

| <b>POLICY AND PROCEDURE</b> |                                     |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| SUBJECT/TITLE:              | Public Health Ethical Practices     |
| APPLICABILITY:              | All Staff                           |
| CONTACT PERSON & DIVISION:  | Health Commissioner, Administration |
| ORIGINAL DATE ADOPTED:      | 06/07/2017                          |
| LATEST EFFECTIVE DATE:      | 12/03/2025                          |
| REVIEW FREQUENCY:           | 5 years                             |
| BOARD APPROVAL DATE:        | N/A                                 |
| REFERENCE NUMBER:           | 800-027-P                           |

#### **A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to:

- a) Define the framework for ethical practice within the department.
- b) Adopt a public health code of ethics applicable to the department and its employees.
- c) Implement an ethics review process.
- d) Support PHAB standard Version 2022.

#### **B. POLICY**

Canton City Public Health (CCPH) will fulfil its mission in a manner that respects the rights of individuals in the community without discrimination. CCPH will make every effort to make decisions and policies that are necessary, effective, proportional, provide the least infringement to all involved, and can be justified to the public.

#### **C. BACKGROUND**

Public health ethics involves a systematic methodology to clarify, analyze, prioritize, and justify possible public health actions based on ethical principles, values, and beliefs of various stakeholders, scientific and other information, and sound public health practice (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Decisions relating to public health policy and practice should be based on sound scientific principles and the values of those most affected. Implementation of many public health interventions requires the careful balance of prevention and liberty.

Public health ethics seeks to understand and clarify the principles and values that guide public health actions. Principles and values provide a framework for decision-making and a means of justifying decisions. Because public health actions are often undertaken by governmental public health agencies and are directed at the population level, the principles and values which guide public health can differ from those which guide actions in biology and clinical medicine (bioethics and medical ethics) which are more patient or individual-centered.

As a field of practice, public health ethics is the application of relevant principles and values to public health decision-making. In applying an ethics framework, public health ethics inquiry carries out three core functions, namely 1) identifying and clarifying the ethical dilemma posed, 2) analyzing it in terms of alternative courses of action and their consequences, and 3) resolving the dilemma by deciding which course of action best incorporates and balances the guiding principles and values.

Do not confuse ethical practice with legal ethics requirements. Ohio law has established an Ohio Ethics Law that applies to all public employees. This law provides a legal framework for your actions relative to your public employment (such as nepotism, public contracts, compensation, and influence). The Ohio Ethics Law will be addressed in a separate policy. Brief Comparison Table:

| Type                 | Focus                                    | Policy Reference            |
|----------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Public Health Ethics | Stakeholder values, program impacts      | This policy                 |
| Legal Ethics         | Conflict of interest, misuse of position | Ohio Ethics Law Policy      |
| Professional Ethics  | Individual license/certification         | Division-specific Standards |

#### D. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Public Health Ethics** – Involves a systematic methodology for clarifying, analyzing, prioritizing and justifying possible public health actions based on ethical principles, the values and beliefs of various stakeholders, scientific and other information, and sound public health practice.

#### E. PROCEDURES & STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

##### 1. PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL PRACTICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

CCPH adopts the following Principles of Ethical Practice of Public Health that are applicable to all employees of the CCPH:

- a. Public health should principally address the fundamental causes of disease and requirements for health, aiming to prevent adverse health outcomes.
- b. Public health should achieve community health in a way that respects the rights of individuals in the community.
- c. Public health policies, programs, and priorities should be developed and evaluated through processes that ensure an opportunity for input from community members.
- d. 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.
- e. Public health should seek the information needed to implement effective policies and programs that protect and promote health.
- f. 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.
- g. 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.
- h. Public health programs and policies should incorporate a variety of approaches that anticipate and respect diverse values, beliefs, and cultures in the community.
- i. Public health programs and policies should be implemented in a manner that most enhances the physical and social environment.



- j. 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.
- k. Public health institutions should ensure the professional competence of their employees.
- l. 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.

In addition, each employee should adhere to any professional code of ethics or standard of practice that is applicable to their professional certification.

## 2. GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL PUBLIC HEALTH DECISION MAKING

The following guidelines will be used for decision-making at the CCPH. These principles should be part of any policy or practice decision-making relating to a public health action. While not a formal or rigid process, these three elements should be considered.

- a. Analyze Ethical Issues
  - i. What are the risks and harms of concern?
  - ii. What are the public health goals?
  - iii. What, if any, are the moral claims of stakeholders?
  - iv. Is the source or scope of legal authority in question?
  - v. Are precedent cases relevant?
  - vi. Do professional codes of ethics provide guidance?
- b. Evaluate the Ethical Dimensions of the Alternate Courses of Public Health Action
  - i. Utility: Does the public health action produce a balance of benefits over harms?
  - ii. Justice: Are the benefits and burdens distributed fairly?
  - iii. Respect for individual and community interests: Does the public health action respect individual and civic roles and values?
- c. Provide justification for a public health action
  - i. Effectiveness: Is the public health goal likely to be accomplished?
  - ii. Proportionality: Will the probable benefits of the action outweigh the infringed moral considerations?
  - iii. Necessity: Is overriding the conflicting ethical claims necessary to achieve the public health goal?
  - iv. Least Infringement: Is the action the least restrictive and least intrusive to all parties?
  - v. Public Justification: Can public health offer justification that citizens, and in particular the most affected, could find acceptable in principle?

## 3. DECISION MAKING IN EVERYDAY PRACTICE

CCPH staff make daily decisions that affect people, programs and policies. Employees have the following expectations relative to everyday decision-making:

- a. All employees will review and sign off on this policy and its appendices, including 800-027-03-A\_Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health.
- b. All employees will complete annual Ohio Ethics Law Training through the Ohio Ethics Commission.

- c. All employees will be familiar with and adhere to any code of ethics or standards of practice for their license or professional certification.
- d. All employees, to the best of their ability, will make decisions that are supported by the guidelines and standards provided in this policy.

#### **4. RESOLUTION OF ISSUES POSING AN ETHICAL DILEMMA**

From time to time, issues will arise that pose an ethical dilemma and are not easily resolved by the individual employee. Examples may include the following:

- a. Significant deviation from established policy or procedure.
- b. Decisions that may result in the restriction of movement of individuals, restriction of liberty, or revocation of a license or permit.
- c. Decisions that may conflict with HIPAA, or a presumed right of privacy.
- d. Decisions that may apply to groups differently, have bias, or have the appearance of discrimination.
- e. Potential conflicts of interest.

When a question or conflict arises that is not easily answered by the employee, it is the employees' responsibility to discuss the issue with their supervisor in an attempt to resolve the issue. If the issue cannot be resolved with the supervisor, then the issue will be discussed with the health commissioner.

Ethical issues may be referred to the Ethics Review Committee when they involve complex dilemmas that extend beyond routine policy interpretation or when they present substantial implications for public trust, individual rights, equity, or legal authority. Staff are encouraged to consult their supervisor to assess whether an issue warrants elevation. The Health Commissioner, in consultation with the involved division or based on the referral form, is responsible for determining whether an issue meets the threshold for formal review.

A referral for ethics review for action can be made by any employee or community member. Referrals shall be in writing using the form 800-027-01-F\_Ethics Review Committee Referral Form. The completed referral shall be submitted to the Health Commissioner who shall convene the Ethics Review Committee and place the item on the agenda for consideration.

#### **5. ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Members of the Ethics Review Committee are appointed by the Health Commissioner to ensure a balance of perspectives and subject matter expertise. When selecting members, the Health Commissioner considers the individual's leadership role, familiarity with public health principles, understanding of equity and community impact, and capacity to engage in ethical deliberation. Temporary or ad hoc members may be added for specific cases when additional expertise or stakeholder representation is required.

CCPH establishes an Ethics Review Committee that consist of: two (2) members of the Division Leadership Team, one (1) staff member, CCPH HIPAA Privacy Officer, a staff member familiar with the dilemma and a representative of the Canton City Law Department, as needed. The Health Commissioner, or designee,

shall serve as chairman. Members of the Ethics Review Committee shall be appointed by the Health Commissioner.

Members of the Ethics Review Committee are appointed for staggered terms of three (3) years, with the option to be reappointed by the Health Commissioner. Terms may be adjusted to ensure continuity and institutional knowledge. To promote fresh perspectives and equitable participation across the department, committee composition will be reviewed annually by the Health Commissioner. Members of the Committee should complete prerequisite training regarding ethics in public health.

- <https://www.mittrainingcenter.org/courses/eipha0622noce>
- <https://sph.unc.edu/nciph/public-health-ethics-online-training/>
- Reach Trainings

The Ethics Review Committee shall meet at the call of the chairman. The purpose of this committee will be to:

- Assist the department in resolving any decisions that pose an ethical dilemma.
- Review any cases brought before the committee.
- Analyze the case.
- Make a recommendation for resolution.

The following procedure applies to the Ethics Review Committee:

- a. The Ethics Review Committee will consider any referral within 30 calendar days of the receipt of the referral with initial acknowledgment of the referral within 5 business days. The Committee may take the following actions relative to this referral:
  - i. No action.
  - ii. Request further information.
  - iii. Accept for review.
- b. If the referral is accepted for review, the Ethics Review Committee will follow the algorithm in 800-027-02-A\_Ethics Review Committee Process Workflow Diagram. Every effort will be made to provide a final recommendation within 180 days of acceptance of a referral for review.
- c. Information gathering and stakeholder input: For all accepted referrals, the Ethics Review Committee will follow a consistent information-gathering process to support a well-informed and ethical resolution.
  - i. Input from affected stakeholders to understand the short- and long-term impact of the potential decision, and to learn about the values, interests, and concerns of those who may be most directly impacted.
  - ii. Collection of additional facts, scientific evidence, and relevant public health research to evaluate the consequences of various courses of action and ensure alignment with sound public health principles.
  - iii. Review of any relevant precedent within the department, including past decisions, policies, or similar ethical deliberations.

- iv. Examination of how other jurisdictions or public health agencies have addressed similar ethical issues, where applicable.
- v. The Ethics Review Committee may utilize experts outside of the CCPH in their deliberation as needed. The committee shall endeavor to collect input from all affected parties and stakeholders.
- d. The final recommendation of the Ethics Review Committee is not binding and may be modified as needed by the Health Commissioner or the Board of Health.
- e. All recommendations for the committee will be in writing and a copy will be provided to the referring entity, the Health Commissioner and any other stakeholders directly affected by the outcome. When appropriate, decisions may also be shared more broadly with internal staff or the community through department newsletters, email, or the department website, with respect to confidentiality laws. The Health Commissioner will determine whether Board of Health notification or public communication is warranted based on the scope and impact of the issue.
- f. All deliberations of the Ethics Review Committee will be conducted in compliance with Ohio laws and rules with respect to public records and public meetings. Every effort will be made to conduct any review with the utmost transparency.

## **6. RETENTION OF ETHICS REVIEWS**

Completed ethics reviews, including all supporting documentation, recommendations, and final determinations, shall be securely stored in the folder associated with this policy, entitled 800-027-P Completed Ethics Reviews in the Employee Portal (SharePoint). Access will be limited to members of the Ethics Committee, the Health Commissioner, and other individuals authorized by the Commissioner.

## **7. RECONSIDERATION AND REVIEW OF DECISIONS**

Ethical decisions and recommendations may be revisited when new information, conditions, or stakeholder perspectives emerge that could materially impact the original conclusion. Reconsideration may be initiated by:

- a. A written request from an affected stakeholder or referring entity;
- b. The emergence of significant new evidence (e.g., legal guidance, scientific findings, or data);
- c. Environmental or programmatic changes that alter the context of the original issue.

The Ethics Review Committee will determine whether the issue warrants re-evaluation and, if accepted, will follow the same process used in the original review. Any revised recommendation will be documented in writing and shared with the original referring entity and any newly affected parties.

Additionally, the Committee may establish a scheduled review date for decisions that are made in rapidly evolving or uncertain contexts, to ensure continued alignment with public health practice, legal authority, and community impact.

## **8. DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY**

The final responsibility for decisions related to this policy rests with the Health Commissioner, unless otherwise specified by the Board of Health or required by law. Recommendations from the Ethics Review Committee are advisory and may be modified or adopted by the Health Commissioner or, in certain cases, referred to the Board of Health.

Issues will be referred to the Board of Health when:

- They involve significant legal or regulatory implications (e.g., potential litigation or constitutional concerns);
- They concern department-wide policies or practices requiring formal Board approval or resolution;
- They involve ethical decisions that may set precedent for future operations or public expectations;
- The Health Commissioner deems the issue to be of such public interest, impact, or sensitivity that Board-level consideration is warranted.

The Health Commissioner maintains authority to resolve ethical issues that arise in the normal course of operations, provided those issues do not meet the above thresholds.

#### F. CITATIONS & REFERENCES

Link to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Ethics webpage:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/od/science/integrity/phethics/>

American Public Health Association, Public Health Ethics Statement:  
[https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/memborgroups/ethics\\_brochure.ashx](https://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/memborgroups/ethics_brochure.ashx)

#### G. CONTRIBUTORS

The following staff contributed to the authorship of this document:

1. Diane Thompson, Director of Nursing
2. Amanda Archer, Health Commissioner

#### H. APPENDICES & ATTACHMENTS

800-027-02-A\_Ethics Review Committee Process Workflow Diagram  
800-027-03-A\_Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health

#### I. REFERENCE FORMS

800-027-01-F\_Ethics Committee Review Referral Form

#### J. REVISION & REVIEW HISTORY

| Revision Date | Review Date | Author    | Notes   |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|---|
| 9/3/2025      |             | A. Archer | Updated process to align with PHAB requirements V2022. Added reconsideration language, retention language, and decision-making authority. |



Canton City Public Health  
All Staff  
FINAL

#### K. APPROVAL

This document has been approved in accordance with the “800-001-P Policy Development” procedure as of the effective date listed above.