Washington County Public Health Advisory Council Ethics Charter

A   Background and Purpose

Efforts to achieve the

Goal Statement

The goal of ~~protecting and promoting the public's health have inherent ethical challenges.~~ the Public Health Advisory Committee (PHAC) is to uphold accountability standards that ensure Washington County Public Health (WCPH) ~~supports~~ is adhering to the adopted public health ethical framework. The PHAC, acting as the Core Ethics Body, will facilitate the process of open and transparent decision making to support an institutional culture of ethical awareness and high ethical standards. ~~To guide the division's work~~

Background and ~~ensure effective public health practice, WCPH has adopted the Public Health Code of Ethics as a guiding framework for programmatic and policy decisions.~~ **Purpose**

~~In order to ensure these ethical standards are upheld, WCPH recognizes the importance of an interdisciplinary ethics core body to address ethical analyses related to policies and operations. Serving as the WCPH ethics core body, the Washington County Public Health Advisory Council will:~~

- ~~Provide guidance to WCPH staff, management, and community partners on ethical issues; and~~
- ~~Provide a process of open and transparent decision making.~~

~~The WCPH Leadership Team, consisting of program supervisors and the WCPH Division Manager, and County Counsel, will review suggested ethical dilemmas brought forward by staff, Public Health Advisory Council members or the community and determine if they are appropriate for analysis. WCPH staff liaisons will have the responsibility of bringing these ethical issues to the Council. The Council will use the Public Health Code of Ethics as a framework for conducting the ethical analyses. To ensure an open and transparent process, key stakeholders will be invited to participate. When appropriate, the Council may also invite non-stakeholders, such as content experts to the deliberation.~~

~~Once an ethical analysis has been completed, the Council will submit a recommended course of action to the WCPH Division Manager. This recommendation will be supported with the results of the analysis and, therefore, will carry a high level of influence. However, although it may differ from the Council's recommendation, it is ultimately the responsibility of the WCPH Leadership Team to make the final policy decision and determine how to implement their decision(s) in order to best serve the residents of Washington County.~~

B   Meetings

Ethical analysis can help people and organizations decide what they should do and why. The purpose of this charter is to describe the rationale, goals, participants, and process for addressing ethical issues at WCPH. Grounding action in core values provides public health with a publicly defensible approach. (APHA, 2019; p 7) This ethics charter does not

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replace the legal standards defined in laws or regulations, and company contracts and policies.

Our Core Values

The following values underlie the ethical review process for WCPH and provide a foundation from which the Core Ethics Body will operate from. (Add in link to guide)

- Professionalism and trust
- Health and safety
- Health justice and equity
- Interdependence and solidarity
- Human rights and civilian liberties
- Inclusivity and engagement

Scope

In Scope

- PHAC will assess the information provided about an ethical issue by engaging with stakeholders and subject matter experts to understand the situation being addressed
- PHAC will utilize the adopted framework for decision making and provide a recommendation that will be brought back to the body that originally brought forward the issue for deliberation

Out of Scope

- PHAC will make no legal determinations or interpretations of laws and statutes
- PHAC provides no oversight of the Department of Health and Human Services/Public Health Division administrations or operations
- PHAC has no authority outside of an advisory role

Team Members and Stakeholders

PHAC Members

- The role of the PHAC is to gather and assess the information regarding the identified issue and provide a recommendation based off their deliberations

Public Health Division Manager

- Will provide the PHAC with any necessary context around County operations and programming

WCPH Staff Facilitator

- Will help facilitate the deliberation and ensure use of the adopted public health ethics framework and application of core values

Relevant Stakeholders and Subject Matter Experts

- Identified stakeholders and subject matter experts will provide additional background information and subject area expertise
- Examples include program managers, supervisors, County Counsel, County Health Officer, community partners

Process for Reviewing Ethical Situations

An ethical situation may come under review for several reasons; an active situation with ethical implications has been identified, a request for review is made as part of a planning process, and/or a hypothetical situation is raised related to data analysis.

A more detailed overview of the process for reviewing ethical situations can be found in the following WCPH documents; *Process for Reviewing Ethical Situations* and *Guide to Public Health Ethics.*

Process Overview

The ethics review process includes three phases:

- Phase 1: Defining the scope of the situation
- Phase 2: Management elevating the issue
- Phase 3: Core Ethics Body makes a decision

Phase 3 focuses on the decision-making process in which the PHAC will participate as the Core Ethics Body. Questions have been designed to help better understand and ethical situation under review. The discussion of these questions aims to do the following:

1. Determine the public health goals of the proposed action
2. Identify the ethically relevant facts and unknown information
3. Analyze the meaning and effects of the action for the health and rights of the affected individuals and communities
4. Analyze how the proposed action fits with core public health values

Finally, grounding questions have been adapted from the APHA Code of Ethics, 2019 to help guide decision making. The grounding questions are as follows:

1. **Permissibility** Would the action be considered ethically wrong if it were to have a good outcome?
2. **Respect** Would the actions be demeaning or disrespectful to individuals and communities even if it benefited their health?
3. **Reciprocity** Have reasonable efforts been made to offset the potential harms and losses that the action imposes on individuals and communities?
4. **Effectiveness** Is it reasonable to expect, based on best available evidence and past experience, that the action would achieve its public health goal?

5. **Responsible Use of Scarce Resources** Did the action demonstrate good stewardship and deserve the trust that the public has invested in public health practitioners?

6. **Proportionality** Did the action demonstrate that public health practitioners are using their power and authority judiciously and with humility?

7. **Accountability and Transparency** Did the action withstand close ethical scrutiny and can it be justified by valid reasons that the general public will understand?

8. **Public Participation** In deciding on the action, have all potentially affected stakeholders had a meaningful opportunity to participate? If some are to be deliberately excluded from decision making, is there an ethical justification for doing so?

Completing the Process

- The deliberation is considered complete when there is a consensus among the group around their recommendations related to the issue

- The WCPH staff facilitator will review with the group their recommendations prior to finalizing

- Once the recommendation has been finalized the WCPH staff facilitator will follow up to learn how recommendations were implemented and report back to the PHAC

Meeting Schedule and Process

One meeting a year of the Public Health Advisory Council will be assigned to ethics core body deliberations and training. Additional meeting timetimes may be set aside as regular Council agendas allow for additional trainings and information sharingissues arise or requests are made.

The Council chair and co-chair will facilitate ethics meetings and ensure Council members follow ground rules for the conduct of meetings, motions, discussion and voting.

WCPH staff will work with Council chair and co-chair to organize and schedule meetings as well as ensure appropriate stakeholders are present. Staff will provide supplemental materials as requested by Council members to aid in the ethical analysis.

Ground Rules

At each meeting, the following ground rules will be respected:
- Everyone participates
- One speaker at a time; Raise name plate to speak
- Start on time and end on time
- Staying on schedule is everyone's responsibility; honor time limits
- Limit side conversations
- Meetings will be uninterrupted (quiet cell phones)
- Respect different opinions
- Follow through on action items

C   Values

- Stakeholders will be invited to participate in ethical analyses to ensure transparency of process.
- Ethical analyses will focus on policy or operations and will not focus on individual or group behavior.
- WCPH will develop and support a culture that values high ethical awareness and standards.