceptable membership of the Neami Research and Evaluation Committee is five members typically comprising of:

- Neami Chief Executive Officer
- Neami Manager Service Development
- Neami State Manager
- Neami Site or Regional Manager
- Neami Research Coordinator
- Community Rehabilitation Support Worker
- Neami Consumer(s)
- External academic researcher(s)
- Consumer Researcher(s)

In addition to the core committee members, University representatives, consumers or staff with a particular interest in a project are regularly consulted and provide additional specific knowledge and skills in their area of expertise. The presence of a wider audience maximises the opportunity for Neami to hear the perspectives of others with an interest or experience in the review of the research or evaluation project being discussed.

## Committee Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Neami Research and Evaluation Committee are derived from the four Committee objectives and include the following:

- To encourage research and evaluation activity throughout Neami and consider ways to foster a culture of enquiry and commitment to research and evaluation amongst all staff
- To determine areas of focus for Neami's research and evaluation program within the context of the directions identified in the Neami Strategic Plan
- To consider all research and evaluation projects to be conducted under the auspice of Neami
- Ensure that all projects undertaken within Neami align with values of genuine consumer participation
- To monitor the progress of research and evaluation projects
- To ensure that research findings are effectively and efficiently transferred into practice
- To develop guidelines for publication of research results and publicity, including a policy regarding media contact
- To identify new members for the Committee
- To develop academic and other appropriate affiliations with research bodies within Australia and internationally
- To report to the Board of Directors progress of research activities on a quarterly basis
- To assess Neami budget and resource requirements for research activity
- Where appropriate, to refer accepted internal projects to the Service Development Team to develop the ethics application for review by an appropriately constituted external Human Research Ethics Committee.

## Generating Research Ideas and Decision Making Process

As Neami is a committed learning organisation, all staff and consumers are encouraged to contribute to generating potential projects for consideration by the Research and Evaluation Committee and National Leadership Team. The following are examples of how ideas for projects are generated:

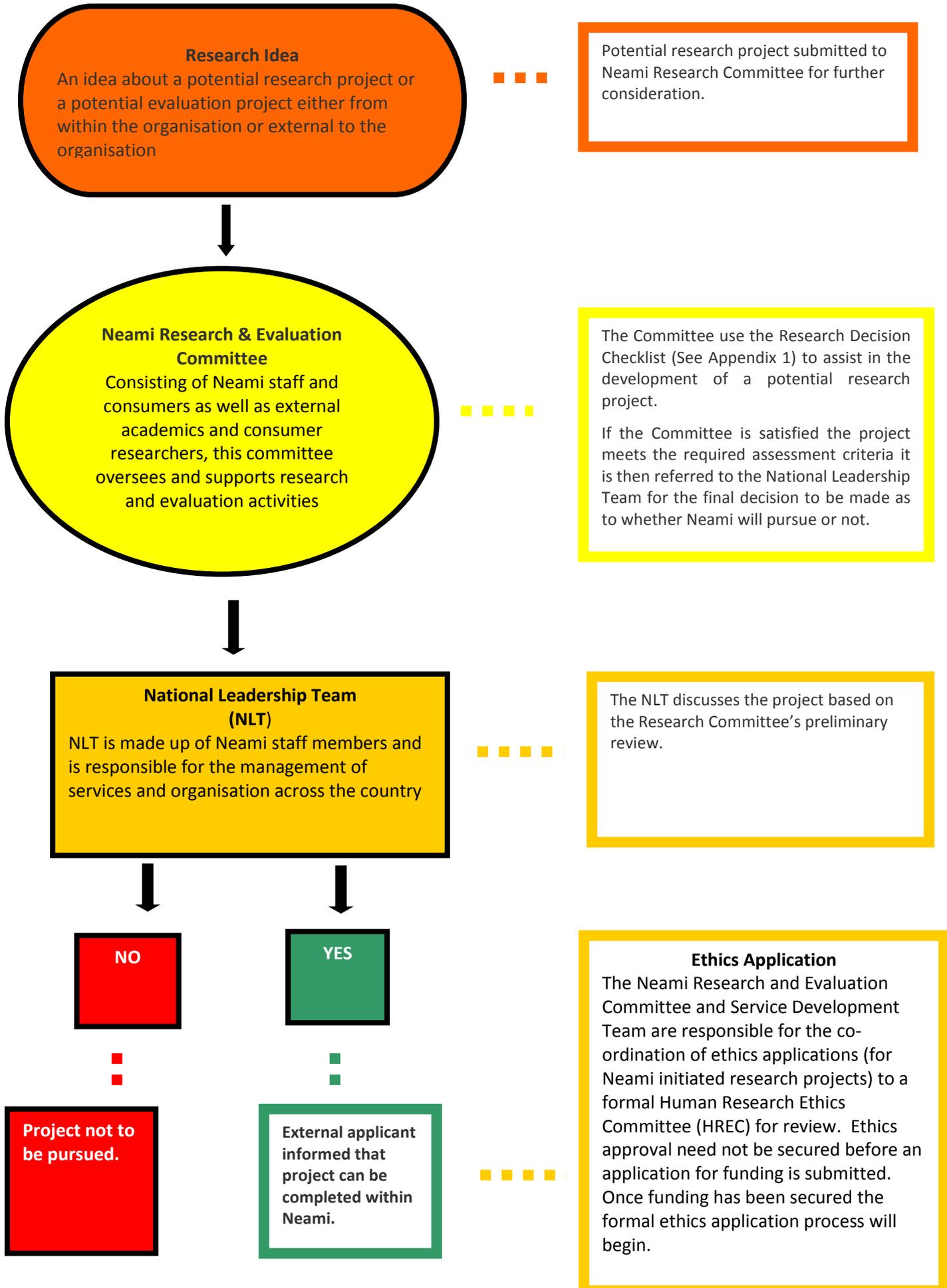
- Discussions at State and National Leadership Team meetings
- Discussions at Neami Research and Evaluation Committee meetings
- Discussions at inter-agency meetings
- Staff input generated through discussions at regular team meetings
- Consumer input generated through research-specific focus group meeting discussions
- Input from Neami Service Development Team
- Input from Neami research partners and through associated research networks
- Staff attendance at research conferences and seminars
- Awareness of research and funding priority areas of Government

A structured and transparent decision making process is an essential component of developing and maintaining a progressive research agenda. The Neami Research and Evaluation Committee has a key role alongside the National Leadership Team in considering and deciding which external research projects Neami will pursue. Diagram One (1) provides an overview of the process by which all research and evaluation projects are considered and approved within Neami. Neami recognises the nuanced differences between research and evaluation projects, and the approval processes for the two approaches reflect this. In recognition of the fact that an evaluation project can often be considered “low risk” enough not to require review by the fully constituted Neami Research and Evaluation Committee, some evaluation projects can be approved by the Service Development Team. A decision tree to guide the approval process for evaluation projects is provided in Diagram Two (2).

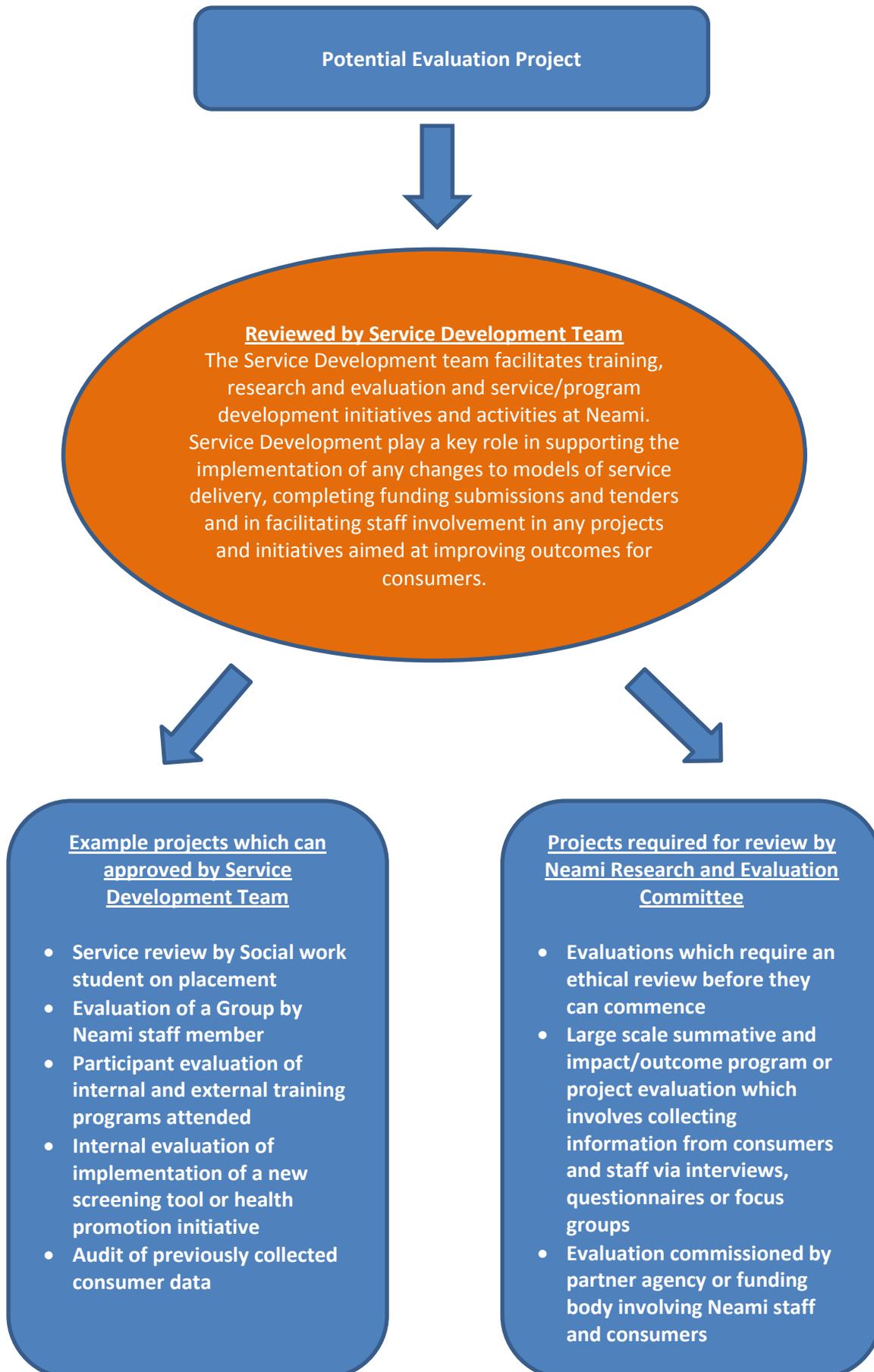
To be approved, potential research and evaluation projects must be aligned with Neami’s Vision, Mission and current Strategic Directions, the Guiding Research Principles and four Key Research Focus Areas, and also meet the preliminary assessment criteria. This decision making process also involves consideration of the consequences of the proposed research for those directly affected by it and to the interests of those who do not take part in the research but who might benefit or suffer from its outcomes in the future.

The specific mechanisms and guidelines for generating ideas and determining research priorities are continually further developed and refined as part of the National Leadership Team and Research and Evaluation Committee meeting discussions.

# Diagram 1 – Research Project Approval Process



## Diagram 2 – Evaluation Project Decision Tree

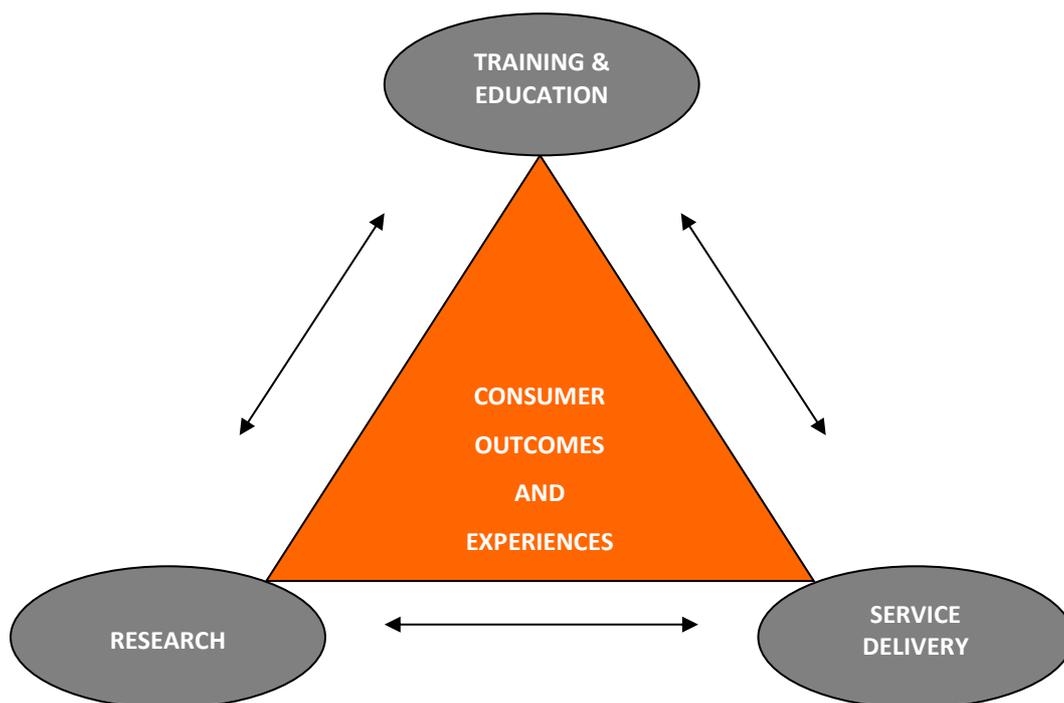


## Neami Research and Evaluation

### Context to Research and Evaluation in Neami

Neami aims to continually refine and improve its practices by ensuring that all Neami services are supported by an appropriate evidence-base and informed by regular monitoring and evaluation activities. Research generates new knowledge and leads to new and innovative ways of solving problems. Within Neami its value is not measured by its complexity but by its ability to contribute to better knowledge in the most appropriate way. As indicated in Diagram Three (3), research is one of three components that influence the outcomes and experiences of Neami consumers. All three components are interrelated and cannot operate in isolation. Implicit within all of these activities is the vital involvement of the consumer perspective in shaping them. For example, research (informed by consumers) provides a source of information to develop staff training which impacts on the services provided to consumers by staff.

#### Diagram 3 – Consumer outcomes: The relationship between research, training, and service delivery



**(Adapted from Victorian Department of Human Services (2005), Mental health research and evaluation framework)**

Mental health services increasingly recognise the need to demonstrate how services provide benefits to service users; this however requires focused investment and resourcing. The purpose of mental health service research is to produce evidence that contributes to improvements in the outcomes experienced by consumers. Neami is dedicated to developing standards of excellence and innovation in practice-based mental health research. The aim of developing these standards is to produce valuable evidence which can make a real difference to the lives of Neami consumers and their families.

Mental health research within Neami is broadly defined to include the processes involved in finding, selecting, using and producing evidence to support decision making related to our service provision. In line with the organisation's acknowledgement of lived experience as a valued asset for the development of services for consumers, Neami engages the consumer perspective at all levels to shape the way the organisation conceptualises and conducts research. A strong commitment to research ensures that Neami is at the forefront of innovation and improvement of psychosocial rehabilitation within a recovery-oriented framework. Additionally, Neami's commitment to a culture of learning and reflection also encourages staff to view research as an integral component of our service delivery and not something which sits outside of core service delivery.

Most importantly, the focus for Neami is not simply on expanding research and evaluation, but on using both to guide our practice. By linking our service delivery and new program initiatives to activities with demonstrated effectiveness we ensure that new knowledge is strategically used to influence the development of innovative approaches. Neami's engagement with the expertise of lived experience in developing and implementing research projects enables the organisation to glean deep, relevant insights into how best to improve services for consumers.

While research and evaluation priority areas for Neami varies across sites, regions and States we anticipate this document will provide a unifying framework for any Neami research and evaluation activity. Some sites may identify the need to deliver services in a different way while others may be looking to gather information about a particular group of consumers. Some research activity will offer immediate benefits to consumers, with other research contributing to our knowledge base for the provision of evidence-based practice over time. The research design and actual methods used to ascertain this information will vary depending on the aims of the research. However, regardless of different methodological approaches, for research to be useful it must be based on sound, ethical principles and be incorporated into a broader integrated research program. To achieve this goal, all Neami research is undertaken in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007* and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007*.

## Evaluation within Neami

Evaluations are aimed at assessing the efficacy, appropriateness and sustainability of programs by identifying where programs can be improved. This is achieved by asking the following types of questions:

- Does it work?
- Does it do what we want it to?
- How well does it work?
- Does it work for the reasons we think it does?
- What could be done to make it work better?
- Would the program resources achieve better outcomes if used in an alternative way?

The regular evaluation of programs and services is a key component of ensuring quality, accountability and sustainability of services within Neami. Evaluation provides a feedback loop into the planning process to ensure that program design and service delivery can be continuously improved upon. Evaluations enable Neami to:

- Assess the effectiveness of a project/program in achieving its objectives
- Know if the intended needs of consumers are being met
- Know if the intended outcomes are being achieved
- Know how improvements can be made
- Add to existing knowledge about programs and services
- Facilitate improvement of programs and services through modifying current operations

There are many different types and approaches to evaluation; with a number of different factors that need to be considered before choosing what kind of evaluation is appropriate. Deciding on which is the appropriate evaluation methodology is dependent on funding available, internal capacity through the Service Development Team and the overall purpose of the evaluation. It is recommended that for each new project, group or program undertaken by a service site or the Service Development Team it must be demonstrated that an evaluation component has been built into its development. The evaluation component must outline the key objectives of the project and how the evaluation intends to measure progress and outcomes of the project in meeting the desired objectives.

Where possible Neami also looks to partner with external agencies, such as Universities to complete larger scale and complex evaluation projects identified as priorities by the organisation. To support the Service Development Team in the completion of large scale evaluations, funding is placed aside each year for consultancy fees.

## Guiding Research Principles

The following principles are in place to guide decision making in research within Neami:

Guiding Principles	Components
<b>Research Priorities</b>	
Priority will be given to projects which respond to issues identified by consumers and those which aim to build knowledge about supporting consumers to live in their community of choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Where appropriate research is based on social and participatory action research methods.</li> <li>▪ Research provides new insights into key health issues and offers potential to improve support/rehabilitation outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Research begins from a literature base of knowledge of good practice.</li> <li>▪ Research supports Neami's focus on evidence-based practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Transparent and Inclusive</b>	
Where appropriate research designs maintain an open and participatory process throughout.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Any barriers to full and comprehensive stakeholder participation in research are identified and addressed.</li> <li>▪ Stakeholders at all levels have frequent, regular, open and constructive input into decision making.</li> <li>▪ Varying stakeholder opinions, skills and experiences are respected and valued.</li> </ul>
<b>Ethical and Quality Design Standards</b>	
Research designs are ethical, and maintain high quality standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All research activities are conducted with the highest ethical standards in accordance with relevant guidelines and laws, particularly the informed consent process, and data storage processes.</li> <li>▪ Perceived benefits for consumers outweigh the potential risk of harm to participants.</li> <li>▪ Quality standards are strictly adhered to throughout the research process.</li> </ul>
<b>Consumer Involvement</b>	
Research designs should consider meaningful involvement of participants including consumers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research methods are grounded in the values, beliefs, experiences of the participants involved in the study, including consumers, with their perspectives given high value.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consumers are provided with opportunities to be involved in the design, development, implementation and follow-up of any research study.</li> </ul>
<b>Effective Dissemination &amp; Knowledge Transfer</b>	
Research findings are effectively disseminated throughout the organisation and the Mental Health sector more generally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information is actively and effectively disseminated internally, including to consumers.</li> <li>▪ Information is disseminated to consumers in a way that is appropriate, timely, and inclusive.</li> <li>▪ Successful approaches and best practices are shared throughout the Mental Health sector.</li> <li>▪ Research findings and data are widely disseminated throughout the Mental Health sector through publication in 'peer reviewed' journals and where possible presented at relevant conferences.</li> </ul>
<b>Fostering Strategic Partnerships</b>	
Strategic partnerships utilise the research expertise of Universities, other research institutions and identified individuals or experts within the field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build partnerships which help create linkages and bridge the gap between research and practice.</li> <li>▪ Collaborations that span research disciplines and consider multiple perspectives have higher priority.</li> </ul>

## Neami Research Directions

Research directions are broad aims that Neami pursues in its research activities. The emphasis of research within Neami is practice-based, action research geared towards developing new models of service delivery and improved interventions that are more responsive to the needs of consumers. This recognises the actions of our direct service staff in making a difference to the quality of the service received by Neami consumers. This form of research is distinct from 'pure' research, which often fails to consider how practices would work in a 'real world' setting with a diverse range of consumers and needs. Initial Neami research activity focuses on the following areas:

- Bridging current evidence and practice gaps by building on existing knowledge of psychosocial rehabilitation in a recovery-oriented framework
- Building new evidence for rehabilitation approaches which can be integrated into a recovery-orientated framework
- Developing and promoting more effective and innovative approaches to research which are practice-based and offer measurable outcomes for consumers and carers
- Further developing existing services and trialling new approaches to working with Neami consumers
- Fostering collaborative research partnerships with universities, research institutes and/or other mental health organisations which utilise the existing knowledge and expertise of each partner.

A focus on such research helps us to:

- Assess the effectiveness of our services in a practical, 'real world' setting
- Understand the factors that influence the need for support and rehabilitation with Neami consumers
- Identify the challenges involved in implementing evidence-based services, and develop an approach to practice that helps us to continually assess the effectiveness of our interventions
- Consider how we effectively translate research findings into practice

These research directions are reflected in and guide Neami priorities for mental health research. They are reviewed annually to ensure they remain relevant to the organisation, consistent with strategic directions and focused on improving consumer outcomes.

## Research Funding

Neami's research program will be developed over time based on success in identifying and securing funding and research partnerships. A dedicated research fund has been established to support Neami's research projects with funding generated through the following means:

- Submitting applications for specific research projects to research funding bodies, such as:
  - Australian Research Council
  - National Health and Medical Research Council
  - State and Federal Government Departments
  - Mental Health Peak Bodies
- Allocating an amount of the Service Development annual budget towards research (Amount determined by Chief Executive Officer)
- Using Neami allocated research funds to leverage additional research funding
- Submitting joint applications for funds with Neami research partners
- Submitting joint applications with post-graduate students for funding to complete their studies at Neami

## Staff Involvement

As a committed learning organisation Neami sees research as a core aspect of its service delivery and part of all staff roles. One role of the Neami Service Development Team is to demystify the research process and assist staff to better understand the value of research and evaluation. It is hoped this will encourage staff to be involved in research and evaluation activities and in the implementation of evidence-based practices. Within Neami there is no expectation for all staff members to be experts in the field of research. There is however an expectation for staff to understand the process of conducting research and to participate in selected research initiatives when necessary. In accordance with Neami's commitment to using learning and action research principles in our research activity, staff are supported to participate in research activities as part of their normal duties. Enabling staff to take active research roles results in improved implementation and use of research findings (Bryar, 2003).

The key goals of staff involvement in evaluation activities (both internal and external) at Neami are to support staff to:

- Build evaluation principles and practice into their work
- Collect and use evaluation data more regularly
- Use evaluation findings to improve programmes and wellbeing
- Support a culture of reflective practice and evaluation

There are many benefits to Neami staff taking active roles in our research activities, such as:

- Research provides staff with a working environment focussed on learning and development
- Research enables staff to develop a clearer understanding of the knowledge and skills they need to apply in their roles
- Research enables staff to develop skills in the processes involved in research and to better understand its relationship to service delivery

## Consumer Involvement

Consumer involvement and participation in all aspects of service delivery is an integral part of Neami and deeply embedded in our culture. There is also increasing national and international recognition of the importance of more inclusive and participatory approaches to mental health research.

Actively seeking the views of consumers about research content and processes is now recognised as an opportunity to access valuable knowledge of improving the relevance of programs and services, and of translating research into practice (Griffiths, et al 2004). Consumer perspectives add significant value to research activities as their lived experiences can offer insights and understandings that may have otherwise been missed. Approaches to genuine consumer participation in mental health research are constantly evolving from symbolic and passive involvement opportunities through to meaningful and collaborative consumer driven research.

People with a mental illness have long been the subjects of research that they have had little control over and/or often misrepresented or misinterpreted their experiences. Increased consumer input into research practices and methods is seen as essential to the provision of effective evidence-based practices. Neami consumers are provided with a range of opportunities for involvement in research including, but not limited to the following:

- Identify research opportunities and needs through participation in Research and Evaluation Committee meetings and workshops
- Contribute to/conduct decision making about research methods, process and data collection, including the recruitment of research participants
- Assist in developing relevant research hypotheses
- Communicate results with peers and support the incorporation of research findings into practice

The meaningful involvement of consumers at all stages of research including its conception, design, analysis, implementation, evaluation and dissemination not only ensures that Neami research is more relevant and ethical but empowers consumers through the acknowledgement of their expertise. It provides them with a voice and helps to overcome stigma by treating them as research partners not research subjects. Research enables consumers to have the opportunity to participate and develop research knowledge and skills, i.e. identifying research priorities and developing ethical data collection methods, etc.

Effective consumer participation in research requires adequate support, knowledge, skills and resources for both consumers and researchers. It takes time to overcome barriers such as a lack of confidence and lack of understanding about research. Neami supports consumer involvement in research activity by:

- Providing training opportunities for consumers, especially in relation to evaluating the effectiveness and outcomes of their own recovery program
- Representation on the Neami Research and Evaluation Committee
- Information, resources and research results made widely available and described in easily understood formats and language
- Development of Neami policies regarding consumer involvement in research

## Communicating Research Activities

Sharing experiences and expertise in the delivery of mental health services is critical to achieving best possible consumer outcomes, with the value of research only fully achieved when the findings are made widely available and the knowledge gained is transferred into effective consumer-centred practice. A key step to ensure that knowledge gained from research is effectively transferred into practice is the dissemination of research findings. Transferring research findings into practice is not a one-off event; rather it is a continual process in which staff knowledge accumulates over time. The Service Development Team has an active role in this continual process by ensuring findings from research are used to inform our service provision. The dissemination and implementation of key research findings contributes to the continuous improvement of our services and enables individual and organisational learning.

A clear communication strategy is an integral component of any research activity within Neami. This process ensures our staff are aware of current research activities and are presented with opportunities to participate. Following the decision by the Neami Research and Evaluation Committee and National Leadership Team to proceed with a particular research project and upon approval of the project received via an appropriately constituted Human Research Ethics Committee, the Service Development Team release an internal project brief detailing the following:

- Project Overview (Including project aim, anticipated outcomes, project costs)
- Project Methods
- Stakeholders
- Staff Involvement Opportunities
- Consumer Involvement
- Implementation process including Project Timeline

Following project completion, findings will be shared with both consumers and staff as well as via peer reviewed journal articles and conference presentations. We aim to ensure that any findings are not left sitting on bookshelves, but rather they are widely disseminated both internally and externally and applied to our services. In addition to the internal report, the following dissemination strategies are also in place to support sector development and influence government policy and potential research funding opportunities:

- Regular internal distribution of a research bulletin summarising research activities
- Presentations at scheduled National and State Leadership and Site meetings
- Presentation of research updates for consumers in various formats (posters, brochures, newsletters etc.)
- Attendance and presentations at relevant conferences and forums
- Publication of research articles in credible peer reviewed journals
- Research information and distribution of findings updated on Intranet and Internet site, written in plain language and accessible to everybody. Public access to Neami research publications is available on the Neami website at <http://www.neaminational.org.au/index.php/publications/#research>
- End of year research report summarising Neami research and evaluation activity included as part of the Neami Annual Report
- Promotion of research activity through research partners and networks

## Neami Ethics Procedures

All research undertaken by Neami is designed and conducted in accordance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007* and ethically reviewed and monitored in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007* and *Privacy Act 1998*. Additionally, all research that Neami undertakes, or participates in, must have approval from an appropriately constituted ethics committee. Neami's decision as to which ethics committee we will approach is dependent on the actual research project itself and its proposed location, and the research partner involved. For instance, Neami may become a partner agency in a research project with a university who have already developed an ethics application and have an existing relationship with a constituted ethics committee. As such, the ethics application would then be submitted through the respective partner's ethics committee to ensure a streamlined approval process is in place.

The dignity, rights, safety and well-being of research participants are the primary consideration of any Neami research activity and are given priority at all times. As an organisation conducting research, Neami is responsible for ensuring that:

- The research is designed, undertaken and reviewed in a way that ensures its integrity and quality
- The research follows the protocols as approved by the relevant ethics committee
- Research staff and participants are fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved
- The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents is maintained and respected if requested
- Research participants participate in a voluntary way and are free to withdraw at any point
- Procedures are in place to ensure collection of high quality, accurate data and the integrity and confidentiality of data during processing and storage

(Australian Government: National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007)

The Neami Research and Evaluation Committee with support from the National Leadership Team is responsible for undertaking the preliminary review (before it is submitted to a Human Research Ethics Committee) of any proposed Neami research project. For the decisions and advice of an ethics committee to be free from bias and adhered to, they must be seen to be made impartially. As such, it is not the intention of the Neami Research and Evaluation Committee to replace the formal submission of research projects for ethics review. The purpose of this preliminary review is to build a program of support and resources to aid Neami staff in their understanding of the ethical considerations and issues that need to be considered throughout the research process, including considering the practicalities of implementation. The preliminary internal review is in place to:

- Ensure that the proposed research meets Neami criteria of ethical considerations (as outlined in Diagram One (1) - Research Approval Flow Chart)
- Provide consultative advice regarding the ethical issues on projects in development
- Provide advice on optimal implementation strategies and uptake of the project by staff and consumers

## Neami Research Partners

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Effective research requires the active contribution of a variety of stakeholders. As with the delivery of Neami services we recognise that effective research cannot be undertaken without a variety of formalised partnership arrangements with both universities and research institutions. Research partnerships create a powerful mix of knowledge that blends the 'on the ground knowledge' of staff with the expertise and perspective of the researcher. Partnerships in collaborative mental health research enable each organisation to effectively align resources and coordinate efforts. The key to a successful partnership or collaboration is to ensure the roles of each partner are clearly defined.

Neami currently maintains a range of collaborative research relationships with various research and academic institutions which to date have provided critical knowledge and learning during previous research activities and in the development and improvement of existing services. These working relationships will be built upon and further strengthened through an increase in Neami's research activity.

## References

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## Appendix 1. Research Decision Checklist

Topic	Questions	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
1. General	Is the aim of the study clearly defined?				
	Is the rationale for the study clearly defined?				
	Are the research question/s clear and appropriate?				
	Have the research question/s already been answered?				
	Is the research design clear and appropriate?				
	Is the recruitment process clearly defined?				
	Is the proposed timeline suitable and realistic?				
2. Research Capacity	Will this project fit with the timetabling of current internal and external research projects?				
	Will Neami staff play a role in this project?				
	Will Neami staff need specific training for this project?				
	Will this fit with current Service Development staff workloads?				
	Are the proposed sites involved in external research projects already?				
	Will this project impact on current staff arrangements at the sites involved?				
	Is Neami required to contribute towards the cost of this project (excluding staff hours)?				
	Does this project fit within Neami's research budget?				
3. Ethical Considerations	Does this project already have ethics approval?				

Topic	Questions	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A
	Are there any ethical issues relevant to the project (e.g. process for gaining informed consent, proposed questionnaires, screening tools, etc.)?				
4. Dissemination and Knowledge Transfer	The methods of disseminating the findings are discussed				
	Intellectual property/ownership of study findings are relevant				
5. Vision, Values and Mission	Is the research aligned with Neami’s vision, values and mission?				
6. Consumer Involvement	Will Neami consumers be provided with opportunities to be involved in the design, development, implementation and follow-up of this project?				
	Will this project contribute towards the implementation of innovation in Neami service delivery that improves consumers’ wellbeing, mental health outcomes, and participation in society?				
7. Strategic Directions	How likely is it that this project will contribute towards the following Neami Strategic Directions?	Unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Unsure
	1. Improve the physical health of consumers attending Neami services				
	2. Promotion of services that achieve quality recovery outcomes				
	3. Expansion of services for people with complex mental health and social needs				
	4. Development of a skilled and diverse workforce that is committed to recovery				