



# Interior Health Ethics Framework and Decision Making Guide

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EVERY PERSON MATTERS

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# Introduction

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Ethics is the moral foundation for health-care practices and processes. It heightens the importance that ***every person matters***.

Ethics is the discipline that examines who we ought to be and what we ought to do in light of who we say we are. Who we say we are is based on our individual, professional, and societal values. Almost every decision, action, and attitude of ours, personally and professionally, is based on these values. The application of ethics will guide thoughtful decision-making processes grounded in transparency, trust, fairness, equity, and safety.

Interior Health (IH) takes its commitment to fostering a culture of ethical awareness and responsibility seriously. The intent of an ethics framework is to support employees and medical staff in identifying and addressing ethical issues. Integral components in the delivery of ethical health care include cultural competency and cultural sensitivity.

IH recognizes wide disparities and specific population needs and possible need for reprioritization under unprecedented situations will occur. It is important for us to reflect on how our services intersect with the social determinants of health, in order to inform the planning and delivery of effective, ethical and equitable health care for everyone, including those most vulnerable. Under such circumstances, moral reasoning ought to be used to evaluate when and how local considerations can be morally relevant in the application of universal principles in local contexts.

The IH Ethics framework has been developed with this in mind. Firstly, as a guide to assist employees and medical staff in framing discussions and making decisions when faced with challenging ethical issues in any area of health care: clinical, business, health technology, human resources, public health, quality improvement, evaluation, or research. Secondly, the framework exists to re-affirm the professional standards of practice and codes of ethics of employees, medical staff, and contracted services within IH, and our mandated obligations of duty to care.

Intended users are all IH employees and medical staff (e.g., physicians, nurse practitioners, etc.), and volunteer services. The ultimate goal is to embed ethics reflection and action into all aspects of the delivery of health-care services across Interior Health.

The IH Ethics Council provides guidance in interpretation and application of the principles of the IH ethics framework and supports ethical practice in all IH sites, programs, and services. The Council's function is to promote an integrated approach to ethics quality for our people, systems, and processes.

Visit the [Ethics](#) web page for more information.

# IH Vision, Mission, Values and Goals

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Interior Health's vision, mission, values, and goals are the foundations that guide our approach to ethical decision-making.

## Our vision

To set new standards of excellence in the delivery of health services in the Province of British Columbia.

## Our mission

Promote healthy lifestyles and provide needed health services in a timely, caring, and efficient manner, to the highest professional and quality standards.

## Our values

- Quality – We are committed to safety and best practice.
- Integrity – We are authentic and accountable for our actions and words.
- Respect – We are courteous, and treat each other as valued clients and colleagues.
- Trust – We are free to express our ideas.

## Our goals

1. Improve health and wellness
2. Deliver high quality care
3. Ensure sustainable health care by improving innovation, productivity, and efficiency
4. Cultivate an engaged workforce and healthy workplace

Our ethics groundwork aligns with Ministry of Health [Setting Priorities for the BC Health Systems](#).

For more information, visit the [Interior Health Strategic Direction](#) page.

# Fostering a Culture of Ethical Awareness and Responsibility

## Do you have an ethics question?



## What should you do if you have an ethics question?

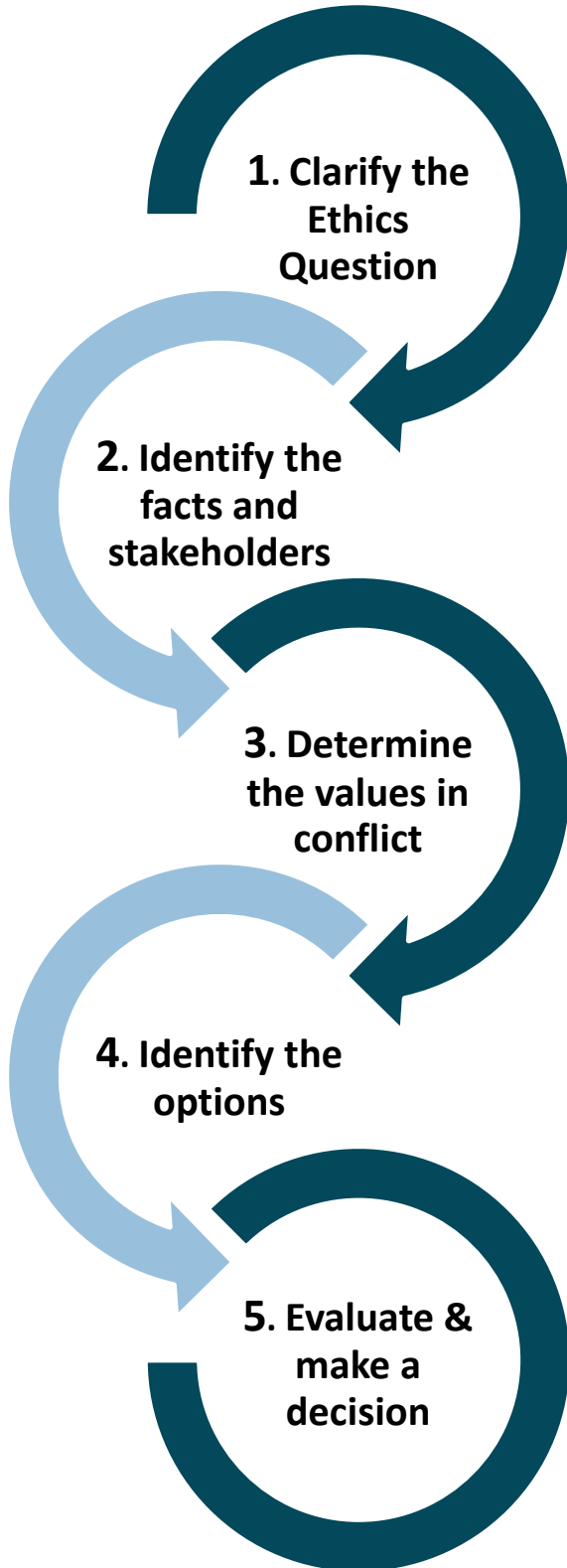
1. Talk with your supervisor or someone else that you trust.
2. Use the ethics decision-making process to work through the issue.
3. Contact the best resource for your type of question from the list below.



# Ethics Decision-making Process

Making ethical decisions can be a complex process.

Use the steps below to work through the issue; remember, ***every person matters***.



**1** Identify the central ethics issue that needs to be addressed.

**2** Collect the relevant facts, and identify what facts you need but don't have.

If it's clinical, collect information about the diagnosis/prognosis, quality of life described in patient's terms, patient's preferences, and contextual features.

Are there organizational policies or guidelines addressing the question? Are there relevant laws?

Which individuals are relevant to this issue and who should be part of the discussion/decision?

Are there any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest?

**3** What are the key underlying values at play here?

What is the central conflict in values?

How do you weigh these values against each other? In other words, in this circumstance, what do you think is most important, and why?

**4** Identify all the potential courses of action, even the ones that don't immediately appear suitable.

Weigh each option against the values that you determined to be of priority in the step above.

**5** Evaluate the choices in the terms of the key values.

Make a decision that is consistent with the identified key values.

# Business Ethics

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IH is committed to fostering integrity in our workplace through ethical business practices.

## Human Resources

[The \*Standards of Conduct for Interior Health Employees\*](#) outline the values, principles, and standards of conduct that guide our actions and interactions. With these standards we maintain and enhance the public's trust and confidence, and ensure superior service to those we serve.

We have a number of duties including but not limited to:

- a duty of loyalty to IH as our employer
- a duty to maintain strictest standards of confidentiality
- a duty to ensure caution when commenting on public issues so as not to jeopardize the perception of impartiality in the performance of our duties
- a duty to provide service to the public in a manner that is courteous, professional, equitable, efficient, effective and responsive to the expectations of a diverse public
- a duty to arrange private affairs in a manner that will prevent conflicts of interest or perceptions of such conflicts from arising
- a duty to ensure our conduct, actions, and demeanor meet legislated standards (e.g., Human Rights Code) as well as meet acceptable social standards

For more information, visit the [Employee Relations](#) web page.

For more information for managers, consult with your [HR Business Partner](#).

## Business Support—advisors of ethical business practices for managers

IH managers have access to Business Support contacts who provide an ethical lens to business decisions. Many of the Business Support staff are Chartered Professional Accountants (CPAs) who are trained in business ethics, maintaining high levels of professional integrity in accordance with professional standards. Business Support is available to managers to provide expert advice on business decisions.

For more information for managers, connect with your [Business Support contact](#).

## Internal Audit

Internal Audit assists the Board of Directors and senior leadership to achieve IH strategies and goals by providing independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to add value and improve operations across the health authority. Internal Auditors review business and clinical systems, report on their effectiveness and appropriateness and provide recommendations and value-added enhancements.

In the performance of their work, Internal Auditors are required to promote an ethical culture. The Internal Audit Code of Ethics includes two essential components which apply to all internal

audit professionals: Principles and the Rules of Conduct. Auditors are expected to uphold and apply the Principles of Integrity, Objectivity, Confidentiality and Competency. Rules of Conduct for each Principle guide the ethical conduct of the Internal Auditors. Internal Audit is available to provide advice on ethical matters.

For more information visit the [Internal Audit](#) web page.

## Clinical Ethics

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The sphere of clinical ethics is focused on promoting the provision of quality health care with primary consideration to the needs, values, and preferences of the person receiving care.

Clinical ethics deliberation can offer guideposts for identifying and addressing ethical questions; the rationale behind identified questions; and finally, at times may also identify other questions that require examination for congruency with professional regulations, legislative mandates or policies. The value in such deliberation is two- fold: Improved decision making – by whom and with whom; and, improved acceptance and transparency of the decision-making process.

Core principles promote intentional decision making and conduct in clinical practice and guide the process of a clinical ethics review:

- Autonomy: Respect ‘this’ person’s decision and choices
- Beneficence: Commitment to do good and promote well-being
- Non-maleficence: Do no harm
- Justice: Act justly within the law and do not discriminate

Good therapeutic relationships are centred on the needs and informed choices of the person receiving care. Observance of these core principles promote respect, mutual giving and receiving, and help to resolve conflict about the goals and means of care when they arise.

If a clinical review should be considered, or an ethical question has not been addressed, discuss it with your manager first. They may contact the Chair of the Geographic Clinical Ethics Committee to discuss the situation. The review may include a meeting with you, the inter-professional team involved, and the Clinical Ethics Committee.

Clinical Ethics Committees provide:

- Confidential review and support to patients, families, and health-care providers when facing difficult ethical issues in patient care
- Education to enhance awareness and understanding of clinical ethics issues in health care
- Policy advice and suggestions in areas of clinical ethics concern
- Participation in debrief sessions to review patient care issues for learning purposes and reflection on ethical decisions made

For more information, visit the [Clinical Ethics](#) web page.



## Health Technology Ethics

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Ethical considerations for accountability and transparency are a significant component to the review and discussions regarding the implications of any new medical (non-drug) technology.

Health Technology Assessment is a process that supports decisions involving the implementation of new and proven clinical technologies, therapies, procedures, and techniques. This process also supports the disinvestment of obsolete technologies across IH. Based upon the Provincial Health Technology Review Committee, the IH Health Technology Assessment Committee uses multiple standardized criteria to evaluate health technologies to determine if a new technology should be adopted or if an obsolete technology should be disinvested.

These include:

- health and non-health benefits to clients
- severity of the condition that clients experience that the technology will address
- environmental impact of the technology
- cost and evidence related to the effectiveness of the technology

Additional factors considered include the technology's contribution to illness or injury prevention and the impact on marginalized or disadvantaged patients.

For more information, visit the [Health Technology Assessment](#) web page.

## Project Ethics

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All projects involving people and their private information require ethics review using the ARECCI© process to:

- Ensure an ethical lens has been applied throughout all phases of project development.
- Ensure a systematic approach to reviewing ethical risk to project participants and the organization.
- Establish accountabilities for managing ethical risk associated with projects within the risk tolerance of the project team and the organization.
- Continually improve the quality of health service delivery in IH by fostering the ethical development of projects involving people and their private information.

Quality Improvement (QI) is part of a culture where quality and patient safety is everyone's responsibility every day to achieve the best possible outcomes through patient-centered care, teamwork, innovation, and learning. QI consists of systematic and continuous actions that lead to measurable improvement in health-care services and the health status of targeted patient groups.

The IH Evaluation Team conducts and supports evaluations with IH projects and programs to determine what is working well and what needs improvement, based on carefully selected criteria. The evidence generated from the evaluations can be used to create recommendations

for improvement, informed decisions, accountability, and continued learning.

The *ARECCI Ethics Guidelines for Quality Improvement*© and *ARECCI Ethics Screening Tool*© provide a consistent framework that promotes the ethical development of all non-research projects, including quality improvement and evaluation projects involving people and their information.

Ethics must be considered in all stages of a project and using the tools will guide project teams in managing the ethical concerns identified during project development. The use of an ethical review framework supports our IH values and demonstrates our commitment to providing a validated process that is designed to protect the people we serve, our employees and medical staff, and the organization.

For more information, visit the [Quality and Patient Safety](#), [Project Ethics \(ARECCI\)](#), [Evaluation and Information Privacy](#) web pages.

## Public Health Ethics

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Public health ethics are concerned with the collective interests of a group (e.g. a population or community) for the common good. Many public health activities are not carried out independently; there is often a strong relationship with municipal, provincial or federal government influence. Ethics issues may occur in any of the core public health functions: health protection, disease and injury prevention, health promotion, health assessment and surveillance, and emergency preparedness and response.

The following principles may be useful for reflection and analysis of ethical issues in public health practice:

- *Harm Principle*: outlines that public health action is reasonable and justifiable to restrict the freedom of an individual or group against their will to prevent harm to others.
- *Least Restrictive or Coercive Means*: supports that the full power and authority of public health be reserved for exceptional scenarios and that more coercive approaches only be used when less coercive strategies have failed.
- *Reciprocity Principle*: outlines the obligation of a public health department to assist individuals to comply with public health action as compliance may impose a burden on persons.
- *Transparency Principle*: embodies that the decision-making process is clear, involves stakeholders, and is free of interference or coercion.

The precautionary principle is also a notable concept to consider in providing guidance with public health ethics issues. The precautionary principle applied to public health decision-making means that persuasive evidence does not have to exist before measures may be taken to protect populations from harm.

For more information, visit the [Public Health Ethics](#) web page.

## Research Ethics

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Research is “an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation” (TCPS2 (2014) p.209). Research creates generalizable knowledge with broad applications and contributes to existing literature on the topic of inquiry.

The Interior Health Research (IH) Ethics Board (REB) provides ethical review of all research involving human participants that involves IH facilities, programs, or other IH resources; is conducted by IH employees, medical staff, or students; or includes as participants IH employees, medical staff, patients and/or their information.

The REB is guided by the ethical principles of Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice to ensure that the well-being of research participants is protected and that the highest ethical standards are maintained throughout the research project. By doing so the REB protects not only the participants but also the researcher and the institution.

The REB adheres to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, the accepted Canadian policy standard for human research, as well as relevant legislation as outlined by Health Canada, the US Code of Federal Regulations, and the province of BC.

For more information, visit the [Research Ethics Board](#) web page.

If you have a question or ethical concern about research in IH, contact the Research Ethics Office at 250-870-4602 or at [researchethics@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:researchethics@interiorhealth.ca).

## Safe Reporting

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IH is committed to minimizing opportunities for theft, fraud, corruption and non-compliant activities through established internal controls that are regularly tested; as well as through the Safe Reporting program.

Safe Reporting offers employees, volunteers, contractors, medical staff and the public a mechanism to confidentially report known or suspected cases of wrongdoing, including actions that pose a danger or risk to patients, clients, public health or the environment or undermine IH’s quality of care and services. Safe Reporting offers protection from reprisal to those Individuals connected to Interior Health provided the concern or ethical matter was reported in good faith. This program detects and deters improper activity within IH in order to positively impact the reputation and effectiveness of the organization and enhance the workplace.

For more information, visit [Safe Reporting](#) or call toll free 1-855-432-7233.

## For more information

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More information can be found on the [Ethics](#) web page.

To contact members of the IH Ethics Council, click [here](#).