

# Fraser Health Ethics Framework

**Ethics Services**

January 5, 2023

## FRASER HEALTH'S APPROACH TO ETHICS

### Decision Methods and Processes

Fraser Health's approach to providing clinical and organizational support for ethically challenging issues was established in 2005 with the creation of Fraser Health Ethics Services (FHES).

Fraser Health's Ethics Framework for raising and addressing ethically challenging issues and questions includes:

- Ethics-Based Decision Process ([Appendix 1](#))
- Clinical Ethics Consultation Toolkit ([Appendix 2](#))
- Good Organizational Decisions: Ethical Decision-Making Toolkit for Leaders and Policy Makers ([Appendix 3](#))

### *What Is an Ethical Issue?*

Ethics includes building the capacity of individuals and teams (regardless of size) to together work through hard questions in such a way as to allow each individual and the team collectively to live with greater integrity.

All questions are ethics questions in some way. All issues have an ethics dimension in that they are based on what we believe is true about the context (facts) and on what we believe is important (values). Accordingly, we cannot divide issues based on which ones have to do with ethics and which do not. Some issues are *ethically challenging* – people experience difficulty in dealing with them because there is an uncertainty or disagreement about the facts and or what should matter most in the situation. Ethically challenging situations are more likely to be encountered in contexts of diversity.

### *Who Faces Ethically Challenging Situations?*

At Fraser Health, we work alongside and serve people who are different from each other in many ways. These differences have important implications for the way that people understand and approach health and health care and can therefore increase complexity and challenges in health care contexts. Differences may include race or ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, language, country of origin, religious and spiritual perspective, socio-economic status, access to power, and experiences of oppression or trauma, among many others.

We all face ethically challenging situations. In the healthcare context this includes patients, families and loved ones, direct care providers (from all professional backgrounds), clinical leaders, administrators, and policy makers. The provision of health care requires making difficult choices about matters that impact life and the well-being of people. The choices we face are significant. When it is unclear what should be most important in making these choices or when there is disagreement or conflict, we face an ethical difficulty. This is where ethics analysis can help.

## *What Is an Ethics Analysis?*

Ethics analysis of an issue involves:

- getting as clear as possible about the facts in the situation
- developing a well justified understanding of what should matter most - the “values”, and
- finding a solution that best lives up to these values in this context.

Ensuring quality ethics analysis requires a respectful and deliberative process, with all relevant or affected stakeholders involved. Such collaboration is required to benefit from the diversity of relevant perspectives that are involved in issues and to honour the impact of most choices on multiple people.

A good process of ethics analysis must make room not only for finding an answer to the immediate problem but also to explore relevant broader questions of the purpose of life, the purpose of the activity as it relates to the purpose of life, and what it means to be a good person.

Having to face values trade-offs and to give up things that matter very much causes people pain. This is considered moral distress. The pain we may experience is made worse when we are powerless to understand the reasons for the sacrifice and when we are not able to contribute our thinking to the decision process (however remotely) that leads to having to sacrifice our values.

Ethics includes building the capacity of individuals and teams (regardless of size) to together work through hard questions in such a way as to allow each individual and the team collectively to live with greater integrity. In this way, ethics is not just about solving problems. Rather, it is about helping those involved make meaning of experiences.

### **Guiding Values**

Working through an ethically challenging issue includes reflecting on what is important. Fraser Health has established at least two formal sets of commitments about what should matter in dealing with issues.

Fraser Health has identified respect, caring and trust as the values that should underpin relationships between people and how we interact with others.

Fraser Health has also established the Equal Respect, Equitable Treatment Framework ([Appendix 4](#)), for dealing with diversity in all aspects of the organization’s work. It sets five Core Commitments for how we work in a context of diversity and inequality:

- **Equal Respect, Anti-Discrimination, and Health Equity for All:** We will treat all people served by and working in Fraser Health with equal respect. We will eliminate individual and institutional discrimination. We will make sure everyone has equitable access to health care.
- **Respect for Indigenous Peoples:** We will specifically focus on the rights of all Indigenous peoples – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – to ensure cultural safety and practice cultural humility.

- **Curiosity, Compassion, and Collaboration:** We will continue to learn from each other, as individuals and communities. We will be curious about each other's traditions, beliefs, and values. We will establish a shared approach to the complex questions we face together.
- **Health and Well-being for All:** We will protect and support the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health and well-being of those we serve and those providing services within, or on behalf of, Fraser Health.
- **Accountability, Growth, and Excellence in All We Do:** We will take responsibility for living up to these commitments. We will continuously improve the environment within the organization.

## Support for Decision-Making

### *How Does Fraser Health Provide Ethics Support?*

FHES provides a range of services and interventions to help deal with hard situations. Our approach focuses on building the capacity of Fraser Health employees, physicians, and teams to use systematic methods of ethics analysis within respectful relationships. Our goal is to help people solve difficult issues and also model how to build trust amongst those involved in these situations, to build resilience in the face of moral distress, and to collaboratively arrive at ethically justified solutions to the problem at hand.

### *Clinical Ethics Consultation Support*

FHES offers a clinical ethics consultation service to support an individual and/or team facing acute ethically challenging situations in the context of the care for individual patients, clients, and residents. You can request a consult by completing [this form](#).

Teams providing care for an individual patient, client, or resident, or the families involved, will face situations where there is uncertainty, disagreement, or conflict about the care/treatment plan. Sometimes relationships in these situations become strained, communication breaks down and become difficult, and members of the group feel strong emotions and experience difficulty grieving and/or coping.

Clinical ethics consultations do not tell people what to do, but rather to help them decide what to do for themselves. In some cases, the Clinical Ethics Consult team will make recommendations. However, such recommendations are not binding, have no legal force, and are not meant to displace the usual decision-makers.

The Clinical Ethics Consultation Service involves having a professional ethicist with the support of ethics consultation team members facilitate a process to work through the ethically challenging situation. The service follows a systematic five-phase process for helping teams to work through the situation. This process is reflected in the Clinical Ethics Consultation Toolkit ([Appendix 2](#)).

The goals of this service are a) to help the team (including the patient and family members) solve the immediate difficulty that they are experiencing and b) to help the team to see what an ethics-based decision process looks like, in an effort to build capacity to use these tools independently.

### *System-Level Ethics Consultation Support*

Fraser Health has a System-Level Ethics Consultation Service to support leaders to make ethically justified decisions for issues that affect groups of people. This usually means creating policies, practice guidelines, strategies and other broad instruments to affect system change. FHES' approach to system-level ethics support is guided by Good Decisions ([Appendix 3](#)).

In FHES' system-level ethics consultation service, ethics-trained professionals assist a Shared Work Team to work through the system-level ethics process in a respectful environment.

Examples of policies created using the system level process include Cannabis for Medical Purposes (revision) ([Appendix 5](#)) and Neurological Determination of Death Policy and Procedure ([Appendix 6](#)). As part of a system level ethics consult specific tools will also be created from time to time for application in a specific context. An example of this is seen in the SBAR – COVID19 Resource Allocation Framework and Process ([Appendix 7](#)).

### **Capacity Building**

Given FHES' focus on building capacity, a key service offered is collaboration with different departments and programs to help incorporate ethics-based decision tools and team building guiding values into day-to-day decision processes. FHES offers multiple touch points for working with individual programs and teams.

### *Annual Conference*

Prior to COVID-19, Fraser Health hosted an annual ethics conference. Each year the conference is a partnership between FHES and another Fraser Health program. This provides an opportunity to help identify and address key ethically challenging issues faced in the partner program. It is also a catalyst for ongoing partnership between FHES and the partner program.

### *Ethics and diversity capacity-building*

When a program or department is ready to develop a broad ethics or diversity capacity building strategy, FHES will work with that program to design and implement a strategy that will meet the goals of the program within the constraints of the program's context. FHES offers a variety of interventions including in-person workshops (focused on diversity core competencies), online modules, and team- and program-specific training as needed, including how to use language service/interpreters.

### *Unit Presence*

Department staff members are available to be present at a program or team's site in an *ad hoc* or a routinized way as a resource to offer critical reflection, immediate support, and resources in a team's day-to-day handling of patient care as it relates to ethically challenging situations.

### *Team Support*

FHES also offers a service to teams facing team-level ethically challenging situations. For example, a team going through a restructuring process may seek this service to help the team deal with moral distress that is being experienced by team members, identify core values to

guide team decision-making in the new reality, and develop strategies for responding to anticipated challenges in a way that lives up to these values.

### **Evaluation and Research to Support Best Practice**

An important part of the mandate for the departments is to undertake research in ethics and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The range of research projects can include assessing the impacts of our interventions, developing, and evaluating methods of ethics consultation and ethics and diversity, equity, and inclusion capacity-building, examining the ethics dimensions of care in particular health care contexts, and understanding and responding to the needs of particular groups and populations within the region.

# APPENDICIES

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## APPENDIX 1: ETHICS BASED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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Fraser Health  
Ethics-Based Decisic

## APPENDIX 2: CLINICAL ETHICS CONSULTATION TOOLKIT

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## APPENDIX 3: GOOD ORGANIZATIONAL DECISIONS: ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING TOOLKIT FOR LEADERS AND POLICY MAKER

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## APPENDIX 4: EQUAL RESPECT, EQUITABLE TREATMENT FRAMEWORK

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Organizational Deci

## APPENDIX 5: CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES

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Revision Cannabis -  
Medical Purposes Di

## APPENDIX 6: NEUROLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF DEATH POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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NDD Policy -  
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## APPENDIX 7: SBAR COVID-19 Resource Allocation Framework and Process

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SBAR - COVID19  
Resource