

RESEARCH ETHICS ANNUAL REPORT

2021-22

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Research Ethics advances Dalhousie's strategic research goals by providing knowledgeable guidance and timely research ethics review and oversight of research involving humans.



Annual Report 2021/22

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Fast Facts

- 128% increase in new submissions since 2010-11, a 137% increase in REB members and a 40% increase in ethics staff.
- 91% increase in new submissions, a 49% increase in amendments, and an 84% increase in continuing reviews in the last 3 years. 567% increase in release of funds requests, and 233% increase in the number of scientific peer reviews on behalf of Animal Care.
- 35% increase in new submissions in the last year.
- 5,000+ reviews of research involving humans conducted by Research Ethics Boards and staff.
- 546 new project submissions, 250 amendments, 633 continuing reviews, 235 final reports.
- 21 work day average turnaround time for initial REB review to researchers for new project submissions.
- 2 Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities).
- 22 Board meetings per year. An additional Health Sciences Board meeting was held under special circumstances.
- 45 Board members (average of 4 new projects/month assigned to each Board member - 2 projects/month as a primary reviewer, 1-2 new projects/month to review at REB meetings; revisions and amendment reviews also regularly assigned).
- 1,407 researchers completed the TCPS online course on research ethics (10,889 researchers have completed it since 2011).
- 20% of new projects reviewed were funded research (funding held at Dalhousie); 8% were tri-agency funded.
- 92% of new submissions involved prospective research; 8% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
- 10% of new submissions to the University REBs were eligible for Board of Record Acknowledgement (multi-jurisdictional).
- 17,084 website page views (14,594 unique pageviews). The Research Ethics website was visited every single day of the year.

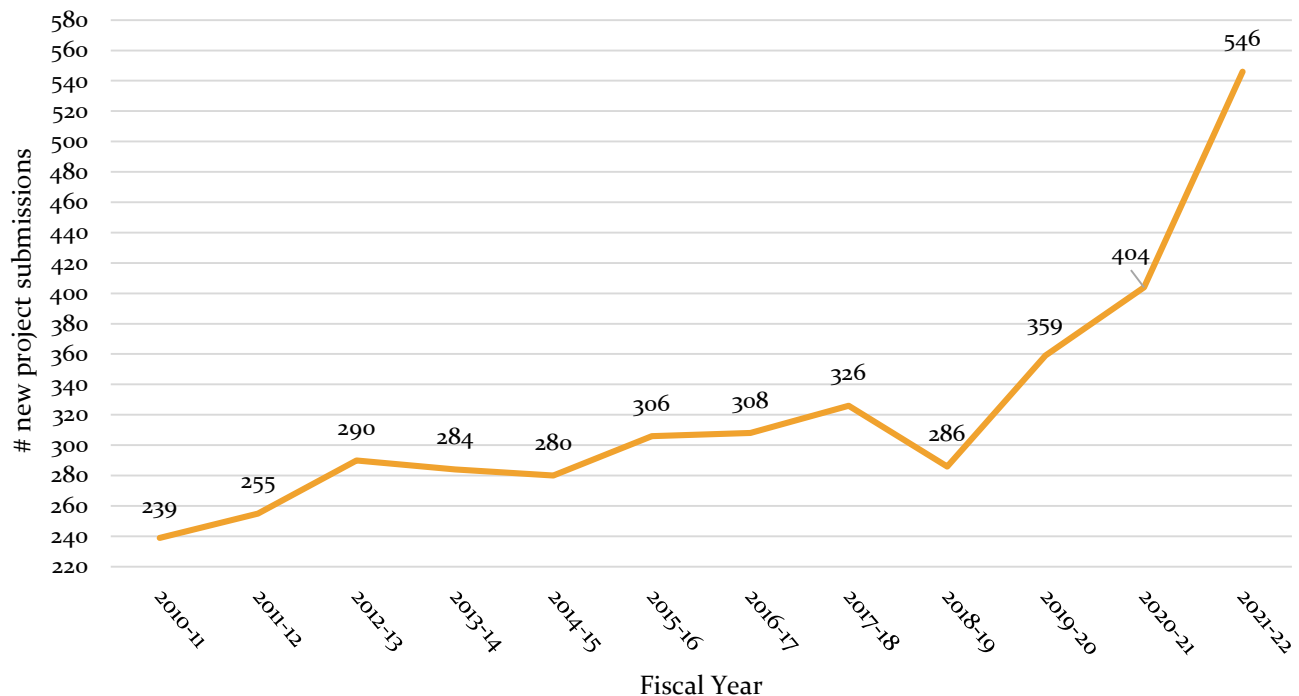
Core Principles:
Respect for Persons
Concern for Welfare
Justice

Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 2.8 full-time permanent staff positions: a director and a manager and a part-time ethics support specialist. The staff coordinated and supported the work of two Research Ethics Boards: Health Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities. There were 23 Board meetings scheduled and 45 Board members (38 of whom were members of the University (31 faculty and 7 students); 7 were community members). The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 5,000 reviews of project submissions, including review of 546 new research projects, 250 amendments, 633 continuing reviews, 235 final reports and 26 ethical approval terminations for non-compliance with continuing review reporting requirements, quarterly reports from research ethics boards at affiliated hospitals (IWK Health Centre, Nova Scotia Health and Horizon Health) and annual reports from unit-level research ethics committees. Research Ethics authorized 80 release of funds agreements with researchers to permit research-related activity to proceed prior to the requirement for research ethics review; the office also coordinated the peer review process on behalf of the University Committee on Laboratory Animals.

This report offers an overview of the activity of Research Ethics for the period April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022.

Historical - New REB Submissions (2011-2022)



Notable this year

Research Ethics has seen a **128% increase in new submissions** since 2010-11, with consistent year-over-year increases including a **35% increase** this the last report. The demands on the REBs continue to be unrelenting, and some members were **increasingly challenged** to meet the review demands. Likewise, the volume and complexity of inquiries to staff has been very high.

Student (post-doctoral and doctoral) members were appointed to the Boards to increase the review capacity of the Boards.

Increasing volume resulted in **limited capacity** to undertake any initiatives that were not directly related to the review of individual research projects.

Throughout the year until March 20, 2022, the Dalhousie Research Ethics Boards operated under its standard operating procedures for **REB Review During Publicly Declared Emergencies**. Research Ethics and the Research Ethics Boards remained operational during the publicly declared emergency. The REB met virtually throughout the year. Staff worked a combination of remotely and hybrid (remotely and in-person).

Research ethics manager participated in an **accreditation review** of the IWK research ethics office (fall 2021).

Research Ethics coordinated with the Dal Libraries to develop the process for access to the **Canadian Index of Well-being – Nova Scotia** and the timing of research ethics board review (March 2022).

Research Ethics coordinated with the Environmental Health and Safety Office to develop guidance on the ethical review process for **cannabis research** involving human participants (August 2021)

The Panel on Research Ethics and the Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research launched the **TCPS2 CORE** (online Course on Research Ethics) in 2022. This is the first major update since 2011. In addition, **public consultations** were held on proposed updates to the TCPS2 in 2021.

There were **staffing interruptions** during the year. The ethics support specialist, Cali Goud, began a one year leave in October and was replaced by Kait Tornblom. The director, Catherine Connors, was on leave in October and November and Angela Hersey stepped in as acting director during this period (with no back-fill of the manager position).

“Thank you for nudging us, and once again, for having a great turnaround time on review for [the student’s] graduate work. REB played a valuable part in helping him achieve his goals.” (Faculty supervisor, with final report)

Educational Activity

Dalhousie supported educational opportunities for Board members and staff. The Research Ethics Board chairs, members and staff were involved in presentations and discussions regarding research ethics principles and the review process with members of the University research community, especially students.

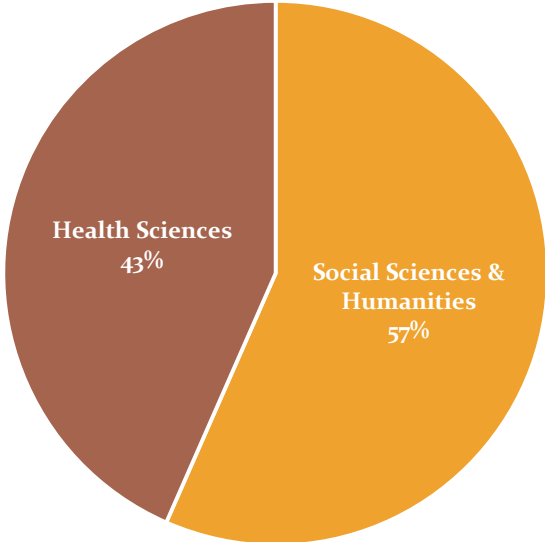
Educational activities included:

- Research Ethics Boards chairs and staff attended the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards national conference virtually (May 2021).
- REB members are required to complete the TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics* and *The Fundamentals of OCAP*®.
- REB orientation program for incoming members held throughout the year by the Board chairs and director.
- 1,407 Dalhousie researchers completed the TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics*; 10,889 researchers completed the tutorial since its inception in June 2011.
- Presentations to:
 - Faculty of Open Learning and Professional Development (August 2021)
 - School of Nursing graduate students (October 2021)
 - School of Physiotherapy graduate students (November 2021)
 - School of Resource and Environmental Studies graduate students (November 2021)
 - Rehabilitation Research graduate students (February 2022)
 - Medical Education Research Roundtable (March 2022)
 - Sociology and Social Anthropology graduate seminar (March 2022)
- Director participated in new Dalhousie academic staff orientation (August 2021).
- Research Ethics hosted an Ask Me Anything session for colleagues in the Office of Research Services (February 2022).
- Research ethics staff completed *The Fundamentals of OCAP*® (April 2021).
- Research ethics staff also participated in continuing professional development in areas including: management, privacy, and equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

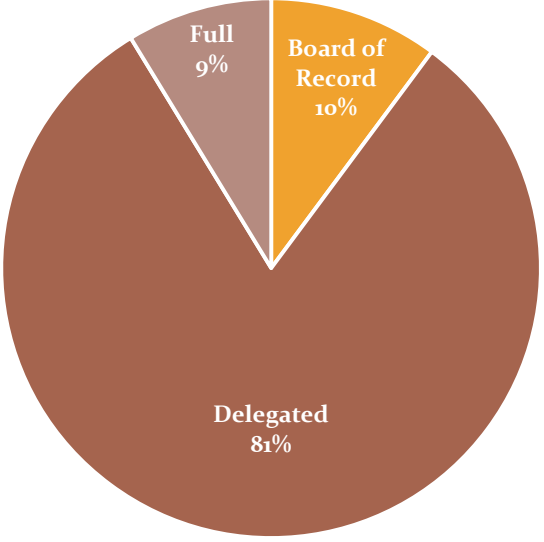
“I appreciate your supportive words. I do enjoy it - there's a lot to learn and it's a really great team. Such a pleasure to be a part of a knowledgeable group that is committed to supporting the Dalhousie community.” (REB member)

Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

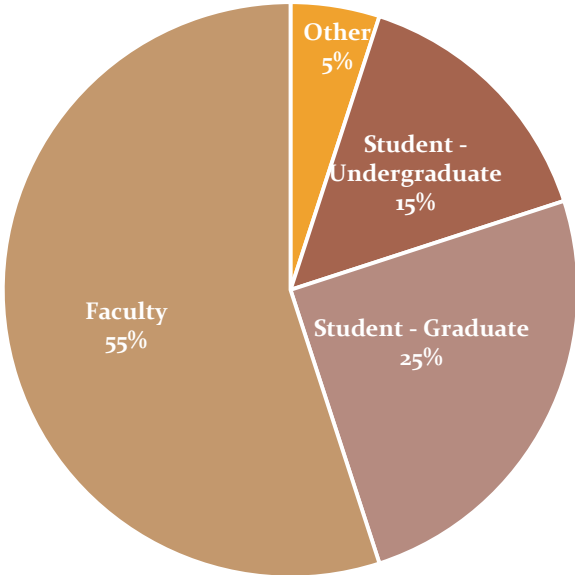
Board Assignment



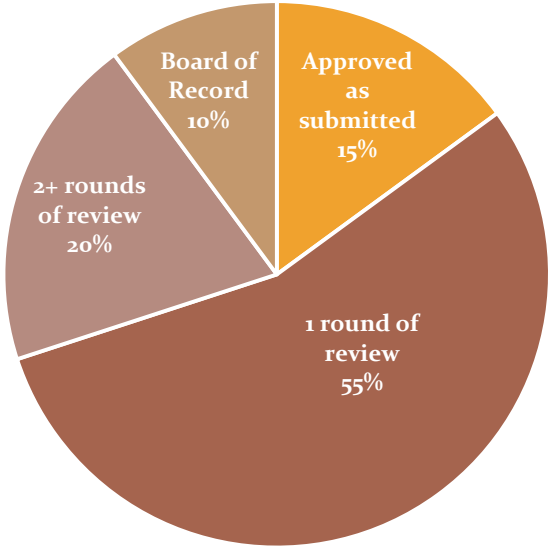
Proportionate Review



Researcher Profile

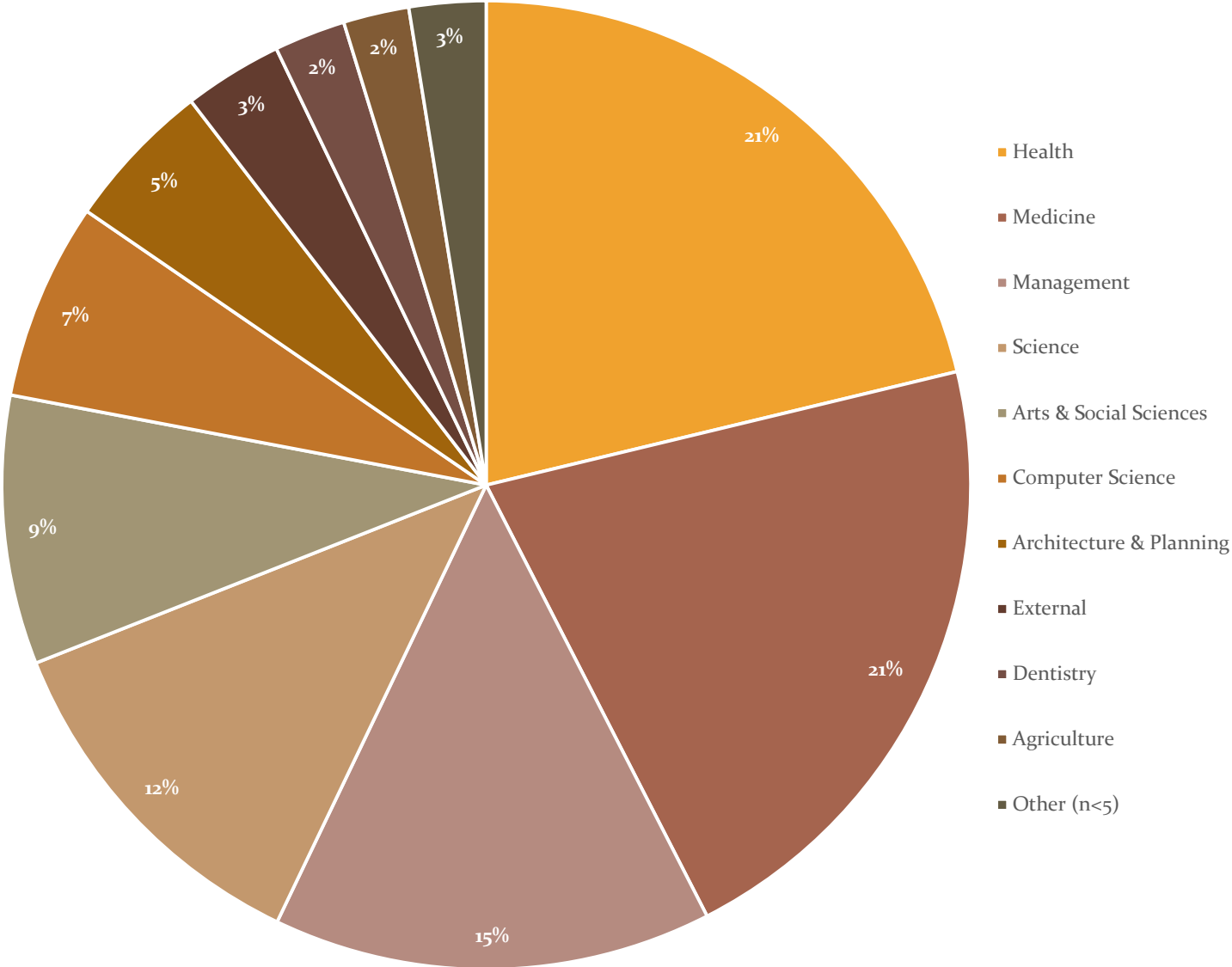


Rounds of Review (application to approval)



Note: 25% of submissions were withdrawn prior to review by the REBs

Submissions by Faculty



“Thanks for the info. It seems like every few days I run into another question for you, I really appreciate your helpful quick responses through this process!” (External researcher)

Board Membership*

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

Lori Weeks (Chair)

Nichole Austin
Sean Barrett
Sarah Burm
Gail Dechman
Nicole Doria
Merle Emms
Sanaz Gerami

Gordon Gubitza
Una Hassenstein
Melissa Helwig
Benjamin Hewins
Jennifer Isenor
Melanie Keats
Michel Ladouceur

Sarah Moore
Cory Munroe
Heather Neyedli
Amanda Porter
Sam Stewart
Christine Stilwell
Igor Yakovenko
Diane Zwicker

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

Karen Foster (Chair)

Raluca Bejan
Julie Blais
Catherine Bryan
John Cameron
Louise Carbert
Helene Deacon

Steven Dukeshire
Michael Halpin
Julie Hyde
Dana Kabat-Farr
Niki Kiepek
Joseph Malloch
Keahna Margeson

Jill McSweeney-Flaherty
Paul Meade
Rick Nason
Lorn Sheehan
Hannah Steeves
Kate Thompson
Jeff Waugh
David Vince

Staff*

Catherine Connors (Director)
Angela Hersey (Manager)
Kaitlin Tornblom (Ethics Support Specialist - 80% (term))

* as of March 31, 2022