

RESEARCH ETHICS ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23

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 2022/23

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Fast Facts

- 5,000+ reviews of research involving humans conducted by Research Ethics Boards and staff.
- 537 new project submissions, 258 amendments, 691 continuing reviews, 221 final reports.
- 22 work day average turnaround time for initial REB review to researchers for new project submissions. 4 day average turnaround time for acknowledgement of other boards of record.
- 2 Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities); 8 Health Sciences REB meetings and 5 Social Sciences & Humanities REB meetings held.
- 43 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).
- 1,514 researchers completed the TCPS online course on research ethics (12,256 researchers have completed it since 2011).
- 18% of new projects reviewed were funded research (funding held at Dalhousie); 7% were tri-agency funded.
- 94% of new submissions involved prospective research; 6% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
- 12% of new submissions to the University REBs were eligible for Board of Record Acknowledgement (multi-jurisdictional).
- 16,350 website page views (13,842 unique pageviews). The Research Ethics website was visited 362/364 days of the year.

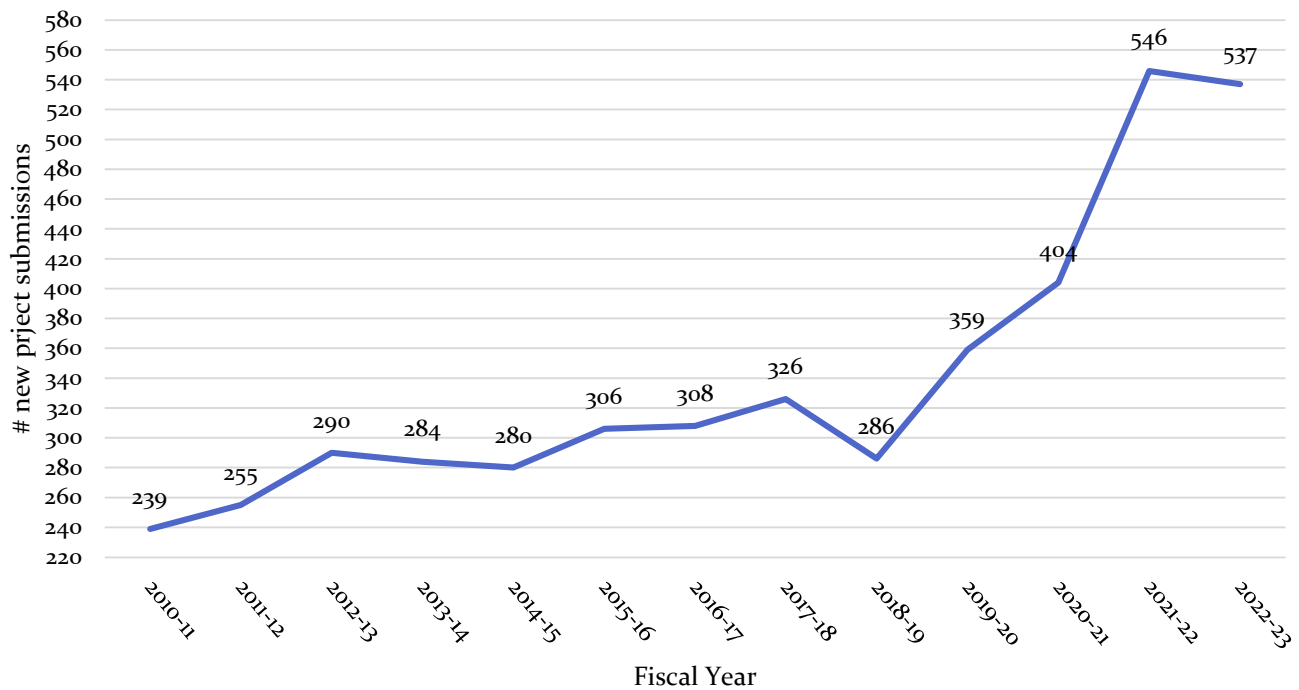
Core Principles:
Respect for Persons
Concern for Welfare
Justice

Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 3 full-time permanent staff positions: a director, a manager and a support specialist. 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 43 Board members (35 of whom were members of the University (29 faculty and 5 students); 8 were community members). The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 5,000 reviews of project submissions, including review of 537 new research projects, 258 amendments, 691 continuing reviews, 221 final reports and 56 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 91 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, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

Historical - New REB Submissions (2011-2023)



Notable this year

Change in **Board leadership**. Dr. Lori Weeks ended her term as chair of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board; **Dr. Jennifer Isenor** assumed the chair in July. Dr. Karen Foster stepped down as chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board; **Dr. Megan Bailey** assumed the chair in July.

Policy renewal of the University *Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans* was initiated. The policy was last approved by Senate in 2012. A working group was formed and met regularly to draft a substantially revised policy and to engage in consultations with representative stakeholder groups for feedback.

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

The demands on the REBs continue to be substantial, and some members were **increasingly challenged** to meet the review demands. Likewise, the volume and complexity of inquiries to staff has been very high. Recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of experienced faculty to serve as board members with the diversity of experience and relevant qualifications are a continued challenge.

The Health Sciences Research Ethics Board Chair and Director met with the Associate Deans (Research) in the Faculties of Dentistry, Health and Medicine regarding **recruitment for REB service**.

Staffing plans were proposed for **additional staff support** in Research Ethics. Approval for an additional manager position for a 2-year term was secured. The Ethics support specialist position was informally assigned full-time to Research Ethics (from 2.8 FTE) in the fall.

A new version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2022) was released in January. Significant changes included new provisions for broad consent for the storage of data and human biological materials for future unspecified research, streamlining multi-jurisdictional research ethics review of minimal risk research, research involving human totipotent stem cells, and review of research involving human cell lines.

*“Thank you so much... We really appreciate all the hard work of the board, and the exceptionally constructive and prompt comments. We are really looking forward to getting this study going!” --
Faculty Member*

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.

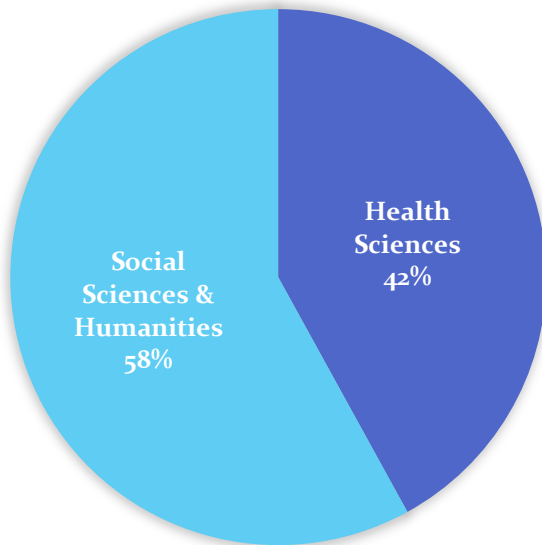
Educational activities included:

- Research Ethics Boards chairs and staff attended the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards national conference virtually (April 2022).
- 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.
- Research ethics staff also participated in continuing professional development in areas including: management, privacy, reconciliation education, and equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.
- 1,514 Dalhousie researchers completed the TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics*; 12,256 researchers completed the tutorial since its inception in June 2011.
- Research Ethics participated in Dalhousie's new academic staff orientation (August 2022).
- Research Ethics hosted lunch and learn session for colleagues in the Faculty research offices (March 2023).

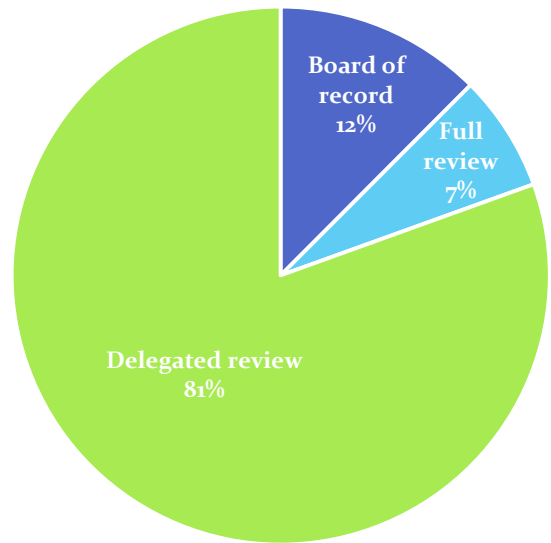
“Thank you for your thoughtful recommendations and comments on my original ethics application. They have been incredibly helpful and thought provoking during the revision process.” --- Graduate Student

Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

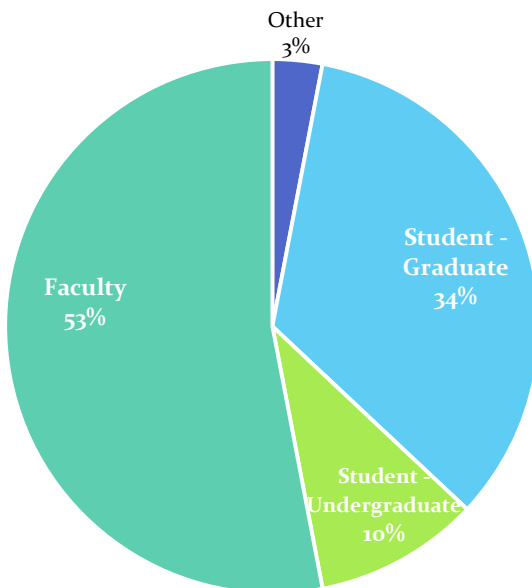
Board Assignment



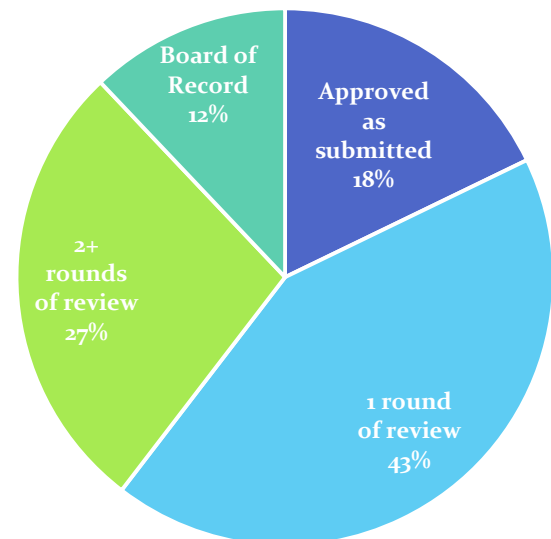
Proportionate Review



Researcher Profile

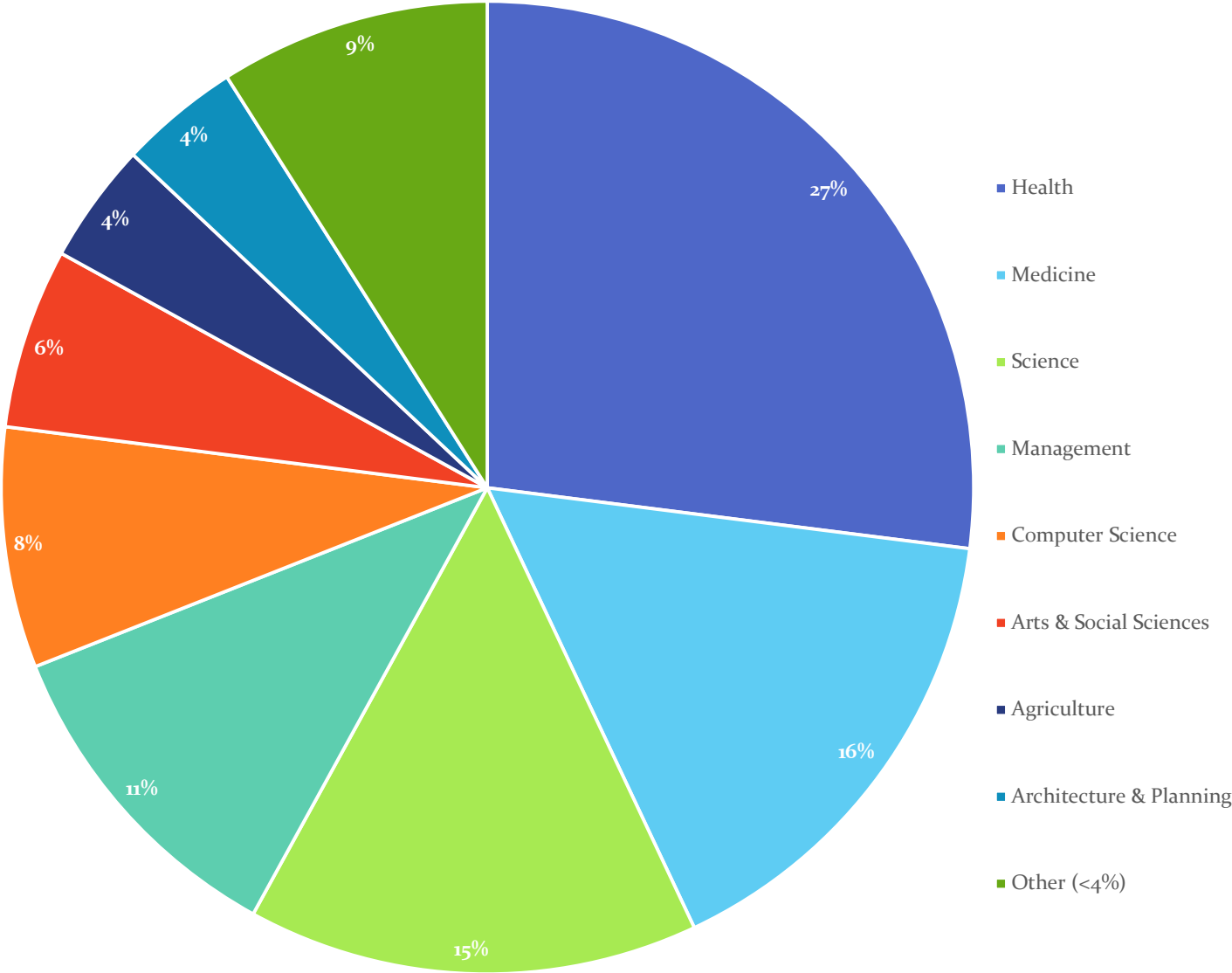


Rounds of Review (Application to Approval)



Note: 28% of submissions were withdrawn for quality control prior to review by the REBs

Submissions by Faculty



"I would like to say thank you very much for your kind and professional guidance." --Faculty Member

Board Membership*

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

Jennifer Isenor (Chair)

Nichole Austin
Sean Barrett
Sarah Burm
Heather Casavechia
Nicole Doria
Violet D'Souza

Merle Emms
Sanaz Gerami
Louise Gillis
Gordon Gubitza
Melanie Keats
Cory Munroe

Brian Murray
Heather Neyedli
Amanda Porter
Jean Shoveller
Nicholas Stewart
Samuel Stewart
Christine Stilwell

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

Megan Bailey (Chair)

Samantha Adema
Raluca Bejan
Catherine Bryan
Louise Carbert
Heather Casavechia
Steven Dukeshire

Michael Halpin
Julie Hyde
Dana Kabat-Farr
Niki Kiepek
Sean Mackinnon
Joseph Malloch
Nissim Mannathukkaren

Keahna Margeson
Paul Meade
Chris Moore
Rick Nason
Lorn Sheehan
Kate Swanson
Kate Thompson (CLT)
Jeff Waugh

Staff*

Catherine Connors (Director)
Angela Hersey (Manager)
Cali Goud (Support Specialist)

* as of March 31, 2023