



COMMITTEE CHARTER

Purpose: The purpose of Public Health Ethics Committee is to provide a mechanism for Public Health Services (PHS) Division, in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), to identify and resolve ethical issues that arise from program, policies, interventions, or employee/employer relations.

To Whom Are We Accountable? As an organizational structure, the Public Health Ethics Committee is accountable to the Public Health Officer, who is in turn is accountable to the County HHSA Director, the County Chief Administrative Officer, and the Board of Supervisors.

Background: A *Public Health Code of Ethics* clarifies the distinctive elements of public health and the ethical principles that are related. The mandate of public health to promote and protect the health of the public is fundamentally a moral one. Thus this carries an obligation to ensure the well-being of our clients and customers, and it implies that the power to execute this mandate is authorized. This Committee supports the explicit, and not implicit, attention to ethics. This Committee will operate under the *Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health*, as developed by the Public Health Leadership Society. 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 will be outlined in the PHS policy and procedure for the Public Health Ethics Committee. The activities of this Committee support the County's Strategic Goal of Operational Excellence. This Committee's efforts will contribute to the strategic vision of the County Strategic Plan and *Live Well San Diego* by ensuring that clients and customers are safe and are not inadvertently harmed due to programmatic or policy actions.

Participation: The Public Health Ethics Committee is composed of members from the Public Health Leaders Committee (i.e., PHS Branch Chiefs, Program Managers, and Supervisors), Regional representation, County Office of Ethics and Compliance, and, depending on the ethical dilemma, County 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.

Identification of Ethical Issue: Agenda Item issues will be identified at monthly PHS Public Health Leaders meetings during the interim from staff. In addition, all staff members are invited to present public health ethical issues to the Committee for review.

Function of Committee: The Committee function is to conduct the ethical analysis to review ethical issues proposed. The Committee will also function to implement its Work Plan.

Meetings: Meetings will be held monthly, as needed, depending on when issues are identified. Meeting will immediately follow the PHS Public Health Leaders meeting and begin at 11:00am on the fourth Monday of each month. Trainings will also occur during the meetings. 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 PHS Executive Team.

Roles and Responsibilities of Participants: The participant roles and responsibilities are as follows:

- **Chair** – Schedules, organizes, and facilitates meetings. The Deputy Public Health Officer (PHS Leadership) shall serve in this role, with the selected Branch Chiefs acting as backup.
- **Facilitator** – A member of the Public Health Ethics Committee. Additionally, other non-member staff may facilitate meetings, after appropriate training.
- **Committee** – Will conduct follow-up reviews of actions resulting from decisions made during the Public Health Ethics Committee.
- **PHS Executive Team** – Reviews the report of the Public Health Ethics Committee.
 - The Executive Team is composed of executive staff of PHS Administration and includes the Public Health Officer/Director of PHS, Assistant PHS Director, and Deputy Public Health Officer.
 - The Executive Team will make the final decisions of actions, if actions are not agreed upon during the Public Health Ethics Committee.
- **PHS Executive Committee** – will review overall training needs of the Public Health Ethics Committee and ensure that such trainings are integrated with other PHS Initiatives, such as Health Equity.
- **Non-Public Health Ethics Committee PHS Staff**
 - All PHS staff members are invited to bring forward public health ethical issues to the Public Health Ethics Committee for consideration to review.

Scope (Boundaries): The focus of the ethical analysis is on public health policy, practice, and operations and not on individual or group behavior. The latter will be referred to the PHS program or the Departmental Human Resource Officer or DHRO.

Strategic Plan:

- **Vision:** A culture of fairness and transparency.

- **Mission:** To create a process of explicit, rigorous, and standard practice to address ethical issues.

- **Values (adopted from the PHS Strategic Plan)**
 - Collaboration ▪ Responsiveness
 - Diversity ▪ Transparency
 - Respect

Strategic Priority Areas and Goal: At least two priority areas will be developed in the following areas:

- **Ethical Analysis**
- **Staff Training** (Will align with the PHS Workforce Development Plan.)

The priority areas and corresponding goals, operational objectives, performance measures, supporting activities, and timelines are detailed in a separate work plan document.

For additional information, please contact:
Public Health Services Administration
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