

Background information

- Alberta has six Research Ethics Boards (REBs) designated under the Health Information Act to review and approve health research:
 1. Alberta Cancer Research Ethics Committee (Alberta Health Services);
 2. Community Research Ethics Board of Alberta (CREBA) (Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions);
 3. Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (CHREB) (University of Calgary);
 4. Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) (University of Alberta, Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health – Edmonton region);
 5. Human Subject Research Committee (University of Lethbridge); and
 6. Research Ethics Review Committee (College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta).
- Each REB is housed within a sponsoring institution/organization. REBs are independent in their decision making and are accountable to the highest level in the institutional body that established them for the process of research ethics review. The institutions are accountable for the research conducted under their jurisdiction.
- In July of 2009, the Council of Chairs agreed to increase the “alignment” among the six health REBs in the province.
- Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions (funded by the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Endowment Fund) was approached to provide secretariat services and to facilitate the project.
- The initiative reflects the changing dynamic of health research which now includes multi-institutional, multi-disciplinary projects involving multiple Research Ethics Boards (REB)
- As a step in the alignment process, the Council of Chairs examined the potential for the use of a common electronic administrative platform to support ethics review processes.
- The Council of Chairs also agreed on the need to establish a strategic direction for health research ethics review in the province.
- The result was a strategic plan completed in March 2010 for moving forward with alignment of health research ethics review in Alberta.
- A joint communique from Executive Sponsors announced ethics harmonization in June 2010

- On February 13, 2011 the *Research Ethics Reciprocity Agreement* was signed by six organizations.
- Once the Agreement is implemented, a harmonized health research ethics review system is expected to encourage investment in Alberta.
- Short term implementation goals: common consent form guidelines; common application form; reciprocity; and a process for dealing with multi-site health research ethics review in early 2011.
- Interest in harmonizing health research ethics review processes in Canada is widespread. Harmonization initiatives are also underway in BC, Saskatchewan and Ontario.