Frequently asked questions

Research ethics and governance fee model

Austin Health is introducing a revised, simplified fee model for research governance and ethics oversight. Below you'll find answers to common questions about what's changing, why, and what it means for researchers.

Discovery & Innovation Unit | Austin Health

1. What are the main changes?

The Discovery & Innovation Unit is introducing a new fee structure as of 1 December 2026.

The pricing model shifts from itemised charges to lifecycle-based fees that bundle up a range of services under one all-encompassing cost.

The new structure is designed to reduce the administrative burden on research teams and ensure the long-term sustainability of ethics and governance services at Austin Health.

By moving away from highly itemised charging, we've reduced administrative complexities – meaning researchers and coordinators can spend more time on the science, not the paperwork.

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2. Why was there a need for change?

The previous model no longer reflected the true cost or workload of research governance.

Research governance doesn't end at ethics approval. DIU provides ongoing support throughout the life of a study – from amendments and safety oversight to contract variations and annual reporting. The older, itemised fee model significantly under-recovered the cost of that work and created an administrative load for both researchers and DIU staff.

The new model:

- better reflects institutional risk and the full lifecycle of ethical and governance oversight
- reduces the number of invoices and associated delays for research teams who have been burdened with reconciliation difficulties
- supports the long-term sustainability of Austin Health's research governance system
- reduces administrative back-and-forth so researchers can spend more time on research, and
- aligns with contemporary governance expectations and accreditation standards.

This change ensures we can continue delivering high-quality, timely and independent governance services as our research portfolio grows.

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3. What exactly is covered in the bundled fees?

The bundles include a wide range of governance and oversight services that were previously charged separately. They are separated into 'initial' services related to your submission, and 'post-approval' services that are relevant after you've received HREC approval.

Examples include:

- HREC liaison and coordination
- Participant Information & Consent Form (PICF) iteration
- contract review and negotiation
- protocol and document amendments
- review of safety events and safety-related documentation
- annual report assessment
- risk-based monitoring and compliance checks, and
- general governance advice across the life of the study.

A detailed schedule outlining inclusions will be published ahead of the 1 December 2026 launch.

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4. Will there still be additional charges?

Only for specialist services that fall outside the bundled model. Examples may include:

- priority review
- first-in-human studies, or
- complex or specialised regulatory assessments.

These will be clearly listed in the published fee schedule.

Should you not meet your reporting requirements by set dates, you may be subject to a late fee.

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5. Will the fees guarantee ethics or governance approval?

No.

Fees cover the work involved in conducting governance and ethics review, but they do not influence or guarantee approval outcomes.

All research must still meet national, institutional and regulatory requirements.

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6. How will the new model help researchers and research support staff?

Researchers can expect:

- **less admin and fewer forms**
- **simpler budgeting** with clear, predictable costs

- **more efficient support** from a well-resourced governance team
- **fewer delays** caused by repeated itemised charges and invoices, and
- **ongoing access** to advisors throughout the life of the study.

The goal is to make the research journey smoother, more transparent and better supported.

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7. How is investigator-led research treated under the new model?

The fee model distinguishes clearly between:

- commercially sponsored research, and
- investigator-led and audit studies.

This ensures fees are proportionate to the type of study and its funding context. Investigator-led projects remain supported and accessible, with fees set at an appropriate level to reflect their typically smaller scale and funding structure.

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8. Where can I find the full fee schedule?

The updated fee schedule will be published on:

- the Austin Health website
- DIU Pulse page
- Research Architect

Researchers will be notified once it is available.

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9. When does the new fee structure come into effect?

The new structure will be enacted on Wednesday 1 December 2026.

Any new submissions from this date onwards will attract a bundled fee treatment with one invoice activating a number of services to support you in your HREC or governance submission.

Any HREC-approved projects will also now be subject to a lifecycle management fee, invoiced initially at the time of approval, and then subsequently upon submission of your annual report. This will grant your team access to a suite of post-approval services to support you on your research journey.

If your annual report is overdue from a previous year, a late fee will apply after 1 December 2026 and post-approval services will cease until your annual report is submitted.

Grace period

If you are up to date with your annual report, you will benefit from a grace period which gives you access to all post-approval services for free, until your next HREC approval anniversary. Once your next annual report is submitted, you will be subject to the new lifecycle management fee and will only receive ongoing services upon payment of that fee.

If your report is outstanding, you will have a month to submit it otherwise face the possibility of your project being put on hold.

While fees support the work involved in review and oversight, they do not influence nor guarantee approval outcomes.

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10. Can I still pay individually for DIU's services?

No, not for the most part.

The bundled fees cover a majority of the services you will need at both initial and post-approval stages. However, if there are bespoke services required outside of the standard set offered (such as a contract with an international party), then we will have the ability to charge for them separately.

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11. When are the bundled fees charged?

The initial bundled fee associated with your submission will be invoiced once the job has been allocated to a member of the DIU. The assigned Ethics & Governance Advisor will send you an email acknowledging your submission and trigger the raising of an invoice with Finance.

This is normally 2-3 business days after your submission on Research Architect.

The first annual lifecycle management fee will be charged at the time of ethics approval and will cover you for the following 12 months. From then on, this fee will be invoiced around the time of your HREC-approval anniversary. The trigger for that invoice will be the submission of your annual report – a mandatory activity due within a month of your anniversary.

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12. How will I be charged?

The DIU will work with Finance to raise an invoice for your bundled fee. If it's for initial services (pre-approval) then that will happen once a DIU team member has been allocated your submission; if it's post-approval, your invoice will be raised upon submission of your annual report shortly after your HREC-approval anniversary.

Fees will be invoiced or can by paid by SPF transfer (internal only).

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13. What if my HREC anniversary is in the middle of the year?

If you are up to date and have submitted all the annual reports expected of you, you will benefit from a "grace period" and have access to post-approval services for free, from 1 December 2026 through til your HREC anniversary.

If your annual report is overdue, you will need to submit that before you can access any of DIU's services.

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14. Will we receive a reminder based on our HREC anniversary or is it up to research teams to be proactive?

To help prepare everyone for this new fee structure, DIU will be doing an audit of all overdue annual reports and contacting relevant teams to remind them of their reporting obligations.

Once the new fee structure comes into play, DIU will provide reminders of any upcoming annual report due dates – this date aligns with your HREC anniversary ie. the date you received approval for your project. Annual reports need to be submitted every 12 months, until project closure, so you can also work towards this project milestone yourself.

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15. What if my annual report is overdue from last year?

DIU will contact you to remind you of your reporting obligations and give you a month to finalise your report, or choose to terminate the project.

If we don't hear from you during that month, or if you don't meet the deadline, we will make moves to close your project.

You will not be able to access DIU post-approval services until you have submitted your overdue annual report. Further to that, you will also be charged a late fee.

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16. Why is it more expensive?

The new fee structure reflects the full range of work DIU undertakes throughout the life of a study, not just at submission and approval.

There are many activities involved in maintaining good governance and regulatory compliance that happen behind the scenes and aren't always linked to a specific request from a research team. Under the previous model, many of these activities were heavily discounted or not charged separately, including:

- safety reporting
- contract amendments
- protocol amendments (major and minor)
- ongoing monitoring
- annual report review
- ongoing HREC liaison
- governance checks
- administrative changes
- general and specific enquiries, and
- correspondence and clarification letters.

The revised lifecycle-based model bundles these services into predictable fees, meaning researchers have ongoing access to support without receiving separate invoices every time assistance is needed.

While the upfront cost may be higher in some cases, it covers significantly more work across the study lifecycle, provides greater budgeting certainty, and helps ensure governance services remain appropriately resourced as Austin Health's research activity continues to

grow. This supports more consistent service delivery, continued compliance with regulatory obligations, and ongoing support for research teams.

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17. How is it fair that everyone pays the same regardless of how often they use DIU services?

Because **every approved research study generates ongoing institutional accountability**, even when the volume of interactions varies.

Every open study requires DIU to maintain active oversight, including:

- annual progress reporting
- monitoring compliance with protocol and ethics conditions
- safety review and escalation
- contract tracking and maintenance
- regulatory and accreditation requirements, and
- risk-based oversight processes across the full portfolio.

Some studies may need more day-to-day support than others, but the organisational responsibility – and risk – remains constant. A bundled, lifecycle-based approach is the fairest and most predictable way to distribute these costs across all studies.

This approach also:

- removes the unpredictability of itemised charges
- prevents disproportionately large bills for studies that need more amendments or safety reviews, and
- ensures fees are proportionate across commercial and investigator-led research.

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18. Where do the fees go?

The fees you pay support the delivery of end-to-end ethics and research governance services at Austin Health – from initial submission through to study close-out.

They fund the people, expertise and systems required to:

- review and coordinate ethics and governance submissions
- provide advice and support to research teams
- monitor safety, compliance and reporting obligations
- manage amendments, contracts and regulatory requirements, and
- maintain accreditation standards and institutional oversight.

While much of this work happens behind the scenes, it is essential to ensuring research is safe, compliant and able to proceed efficiently.

The Discovery & Innovation Unit operates as a cost-recovery service, meaning fees are used to sustain and improve the governance support provided to researchers. This includes keeping pace with the growing volume and complexity of research at Austin Health, and ensuring the right level of expertise is available when you need it.

Importantly, the move to bundled, lifecycle-based fees is designed to provide better overall value – replacing multiple individual charges with more predictable costs and ongoing access to support throughout your study.

In short, fees are reinvested into maintaining a robust, responsive and sustainable research governance system that supports both individual projects and the broader research environment at Austin Health.

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19. Is an annual report compulsory?

Yes. Staying on top of your annual progress reports is essential to keeping your study active and compliant at Austin Health. It's a core requirement of ethical and responsible research conduct and you are obligated to submit annual reports to the responsible party (either the Human Research Ethics Committee or RGO depending on your project's approving HREC and site role).

Find out more about your obligations here.

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20. What if I don't want to pay the new fees?

It's quite simple – if you don't pay the initial fee upon submission, we won't be able to work on your project.

And if you don't pay the lifecycle management fee, you won't have access to post-approval services. Basically, you will not be able to continue your research project at Austin Health and the ethics approval and/or site governance authorisation will be closed.

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21. My study is expected to close within the next year but I've been charged the annual fee in advance. Do I have to pay it?

Yes, as you will still be running an active project in some capacity within the next 12 months – even if it's for a short amount of time – you need to pay your annual lifecycle management fee when invoiced. This ensures your project and team are covered should they need to draw on any services, which is likely given the reporting involved in closing a project.

If you don't want to pay the fee, you will need to close your project at that start of your next billing period, and cease any further activity.

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22. I still have questions – who can I speak to?

We understand that change can take a bit to get used to, and we're here to support you through this change process. If you would like to talk through your particular situation and discuss the impact of the new fee structure on your project, please contact **Kate Khamly, Deputy Director – Research Governance & Integrity** by email at kate.khamly@austin.org.au