Research Ethics advances the strategic objectives of Dalhousie Research Services by providing knowledgeable guidance and timely research ethics review and oversight of research involving humans.
Annual Report 2017/18

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Fast Facts

- 3,000+ reviews of research involving humans conducted by Research Ethics Boards and staff.
- 326 new project submissions. This reflects a 50% increase in new submissions over the last nine years.
- 18 work day average turnaround time for initial REB review to researchers for new project submissions.
- Other ethical reviews conducted included 191 amendments, 232 continuing reviews, 260 final reports. Ethical approvals were terminated for 43 projects for non-compliance with continuing review reporting requirements.
- 2 Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities).
- 22 Board meetings per year.
- 30 Board members (average of 2 new projects/month assigned to each member as a primary reviewer as well as 2 new projects/month to review at REB meetings).
- 1,093 researchers completed the TCPS online course on research ethics.
- 24% of new projects reviewed were funded research (12% were tri-agency funded).
- 92% of new submissions involved prospective research; 8% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
- 12% of new submissions to the University REBs required REB review at more than one institution (multi-jurisdictional).

Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 2 full-time permanent staff positions: a director and a manager. This was supplemented by a 40% administrative assistant in a term position until December and then by a 40% temporary administrative assistant. The staff coordinated and supported the work of two Research Ethics Boards: Health Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities. There were 22 Board meetings scheduled and 30 Board members (25 of whom were members of the University; 5 were community members). The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 3,000 reviews, including review of 326 new research projects, 191 amendments, 232 continuing reviews, 260 final reports and 43 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 Authority and Horizon Health) and annual reports from unit-level research ethics committees. Research Ethics authorized 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, 2017 to March 31, 2018.
Research Ethics - Activity Cycle

Appointments

There was no change in the leadership of the Boards. Dr. Tannis Jurgens (College of Pharmacy) continued as chair of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board and Dr. Karen Beazley (School of Resource and Environmental Studies) continued as chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board.

The research ethics office was staffed by Catherine Connors (director) and Angela Hersey (manager). These permanent positions were supplemented by administrative assistance on a term appointment by Keerthi Luthra, 40% of whose time was assigned to research ethics until the term ended in December 2017. Temporary assistance was secured in January 2018, again with 40% of this position assigned to research ethics support.

In addition to administrative staffing interruptions during the year, Board membership also faced shortfalls; one Faculty was not able to meet its membership obligations and instances of limited meeting attendance and delayed reviews by members was also problematic.
Accomplishments & Initiatives

DRS survey results The Dalhousie Research Services Support Survey 2017 results noted that “The Research Ethics Board and the Animal Care Committee consistently had positive average scores and had the highest scores across support units.” Of note, half of the submissions to the REB are from students who were not invited to participate in this survey.

Monthly activity reports Increased transparency of ethics activity to REBs through provision of monthly activity reports that include information about: new projects approved, projects closed and amendments approved on behalf of each Board (November 2017).

Consent agenda Increased efficiency of Board meetings through adoption of a consent agenda for routine matters and by sharing educational information for Board members on the online review platform (December 2017).

Unit-level review reports For the first time, annual reports were received from all faculties, departments and schools providing unit-level review of minimal risk course-based research (June 2017).

Renewal of Research Ethics Cooperation Agreement with NSHA and IWK The director initiated the renewal of the research ethics review cooperation agreement between the University, the Nova Scotia Health Authority and the IWK Health Centre to ensure the continuing cooperation between the University and these affiliated hospitals with respect to research ethics review. The agreement was renewed until 2022.

Quick reference guide A reference guide for protecting electronically-stored personally identifiable research data was developed for researchers and posted on the website (June 2017).

Research Data Advisory Committee The manager participated in initiatives led by the Dal Libraries to develop a University-wide research data management policy.

VPR initiatives Research ethics staff participated in initiatives of the vice president research office, including: process mapping consultations (fall 2017), strategic plan IMPACT session participation (January 2018), DRS external review consultations (February 2018) and the director participated in the search committee for the responsible conduct of research facilitation officer position (October-November 2017).

Compliance The director engaged in the following activity to ensure the University remained in compliance with national and international criteria:

- Provided feedback to the vice president research (acting) on proposed changes to the Tri-Agency Agreement on the administration of agency grants and awards by research institutions (August 2017).
- Submission of the University’s renewal for Federalwide Assurance for the Protection of Human Subjects to the US Office of Human Research Protections (renewed until July 13, 2022). The director also submitted information for the renewal of institutional

- Clinicaltrials.gov – oversight of registration site.
- Review of the State of Qatar Supreme Council of Health Policies, Regulations and Guidelines for Research Involving Humans to provide advice on whether Dalhousie University would comply as a signatory on an Assurance (that would then permit a Dalhousie researcher to engage in research involving humans involving the State of Qatar) (August/September 2017).

**Educational Activity**

Dalhousie supported educational opportunities for Board members and staff. REB members led education sessions at the national ethics conference. The director and the Research Ethics Board chairs were all 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, staff and 10 REB members attended the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards national conference (April 2017). Dalhousie faculty also led several sessions at the conference:
  - Dr. Francoise Baylis delivered a plenary session titled *Canada Gets a Failing Grade on Inclusion of Pregnant Women in Clinical Research*.
  - Dr. Jacqueline Gahagan (HS REB) was a panelist in a plenary session on *Why Sex and Gender Matter in Research Ethics*.
  - Dr. Matthew Schnurr (SSH REB) presented a poster on *Research Ethics and The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (co-authored by Alana Taylor, Karen Beazley, Scott Comber, Catherine Connors, Binod Sundararajan and Cathie Watson).
- Research Ethics manager attended the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards regional conference (November 2017).
- Invited guest speakers to REB meetings on topics including:
  - *CIHR Sex and Gender in Research* online training modules (HS REB, October 2017)
  - *Wigmore test and participant confidentiality* (HS REB, October 2017)
  - *REDCap and the REB* (SSH REB, April 2017; HS REB, July 2017)
  - *Media Relations* (SSH REB, May 2017)
- Director and manager attended *Right to Know: Balancing Access and Privacy Symposium* – Halifax (September 2017).
- Manager attended Tri-Agency regional stakeholder consultation session on the proposed data management policy (February 2018).
- Manager attended a records management workshop led by the university’s records management consultant (August 2017).
- Manager completed 6-part Dalhousie Supervisory Development Program (April 2017).
• Director completed *CIHR Institute of Gender and Health Core Competency Module for Sex and Gender in Primary Data Collection with Humans* (October 2017) and re-completed the *Course on Research Ethics* online training (September 2017)
• REB orientation program for incoming members.
• Researchers were encouraged to complete the TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics*; 1,093 Dalhousie researchers completed the course over the year; 5,986 researchers completed the tutorial since its inception in June 2011.

“I will tell you it’s the committee I like the most being a part of as I always have fun at the meetings!!” (Research Ethics Board member)
Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

Board Assignment

- Social Sciences & Humanities 56%
- Health Sciences 44%

Proportionate Review (Full Board vs Delegated Review)

- Delegated review 87%
- Full review 13%

Researcher Profile

- Faculty 51%
- Student - graduate 39%
- Student - undergrad 10%

# Rounds of review (application to approval)

- 1 review 63%
- 2 reviews 20%
- 3+ reviews 3%
- Withdrawn 9%
- Approved as submitted 5%

"Many thanks for your incredible turn around!" (Faculty member)
Submissions by Faculty

“Thank you so much for your excellent guidance to get the REB approval, for Dalhousie to participate in our study and for the warm welcome during my visit.” (International student).
Board Membership*

**Health Sciences Research Ethics Board**

- Tannis Jurgens (chair)
- Chris Blanchard
- Martha Brillant
- Merle Emms
- Jacqueline Gahagan
- Edward Gores
- Gordon Gubitz
- Melanie Keats
- Michel Ladouceur
- Anna MacLeod
- Alissa Pencer
- Sam Stewart
- Lori Weeks
- Swarna Weerasinghe

**Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

- Karen Beazley (chair)
- Megan Bailey
- Peggy Cunningham
- Steven Dukeshire
- Jean-Sebastien Guy
- Kirstie Hawkey
- Aaron Newman
- Robin Oakley
- Laurene Rehman
- Matthew Schnurr
- Don Sinclair
- Binod Sundararajan
- Tracy Taylor-Helmick
- Sara Torres
- Cathie Watson
- Diane Zwicker

**Staff**

- Catherine Connors (director)
- Angela Hersey (manager)
- Amanda Leslie (temporary, part-time (40%) administrative assistant)

*As of March 31, 2018

Core Principles:

Respect for Persons
Concern for Welfare
Justice