



PHSA Ethical Practice Guide

PHSA Ethics Service
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Introduction

The PHSA Ethical Practice Guide offers an overview of values and approaches that support ethical practice across our organization. The Ethical Resolution Process included in this guideline provides a standardized approach to working through ethically challenging situations.

The PHSA Ethics Service is accountable for developing, disseminating and revising this guideline, with input from patients/clients, families and teams across PHSA. In our [annual report](#), we document trends in ethics issues and how we apply this information in supporting quality improvement, for example, through education and policy.

PHSA Culture of Ethics

PHSA is committed to supporting a Culture of Ethics in our delivery of healthcare. A Culture of Ethics requires that values be made explicit in the design and delivery of healthcare. The values, perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of individuals, families and communities we serve are foundational to the care we provide.

Everyone at PHSA has a role to play in ensuring care is provided ethically. All members of the PHSA community—including patients/clients, families, staff, volunteers and leaders—are encouraged to access this guideline and other PHSA Ethics Service resources. The Ethics Service provides formal educational opportunities to enhance ethics-related skills and is available for consultation on clinical, organizational (e.g., resource allocation) and policy issues.

We acknowledge that in Canada, healthcare ethics has traditionally been limited to Western ways of thinking and that bioethics as a field has contributed to ongoing oppression within healthcare. We further acknowledge that previous ethical decision-making frameworks, which centered Western biomedical ethics principles, were not adequate for providing culturally safer care across PHSA.

We explicitly recognize that Canadian health care systems perpetuate colonial violence, Indigenous-specific racism, structural barriers, and social inequities that affect First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and communities. As our culture of ethics evolves, we commit to anti-racist practices, addressing systemic inequities and discrimination, decolonizing our systems of care, integrating Indigenous worldviews into our work, and upholding Indigenous rights. (1,2,3)

Using sound approaches to ethical practice across PHSA is essential for reaching ethically appropriate and publically accountable resolutions to complex issues. We support robust ethical analysis through careful application of relational ethics, narrative ethics, intersectional bioethics, decolonizing approaches, and principles of biomedical ethics, as well as integration of Indigenous, western and other worldviews. We promote anti-racism, cultural safety and humility, justice, equity, diversity and inclusion to support positive healthcare experiences.

Indigenous Rights and Worldviews

Our intention is to continually evolve our approaches to ethical practice at PHSA, and to do this in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and communities. We commit to working alongside PHSA Indigenous Health, as we continually revise this living and breathing guideline to support cultural safety, cultural humility, decolonization and eradication of Indigenous-specific racism.

We are committed to upholding Indigenous-specific rights for BC First Nations, other First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and communities. In our work we seek to support the rights outlined in the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People* (UNDRIP), the *B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA), the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report: Calls to Action*, and the *In Plain Sight Report*. (4,5,6,7) These include rights to: the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; access healthcare without discrimination; be actively involved in developing health programs; and access traditional medicines and maintain traditional health practices.

Supporting Indigenous rights requires that we embrace more than one worldview, that we understand western ideology may be misguided or incorrect, and that we recognize when an Indigenous worldview should be made paramount over a western worldview. This requires exploration and recognition of conscious and unconscious biases that can give undue weight to western worldviews, as well as active engagement with knowledge keepers who can support our understanding of Indigenous worldviews.

Indigenous worldviews and Wise Practices must become integral parts of supporting holistic health and wellbeing within our systems of care. This includes focusing on living well, not just alleviating illness, and recognizing the value of Indigenous healing practices. Organizational practices should support taking care of the land and people for future generations.

The PHSA Ethics Service is committed to:

- Anti-racism, cultural safety and cultural humility;
- Purposeful, ongoing and inclusive partnerships and effective communication with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and communities;
- Creating environments for truth telling and reconciliation in culturally safe ways;
- Delivering inclusive and culturally safe programs and services; and
- Establishing transparent, respectful and reciprocally accountable relationships to support culturally safe, trauma-informed care.

As we shift our healthcare ethics practices to better support cultural safety and humility, relational approaches both guide us and inspire us to do better. The work of decolonizing healthcare ethics practices, eradicating Indigenous-specific racism, and supporting cultural safety and humility are every day issues, requiring our everyday attention.

PHSA Ethics Service

The PHSA Ethics Service strives to:

- Foster a culture of ethics within PHSA;
- Make values explicit in healthcare service delivery and decision-making processes; and
- Support anti-racism, cultural safety and humility, justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in healthcare.

We do this through:

- Providing confidential support to people seeking and accessing services, families, health care providers and professionals, administrators and leaders;
- Ensuring decisions are made through open, transparent, inclusive and fair processes;
- Giving recommendations to support ethical processes surrounding clinical, organizational and policy issues; and
- Providing education and resources to support ethical practice.

The Ethics Service receives requests for support from people seeking and accessing care, families, health care providers and professionals, administrators and leaders. The guidance we provide and the tools we use are tailored to each request. Requests may involve clinical care, public health, organizational issues, policy or education.

- **Clinical and public health ethics:** We provide confidential support to people seeking and accessing care, families and healthcare providers and professionals. Clinical ethics consultations focus on healthcare services delivered to individuals and families. Public health ethics consultations address healthcare services delivered to populations and communities.
- **Organizational ethics:** We guide ethical practices at the organizational level, for example, supporting resource allocation decision-making and addressing bias in healthcare. Organizational ethics consultations focus on helping healthcare systems operate ethically.
- **Policy:** We partner with healthcare teams to develop and review policies and guidelines. These consultations involve development and review of policies and guidelines that shape clinical practice, public health services and organizational operations.
- **Education:** We foster strong ethical practices throughout PHSA through education and resources. We build ethics capacity within PHSA through collaborative practices, ethical practice tools and both in-person and online education.

Values and Ethics

Values

Values shape our attitudes, behaviours, actions and relationships. Personal values are an individual's deeply held beliefs about what is important and what is right. Collective values are core beliefs shared by members of a group, organization, culture or society. Our individual and collective values may evolve over time. At the PHSA Ethics Service, we are committed to drawing upon Indigenous, western and other worldviews and values.

At PHSA, our organizational values are to respect people, be compassionate, dare to innovate, cultivate partnerships, and serve with purpose. These values are foundational to organizational (e.g., business, resource allocation), clinical, and research ethics practices across PHSA. In addition to these overarching ideals, the following values are central to healthcare ethics.



Care

Care involves demonstrating kindness, concern, attention and empathy in providing what is necessary for health and wellbeing. Wellbeing is a state of holistic health, comfort and life satisfaction. It is our duty as health professionals to engage with individuals, families and communities in caring relationships and to find out what care and wellbeing means to them.

Respect

Respect refers to our regard for the feelings, wishes, rights and traditions of others. We demonstrate respect through relational and narrative practices, and by honouring privacy, autonomy, self-determination, worldviews and rights to make decisions about health and healthcare. We work to build trust in healthcare systems and to promote respect by engaging in best practices, Wise Practices, relational practices, trauma-informed care, harm-reduction approaches and cultural inclusion.

Humility

Humility refers to acknowledging our own limitations and having a willingness to learn from others. We work in partnership and seek consensus wherever possible. We remain modest about our role in the healthcare journeys of those we serve and recognize the dignity and wisdom of patients, families, communities and Indigenous and other non-western worldviews.

Equity

Equity in healthcare requires ensuring every person has opportunities to attain the highest possible standard of health. We commit to addressing health disparities rooted in bias related to Indigeneity, race, ethnicity, citizenship, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, class, education, religion, culture and other factors. We promote health equity by working to ensure all people have timely access to quality care, and ultimately, fair and just opportunities to reach their fullest health potential.

Stewardship

Stewardship involves the careful and responsible management and allocation of healthcare resources to ensure sustainability. This includes environmental stewardship, accounting for the impacts of healthcare systems on the wellbeing of the environment and those most affected by climate change and other environmental issues. Drawing on Indigenous worldviews, emphasis should be placed on taking care of land and people for future generations.

Justice

Justice means treating people fairly and equitably, without favoritism or discrimination. It requires us to understand the narratives of, and act in solidarity with, those being oppressed and marginalized within society and systems of care. In upholding justice, we respect human rights and diverse worldviews. We meaningfully engage with stakeholders, are transparent in our processes, and demonstrate public accountability.

Ethics

Ethics involves systematically determining how to act in ways that are consistent with values. Ethics requires us to think critically about our values, how we make decisions, and how our actions affect others.

We encounter ethical issues on a daily basis in healthcare. You may have an ethical issue if:

- You are asking, what is the right thing to do?
- You are asking, what is most important?
- You are asking, what is the right way to be in a relationship with others?
- There is disagreement about the right thing to do or the right way to act.
- None of the available options seems acceptable.

The PHSA Ethics Service is available to support you in working through ethical issues. The following are ethical themes that are common in ethics consultations at PHSA.



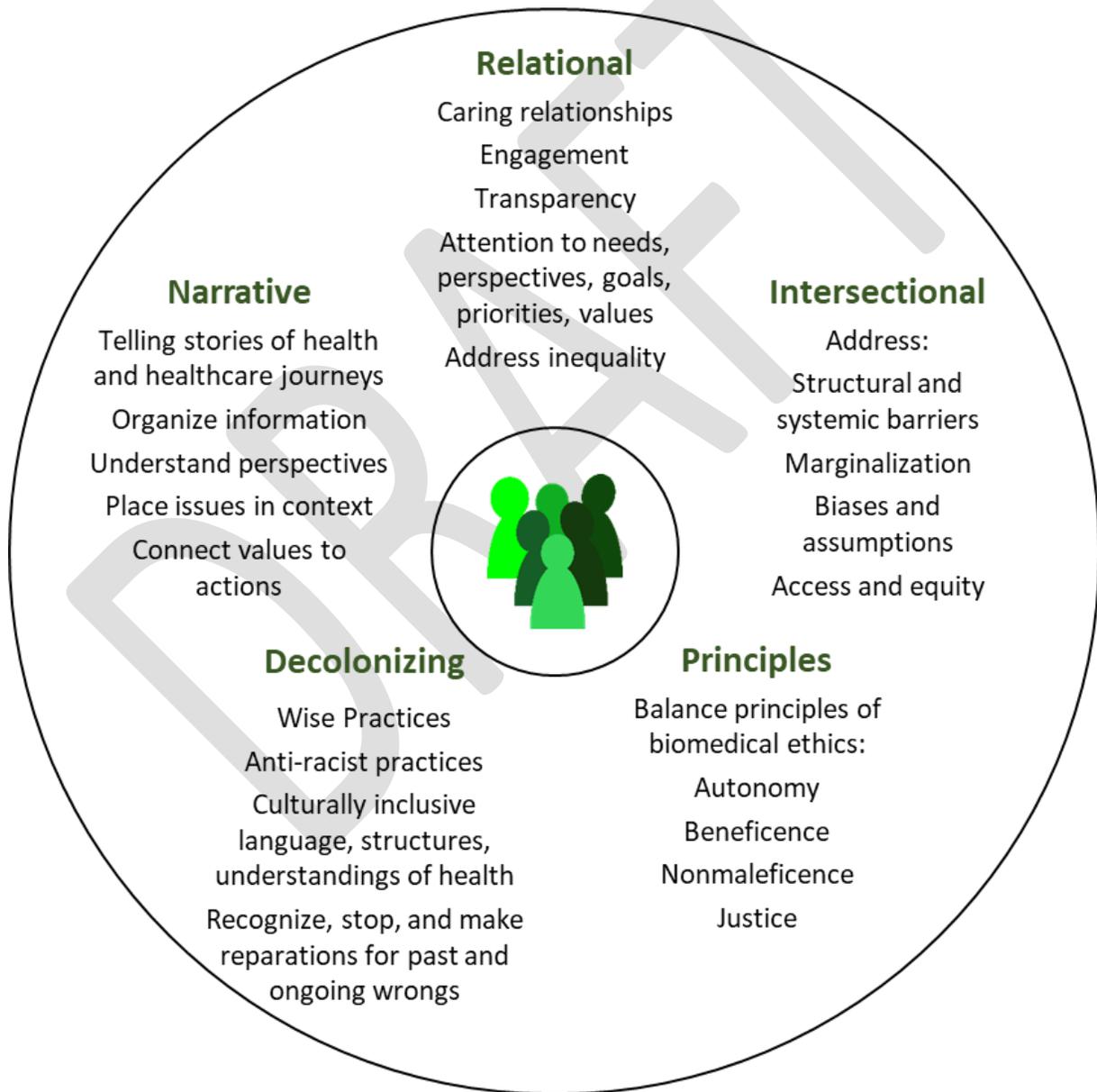
Ethical issues may arise when we are working in clinical care and in public health. They can also emerge in organizational and policy work. The Ethics Service provides support in these areas.

The values and approaches presented in this document are consistent with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (8) and can be applied in supporting best practices in health research. Specific questions about [research ethics at PHSA](#) should be directed to the appropriate Research Ethics Board.

Approaches to Healthcare Ethics

At the PHSA Ethics Service, we recognize that no single ethical approach can be applied to resolve all issues in healthcare. Therefore, we draw on multiple approaches and tools in supporting our Culture of Ethics.

The primary stakeholders—patient, client, family, community—are kept at the centre. We apply relational, narrative, intersectional, decolonizing and principles approaches in the design and delivery of care and in the identification, analysis and resolution of ethical issues.



Relational Ethics

Relational ethics focuses on the ways in which we act and respond within interpersonal relationships, with understanding that people are dependent on one another and should not be viewed in isolation. Caring relationships should be fostered in every healthcare interaction, through respectful engagement, transparency, and attending to the needs, perspectives and experiences of those engaged in care. Care ethics also describes our collective, social responsibility to provide care with humility and in ways that address inequality. (9,10)

Narrative Ethics

Narrative ethics recognizes the importance and power of story-telling about health and healthcare journeys when engaging in conversations about ethics. These narratives can organize information, connect values to actions, and reveal potential resolutions to ethical challenges. A narrative approach may involve asking people to reflect on how their healthcare journey has unfolded and then explore the best path forward based on the information, perspectives, context and values revealed through the telling of the story. (11,12)

Intersectional Bioethics

Intersectional bioethics focuses on the unique forms of oppression and the structural and systemic barriers experienced by those with marginalized and intersecting identities. An intersectional approach to bioethics involves self-reflection, examining biases, challenging assumptions and understanding how healthcare equity, access and interactions are shaped by institutions, policies, and social identities. (13,14)

Decolonizing Approaches

Decolonizing approaches to healthcare involve actively decentering western biomedical understandings and supporting Wise Practices, defined as inclusion of diverse Indigenous knowledge and health practices that contribute to sustainable and equitable conditions. This requires placing value on inclusive language, structures and understandings of the body, health and wellness. Decolonizing approaches involve recognizing historic and ongoing harms caused by deliberate separation of people from land, family and culture, taking action to stop these practices, and make reparations for past wrongs. (15,16)

Principles of Biomedical Ethics

Principles of biomedical ethics provide a normative moral framework for analyzing ethical issues. Principles frequently applied in clinical ethics in North America include respect for autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice. (17,18) In clinical scenarios, a balance is sought among self-determination of individuals (autonomy), providing beneficial care (beneficence), minimizing harms (nonmaleficence), and fairness (justice). Public health ethics focuses largely on promoting the health of populations and reducing inequities, using a systematic approach to clarify, prioritize, and justify possible courses of action. (19,20)

Ethical Resolution Process

When facing an ethical issue in healthcare, determining what should be done can be challenging. There may not be one 'right' choice; however, through ethical analysis, some options usually emerge as better than others.

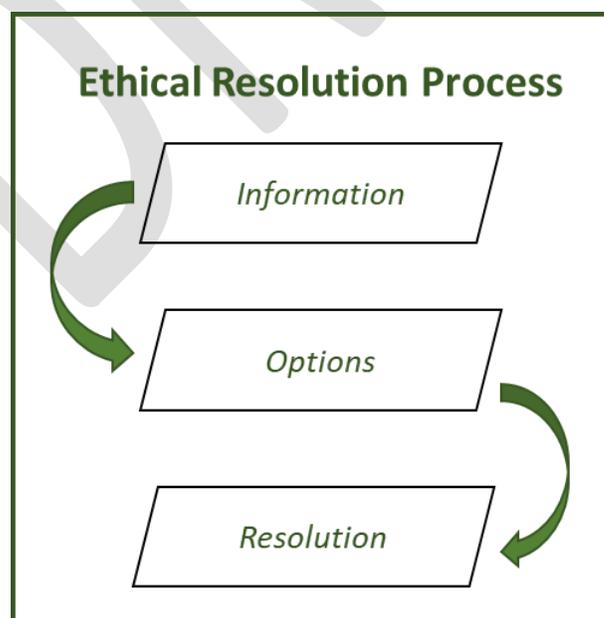
The PHSA Ethical Resolution Process is designed to support teams to:

- Centre patients, clients, families and communities in care;
- Draw on appropriate ethical approaches for the issue at hand;
- Understand the roles of values and context in addressing ethical issues;
- Engage in inclusive, collaborative, transparent and culturally safer processes; and
- Gather information, identify and analyze options and develop ethical resolutions.

We encourage everyone to use the PHSA Ethical Resolution Process as we strive to provide healthcare of the highest quality to all people, and particularly to Indigenous Peoples and others who have been harmed by systemic oppression (e.g., colonization, medical racism). Stakeholder engagement is integral to our Ethical Resolution Process.

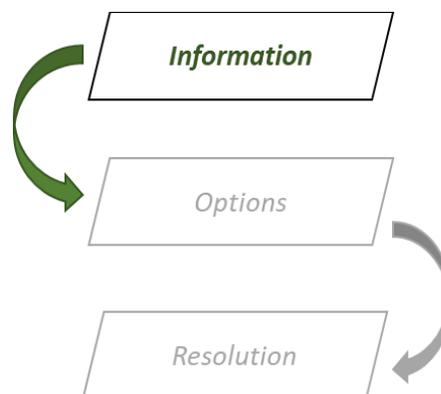
The Ethical Resolution Process focuses on:

1. Gathering **information** to understand and resolve an ethical issue;
2. Identifying and analyzing **options**; and
3. Facilitating and evaluating an ethical **resolution**.



Information

It is important to gather the appropriate information to reach an ethical resolution. The amount of information that may be realistically gathered may depend on time available. Some issues may need to be resolved in minutes (e.g., emergency health services), while others will unfold over weeks or months (e.g., policy issues). It is our responsibility to diligently and thoughtfully collect information necessary to inform a reasonable ethical analysis.



Engaging Stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement should be inclusive of all relevant parties and be collaborative, transparent and culturally safer. We emphasize relational practices in centering patients, clients, families and communities in the information gathering process. Narrative approaches can be used to learn about the values and contextual factors (e.g. intersectional oppression, culture) affecting those closest to the ethical issue. Information (e.g., community supports, medical prognosis, resource and environmental considerations) may also be sought from healthcare providers and professionals, administrators and other relevant stakeholders.

Identifying Information Needs

Different kinds of information are needed to address different ethical issues. The following questions may be helpful in identifying what information is needed.

- What do we already know?
- What social factors, cultural factors, facts and evidence should be considered?
- Who is affected by this issue and who is in relationship with these stakeholders?
- Whose needs, perspectives, goals, priorities and values should be clarified?
- What resources are available (e.g., financial, environmental, human resources)?
- What laws, organizational values, guidelines, policies and procedures are relevant?
- What biases and assumptions should be addressed?

Clarifying Ethical Issues

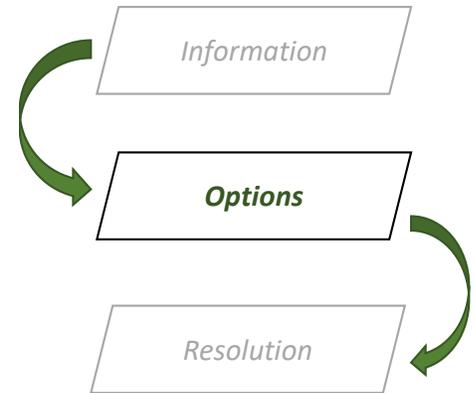
The information gathered should aid in clarifying the ethical issue. Ethical issues may be framed in terms of values that are in conflict. It can be helpful to clarify an ethical issue by framing it as a question.

Options

Engaging Stakeholders

The patients, clients, families and/or communities most affected by the ethical issue should be engaged in identifying options whenever possible. Stakeholders who have the most to gain and the most to lose in a given situation bring important perspectives, particularly about values and context.

It is important to foster strong communication and relationships through this process. Stakeholders should be engaged in inclusive, collaborative, transparent and culturally safer discussions about potential options. Stakeholder biases should be taken into account, particularly those surrounding western and Indigenous worldviews.



Identifying Options

When identifying options encourage stakeholder to put all ideas on the table. Innovative, ethical resolutions may be found through open and inclusive engagement. Whenever, possible identify more than two options.

Analyzing Options

Once options have been identified, they should be analyzed to determine whether they are ethically acceptable. Analysis should be conducted in relation to values, ethics and feasibility.

Values

Values should be taken into account in analyzing all options. For example:

- What values (e.g., care, respect, humility, equity, stewardship, justice) support each option?
- Which options best align with the values of primary stakeholders and PHSA as an organization?

Ethical Approaches

Depending on the setting (e.g., clinical care, public health, organizational), different ethical approaches may be used in the analysis. In some situations, a single approach to analysis may be most appropriate. In other situations, multiple approaches may be applied in determining which options are ethically acceptable.

The following questions provide guidance for how to take up each of these approaches in practice:

Relational

- Which options will enhance caring relationships?
- Which options most closely align with the stated needs, perspectives, goals, priorities and values of stakeholders?
- Which options address inequity?

Narrative

- Which options fit with the narrative of the primary stakeholder(s)?
- Which options make the most sense within the context of the narrative?
- Which options would be consistent with how the stakeholders live their values?

Intersectional

- Which options best account for intersecting and marginalized identities of stakeholders?
- Which options best address structural and systemic barriers to healthcare resources?
- Which options best account for and address harmful biases and assumptions?

Decolonizing

- Which options are most consistent with Wise Practices?
- Which options are inclusive of diverse Indigenous knowledge and health practices?
- Which options contribute to sustainable and equitable conditions?
- Which options are culturally inclusive in terms of language, structures and understandings of the body, health and wellness?
- Which options embrace decolonization, through recognizing historic and ongoing harms caused by deliberate separation of people from land, family, and culture, taking action to stop these practices, and make reparations for past wrongs (e.g., systemic racism)?

Principles

- How should the principles of biomedical ethics be balanced?
- Which options support respect for autonomy and self-determination?
- Which options will result in the most benefit?
- Which options will result in the least harm? How can potential harms be mitigated?
- Will any options create an undue burden for one or more stakeholders?
- Which options promote fairness and equity, without favoritism or discrimination?

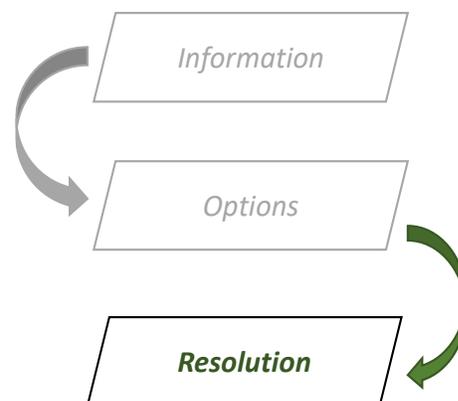
Feasibility

Options should be feasible, in that the resources necessary to implement an option are available. These may include healthcare resources, community resources and social supports.

Resolution

As options are analyzed, it may become clear that some are ethically acceptable while others are unacceptable. Some may be ethically acceptable, but not feasible based on available resources.

Based on the available information and analysis of options, a resolution to the ethical issue is proposed.



Engaging Stakeholders

The patients, clients, families and/or communities most affected by the ethical issue should be engaged in resolving the ethical issue whenever possible. If multiple options are ethically acceptable and feasible, the primary stakeholder should be supported to choose among those options.

If no ethically acceptable and feasible options are satisfactory to the primary stakeholder, the healthcare team should engage through relational practice in transparent and culturally safer discussion of available options and limitations. Ideally, the primary stakeholders and the healthcare team can collaborate to reach consensus on a mutually agreeable resolution.

If the healthcare team cannot identify a mutual resolution that accommodates stakeholder requests, this must be clearly justified and communicated. The stakeholders must be informed of any right to review or appeal the conclusions of the healthcare team.

Establishing Ethical Justification

An ethical justification should be established and documented.

- What was the ethical issue?
- What stakeholders were engaged?
- What information was central to the analysis?
- What options were considered?
- What option was selected?
- How is the option consistent with stakeholder and organizational values?
- How was it determined that the option was ethically acceptable?
- Were fairness, equity, inclusivity, collaboration, transparency, cultural safety and humility, and/or Indigenous worldviews appropriately upheld through the ethical resolution process?

Facilitating a Resolution

Those involved in the ethical resolution process should facilitate the plan with care and attention given to the concerns of all stakeholders. When planning how to facilitate the resolution, several factors should be considered:

- How can clients, patients, families or communities be kept at the centre of care?
- Who needs to receive information about the resolution?
- Who is best situated to communicate information?
- How can strong relationships be fostered through this process?
- Is the resolution process inclusive?
- Is resolution process collaborative?
- Is the resolution process transparent?
- Is the resolution process culturally safer?

Evaluating the Resolution

Once the ethical issue has been resolved, it is important to evaluate the outcomes and implications of the resolution. After gathering feedback from stakeholders (as appropriate) and reflecting on the resolution, consider:

- Was the resolution facilitated in a manner consistent with values of stakeholders?
- Were relationships impacted as a result of the ethical issue and resolution process?
- Were the actual outcomes the same as the anticipated outcomes?
- Were potential harms effectively mitigated?
- Did the resolution promote fairness and equity?
- Was the ethical resolution process experienced as inclusive, collaborative, transparent and culturally safer?
- Was the plan appealed or reviewed?
- Is any follow-up with stakeholders needed?
- What can be learned from this process to inform future practice?
- Should any changes to policies or procedures be made as a result of this process?

It may be appropriate to hold a meeting with some or all of the stakeholders as part of the evaluation process. Documentation of the evaluation is important for informing future practice and policy.

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PHSA Ethics Service Practice Tool

