



Minutes of the one hundred and fifteenth meeting of the Advisory Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology

Held online on 14 August 2025

Present

Debra Wilson (Chair)

Lynsey Cree

Seth Fraser

Neuton Lambert

Amanda B Lees

Kathleen Logan

Andrew Murray

Catherine Ryan

Karaitiana Taiuru

Non-members present

Peter Le Cren. Ethics Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology.

Natalia Jefferson. Ethics team, Ministry of Health.

Martin Kennedy. ACART Secretariat, Ministry of Health.

Saskia Patton. Manager, Ethics team, Ministry of Health (part of meeting).

1. Welcome and karakia

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting at 9.00 a.m., welcomed the ECART member and the OCC observer, and reminded the committee that Dr Richard King and Jeannette Mackenzie will be joining at 10:30am for their presentations about pre-implantation genetic testing. They then opened the floor for Dr Cree to speak about the conferences she had attended in the interim period.

2. Opening comments

- 2.1 Dr Cree had attended the Genetic Society of Australasia, and highlighted that one presentation referred to variants of uncertain significance (VUS). The rest of the presentations were mainly non-human focused. Dr Cree also had the opportunity to speak to an expert on rare diseases, and they discussed the experience of gathering evidence for VUS. This expert pointed out that New Zealand currently uses the American College of Medical Genetics standards to interpret their data, and Dr Cree noted that these guidelines were developed a decade ago, and are currently being updated and expected to be completed by the end of this year.
- 2.2 Dr Cree had also attended the Embryologist Day, where Jeanette MacKenzie (upcoming presenter) introduced the study that her team is doing. Dr Cree noted the event was useful for ACART's current discussions embryo quality and quality predictions, plus ethical debates regarding the use of AI.
- 2.3 Dr Cree also referred to another session in embryo research and governance, that she considers an interesting discussion for the guidelines on Human Reproductive Research. There was a debate about defining the moral status and regulatory oversight around the use of embryos.
- 2.4 Two other presentations Dr Cree highlighted were about the sequencing of human embryos: one about the technical challenges and another about the clinical use of them. This is relevant for ACART's work on PGT, where embryos are being tested for monogenic diseases. Dr Cree referred to the ethical dilemmas associated with the work, especially for data ownership and consent, and the lack of consistency among labs and their findings, as well as discussions about embryoids never going *in vivo* when used for research in labs.
- 2.5 Comments from members were around noting that the use of AI is increasing, and agreeing that there are certain boundaries or cautions with the use, as it can be used as a tool to support decisions, but not a decision-maker. For example, as a tool to standardize genome tests.

Action

- *Dr Cree to write up notes about the discussions and circulating them with the committee.*

3. Apologies

- 3.1 Shalomy Sathiyaraj.
Seth Fraser: attending the first half of the meeting.

4. Approval of the agenda

4.1 Members approved the agenda.

Action

- *Secretariat to add the August 2025 agenda to the ACART website.*

5. Declarations of Interests

5.1 No conflicts of interest declared.

6. Minutes of ACART's meeting in June 2025

6.1 Members accepted the minutes.

Action

- *Secretariat to publish the 19 June 2025 minutes on the ACART website.*

7. Actions arising from ACART's June 2025 meeting

7.1 Noted, and referred to later in the projects.

8. Status of ACART's work programme

8.1 Referred to later in the projects.

9. Report on ECART's recent meeting

9.1 Members discussed highlights in ECART's previous minutes of the 11th of April.

- Within-family sperm donation; a case raised interesting issues, as it was approved, particularly when intergenerational matters might need to be managed.
- A member requested clarification on the purpose of reading minutes for ECART. The chair indicated that statutorily, ACART monitors decisions made by ECART, plus, by reading minutes, ACART might see trends arising, and underlying issues that ACART may need to consider.
- There was an in-depth discussion about extended storage.

9.2 Members also discussed ECART's recent meeting, of 8 August. Dr Taiuru had attended ECART and highlighted the following cases.

- Consent being withdrawn. A father had withdrawn consent 2 months prior, and the mother wanted to use the stored sperm. There had been a discussion about whether he might change his mind, and whether the consent can be questioned if the mother was the one not consenting to the use.
- A young female that had eggs frozen due to suffering cancer, and a debate regarding time limit to extract eggs, and consent to use them, based on the

HART Act.

Action

- *Chair to talk to ECART Chair about how ECART provides information to ACART. This could be an overview of data and interesting issues to raise.*

PGT: Presentations by guests

- Before considering pre-implantation genetic testing, at item 12 of the agenda, ACART heard presentations from two speakers about the same topic. ACART's subsequent discussion is presented below in item 12.

Dr Richard King discussed Variants of Uncertain Significance

- Dr King gave an overview of what VUSs are, the uncertainty around them, as well as gaps and issues in assessment and testing.
- Members discussed using the severity of a condition as a criterion for deciding whether to test for a condition. Members agreed that the seriousness of a condition needs to be elaborated on to improve the clarity and intention of the regulations.
- Members also commented on the 25% likelihood of a gene being transmitted as the basis for tests to be EPs and that this threshold needs to be reconsidered.
- Questions from the members included whether there are any specific variants of uncertain significance that are likely to be classified as likely above a certain threshold, and severe that a list could be made of it.

Jeanette MacKenzie presentation about research on attitudes towards PGT

- Ms MacKenzie is the Scientific Director at Fertility Plus, and also part of the Northern Region Fertility Service Advisory Committee.
- Ms MacKenzie presented an overview of their recent work surveying attitudes toward the use of PGT. She explained the method for the work, and results from the survey. The aim of the project was to establish the current opinions across New Zealand on the PGT approval process.

Members asked the following questions

- How many PGT cycles are funded in NZ every year?
- Is this study intended to be presented to a fertility society or conference?
- Whether people that are having IVF are entitled to PGT?
- In the USA, genetic screening is available, where they look for a long list of gene variances. That screening is used for scoring and ranking the embryos; could that method of grading embryos be considered in New Zealand?

Members discussed the following matters

- There was a discussion about whether ACART can give advice to ECART about interpreting current guidelines.
- Members discussed the need to clarify whether ACART can provide advice that is

outside of existing guidelines, and not within the scope of the HART Order.

- Members supported the case-by-case approach where ACART could provide advice to ECART under due consideration.
- Members agreed to have an offline conversation about whether providing case-by-case advice could be a short term solution while ACART works on more general guidelines. The members will be: the ACART Chair, Mr Fraser and Dr Logan.
- The long-term solution would have to meet the conditions of a guideline, meaning it has to meet legislative requirements, and for that, they would have to provide advice to the Minister.

Actions

- *Chair to liaise with relevant people, to see if ACART can provide advice, and what that advice might be.*
- *Update to be provided in the next ACART meeting and then committee will decide whether they want to provide advice.*

10. ANZARD annual monitoring report: for approval

- 10.1 Comments from members: one of the statements about ethnicity could be misleading, especially when using such a small sample size. Members agreed to request an edit.
- 10.2 A member noted the introduction refers to infertility, but that is not the only reason why people use ART — for example same-sex couples. Member suggests being more inclusive.
- 10.3 On the note of potential discrimination, the Chair recommended changes to the gendered language.
- 10.4 Members agreed in principle that the report is almost ready for publication subject to the changes.

Action

- *Members to send suggestions for edits to secretariat, and will be reviewed in the next ACART meeting.*

11. Correspondence

- 11.1 Members discussed the ECART email about intending parents choosing donors.
- 11.2 The other six items were all related to PGT and had been noted.

Action

- *Reply to ECART Chair: acknowledged that there may be some ethical issues involved in this particular case, but, upon reflection, it's a personal issue for the consumers to decide. Therefore, ACART does not have an opinion.*

12. Projects: pre-implantation genetic testing

- 12.1 The Chair noted the presentations from earlier in the meeting and opened with the

following questions: are changes needed to the current system? If yes, what changes need to be made, are we going to recommend changes to the HART Order to make more testing available, or change the guidelines?

- 12.2 Members agreed that changes are needed, and also that there is a need to provide more flexibility, while keeping a degree of oversight, to stop inconsistencies in decision-making.
- 12.3 Members also agreed guidelines need to be made quickly for some existing cases, and also, a change is needed in the HART Order as there will be future cases, given the increase in the use of the technology.
- 12.4 One member suggested the need to widen the range and probability of conditions that could be considered as an established procedure. Another suggestion was to change the HART Order, as the concepts currently described there are quite basic, so there could be a change in the fundamental limits that are in there.
- 12.5 A working group has been formed to develop ideas, identify issues and report back. Members are the ACART Chair, Catherine Ryan, Dr Cree and Dr Murray.

Actions

- *Working group to draft ideas and report back in the next ACART meeting in October.*
- *Secretariat to invite Rare Disorders New Zealand Group to next meeting.*

13. Possible unintended discrimination: oral update

- 13.1 The Chair told members that she and the ECART Chairs are in contact on this matter.

14. Human reproductive research: oral update

- 14.1 This matter is currently with Ministers Reti and Brown, as Minister Costello is consulting them. Waiting on direction from the Minister.

15. Chair's report

- 15.1 A member referred to the Mitochondrial UK study circulated to the secretariat, that described the babies born after the pronuclear transfer work.
- 15.2 The Chair mentioned a study in Canada about Mental Health following surrogacy. This study suggests an increased chance of mental illness following giving birth. This resonated with the volume of surrogacy applications that are presented to ECART, where the surrogates have had a previous history of mental health issues, and then there is an increase of them post-surrogacy. The Chair considers that this is a matter for ACART to consider in the future.

16. Member reports on research papers: for noting

- 16.1 A member noted that Sonja Goedeke had presented, at the NZ Embryologists meeting, on the DIANZ survey results about the disclosure of donor conception.

They will confirm with Sonja if their results could be circulated among ACART.

17. Secretariat report: for noting

- 17.1 The Chair acknowledged the work that the Secretariat has been doing between meetings.

18. Work between meetings: for agreement

- 18.1 The chair summarized the work for the ANZARD report and the working group for PGT that has been created recently.

19. Update on appointments

- 19.1 The Chair commented on the need to have a permanent member from the Office of the Children's Commissioner / Mana Mokopuna, and acknowledged the good work that Dr Logan is doing. The second item to note is that the terms of five members end in mid-2026.

20. Attendance at ECART meetings in 2025

- 10 October, Amanda
- 12 December, Shalomy

The meeting closed at 3 pm.