Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Universities Communiqué

International Indigenous Research Conference (IIRC22)

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For immediate release

A call for universities to stop data-harming Indigenous communities

Universities produce and hold a significant amount of data through research, consultation, teaching and learning activities. These data include historical and contemporary information and knowledge from and about Indigenous individuals, families, communities, epistemologies, languages, cultures, lifeways, and environments.

Indigenous data sovereignty (IDSov) refers to the inherent and inalienable rights of Indigenous Peoples over the collection, ownership, and application of our own data.[1] IDSov is internationally recognised and supported by global human rights instruments,[2] international and domestic codes,[3] standards,[4] principles,[5] guidelines,[6] and models.[7] IDSov recognises the intimate and sacred relationships that Indigenous peoples have with other-than-human kin including mountains, rivers and oceans, lands, and skies.[8]

Universities are largely failing to protect and uphold IDSov. In many instances, universities are gatekeeping Indigenous data in ways that make it difficult for Indigenous peoples to identify, access, use, and benefit from it. Some want to be Indigenous data sovereignty institutions but their actions suggest the opposite. At worst, universities are enabling researchers to continue data practices that are extractive and exploitative. These practices not only contribute to systemic inequities, but also result in data harms to Indigenous communities. This has to change.

We assert that:

- We need Indigenous #DATABACK now: **Indigenous data belong in Indigenous hands.** This includes data yet to be generated and collected, as well as data that universities already hold. IDSov requires the disruption and reconfiguration of current assumptions about ethics, contracting, administrative activities and intellectual property.

- As well as repatriating Indigenous data back to communities, universities also have a responsibility to support Indigenous-controlled data repositories.

- Indigenous data is valuable and precious for Indigenous peoples, representing a tangible and intrinsic treasure. The benefits that flow from Indigenous data must be determined by Indigenous communities. Research involving Indigenous data must be Indigenous governed, and should not proceed unless Indigenous communities have mandated the research.

- Indigenous data requires active protection and care at every stage of its lifecycle, from collection and analysis, to storage and sharing. Universities must commit to community research and data management protocols that enable Indigenous communities to meaningfully exercise authority over Indigenous data. Such protocols require universities to establish and nurture meaningful long-term relationships with Indigenous communities, with their consent, and with the explicit recognition that some Indigenous communities are not interested in building relations with colonial institutions.

- University ethics processes are narrowly focused on individual rights but fail to recognise and protect collective data rights. University ethics processes need to be revised to be consistent with IDSov requirements.

- University ethics requirements place the burden of accountability on individual researchers but universities also need to be accountable to Indigenous communities. This includes responsibilities for the co-development and resourcing of access routes to data and data products such as analyses and analysis tools, academic papers and reports.

This communiqué is an expression of trans-Indigenous data solidarity from Aotearoa to Oceania and Turtle Island. **We call on universities to take action and to address specific issues relating to Indigenous data ownership, control, access, analysis and storage**.

About this communiqué

This communiqué was developed by the Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collab held at the 10th International Indigenous Research Conference (IIRC22), 15-18 November 2022. Hosted by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Centre of Research Excellence, IIRC has a well established reputation as a premiere international Indigenous conference.

The IIRC22 IDSov Collab included: Vanessa Clark (Waikato; Ngāti Tiipa, Ngāti Tahinga, Ngāti Āmaru), Donna Cormack (Kai Tahu, Kāti Mamoe), Petera Hudson (Te Whakatōhea), Jacquie Kidd (Ngāpuhi), Tahu Kukutai (Ngāti Tiipa, Ngāti Māhanga, Ngāti Kinohaku, Te Aupōuri), Kevin Lujan Lee (Chamoru, familian Capili), Ella Newbold (Ngāti Tiipa, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Pāoa), Hannah Rapata (Kāi Tahu), Ernestynne Walsh (Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui), Emma West; Margaret (Nikal) Yun-Pu (Tu (Kabala'an)).

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End notes

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