
ALBERTA RESEARCH ETHICS HARMONIZATION: EXECUTIVE SPONSORS JOINT COMMUNIQUE

FROM

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BACKGROUND

Alberta has six Research Ethics Boards (REBs) designated under the Health Information Act to review and approve health research. These boards are:

- Alberta Cancer Research Ethics Committee (Alberta Health Services);
- Research Ethics Review Committee (College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta);
- University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) Panel A Biomedical Research and Panel B Health Research (University of Alberta);
- Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (University of Calgary);
- Human Subject Research Committee (University of Lethbridge); and
- Community Research Ethics Board of Alberta (CREBA) (Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions)

The autonomous nature of the REBs' decision-making is supported by institutional leadership.

The Council of Chairs of the Health Research Ethics Boards of Alberta provides a forum for discussion and for leadership to address issues affecting health research ethics in the province. In July 2009, the Chairs agreed to increase alignment among the six health REBs. In consultation with stakeholders, and in accordance with similar initiatives across Canada, the Council recognized that the current review process could be improved by a more aligned and coordinated provincial research ethics review system that would improve efficiencies and facilitate additional research investment.

The Council developed a strategic plan for moving to an effective alignment framework (see *A Strategy for Moving Forward Alberta's Health Research Ethics Boards, Final Report, March 2010*), and has begun initiatives to support its implementation.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

On June 14th, 2010, executive leaders (cited above) of the institutions and organizations responsible for health research ethics in Alberta met to review progress and discuss next steps, and jointly state that:

We applaud the work of the Council of Chairs and endorse the plan developed by the Council to increase cooperation and alignment among Alberta's Research Ethics Boards.

The plan will increase harmonization of ethics review processes. We recognize the benefits to be gained through harmonization, including:

- *Retaining the high standards of protection for people involved as research subjects*
- *Enhancing transparent and user-friendly processes for all applicants*
- *Strengthening communication and coordination across REBs*
- *Increasing efficiency of review processes*
- *Improving system effectiveness for health research ethics*

We confirm the commitment of our institutions to work together to achieve the 2010 goals of the Strategy for Moving Forward, including:

- *Common or compatible platforms for the management and administration of REB processes*
- *Commensurate application forms and coordinated processes appropriate to the kind of research proposed*
- *Common informed consent templates, accommodating various study types*
- *Reciprocity agreements in place among the institutions*

Any and all changes will comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Protection of Human Subjects, will retain adherence to institutional policies and will not impede the independence of the six boards.

Work on all areas of coordination and alignment will proceed concurrently, with the goal of a harmonized system in Alberta by the end of 2010.

We acknowledge and thank the Council of Chairs for the work done to date on the alignment plan and multiple related initiatives.