



# **Neami Research Framework**

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# Neami Research Framework

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## Introduction

This Research Framework has been developed because 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 Research Framework is intended to ensure that Neami research activities are both ethical and sensitive to presenting consumer needs, and are practically relevant to staff in their work.

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 Framework Aims & Objectives

This Research 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 skills in research, which will further contribute to sector reform.

### Aims

The development of this Research 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 activities. It outlines the rationale for research, 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 at Neami.

### Objectives

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

- Promote Neami as a leading organisation in the provision of recovery focused evidence-based research
- Develop a standard of excellence for research in the community-based mental health field

- Optimise the translation of research findings into Neami practice and policy
- Use research 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 activities

## **Neami Research Committee**

Neami has developed a Research Committee to oversee and support its research activities. The Research Committee is a sub-committee of the National Leadership Team. This Committee ensures all research is conducted in accordance with Neami values and currently accepted ethical practices. 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 through the coordination, monitoring and provision of overall management of Neami research activities.

### Statement of Purpose

The Neami Research Committee oversees and supports Neami's research 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 research projects and assist in determining research priority areas
- 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 project
- Ensure accepted research can be effectively implemented and has sufficient available resources to be completed

## Committee Objectives

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

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Task</b>
<b>Objective 1</b> To take responsibility for the development and review of research infrastructure and standards across Neami.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ To review, develop and disseminate research policies across Neami.</li><li>▪ To effectively disseminate research activity findings throughout Neami.</li><li>▪ To encourage staff involvement in Neami research activity.</li></ul>
<b>Objective 2</b> To oversee existing research projects within Neami and review requests for new projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Review the status of current research 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.</li></ul>
<b>Objective 3</b> To develop specific research priorities and projects in line with Neami strategic planning priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Identify research gaps and develop potential research projects accordingly.</li><li>▪ Identify and develop partnerships with key research agencies.</li></ul>

The Research 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 there is always a consumer representative on the Research Committee. The minimum acceptable membership of the Neami Research Committee is five members typically comprising of:

- Neami Chief Executive Officer
- Neami Manager Service Development
- Neami State Manager

- Neami Site or Regional Manager
- Community Rehabilitation Support Worker
- Neami Consumer
- Neami Carer
- External academic researcher
- Consumer Researcher

In addition to the core committee members, University representatives, consumers or staff with a particular interest in a research 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 study being discussed.

### Committee Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Neami Research Committee are derived from the three committee objectives and include the following:

- To encourage research activity throughout Neami and consider ways to foster a culture of enquiry and commitment to research amongst all staff.
- To determine areas of focus for Neami's research program within the context of the directions identified in the Neami Strategic Plan
- To consider all research to be conducted under the auspice of Neami
- To monitor the progress of research 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 quarterly basis

- To assess Neami budget and resource requirements for research activity
- To refer accepted projects to the Service Development Team to develop the ethics application for review by an appropriately constituted 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 research projects for consideration by the Research Committee and National Leadership Team. The following are examples of how Neami generates research ideas:

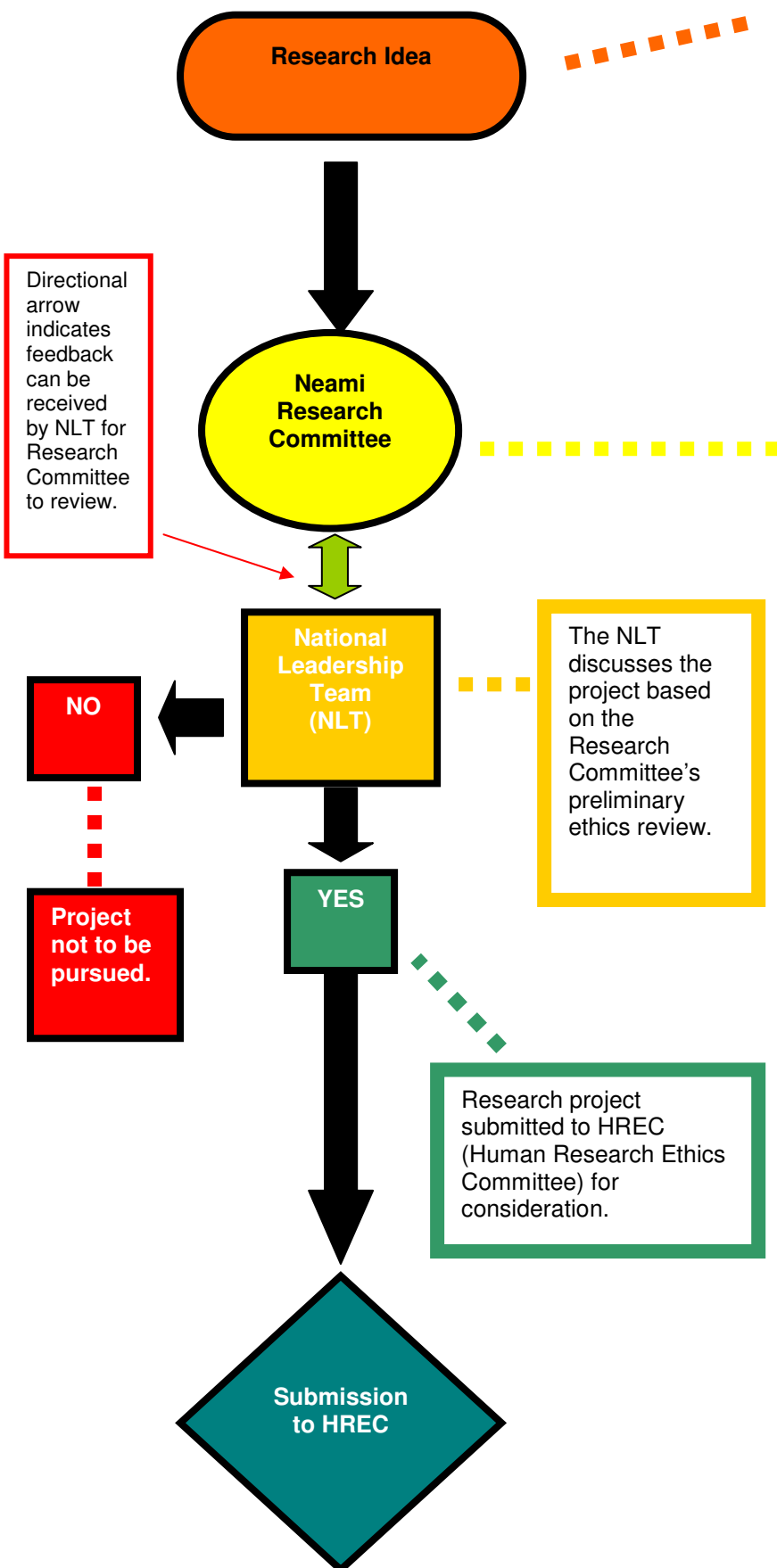
- Discussions at State and National Leadership Team meetings
- Discussions at Neami Research Committee meetings
- Discussions at inter-agency meetings
- Staff input generated through discussions at regular team meetings
- Consumer input generated through Consumer Advisory Group (C.A.G) meeting discussions
- 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 Committee has a key role, alongside the National Leadership Team in considering and deciding which research projects Neami will pursue. Diagram One (1) provides an overview of the process in which all research projects are considered and approved within Neami. To be approved, the potential research project must be aligned with Neami's Vision, Mission and current Strategic Directions, the Guiding Research Principles and four Key Research Focus Areas (as discussed on pages 13-14), and also meet the preliminary ethics assessment criteria. This decision making process also involves consideration of the consequences of the proposed

research for those directly effected 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 Committee meeting discussions.

**Diagram 1 – Internal Research Project Approval Process**



Potential research project submitted to Neami Research Committee for further consideration.

The Committee use the following questions to assist in the development of a potential research project:

- What is the aim/purpose of the project?
- Why is this project relevant to Neami’s research priorities?
- Is the research aligned with Neami’s vision, values, mission and strategic directions?
- How will the project impact on Neami consumers?
- What role will Neami staff have in the project? Will they require any specific training?
- What impact will the project implementation have on current staff arrangements? (Is the project feasible?)
- How will the research findings enhance our knowledge?
- Who will this project benefit?
- How will this research be of benefit to Neami staff and/or consumers?
- Has anyone else already answered this research question?
- Who is the intended target audience of the research?
- How does the research engage consumers in the overall design and conduct of the research?
- How are the findings of the research going to be disseminated both internally and externally?
- What costs are involved?
- What is the appropriate process for gaining ethical approval? E.g. project scope and geographical area involved.

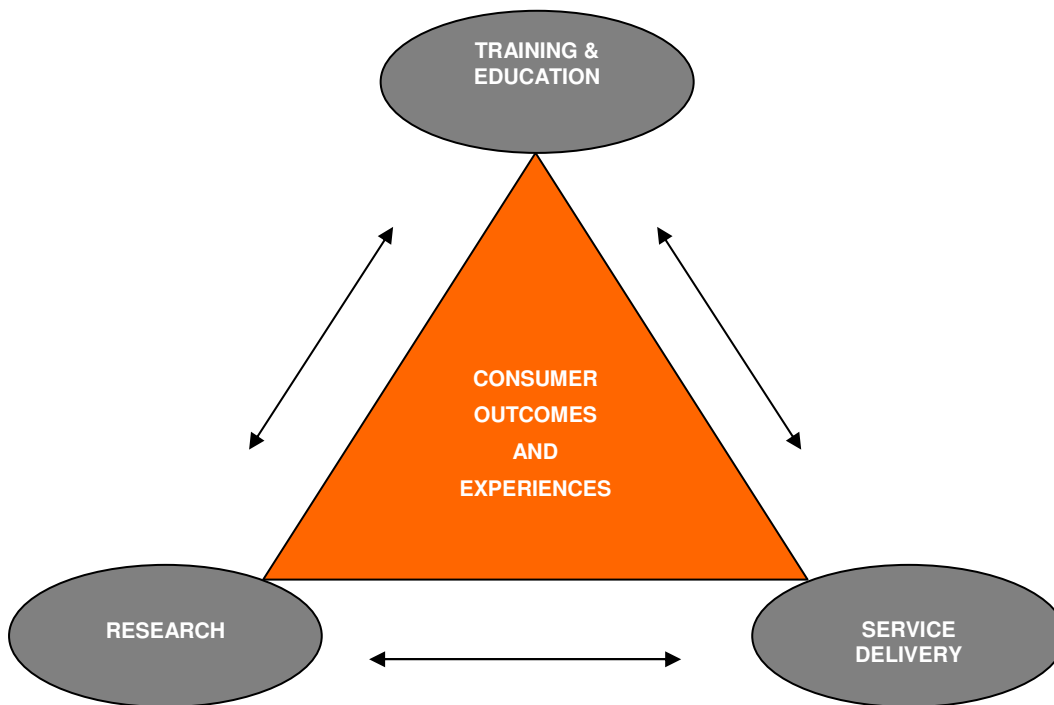
If the Committee is satisfied the project meets the required assessment criteria it is then referred to the National Leadership Team for the final decision to be made as to whether Neami will pursue or not.

# Neami Research

## Context to Research at Neami

Neami is committed to continually refining and improving its practices. To achieve this goal it is essential that all services delivered by Neami 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. 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 Two (2), 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. For example, research provides a source of information to develop staff training which impacts on the services provided to consumers by staff.

**Diagram 2 – 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. 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, but on using research to guide our decisions. 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.

While research priority areas for Neami varies across sites, regions and States we anticipate this document will provide a unifying framework for any Neami research 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*.

## Guiding Research Principles

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

<b>Guiding Principles</b>	<b>Components</b>
<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 supports Neami's transition towards increased evidence-based practices.</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 storage of research data.</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> <li>▪ Where appropriate consumers are involved in the design, development, implementation and follow-up of any</li> </ul>

	research study.
<b>Effective Dissemination</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>▪ 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>

(Adapted from Alberta Mental Health Board (2005): A Plan for a Mental Health Research Program)

### 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:

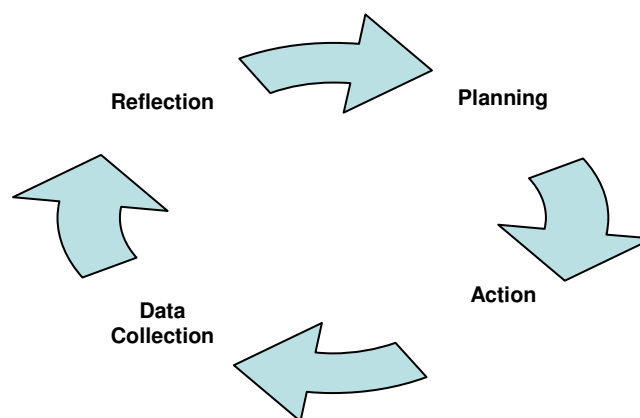
- Submitting applications for specific research projects to research funding bodies, such as:
  - Australian Research Council
  - National Health and Medical Research Council
  - State and Federal Government Departments
  - Mental Health Peak Bodies
- Allocating an amount of the Service Development annual 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

### Action Research

The principles of Action Research act as the overarching guiding process in which the majority of Neami research is undertaken. Action Research assists with continuous service improvement and the resolution of presenting problems, via an ongoing cycle of planning, action, data collection and reflection, which leads to further planning. It is a form of inquiry that sets out to explicitly study something in order to change and improve it (Wadsworth, 1984). Action Research is usually conducted by individuals and organisations that wish to inform and improve their practice, and nearly always occurs in a ‘real world’ setting. It is a fundamental conceptual approach by Neami to undertake research activities which draw on consumers, staff and external providers to share expertise and experience in a structured way. The principles of Action Research are also closely related to those used in Reflective Practice. Using an Action Research process within Neami enables even small local reflections which focus on a specific issue to inform practice and ultimately improve consumer outcomes more broadly. The four basic phases in the Action Research cycle adopted by Neami can be seen in Diagram Three (3).

**Diagram 3 – Action Research Cycle** (Adapted from Wadsworth, *Do It Yourself Social Research*, 1984)



- **Planning Phase:** Actions are proposed and a plan developed to address an issue or identified problem
- **Action Phase:** The plan is implemented and the cycle continues as outcomes are observed, recorded, and shared
- **Data Collection:** The issue or problem is monitored and described. Useful data is recorded and kept
- **Reflection Phase:** Observations are interpreted and shared so that the issue or problem can be better understood to influence any future planning

### Neami Service Development Team

Neami is committed to building a culture of learning and continuous quality improvement and has developed a Service Development Team to support all staff in these areas. Neami Service Development facilitates training, research and evaluation and service/program development activities. Service Development supports staff to build their skills and deliver the most accessible and effective mental health programs possible for Neami consumers. Support and information provided by the Service Development Team also ensures that staff remain abreast of contemporary research. The Service Development Team works closely with the National Leadership Team and Neami Research Committee to support staff in undertaking research duties and in coordinating the day to day operation of Neami's research activity.

### 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. It is hoped this will encourage staff to be involved in research 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).

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 Committee meetings and workshops

- Contribute to 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, 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 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

### Dissemination and Knowledge Transfer

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. Dissemination however goes beyond research findings being made available through the traditional means of journal publication and conference presentations. Dissemination of knowledge also involves a process of extracting key messages or implications derived from research findings and communicating them to relevant stakeholders including staff, funding bodies and consumers. Furthermore, the development of specific training is often required to effectively transfer findings into practice.

### Communicating Research Activities

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 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 Leader Leadership, Site and C.A.G meetings
- 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
- End of year research report summarising Neami research activity included as part of the Neami Annual Report
- Promotion of research activity through research partners and networks

### Transferring Research Findings into Practice

With support from the Service Development Team, Neami State Managers and the National Leadership Team maintain a lead role in advancing our knowledge of evidence-based practices. This is achieved through making any research findings widely available and facilitating the development of a workforce trained to effectively deliver these practices. Advancing the current use of evidence-based practices within Neami involves disseminating strategies, such as education events and written material; enabling methods, such as practice guidelines and decision support; and reinforcing strategies such as practice development mechanisms (Torrey, et. al, 2001).

Over time the Service Development Team plans to develop an Evidence-Based Practice Toolkit; based on a similar kit developed by Torrey and colleagues. This Toolkit will increase our knowledge of evidence-based practices and assist staff in utilising these practices in their work by providing simple to use tools with consumers. The Evidence-Based Practice Toolkit, will include integrated written material, web based resources and further training opportunities related to the provision of evidence-based practices. This process is designed to promote the consistent delivery of effective services throughout Neami. Written material includes: a list of

commonly asked questions and answers, a paper summarising the scope and limits of the evidence supporting the particular practice and a general paper articulating the rationale for adopting practices that are strongly supported by research (Torrey, et. al, 2001). The Toolkit will be developed to support the articulation of Neami's theoretical foundations and model of service delivery.

### 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 dependant 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 Committee with support from the National Leadership Team is responsible for undertaking the preliminary ethics 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 Committee to replace the formal submission of research projects for ethics review. The purpose of this preliminary ethics 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

After the preliminary internal ethics review has taken place, the Neami Research Committee and Service Development Team are responsible for the co-ordination of the ethics application to a formal Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for review. Ethics approval need not be secured before an application for funding is submitted. Once funding has been secured the formal ethics application process will begin. However, any proposed Neami research activity will not commence until written advice is received from the relevant HREC advising that the project has ethics approval. While the process of ethical reviews are important in ensuring the ethical standards of research are adhered to, it is the responsibility of Neami, in particular the Research Committee and National Leadership Team, with support from the Service Development Team to ensure that a climate of responsible and ethical behaviour in research is maintained throughout.

## Neami Ethics Training For Staff

The successful completion of research activities within Neami relies upon the building of appropriate structures and the creation of a culture that recognises the central place ethics occupy in good research practice. Ethics training for staff involved in research activities plays a central role in this process. As such, appropriate training (dependant on the research activity being undertaken) is provided to all Neami staff with an active role in a research project. This ensures the necessary resources are in place for Neami to carry out the responsibilities of a research project efficiently, effectively and independently.

## Neami Research Partners

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.

Partnerships and networking within the research and academic community enable Neami to:

- Facilitate collaborative research
- Promote and develop an applied research culture to encourage participation by staff
- Plan and set priorities related to mental health research
- Develop and manage a variety of mental health research projects
- Develop the capacity to involve a variety of stakeholders including consumers and other community organisations in research projects
- Develop organisational capacity in conducting mental health research by learning from the expertise and experience of partner agencies
- Be made aware of opportunities for collaboration or research funding available
- Establish an identity and reputation within the research field
- Disseminate our research findings through a variety of different networks
- Remain aware of the contributions currently being made on a particular subject area so that our work builds on existing work rather than replicating it

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.

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