



Nova Scotia Health Ethics Framework

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Ethics Framework

Table of Contents:

- 1. Introduction 3
- 2. Overview – Ethics Nova Scotia Health Model 3
 - 2.1. History..... 3
 - 2.2. Nova Scotia Health Vision, Mission, and Values..... 3
- 3. Ethics Support in Nova Scotia Health..... 3
 - 3.1. Accessing Ethics Support 4
 - 3.2. Research Ethics 4
- 4. Components – Ethics Nova Scotia Health 5
 - 4.1. Zone Ethics Committees 5
 - 4.2. Local Ethics Teams 5
 - 4.3. Ethics Leads Group 5
- 5. Ethics Collaborations..... 5
 - 5.1. NSHEN 5
 - 5.2. Dalhousie Department of Bioethics..... 6
- 6. Ethics Tools..... 6
 - Ethics Nova Scotia Health Tool: An approach to working through ethical questions 6
 - Patient and Family Ethics Tool..... 6

1. Introduction

This framework provides an explanation of how ethics support is provided within Nova Scotia Health. Ethics support is provided in three primary areas: clinical, organizational and research. Ethics Nova Scotia Health provides support for clinical and organizational ethics questions and issues that arise, while support for research ethics is provided by the Nova Scotia Health Research Ethics Board (REB).

In the following, an overview of the Ethics Nova Scotia Health model is provided, along with links for how to access this form of support. A description of the Nova Scotia Health Research Ethics Board (REB) is also provided with a link for this form of support (see Section 3.2 specifically).

2. Overview – Ethics Nova Scotia Health Model

2.1 History

In 2015, Nova Scotia's former District Health Authorities (DHAs) amalgamated to become the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA), now referred to as Nova Scotia Health. Previously there had been ethics supports (such as ethics committees, ethics tools and frameworks, and consultation services) in each district, and although all the districts collaborated through the Nova Scotia Health Ethics Network (NSHEN) there was no formal coordination of ethics activities nor an effective mechanism to engage with ethics issues that were relevant to the entire province.

Representatives from the DHA ethics committees met, along with members of the Dalhousie University Ethics Collaborations Team, to craft the Ethics Nova Scotia Health model. The transition to Nova Scotia Health provided opportunities to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in providing ethics support, especially for health policy and organizational ethics issues. The Ethics Nova Scotia Health model was designed to capitalize on this opportunity.

The goal of Ethics Nova Scotia Health is to support and cultivate a culture of ethics within the provincial health authority, such that those who work within Nova Scotia Health have the capacity and confidence to apply ethics lenses to their work. Ethics Nova Scotia Health falls under the portfolio of the VP Health Services, Quality, and System Performance.

2.2 Mission, Vision, and Values

In short, the following describes the vision, mission and values for Nova Scotia Health. Additional information on the [strategic plan](#) for Nova Scotia Health can be found on the public website.

Vision: Healthy people, healthy communities – for generations

Mission: To achieve excellence in health, healing and learning through working together

Values: Respect, Integrity, Innovation, Courage, Accountability

3. Ethics Support in Nova Scotia Health

In addition to research ethics support provided by the Nova Scotia Research Ethics Board, the

ethics support provided by Ethics Nova Scotia Health is focused in four different areas that meet both clinical and organizational ethics support needs. These four areas of support are:

- *Ethics education* - offer ethics-related sessions tailored to unit, department, or program needs. Ethics Nova Scotia Health has also created animated videos about informed choice and personal directives.
- *Clinical ethics consultation* – relates to a specific patient’s care, either past or present, or to a particular clinical situation that involves questions of professional ethics.
- *Organizational ethics consultation* - relates to broader, systems-level issues, often affecting a wide range of patients or other stakeholders.
- *Policy development and review* - assistance in the development or review of a health policy that has significant ethical elements.

3.1 Accessing Ethics Support

Ethics support (clinical and organizational) can be accessed via web-based request forms, email, or by telephone (confidential request line). Information on how to make an ethics request is provided on both the [public](#) and [corporate](#) websites, along with additional information about ethics support.

3.2. Research Ethics at Nova Scotia Health

The [Research & Innovation](#) website provides a comprehensive overview of this area at Nova Scotia Health, which falls under the VP, Research, Innovation, and Discovery and Chief Nurse Executive.

[Research ethics](#) for Nova Scotia Health is further addressed by the Nova Scotia Health Research Ethics Board (REB). Included here is a short excerpt from this website about the role of research ethics at Nova Scotia Health:

“...all research projects involving patients, staff, resources or data are reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) before the research begins. This requirement also applies to research involving human participants, human biological materials as well as human embryos, fetuses, fetal tissue, reproductive materials and stem cells. This applies to materials derived from living and deceased individuals.

The Nova Scotia Health REB has the authority and resources to review research protocols that will be conducted within [its purview]. Board membership includes representatives from each zone who meet via video conference on a weekly basis. The Nova Scotia Health REB is a paperless enterprise and the ROME database is the platform for on-line submissions to complete the research ethics review process.”

“The goals of the...REB are to:

- Meet the requirements of the [Tri-Council Policy Statement](#) Guidelines, ICH-GCP Guidelines, and Health Canada Division 5 Food and Drug Regulations which protect the safety and well-being of research participants
- Reduce review timelines and simultaneously maintain a high quality research ethics review

- Increase the capacity throughout the province to conduct health research of all kinds
- Attract and retain health professionals interested in research throughout the province
- Create a competitive research environment that attracts research to Nova Scotia”

4. Components – Ethics Nova Scotia Health

In order to deliver ethics support across the province, Ethics Nova Scotia Health is made up of Zone Ethics Committees, Local Ethics Teams, and an Ethics Leads Group. Collectively, these components ensure that the four above-outlined forms of ethics support are provided. Over time, the mix of components in each zone has evolved to meet the number of requests, loci of activities, and available membership. This flexibility and responsiveness is a strength of this approach to ethics support.

4.1 Zone Ethics Committees

Generally speaking, Zone Ethics Committees help organize and/or provide clinical ethics consultation and ethics education. They also review policies and, as requested, support organizational ethics consultations. These committees provide support for Local Ethics Teams if these are active within a particular zone. Zone Ethics Committees also contribute to ethics-related accreditation activities.

4.2 Local Ethics Teams

Local Ethics Teams assist with addressing health care ethics needs at the local level within their respective zone. In doing so, they may provide clinical ethics consultation and/or ethics education (alone or in coordination with the Zone Ethics Committee). Local Ethics Teams may also provide ethics review of policies and/or support for organizational ethics consultations. Local Ethics Teams contribute to ethics-related accreditation activities.

4.3 Ethics Leads Group

The Ethics Leads Group acts as a ‘hub’ for coordination, discussion, and oversight of all of Ethics Nova Scotia Health’s health care ethics activities. This includes sharing information about these activities; strategizing about current and anticipated ethics-related needs within the organization, and how best to meet these needs; as well as identification of themes and trends across ethics issues. This Group leads and/or supports organizational ethics consultations (in coordination with the Ethics Collaborations Team and the Nova Scotia Health Ethics Network). It also provides leadership and support in meeting ethics-related accreditation standards. The membership of this group includes members from each of the four Zones within Nova Scotia Health and the members of the Ethics Collaboration Team, which includes the Nova Scotia Health Ethics Network Ethicist, to further facilitate coordination, awareness, and oversight of relevant ethics issues and activities.

5. Ethics Collaborations

Nova Scotia Health has two contractual agreements that ensure access to relevant applied ethics expertise. These are:

5.1 Nova Scotia Health Ethics Network (NSHEN)

NSHEN consists of the collaborating partners of - Nova Scotia Health, the IWK Health

Centre, the provincial Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Seniors and Long Term Care, and the Dalhousie University Department of Bioethics. With the aim of building capacity for ethical practice, NSHEN focuses on ethics education, health policy, clinical ethics, and organizational ethics. NSHEN is committed to making connections, fostering relationships, and developing resources so that the ethics questions and concerns that are encountered each day in the health system are better identified and addressed.

5.2 Dalhousie University Department of Bioethics Ethics Collaboration

The Department of Bioethics is involved in a long-standing ethics collaboration with Nova Scotia Health that dates back to the previous Capital Health District Authority. The goal of the Ethics Collaboration is to provide ethics expertise, leadership, and support for ethics at Nova Scotia Health, including clinical and organizational ethics consultation, policy development and review, and ethics education. The members of the Department of Bioethics who provide this applied ethics expertise, including the NSHEN Network Ethicist, are collectively referred to as the Ethics Collaborations Team.

6. Ethics Tools

6.1 Ethics Nova Scotia Health Tool: An Approach to Working Through Ethical Questions

To assist with addressing ethical questions that arise, an Ethics Nova Scotia Health Tool is available. It provides support in clarifying these questions and working through to an answer. Please click [here](#) to find and download this tool.

6.2 Patient and Family Ethics Tool

This tool is designed for patients and families (loved ones). It may be useful when deciding about what is important and what to do as part of making health care decisions. This tool can help if one isn't sure about the right thing to do or disagrees with someone about what decision to make. It may also be helpful if one is wondering about how to talk with the health care team about what's important to you or your loved one. This tool is available in four languages (English, French, Arabic, and Chinese). It can be found on the public website – [click here](#).