

Waushara County Health Department Public Health Ethics Committee



Purpose

The purpose of the Waushara County Public Health Ethics Committee is to guide in the decision making processes that surround both ethical issues and when implementing new projects and programs at the Waushara County Health Department (WCHD). The WCHD utilizes a set of ethical principles that help to identify, analyze, and resolve ethical conflicts or tensions that arise. The goal of the Waushara County Public Health Ethics Committee is to decide what choices should be made when facing an ethical dilemma including rationale for those choices.

The Ethics Committee's focus is on the populations, institutions, and communities as well as the interdependence of people, public engagement, social good and avoidance of social harm in Waushara County. Through this process, the WCHD will be able to clarify, prioritize, and justify possible courses of Public Health Action, increase the capacity to recognize ethical issues, foster respectful deliberation about ethical tensions, enhance public trust and relationship building, and strengthen scientific integrity and professional excellence.

The Waushara County Public Health Ethics Committee is separate from Waushara County Ethics Committee, as described in the ethics ordinance, in that it focuses on the clients that are seen by the WCHD and the surrounding care and support received by the clients. Although separate, the committee recognizes a potential future need to collaborate with the Waushara County Ethics Committee, if warranted.

To Whom Are We Accountable?

As an organizational structure and as a public entity, the Public Health Ethics Committee is accountable to the Public Health Officer. The Public Health Officer is in turn accountable to the Waushara County Board of Health. The Waushara County Board of Health is in turn accountable to the Waushara County Board of Supervisors, who therefore, is accountable to the public.

Guiding Ethical Principles

The Waushara County Public Health Ethics Committee will utilize the *Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health*, as developed by the Public Health Leadership Society. (See Appendix A).

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Background

This Committee will operate under the *Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health*, as developed by the Public Health Leadership Society. (See Appendix A). These principles support the core elements of public health and align with the 10 Essential Public Health Services. The skills necessary to convey public health ethics include the following: 1) the ability to identify an ethical issue; 2) the ability to conduct ethical decision-making, including identification and weighing of harms and benefits of the potential action; 3) understanding the full spectrum of the determinants of health; 4) understanding basic ethical concepts such as justice, virtue, and human rights; and 5) building and maintaining public trust. The decision-making framework is outlined in Appendix B.

Assumptions

- No additional resource allocations are available to the Committee.
- The Public Health Officer and Waushara County Board of Health will respect and give strong consideration to Committee recommendations.
- Results of ethical analyses will be communicated back to all participants.

Values

- Stakeholders will be invited to participate in ethical analyses to ensure transparency of process.
- Staff facilitating ethical analyses will have met basic training requirements as outlined in the Workforce Development Plan.
- WCHD will develop and support a culture that values high ethical awareness and standards.

Scope (Boundaries)

Ethical analyses will focus on policy or operations and will not focus on individual or group behavior. Suspected unethical behavior on the part of an individual or group will be referred to the Waushara County Ethics Committee as addressed in the ethics ordinance.

Participation

The Public Health Ethics Committee is composed of staff members from the Waushara County Health Department and, depending on the ethical dilemma, County Corporation Counsel, as needed. Representatives from other County departments and subject matter experts, as well as community stakeholders, may be invited to participate, as needed. A statement of confidentiality will be signed by Committee members.

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Roles and Responsibilities

- **Chair**
 - Schedules, organizes, and may facilitate meetings.
 - Will review overall training needs of the Public Health Ethics Committee and ensure that such trainings are integrated with other WCHD Initiatives.
 - Report committee decisions and actions to the Waushara County Board of Health, as needed.
- **Facilitator**
 - A member of the Public Health Ethics Committee. Additionally, other non-member staff may facilitate meetings, after appropriate training.
- **Committee**
 - Will conduct report review and follow-up reviews of actions resulting from decisions made during the Public Health Ethics Committee.
- **Non Public Health Ethics Committee WCHD Staff**
 - All public health staff members are invited to bring forward public health ethical issues to the Public Health Ethics Committee for consideration to review.

Identification of Ethical Issue

Agenda item issues will be identified at the Waushara County Health Department all staff retreat. In addition, all staff members and ethics committee members are invited to present public health ethical issues to the Committee for review at any time.

Meetings

Meetings will be held as needed, depending on when issues are identified. Minutes shall reflect attendance. Reports will be generated reflecting the deliberation of the issue and actions identified. Results of the ethical analysis will be reviewed by the Public Health Ethics Committee members.

This document was created with examples from:

- San Diego, CA (PHS Public Health Ethics Committee Charter, April 2015)
- Clark County, WA (Clark County Public Health Ethics Committee Charter, June 2014)
- Establishing an Ethics Committee (NACCHO)

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Appendix A:

Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health

1. Public health should address principally the fundamental causes of disease and requirements for health, aiming to prevent adverse health outcomes.
2. Public health should achieve community health in a way that respects the rights of individuals in the community.
3. Public health policies, programs, and priorities should be developed and evaluated through processes that ensure an opportunity for input from community members.
4. Public health should advocate for, or work for the empowerment of, disenfranchised community members, ensuring that the basic resources and conditions necessary for health are accessible to all people in the community.
5. Public health should seek the information needed to implement effective policies and programs that protect and promote health.
6. Public health institutions should provide communities with the information they have that is needed for decisions on policies or programs and should obtain the community's consent for their implementation.
7. Public health institutions should act in a timely manner on the information they have within the resources and the mandate given to them by the public.
8. Public health programs and policies should incorporate a variety of approaches that anticipate and respect diverse values, beliefs, and cultures in the community.
9. Public health programs and policies should be implemented in a manner that most enhances the physical and social environment.
10. Public health institutions should protect the confidentiality of information that can bring harm to an individual or community if made public. Exceptions must be justified on the basis of the high likelihood of significant harm to the individual or others.
11. Public health institutions should ensure the professional competence of their employees.
12. Public health institutions and their employees should engage in collaborations and affiliations in ways that build the public's trust and the institution's effectiveness.

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Appendix B:

A Framework for Ethical Decision Making

Recognize an Ethical Issue

1. Could this decision or situation be damaging to someone or to some group? Does this decision involve a choice between a good and bad alternative, or perhaps between two "goods" or between two "bads"?
2. Is this issue about more than what is legal or what is most efficient? If so, how?

Get the Facts

3. What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are not known? Can I learn more about the situation? Do I know enough to make a decision?
4. What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome? Are some concerns more important? Why?
5. What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted? Have I identified creative options?

Evaluate Alternative Actions

6. Evaluate the options by asking the following questions:
 - Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)
 - Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Approach)
 - Which option treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)
 - Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)
 - Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Approach)

Make a Decision and Test It

7. Considering all these approaches, which option best addresses the situation?
8. If I told someone I respect-or told a television audience-which option I have chosen, what would they say?

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Act and Reflect on the Outcome

9. How can my decision be implemented with the greatest care and attention to the concerns of all stakeholders?
10. How did my decision turn out and what have I learned from this specific situation?

This framework for thinking ethically is the product of dialogue and debate at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Primary contributors include Manuel Velasquez, Dennis Moberg, Michael J. Meyer, Thomas Shanks, Margaret R. McLean, David DeCosse, Claire André, and Kirk O. Hanson. It was last revised in May 2009

An Ethics Framework for Public Health



Nancy E. Kass, ScD, *Am J Public Health*. 2001 November; 91(11): 1776–1782.

1. What are the public health goals of the proposed program?
2. How effective is the program in achieving its stated goals?
3. What are the known or potential burdens of the program?
4. Can burdens be minimized? Are there alternative approaches?
5. Is the program implemented fairly?
6. How can the benefits and burdens of a program be fairly balanced?