



health

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# CONFLICT OF INTEREST GUIDE FOR MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL HEALTH RESEARCH AND ETHICS COMMITTEE (MPHREC)



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## **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the SOP is to effectively manage potential conflicts of interest for researchers and MPHREC members.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

Ethics consists of the fundamental issues of practical decision making, such as the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong and how to prioritise competing values. Consequently, a conflict of interest may exist whenever an individual has a stake in the outcome of research and/or review of research projects. In any situation in which an interest interferes, or has the potential to interfere, with a person, organization or institution's ability to act in accordance with the interest of another party, assuming that the person, organization or institution has an obligation to do so.

Both the MPHREC members and Researchers hold trust relationships which can be compromised by real or perceived conflicts of Interest. Such a compromise could undermine the community's trust in research. Therefore, both the researcher and the MPHREC member must identify and address conflicts of interest - real or perceived - to maintain the public confidence and trust, discharge professional obligations, and ensure accountability.

## **3. RESPONDING TO CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

MPHREC members and Researchers must disclose real or perceived conflicts of interest to the Chair of the MPHREC. If the conflict involves the Chair, he/she will raise it with members of the MPHREC.

### **3.1. Conflict of Interest Involving Researchers**

**3.1.1** The MPHREC will assess the likelihood that the researcher's judgement may be influenced, or appear to be influenced, by private or personal interests, and will assess the seriousness of any harm that is likely to result from such influence or from the mere appearance of undue influence.

**3.1.2** Competing interests may arise from family relationships, financial partnerships or other economic interests. The decision of the MPHREC is final.

**3.1.3** The following can act as a guide when examining real or perceived conflicts of interest:

- Would the researcher be biased in any way that would affect the goals of the research?
- Would an outside observer question the ability of the individual to make a proper decision despite possible considerations of private or personal interests?
- Would the public believe that the trust relationship between the relevant parties could reasonably be maintained if they had accurate information on the potential sources of conflicts of interest?

**3.1.4** Researchers may have frequent conflict of interest that cannot be avoided. In research, decision making processes often require expert advice, and the community of experts in a field can be so minute that all the experts are linked with the matter under decision.

**3.1.5** An individual researcher should therefore pre-empt the conflict from time to time, and be alert and ready to acknowledge the conflict and make the disclosures appropriately.

**3.1.6** Researchers' should deploy the following approach to manage conflict of interest:

- Read and understand the institution's policy on conflict of interest.
- Maintain records of activities that may potentially lead to conflicts, examples (but not limited to) board of directors, membership of committees, selection committees and financial delegation of in receipt of stocks or shares or cash from external parties to support research activities.

**2.1.4** When an individual is invited into a committee or equivalent, review current activities for actual or apparent conflicts and bring possible conflicts of interest to the attention of those running the process. Individuals must disclose any actual, apparent or perceived conflict of interests.

## **3.2. Conflict of Interest Involving MPHREC members**

**3.2.1** To maintain the independence and integrity of ethics review, it is of the highest importance that members of the MPHREC avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest.

### **3.2.2** For example,

MPHREC members are in a clear conflict of interest a) when their own research projects are under review by their MPHREC; or b) when they have been in direct academic conflict, have collaborated with, or have provided support to the researcher whose proposal is under review. In the cases where a member of the MPHREC has a conflict with the research under review, that person should not be present when the MPHREC is discussing or making decisions on that research.

### **3.2.3** Disclosures must cover the full range of potential interests:

- Direct benefits like the provision of materials or facilities, and
- Financial or in-kind support, for example, payment of travel, accommodation expenses to attend conferences.

### **3.2.4** Such disclosure should cover any situation in which the conflict of interest may, or may be perceived to, affect decisions regarding other people;

## **4. IDENTIFYING CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

### **4.1. Common examples of conflict of interest**

**4.1.1** Self-dealing, the act of advancing one's interests in conflict with responsibilities to others.

**4.1.2** Conflict of effort (also called a conflict of commitment), where an outside activity conflicts with one's primary responsibility.

**4.1.3** Nepotism, preference to family or friends.

**4.1.4** Offering or accepting gifts or finance, favours to influence decision making.

**4.1.5** Suppression of data that contradicts the desired outcome.

**4.1.6** Disseminating confidential information outside its intended audience.

**4.1.7** Influence peddling, the act of using one's authority to benefit another.

**4.1.8** Personal beliefs that are in direct conflict with the topic he/she is researching.

## **4.2. Resolution of conflict of interest**

- 4.2.1** When asked to perform an expedited review or to be a primary reviewer, a Committee member that has a financial or role conflict shall disclose such a conflict and decline to undertake the review.
- 4.2.2** Committee members having reported a financial or role conflict may, unless the Chairperson determines otherwise, comment on the matter before the Committee but may not participate in the Committee's decision on the matter, and the Chairperson (subject to being overruled by the Committee) may impose additional restrictions (such as requesting the member to leave the meeting while the matter is discussed) as he / she believes are warranted under the circumstances.
- 4.2.3** The conflict of interest shall be announced during the meeting, and the minutes of the meeting shall record the declared conflict of interest and the steps taken to deal with the situation with regard to the Committee's deliberations and decisions.
- 4.2.4** Similarly, the Chairperson will hand over their responsibility to the Vice-Chairperson whenever he/she is conflicted, and the minutes of the meeting shall record the declared conflict of interest and the steps taken to deal with the situation with regard to the Committee's deliberations and decisions.

## **5. CONTRAVENTION OF THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST SOP**

Consequence management will be applied accordingly on all Researchers or MPHREC members found to have contravened the SOP on conflicts of interest.

**6. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

| <b>Conflict of interest statement</b> |  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| A                                     | To the best of my knowledge I have no conflicts of interest  |  |
| B                                     | Further to this: I will inform the MPHREC immediately if any real or perceived conflict arises during this study/project |  |
| C                                     | I consider that I have a conflict of interest (please explain below):  |  |
|                                       |  |  |
|                                       | Name:  |  |
|                                       | Signature:   |  |
|                                       | Date:  |  |

**7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST SOP APPROVAL**

**APPROVED / NOT APPROVED**



**DR LK NDHLOVU**

**HEAD: HEALTH**

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