

Custodianship Charter of the Declaration of Sydney V1.0

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Preamble

The Declaration of Sydney articulates shared ethical principles for the responsible development and use of computational and artificial intelligence-enabled technologies in neurosurgery. To preserve its integrity, independence, and long-term relevance, a clear framework of stewardship is required. This Custodianship Charter establishes the purpose, authority, limits, and processes by which the Declaration is safeguarded over time. It defines a model of ethical governance that is independent, non-commercial, and non-regulatory, grounded in transparency, accountability, and collective responsibility. The charter is intended to ensure that the Declaration remains accessible, coherent, and faithful to its founding intent, while allowing for thoughtful evolution in response to scientific, ethical, legal, and societal change.

1. Purpose of the Custodian Group

1.1. Establishment and Mandate

The Declaration of Sydney Custodian Group (“the Custodian Group”) is hereby established as the independent, non-commercial, and non-institutionally bound steward of the Declaration of Sydney. Its mandate is to preserve and uphold the Declaration’s ethical integrity, coherence, accessibility, and long-term continuity, ensuring it remains a credible reference for the global community.

1.2. Nature of Custodianship

The Custodian Group acts in a capacity of ethical stewardship, not regulatory authority. It does not govern clinical practice or replace legal and professional frameworks. Rather, it safeguards the Declaration’s meaning, intent, and responsible use as a moral and professional point of reference.

1.3. Preservation of Integrity and Intent

The Custodian Group is responsible for preserving the Declaration’s founding intent and conceptual coherence, and for protecting it from fragmentation or distortion. This includes safeguarding against misrepresentation, selective citation, unauthorised modification, and undue capture by commercial, political, or institutional interests.

The Custodian Group serves as the authoritative reference point for the current official version of the Declaration.

1.4. Accessibility and Continuity

The Custodian Group shall ensure that the Declaration remains publicly accessible, freely available, and persistently hosted over the long term. Continuity independent of any single conference, institution, or funding body is a core obligation of custodianship.

1.5. Ethical Governance and Transparency

The Custodian Group shall conduct its work in a manner consistent with the ethical principles articulated in the Declaration. In particular, custodianship should be exercised with transparency, reasoned deliberation, and public accountability, such that the process of stewardship strengthens confidence in the Declaration as an ethically grounded initiative.

1.6. Evolution of the Declaration

The Custodian Group shall maintain the Declaration as a living but stable document. Revisions, where necessary, shall be undertaken with restraint: they should be deliberate, justified by substantive developments, and conducted through consultation rather than unilateral action. Core principles shall be treated as enduring unless compelling ethical justification exists for change.

2. Scope and Limits of Authority

2.1. Scope of Authority

The authority of the Declaration of Sydney Custodian Group is limited strictly to the stewardship of the Declaration itself. Within this scope, the Custodian Group is responsible for maintaining the official text of the Declaration, including its current version and historical record; overseeing proposed amendments, updates, or clarifications in accordance with this charter; and safeguarding the Declaration's ethical coherence, internal consistency, and alignment with its founding principles.

Where ambiguity, misrepresentation, or conflicting uses arise, the Custodian Group may articulate the authoritative interpretation of the Declaration. The Group is also responsible for managing the Declaration's official digital presence and associated explanatory materials, as well as overseeing the processes for endorsement or public affirmation where such processes are established.

The authority of the Custodian Group extends only to these functions and no further.

2.2. Explicit Limits of Authority

The Custodian Group shall not exercise authority beyond ethical stewardship of the Declaration.

In particular, it does not regulate clinical practice, professional conduct, or standards of care; approve, certify, endorse, or prohibit specific technologies, products, algorithms, or vendors; issue binding rules, sanctions, or compliance requirements; or act as a legal, licensing, accreditation, or enforcement body. The Declaration shall not be presented as superseding or replacing national laws, professional guidelines, or regulatory frameworks.

Any activity that would reasonably be construed as regulatory, commercial, or coercive lies outside the Custodian Group's mandate.

2.3. Non-Substitution Principle

Neither the Declaration of Sydney nor the Custodian Group that stewards it shall be presented as a substitute for clinical judgment, professional responsibility, bedside ethical deliberation, institutional governance, or legal and regulatory oversight.

The Declaration is intended to inform, guide, and inspire ethical reflection and responsible practice, not to determine outcomes or dictate decisions.

2.4. Independence and Non-Affiliation

The Custodian Group shall operate independently of any single conference, academic institution, professional society, corporation, funding body, or political authority.

While dialogue, consultation, and collaboration with external stakeholders are encouraged, such engagement shall not compromise the independence, neutrality, or ethical credibility of the Custodian Group.

2.5. Authority Over Representation and Use

The Custodian Group may clarify appropriate citation and use of the Declaration and may publicly address instances of material misrepresentation or misleading attribution. Such authority is interpretive and communicative, exercised to preserve ethical clarity and public understanding. It does not entail enforcement, sanction, or legal action.

3. Composition, Eligibility, and Appointment of Custodians

3.1. Composition of the Custodian Group

The Custodian Group shall consist of a fixed number of members, ordinarily between five (5) and eleven (11) individuals.

The Group shall be multidisciplinary in composition, bringing together expertise from neurosurgery, computational and data sciences, and ethics, philosophy, or law as applied to medicine and technology. In addition, the Custodian Group shall reflect geographic diversity and a balance of perspectives across different healthcare systems and resource settings.

No single discipline, institution, country, or sector shall constitute a majority of the Custodian Group. Custodians serve in their personal capacity and do not represent their employers, institutions, professional societies, or commercial entities.

3.2. Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility for appointment as a custodian is based on relevance of expertise, ethical engagement, and commitment, rather than academic rank, seniority, or formal title.

Individuals may be considered eligible where they demonstrate recognised experience relevant to computational neurosurgery or its ethical, legal, or societal dimensions; a record of professional integrity and reasoned judgment; and a willingness to contribute time and attention to custodial responsibilities. Early- and mid-career individuals may be appointed where they bring appropriate expertise and sustained commitment.

Appointment is contingent upon agreement to adhere to this charter, including expectations regarding transparency and management of conflicts of interest.

3.3. Appointment Process

The initial Custodian Group shall be appointed from among contributors to the Declaration of Sydney, including members of the original Task Force, through a documented consensus process coordinated by the Declaration's organisers.

Subsequent appointments shall be made by the sitting Custodian Group following nomination and approval through collective decision-making. In making appointments, custodians shall explicitly consider disciplinary balance, geographic diversity, and continuity of experience, as well as the evolving needs of the Declaration.

3.4. Nature of Service

Custodians serve on a voluntary and non-remunerated basis.

Service as a custodian entails responsibility rather than status or authority. Custodians are expected to participate in deliberations, contribute to the review of proposed revisions or interpretations, and uphold the independence and ethical integrity of the Declaration in professional and public contexts.

3.5. Limits on Individual Action

Custodianship is exercised collectively. No individual custodian may act on behalf of the Custodian Group or the Declaration unless explicitly authorised by a recorded group decision. Individual custodians shall not issue official interpretations, public statements, endorsements, or representations of the Declaration in a personal or institutional capacity. All formal actions of the Custodian Group must be collective, documented, and consistent with this charter.

4. Terms of Service, Rotation, and Succession

4.1. Duration and Renewal of Service

Custodians are appointed for a fixed term of three (3) years. An individual may be reappointed once, for a maximum of six (6) consecutive years of service.

Following completion of two consecutive terms, a custodian shall not be eligible for reappointment until at least one full term cycle has elapsed. This limitation applies uniformly and is intended to promote renewal, prevent concentration of influence, and preserve the independence and credibility of the Custodian Group.

4.2. Rotation and Continuity

Custodial appointments shall be structured to ensure staggered rotation over time. As a guiding principle, rotation should occur in a manner that avoids simultaneous turnover of a substantial proportion of the Custodian Group and preserves continuity of institutional memory through overlapping terms.

The initial Custodian Group may adopt transitional arrangements to establish a staggered rotation pattern consistent with these principles.

4.3. Vacancies, Resignation, and Succession

A custodian may resign at any time by providing written notice to the Custodian Group.

Where a custodian becomes unable or unwilling to fulfill their responsibilities, due to prolonged inactivity, incapacity, or other substantial reasons, the position may be declared vacant following documented consideration by the Custodian Group. Vacancies shall be filled in accordance with the appointment principles set forth in Section 3.

Appointments made to fill a vacancy may be for the remainder of the vacated term or, where appropriate, for a full new term, provided that overall balance and rotation of the Custodian Group are maintained.

4.4. Principle of Non-Indispensability

No individual custodian is indispensable to the functioning, legitimacy, or continuity of the Custodian Group.

Custodianship is a collective and renewable responsibility, not a permanent appointment. The Custodian Group shall maintain documentation, records, and practices sufficient to ensure continuity of stewardship regardless of changes in individual membership.

5. Leadership Structure and Functional Roles

5.1. Chair or Co-Chairs

The Custodian Group may appoint a Chair or Co-Chairs to support coordination and external interface. The Chair's role is primarily facilitative. Responsibilities may include convening meetings, supporting structured deliberation, and serving as a point of contact for external inquiries where appropriate. The Chair is also responsible for ensuring that custodial processes are conducted in accordance with this charter. The Chair does not exercise unilateral decision-making authority and acts at all times on behalf of, and accountable to, the Custodian Group as a whole.

5.2. Secretary or Coordinator

The Custodian Group may designate a Secretary or Coordinator to support administrative continuity. This role may include maintaining records and minutes, managing version control of the Declaration and associated documents, coordinating consultations or review processes, and supporting the orderly flow of information within the Custodian Group. Where applicable, this role may also oversee logistical aspects of the Declaration's digital presence, including documentation related to endorsements or public access.

5.3. Technical Steward (Optional)

Where needed, the Custodian Group may appoint a Technical Steward to support the Declaration's digital infrastructure. The Technical Steward's role is operational rather than decision-making, and may include oversight of website hosting, data backups, accessibility, and long-term digital preservation. This role is optional and may be fulfilled by a custodian or an external contributor acting under the direction of the Custodian Group.

5.4. Flexibility of Roles

Roles may be combined, rotated, shared, or left vacant depending on the size, needs, and capacity of the Custodian Group at a given time. No role is permanent, and all roles remain subject to collective oversight and review.

The absence of a designated role shall not impede the functioning or legitimacy of the Custodian Group.

6. Decision-Making, Deliberation, and Voting

The Custodian Group shall conduct its deliberations and decisions in a manner that is transparent, reasoned, and proportionate to the significance of the matters under consideration. Decision-making is intended to support ethical stewardship of the Declaration rather than efficiency or expedience alone.

6.1. Collective Deliberation

All substantive decisions concerning the Declaration shall be made through collective deliberation of the Custodian Group. Custodians are expected to engage in good-faith discussion, consider diverse perspectives and ethical implications, and avoid adversarial or purely majoritarian approaches where consensus can reasonably be achieved.

Deliberation should privilege clarity of reasoning and alignment with the Declaration's core principles over speed or convenience. Disagreement, when expressed constructively, is recognised as a legitimate and often valuable part of ethical governance.

6.2. Types of Decisions

For governance purposes, decisions may be understood as falling into three broad categories:

- *Routine matters*, such as administrative actions, website maintenance, or factual clarifications;
- *Interpretive matters*, including guidance on meaning, scope, or appropriate use of the Declaration;
- *Substantive matters*, including revisions, amendments, or changes affecting the principles or structure of the Declaration.

Different thresholds and procedures apply depending on the nature and significance of the decision.

6.3. Decision Thresholds

Unless otherwise specified:

- *Routine matters* may be decided by a simple majority of participating custodians;
- *Interpretive matters* should, where possible, be resolved by consensus, and by majority where consensus cannot reasonably be reached;
- *Substantive matters* require a qualified majority of at least two-thirds of the Custodian Group.

Where participation occurs remotely or asynchronously, reasonable efforts shall be made to ensure that all custodians have a meaningful opportunity to contribute before decisions are finalised.

6.4. Quorum and Validity of Decisions

A quorum for decision-making shall consist of more than half of the current Custodian Group. Decisions taken in the absence of a quorum are provisional and subject to confirmation once a quorum is met, unless exceptional circumstances justify immediate action. In such cases, the justification for proceeding without quorum shall be documented.

6.5. Voting and Record-Keeping

Voting may occur in person, by video conference, or through secure electronic means. Votes shall be recorded and time-stamped as part of the Custodian Group's records. Abstentions may be noted and are not counted as votes cast. Where a conflict of interest exists, the affected custodian shall recuse themselves from deliberation and voting on the relevant matter.

6.6. Minority Views and Dissent

Where substantive disagreement persists, the Custodian Group should seek to document the reasoning underlying different positions where doing so enhances transparency and ethical clarity.

Formal dissent statements are not required. The goal of decision-making is not uniformity, but reasoned alignment with the Declaration's purpose and values.

6.7. Emergency and Time-Sensitive Decisions

In rare circumstances requiring urgent action to protect the integrity or credibility of the Declaration, a provisional decision may be taken by a delegated subset of custodians.

Such decisions shall be narrowly scoped, clearly documented, and reviewed by the full Custodian Group at the earliest opportunity.

7. Conflicts of Interest, Accountability, and Removal

The credibility of the Declaration of Sydney depends on the integrity, independence, and ethical conduct of those entrusted with its custodianship. This section sets out expectations for responsible conduct, transparency, and accountability, and defines how conflicts or serious failures of responsibility are addressed.

7.1. Disclosure and Management of Conflicts of Interest

All custodians shall disclose material conflicts of interest that could reasonably be perceived to influence their judgment in matters relating to the Declaration. Such conflicts may arise from financial relationships with commercial entities developing or deploying AI or neurotechnology, advisory or governance roles in relevant organisations, or personal, professional, or institutional interests that intersect with issues under deliberation.

Disclosure is an ongoing obligation rather than a one-time requirement. Where a conflict arises in relation to a specific matter, the affected custodian shall recuse themselves from deliberation and voting on that issue. The existence of a disclosed conflict does not in itself constitute misconduct, provided it is managed transparently and appropriately.

7.2. Standards of Conduct and Accountability

Custodians are accountable to the Declaration and to the ethical standards it articulates.

In fulfilling their role, custodians are expected to act in good faith and with due care, engage respectfully with differing viewpoints, avoid using their position for personal, institutional,

political, or commercial advantage, and uphold the independence and integrity of the Custodian Group in both public and professional settings.

Failure to meet these standards may give rise to review or corrective action under this charter.

7.3. Grounds for Review or Removal

A custodian may be subject to review or removal where there is substantiated concern regarding persistent failure to fulfill custodial responsibilities, material breach of this charter or the Declaration's principles, failure to disclose or appropriately manage conflicts of interest, or conduct that materially undermines the credibility, independence, or ethical standing of the Declaration. Disagreement, dissent, or minority views expressed in good faith shall not constitute grounds for review or removal.

7.4. Removal Process

Removal of a custodian is an exceptional measure and shall be undertaken with restraint and due process. Where removal is considered, the custodian concerned shall be given notice of the concerns raised and a reasonable opportunity to respond. Deliberation shall occur within the Custodian Group, excluding the individual concerned. Removal requires a qualified majority of at least two-thirds of the remaining custodians, and the rationale for removal shall be documented.

7.5. Proportionality and Transparency

Actions taken under this section shall be proportionate to the seriousness of the concern and guided by the aim of preserving the integrity of custodianship rather than imposing punishment.

While internal records of accountability processes shall be maintained, public disclosure of conflicts or removals shall occur only where necessary to preserve trust in the Declaration and its stewardship.

8. Transparency, Records, and Public Communication

The Custodian Group recognises that the credibility and authority of the Declaration of Sydney depend not only on its substantive content, but also on the transparency with which it is stewarded, documented, and communicated. The purpose of this section is to ensure clarity, continuity, and public trust, while respecting the need for protected space for internal deliberation.

8.1. Records and Institutional Memory

The Custodian Group shall maintain appropriate records of its activities sufficient to preserve institutional memory and accountability over time. Such records should document significant actions affecting the Declaration, including revisions, interpretive guidance, appointments, and other material decisions.

Records are not required to be exhaustive or verbatim. They must, however, be clear, dated, and retained in a secure and accessible manner that does not depend on any single custodian. Responsibility for record-keeping may be delegated, but ultimate accountability rests with the Custodian Group collectively.

8.2. Version Control and Archiving

The Custodian Group is responsible for maintaining clear and transparent version control of the Declaration. Each official version shall be dated, identifiable, and publicly accessible through the Declaration's official digital presence.

Earlier versions shall be preserved and remain available for reference and citation. Where revisions occur, concise explanatory notes should accompany the updated text to describe the nature and rationale of the changes. No version shall be deleted, overwritten, or retrospectively altered.

8.3. Public Transparency

The Custodian Group shall ensure an appropriate baseline level of public transparency consistent with the nature of an ethical declaration. At a minimum, this includes public access to the current version of the Declaration, identification of the Custodian Group and its members, and a high-level description of the custodianship charter.

Transparency is intended to support trust and legitimacy. It does not require disclosure of internal deliberations, correspondence, or individual voting positions unless exceptional circumstances make such disclosure ethically necessary.

8.4. Public Communication and Representation

Public communication on behalf of the Declaration shall be accurate, restrained, and aligned with its ethical purpose. Statements, clarifications, or representations of the Declaration shall be issued only by the Custodian Group collectively, or by individuals explicitly authorised to do so.

Custodians may reference the Declaration in academic, clinical, or professional contexts in their personal capacity, provided such references do not imply formal authority, endorsement, or representation beyond that conferred by this charter.

8.5. Engagement with External Stakeholders

The Custodian Group may engage with journals, conferences, professional societies, policymakers, patient groups, and other stakeholders to promote understanding of the Declaration and its ethical principles.

Such engagement should be dialogical rather than promotional, and must not compromise the independence of the Custodian Group or imply endorsement of specific technologies, products, institutions, or policies. The Declaration is intended to serve as a shared ethical reference, not as an advocacy, certification, or enforcement instrument.

9. Amendment, Review, and Dissolution of the Custodianship Charter

The Custodianship Charter is intended to provide durable guidance for the stewardship of the Declaration of Sydney while remaining capable of thoughtful adaptation over time. This section establishes how the charter itself may be reviewed, amended, or, if necessary, brought to an orderly conclusion.

9.1. Periodic Review

The Custodian Group shall periodically review this charter to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in light of evolving scientific, ethical, legal, and societal contexts. Review need not occur on a fixed schedule. Rather, it should be undertaken when substantive changes in context, scope, or practice warrant reconsideration. Stability and continuity are preferred over frequent modification, and review should be guided by reflection rather than reaction to transient developments.

9.2. Amendment of the Charter

Amendments to this charter may be proposed by any custodian. Proposed amendments shall be accompanied by a clear rationale explaining why the change is necessary and how the proposed modification preserves the charter's core principles. Amendments should be considered with restraint and adopted only where they strengthen the integrity, independence, or practical functioning of custodianship. Adoption of an amendment requires a qualified majority of at least two-thirds of the Custodian Group following documented deliberation.

9.3. Relationship Between the Charter and the Declaration

This Custodianship Charter exists solely to support and protect the Declaration of Sydney. Amendments to the charter shall not be used to indirectly alter the meaning, scope, or ethical commitments of the Declaration itself. Where amendments to the Declaration are contemplated, such changes must follow the procedures established for the Declaration and not be effected through modification of this charter alone.

9.4. Dissolution or Transition of Custodianship

In the unlikely event that the Custodian Group is no longer able to fulfill its mandate, the group shall seek to ensure an orderly transition of custodianship rather than abandonment of the Declaration.

Dissolution or transfer of custodianship may be considered where the Custodian Group becomes persistently non-functional, where independence or credibility can no longer be reasonably maintained, or where a successor custodial arrangement demonstrably better serves the Declaration's long-term integrity.

Any such decision requires a qualified majority of the Custodian Group and must prioritise continuity of public access, preservation of records, and transparency regarding the transition.



9.5. Preservation of the Declaration Beyond Custodianship

Regardless of changes to custodianship arrangements, the Declaration of Sydney shall remain publicly accessible, archived, and citable.

The ethical commitments articulated in the Declaration are not contingent upon the continued existence of any specific custodial structure. Custodianship exists to safeguard these commitments, not to condition their validity or authority.