



health

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE'S CODE OF CONDUCT

REF: SOP/01/ 06/2024: MPHREC



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Research ethics encompass the principles, guidelines, and standards that govern how research should be conducted to ensure the protection of the rights, well-being, and dignity of all individuals involved in or affected by the research.
- 1.2 Ethical considerations in research are vital to maintaining trust, credibility, and the integrity of the scientific and academic community.
- 1.3 The code of conduct for ethical research provides standards of good practice to guide members to follow the ethical principles of honesty, integrity, good stewardship, accountability, professional courtesy and fairness as indicated in Clause 2, below.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.1 Integrity and Honesty

- 2.1.1 Members of the Mpumalanga Provincial Health Research Ethics Committee (MPHREC) must act in good faith and in the best interest of the research participants.
- 2.1.2 Members of the MPHREC should avoid conflicts of interest and bias. In cases where a conflict cannot be avoided, it should be disclosed to the committee in full at the earliest opportunity, and then proactively managed.
- 2.1.3 Members of the MPHREC should act ethically.

2.2 Good Stewardship and Accountability

- 2.2.1 Members of the MPHREC should take responsibility for one's actions, admit mistakes, and learn from them.
- 2.2.2 Protect the confidentiality and privacy of sensitive information entrusted by others.

2.3 Professional courtesy and fairness

- 2.3.1 Treat all individuals with respect, dignity, and fairness, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or any other characteristic.
- 2.3.2 Foster an inclusive environment that welcomes diverse perspectives and promotes equal opportunities for everyone.
- 2.3.3 To review independently, impartially and objectively whether the proposed design and conduct of research is likely to protect participants' safety, rights and welfare.

2.4 Timeliness and Responsiveness:

- 2.4.1 MPHREC members should fulfill their committee duties promptly, including attending meetings, reviewing proposals, and responding to ethical complaints in a timely manner.
- 2.4.2 Delays should be minimized to ensure efficient and effective oversight.

3. GENERAL CONDUCT OF MEMBERS

All MPHREC members are expected to:

3.1 MPHREC Meetings

- 3.1.1 Participate actively in the deliberations of MPHREC meetings, and to allow all other members to also participate and communicate their views in an atmosphere of openness, tolerance, fairness, and mutual respect.
- 3.1.2 Acknowledge the expertise and discipline-specific knowledge of other MPHREC members in discussions and respect discipline-specific differences in research paradigms, methodologies, and determination of academic merit.
- 3.1.3 MPHREC members may sit on an adhoc basis as mandated by the need to review urgent studies, such as disaster or outbreaks.

3.2 Ethical Review of Research Proposals

- 3.2.1 Complete all assigned research proposal reviews diligently, and timely enough to give required attention to detail.
- 3.2.2 Allow only considerations of research ethics and how these relate to the protection of participants' rights and interests to guide decision-making in the research proposal review process.
- 3.2.3 Reach decisions on ethical review of research proposals independently, by consideration of facts as contained in the research proposal, sound knowledge of the principles of research ethics and criteria for the MPHREC's decision codes.
- 3.2.4 Ask for advice or guidance from other MPHREC members if uncertain about any aspect of research proposal review.
- 3.2.5 Request clarification if required from supervisors, students, or researchers during the research proposal review process.
- 3.2.6 Write useful research proposal reviews – i.e., reviews that are concise, clear, draw attention to deficiencies or areas that require revision, clearly explain deficiencies or the need for revision and offer advice if appropriate.

- 3.2.7 Avoid critiquing research design or method unless deficiencies can be identified that have clear ethical implications.
- 3.2.8 Avoid excessive critique of grammar, punctuation, spelling or technicalities of reference style (these can be pointed out in a concise and general way in order to give feedback that may improve the quality of the research proposal, but are not of primary concern in an ethical research proposal review).

3.3 Confidentiality

- 3.3.1 At all times uphold the duty to treat all research-related and other personal information discussed or communicated during the course of MPHREC activities as strictly confidential.

3.4 Conflicts of Interest

- 3.4.1 Be constantly aware of the possibility of conflicts of interest arising during MPHREC-related activities and be able to declare them when they occur during the performance of assigned duties.
- 3.4.2 Always declare possible conflicts of interest or ask the advice of the Chairperson and other members at a MPHREC meeting if uncertain of whether a conflict of interest exists, may exist or not.

4. AVOIDING UNAUTHORIZED USE OF AUTHORITY

- 5.1 MPHREC members should not use their position for personal gain or to exert undue influence on research proposals or ethical matters.
- 5.2 MPHREC should avoid any form of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation against researchers or fellow committee members.

5. ENFORCEMENT AND CONSEQUENCES

- 6.1 A member who absents himself/herself for two (2) consecutive ordinary meetings of the committee without leave or an apology will be deemed to have resigned and his/her position will be declared vacant by the chairperson of the MPHREC at a full committee meeting.

6. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

6.1 The chairperson/members of the MPHREC shall sign confidentiality forms on the first meeting of their term in office and will sign declaration forms each time the committee sits (Annexure 2).

6.2 Should the chairperson/member of the MPHREC is conflicted in any research application, the chairperson/member shall reclude him/herself from a meeting, until decisions are made on that particular research application.

6.2.1 The chairperson must not use their membership to gain a favourable advantage.

6.2.2 The Vice-Chairperson chairs the session in which the chairperson is conflicted.

6.3 These disclosures must cover the full range of potential interests:

6.3.1 such as direct benefits like the provision of materials or facilities, and

6.3.2 financial, academic or in-kind support; for example, payment of travel, accommodation expenses to attend conferences.

6.4 Such disclosure should cover any situation in which the conflict of interest may, or may be perceived to, affect decisions regarding other people.

6.5 Researchers have an obligation, at the time of reporting, proposing research, or seeking approval from MPHREC or other regulatory authorities to declare any conflict of interest which has a potential to influence the project and its conduct.

6.6 The chairperson/members of the MPHREC must reclude from the committee when discussion of projects in which they are personally involved takes place and must not use their membership to gain a favourable advantage.

6.6.1 Members who have a conflict of interest should disclose such interest before meetings by filling in an appropriate form (Annexure 2).

6.6.2 The chairperson of the MPHREC or his or her delegate and three others key members should have a separate meeting to assess the extent of the conflict of interest.

6.6.3 A final decision should thereafter be made on whether the affected member(s) will be recused from the meeting with written reasons and a record should be kept thereafter.

7. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

7.1 MPHREC members shall handle conflicts or disputes among committee members in a professional and respectful manner.

7.2 They should seek guidance from the chair or other designated authority to resolve conflicts when necessary.

8. BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

8.1 Violations of this Code of Conduct may result in sanctions, including removal from the committee or other appropriate actions, as determined by the institutional authorities.


8.2 The MPHREC Chairperson in consultation with the committee may recommend to the Head: Health on behalf on the MEC, that the MPHREC member be removed or recalled based on failure to adhere to the code of conduct.

9. CODE OF CONDUCT REVIEW

9.1 This code of conduct shall be reviewed every five years or amended as and when necessary.

10. CODE OF CONDUCT APPROVAL

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED



DR LK NDHLOVU

HEAD: HEALTH

12/6/2024

DATE

Effective date 12/06/2024



ANNEXURE 1: CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MPHREC MEMBERS

All REC members are expected to:

1. MPHREC Meetings

- 1.1 Participate actively in the deliberations of MPHREC meetings, and to allow all other members to also participate and communicate their views in an atmosphere of openness, tolerance, fairness and mutual respect.
- 1.2 Acknowledge the expertise and discipline-specific knowledge of other MPHREC members in discussions and respect discipline-specific differences in research paradigms, methodologies and determination of academic merit.
- 1.3 MPHREC members may sit on an adhoc basis as mandated by the need to review urgent studies, such as disaster or outbreaks.

2. Ethical Review of Research Proposals

- 2.1 Complete all assigned research proposal reviews diligently, and timely enough to give required attention to detail.
- 2.2 Allow only considerations of research ethics and how these relate to the protection of participants' rights and interests to guide decision-making in the research proposal review process.
- 2.3 Reach decisions on ethical review of research proposals independently, by consideration of facts as contained in the research proposal, sound knowledge of the principles of research ethics and criteria for the MPHREC's decision codes.
- 2.4 Ask for advice or guidance from other MPHREC members if uncertain about any aspect of research proposal review.
- 2.5 Request clarification if required from supervisors, students or researchers during the research proposal review process.
- 2.6 Write useful research proposal reviews – i.e. reviews that are concise, clear, draw attention to deficiencies or areas that require revision, clearly explain deficiencies or the need for revision and offer advice if appropriate.

- 2.7 Avoid critiquing research design or method unless deficiencies can be identified that have clear ethical implications.
- 2.8 Avoid excessive critique of grammar, punctuation, spelling or technicalities of reference style (these can be pointed out in a concise and general way in order to give feedback that may improve the quality of the research proposal, but are not of primary concern in an ethical research proposal review).

3. Confidentiality

- 3.1 At all times uphold the duty to treat all research-related and other personal information discussed or communicated during the course of MPHREC activities as strictly confidential.

4. Conflicts of Interest

- 4.1 Be constantly aware of the possibility of conflicts of interest arising during MPHREC-related activities and be able to declare them when they occur during the performance of assigned duties.
- 4.2 Always declare possible conflicts of interest or ask the advice of the Chairperson and other members at a MPHREC meeting if uncertain of whether a conflict of interest exists, may exist or not.
- 4.3 Declaration of conflict of interest is done using the prescribed form (MPHREC SOP Annexure 17).

REC Member Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____



ANNEXURE 2: DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

(Annexure 3)

Declaration and Conflicts of Interest Form

MPUMALANGA HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MPHREC) FORM

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

I, _____, Position in the MPHREC _____

Solemnly declare that:

1. I am acquainted with the regulations contained in the Act of Protection of Information.
2. I understand that I may not divulge information of any kind from whatever source that I might have in my possession, or might in future receive, to any unauthorized person, either verbally or in writing, without the prior approval of the Chairperson or an officer authorized by him/her to give such approval.
3. I understand that the above-mentioned regulations not only apply during my term of office, but also after my duties with the Committee have been terminated.
4. I am fully aware of the serious consequences that may result in the event of a breach or infringement of the above-mentioned regulations.

Signature
Date: _____

Witness
Date: _____

Furthermore, on conflict of interest:

Research project you wish to make a DECLARATION about	
Name of researcher (if known):	MPHREC (non-medical) Clearance number (if known):
Title of research project (if known), or topic of the project:	
Do you or your partner have any financial, academic, or other interest in the subject matter of the meeting, which may be considered as constituting a real, potential, or apparent conflict of interest?	
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> Name of the Member: _____
If yes, please provide the detail below:	
Nature of interest: _____	
Name of the entity and or individuals: _____ _____ _____ _____	
If there is anything else, or the perception by others, that could affect your objectivity and independence in the meeting? If your answer is yes, please supply details of such. _____ _____ _____ _____	
I, _____ hereby declare that the disclosed information is correct, and no other situation of real potential or apparent conflict of interest is known to me. I undertake to inform the meeting of any status changes that may be brought to light because of any issue that may arise as the meeting progresses. I also undertake to timely inform the committee of any changes in these circumstances during the period when I am still serving as a committee member.	
Signature _____ Date: _____	Witness _____ Date: _____