

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Public Health Ontario's Centralized Ethics Review Process

Public Health Ontario's (PHO) Ethics Services offers a TCPS2 ([Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#)) compliant, centralized ethics review process that supports a single ethics review for projects involving more than one public health unit (PHU). This single review can be done by PHO's ethics review board (ERB), on behalf of multiple PHUs participating in the same project. A centralized ethics review process can be *efficient* without compromising *quality* by:

- avoiding unnecessary duplication from multiple independent ethics reviews; and
- enabling collaborative partnerships among PHUs.

What is a multi-jurisdictional project?

Public health evidence generating initiatives often involve collaborative partnerships among public health professionals from multiple institutions (e.g. PHUs, universities, hospitals, community agencies). A multi-jurisdictional project includes, but is not limited to, the following situations:

- a single project being conducted by a team of public health professionals affiliated with different institutions;
- various phases or parts of a project conducted by different institutions, for e.g., recruitment and data collection occurs at one institution and data analysis occurs at a different institution;
- several projects conducted independently by public health professionals affiliated with different institutions, with data combined at some point to form a single project.

Each collaborating institution is responsible for the ethical acceptability and conduct of the project undertaken within its jurisdiction (e.g., PHU's program clients or data) or by its staff (e.g., PHU staff recruit participants and collect data). As a result, multi-jurisdictional projects often involve multiple independent ethics reviews from different institutions collaborating on a single project.

How does PHO's centralized ethics review process work?

- Project teams appoint a lead applicant from one PHU to lead the project and ethics review process.
- Collaborating PHUs that require ethics review can appoint PHO's ERB as their board of record (BOR) for that particular project. Only PHUs on the project can appoint PHO's ERB.
- A single [PHO Ethics Review Board Application Form](#) is submitted to PHO's ERB by the lead applicant. The ethics application includes any relevant information specific to each participating

institution (e.g., details about sample, recruitment strategies, data collection, data analysis etc.) that might have an impact on the review.

- PHO's ERB conducts a single review on behalf of the PHUs that appoint PHO's ERB as their board of record.

What is a board of record (BOR) agreement between a PHU and PHO?

The BOR agreement serves as an overarching agreement to be signed once, and applies to projects where the PHU appoints PHO as their board of record. The purpose of the agreement is to document the roles and responsibilities of PHO, the PHO ERB and the PHU. Use of PHO's ERB for any given project is completely optional. Conditions of the agreement apply only to projects that a PHU chooses to submit to PHO's ERB.

For multi-jurisdictional projects, PHUs with an existing BOR agreement are encouraged to appoint PHO's ERB for that project to reduce the number of independent ethics reviews across participating PHUs.

If your PHU does not have an existing PHO ERB agreement and signing on, contact ethics@oahpp.ca.

What if my PHU already has access to a TCPS 2 compliant ethics board?

PHUs that have access to a TCPS 2 compliant ethics board, either internal (i.e., within your PHU) or external (e.g., through a University) are free to use either that board or PHO's ERB when involved in a multi-jurisdictional project. If a PHU decides to use an external board for ethics review, a letter of approval may be required by PHO's ERB if part of the project is being conducted by the PHU (e.g. participant recruitment, data collection and analysis).

PHUs with access to an internal TCPS2 compliant board can only use PHO's ERB to review multi-jurisdictional projects involving PHUs.

What if my PHU doesn't require ethics review for a multi-jurisdictional project?

It is the PHU's responsibility to determine whether a project requires ethics review. If a PHU decides that a project does not require ethics review, then a BOR agreement with PHO is not required. If part of the project is being conducted by the PHU (e.g. participant recruitment, data collection and analysis), PHO's ERB may require a letter of support authorizing the PHU's role on the project.

What does my PHU have to submit to PHO's ERB for a multi-jurisdictional project?

LEAD APPLICANT AND PHU

The lead applicant and PHU is responsible for submitting the ethics review board application and necessary approvals from collaborating institutions (both PHUs and non PHU sites). Click here for a step by step guide on [how to prepare and submit a new ethics review board application](#).

Lead applicants should determine what institutional approvals are required from each collaborating institution prior to starting the project. Projects will not be approved until all necessary documents have been submitted to PHO.

COLLABORATING PHU

PHUs that appoint PHO’s ERB as their BOR are required to submit a **Request to Appoint Form** with the ethics review board submission.

If part of the project is being conducted by a PHU that has not appointed PHO’s ERB for that project, the ERB may require a type of institutional approval or authorization depending on the nature and degree of their involvement on the project. Table 1. provides an overview of the different types of institutional approvals according to a PHU’s BOR agreement status and institutional ethics review requirements.

Table 1: Type of institutional approvals according to BOR agreement status and institutional ethics review requirements

| PHO BOR agreement status and institutional ethics review requirements | Type of institutional approval or authorization |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Existing PHO BOR agreement and will appoint PHO’s ERB for ethics review (this includes PHUs that have access to an existing TCPS 2 board) | Request to Appoint Form <i>(required with submission of application)</i> |
| No PHO BOR agreement, and has/will obtain ethics review and approval from an external TCPS 2 compliant ethics board | Letter of approval from external ethics board <i>(if required by PHO’s ERB)</i> |
| No PHO BOR agreement and doesn’t require ethics review | Letter of support <i>(if required by PHO’s ERB)</i> |

If you are interested in learning more about this service, please contact Charoula Tsamis, PHO’s Research Ethics Officer at 647-260-7292 or ethics@oahpp.ca.



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