

NCLS Research Privacy Policy

NCLS Research has served the churches and wider community for 30 years. We are committed to protecting the privacy of the people who make our research possible and depend on their trust and goodwill to achieve our mission.

The Federal Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act) regulates how personal information (defined as information or an opinion about an identified individual, or an individual who is reasonably identifiable) is handled. NCLS Research has responsibilities under the Privacy Act. Specifically, NCLS Research is required to handle, use and manage personal information in accordance with the 13 Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) included in the Act.

Collection of personal information

NCLS Research seeks to provide an evidence base to help churches to connect with the wider community. Our mission is to use credible research to identify signs of hope, to nurture life in both leadership and churches, and to encourage the wider community to reflect upon its spiritual journey and the churches' place within it. Research aims include studying Australian spirituality, church health, effective and sustainable leadership, and the connections between church and community. NCLS Research collects a wide range of data to do with demographics, well-being, religious faith and practice, attitudes and behaviours related to issues of social and political importance, civic contributions of individuals and churches and more, in order to better understand the shape of churches and their place in society today. NCLS research projects are assessed via the ethics approval processes of Charles Sturt University.

NCLS Research collects research information via paper and electronic means, and sometimes via interviews. Participation by churches and individuals is informed and voluntary. Sometimes, we collect personal information, including sensitive information (e.g. ethnicity, religious beliefs, political views, health information that can be linked to individuals) in order to achieve our research aims. Personal information is only collected where necessary. If we are collecting names and contact details, the purpose of this will always be made clear in writing.

NCLS Research's largest project is the National Church Life Survey (NCLS). The NCLS is a large-scale quantitative research project that has surveyed thousands of local churches, hundreds of thousands of church attenders and thousands of local church leaders from approximately 20 Christian denominations across Australia every five years from 1991 onwards. All data collected is identified at the level of the local church. This identification is necessary in order to provide churches with feedback about their health or vitality. Church attenders who provide research data as part of the NCLS do so anonymously, therefore the data are generally not identifiable at the individual level and do not constitute personal information. However, in some cases data may be re-identifiable especially in a small church – through a combination of the local church level identification and the demographic information that the individual has provided. However these data are never provided in an identifiable form to a third party.

There are two further instances where NCLS Research collects personal information via the NCLS. First, the study of effective and sustainable leadership involves collecting information from and about church leaders who may be reasonably identifiable. Such information includes ethnicity, religious beliefs, self-reported psychological wellbeing, and evaluations by church attenders of the leaders' effectiveness in ministry. Names of leaders are not provided to NCLS Research, however leaders may be reasonably re-identifiable because the data is identified at the level of the local church. To guard against identification of church leaders, files with church identifiers are stored separately from leader research data files, and identifiers are removed from leader files prior to analysis.

Second, NCLS Research provides church attenders with the opportunity to complete a separate reply slip when they fill out their attender survey form in order to opt in to: 1) receive marketing information from NCLS sponsors (sponsors help to fund the NCLS and are located in Australia), 2) receive information about NCLS Research projects (information about specific projects and/or general sign-up to e-news), and/or 3) sign up to an online research panel. The reply slip is separate from the survey form.

NCLS Research collects and holds some personal information for other research projects. Such data is collected and held only where necessary and is always stored in files that are separate from the research data. For example, we hold personal information – names, contact details and basic demographics – for participants in our online research panels. This information is needed in order to contact people to take part in a survey, and to only contact them when it is relevant (e.g. a survey for a particular age group). It is also necessary to hold personal information for projects involving longitudinal research of individuals, in order both to collect data and to merge waves of data. Any identifying information is removed from research data prior to analysis.

NCLS Research also holds a database of names and contact details of individuals who receive our e-news bulletin. Inclusion on the list is voluntary and individuals may at any time request to be deleted from the list.

Disclosure of personal information

NCLS Research does not transfer personal information to any third party without the consent of the individual to whom the information relates.

NCLS Research discloses the following personal information: 1) As a part of the local church life profile of church health, aggregated opinions about local church leadership (which may be identified with a particular church leader depending on the size/nature of the local church and may therefore constitute personal information) are released to the local church leadership and to nominated leaders in the church region (e.g. diocese, synod) to which the local church belongs. Access to the data by the local church region is governed by a set of clear protocols. 2) Names and contact details for church attenders are provided to NCLS sponsor organisations only with permission from attenders, who have provided it for this purpose.

No personal information is disclosed in any other outputs from NCLS Research.

NCLS Research provides datasets to researchers outside our organisation in some instances, for the purposes of research projects. This data is de-identified prior to release. In some instances a linking key may be included for the purposes of linking datasets – but it cannot be used to concretely identify the

information. Datasets are only released with a research licence, in which the licensee agrees to use the dataset only for the purposes and in the ways specified in the licence.

Research outputs such as research reports, occasional papers, fact sheets and academic articles report aggregated rather than individual-level statistical data. In some instances, quotes from non-identified individuals may be included for the purposes of illustration.

NCLS does not disclose personal information to overseas recipients.

Security of personal information

NCLS Research takes all reasonable precautions to protect the personal information that we hold.

All NCLS Research computer systems are located in Australia. NCLS Research stores all user information from our surveys in secure servers in Australia for as long as required for the purposes for which it has been collected.

Personal information is stored securely and separately from research data files. Personal information and data files can be merged via a linking key, however only authorised NCLS Research staff may access the personal information. Personal information is destroyed as soon as it is no longer required for the research purposes for which it was collected.

NCLS Research takes reasonable steps to protect personal information from research participants who transmit information to us online (e.g. via an online survey) from loss, misuse, and unauthorised access, use, modification, disclosure, alteration or destruction. Research participants are responsible for the security of and access to their own computer and are instructed to close their browser when they have finished their user session so as to ensure that others cannot access their personal information if they share a computer with someone else. Participants should also be aware that if their web browser privacy settings enable form auto fill, free text answers that they have previously entered into a survey form might be viewable by another person who uses their device to also complete the survey. Participants should change the form history options in their privacy settings if they are concerned about this.

All NCLS Research staff who have access to personal information are required to abide by this privacy policy.

Access to personal information

Individuals may seek access to and request the correction or deletion of their personal information as specified in the APPs.

Contact

For further information about this privacy policy or to make a request or complaint, please contact:

Privacy Officer, NCLS Research

Phone: +61 9139 2525

Email: info@ncls.org.au

Post: NCLS Research, PO Box 92, North Ryde, NSW 1670 Australia