DIVISION OF HEALTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH COORDINATION PROGRAM
RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects

PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
(PAHO/WHO)

525 23rd Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20037-2985

Phone: (+202) 974-3041; Fax: (+202) 974-3652
E-mail: RGP@paho.org

ETHICAL GUIDELINES
FOR
RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

In its research activities, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) seeks to ensure that any project in which it is involved complies with international ethical guidelines. The PAHO Research Grants Program (RGP), in its dual function of promotion of research and involvement in research development, has been entrusted with the task of ensuring that these guidelines are followed.

All PAHO grants needs to meet certain criteria and have already undergone a process of ethical review before submission to RGP and subsequent review by the PAHO Ethical Review Committee (PAHOERC). The purpose of this booklet is to inform international researchers receiving grants from PAHO of their responsibility in complying with ethical guidelines and how they should go about meeting the necessary requirements.

Any project submitted to PAHO for a grant must contain the following:

A. Detailed description of procedures to be followed to protect persons participating in the study.

B. Copy of informed consent form to be used with human subjects participating in the study.

C. Signed certifications by the local / institutional / AD HOC Ethical Review Committee.

The following three parts of this document are meant to provide the researcher with sufficient information to enable him/her to meet the above requirements.

A. Ethical Procedures to Be Followed in the Study

The research protocol should contain a detailed description of the procedures to be followed to ensure the protection of the human subjects involved in the study.

Whenever research involves human subjects, this section should *explicitly provide for the following*:

- The *known benefits and risks or disadvantages* for the subjects in the study.
- *Exact description of the information to be delivered to the subjects of the study and when it will be communicated both orally or in writing.* Examples of this information include the following:
  - the objectives and purposes of the study
  - any experimental procedures
  - possible discomforts
  - expected benefits of the procedures used
  - any known short- or long-term risks alternative methods for treatment if the study is a clinical trial
  - duration of the studies
  - suspension of the study if a finding is made of negative effects or if there is sufficient evidence of positive effects that do not justify continuing with the study
  - the freedom of subjects to withdraw from the study whenever they want

Note: If said subjects are minors, the informed consent form is to be designed for their parents or guardians. *If for any reason these minors cannot participate because of reluctance on their part to expose their situation to their parents or guardians (thus placing them at greater risk), the study should include measures to provide them with care or counsel even if they are excluded from participating.*

- When appropriate, indicate any special incentive or treatment that subjects will receive through their participation in the study. If there is any type of remuneration, specify the amount, method of delivery, time, and reason why payment is required. *The study should ensure that the subjects involve suffer no financial burden as a result of their participation.*
- Indicate *how the information obtained from participants in the study will be kept confidential*.
- *List the drugs, vaccines, diagnoses, procedures, or instruments to be used, whether they are registered, unregistered, new, or currently in use in the country.*

Moreover, responses are required for other ethical concerns, such as the following:

- In studies where personal information will be obtained from the subjects, indicate how the information will be kept confidential.
- For studies involving the participation of subjects in an experiment (experimental or quasi-experimental trials, studies of interventions, etc.), information should be provided on the free and informed consent of the participants and the strategy that will be used to obtain it.
- Brief synopsis of how the research findings will be reported and delivered to the subjects involved in the study or to other interested parties.
- Indicate and justify the inclusion, as appropriate, of children, the elderly, physically challenged, and pregnant women. Justify the non-inclusion in the study group, if appropriate, of women (of any age), an ethnic minority, racial group, etc.
- When appropriate, indicate how the appropriate balance of the two sexes will be ensured in the study groups. In addition, indicate, when appropriate, how gender inequities and discrimination and disadvantages can affect women's involvement in the research.

B. Informed Consent: Attach the informed consent form to be signed by the persons participating as subjects in the study. Said form should be prepared in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. *Individual informed consent:* For all biomedical research involving human subjects, the investigator must obtain the informed consent of the prospective subject or, in the case of an individual who is not capable of giving informed consent, the proxy consent of a properly authorized representative.
2. *Essential information for prospective research subjects:* Before requesting an individual's consent to participate in research, the investigator must provide the individual with the following information, in language that he or she is capable of understanding:

- That each individual is invited to participate as a subject in research, and the aims and methods of the research.
- The expected duration of the subject's participation.
- The benefits that might reasonably be expected to result to the subject or to others as an outcome of the research.
- Any foreseeable risks or discomfort to the subject, associated with participation in the research.
- Any alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be as advantageous to the subject as the procedure or treatment being tested.
- The extent to which confidentiality of records in which the subject is identified will be maintained.
- The extent of the investigator's responsibility, if any, to provide medical services to the subject.
- That therapy will be provided free of charge for specified types of research-related injury.
- Whether the subject or the subject's family or dependants will be compensated for disability or death resulting from such injury.
- That the individual is free to refuse to participate and will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which he or she would otherwise be entitled.

3. *Duties of the investigator*

- Communicate to the prospective subject all the information necessary for adequately informed consent.
- Give the prospective subject full opportunity and encouragement to ask questions.
- Exclude the possibility of unjustified deception, undue influence and intimidation.
- Seek consent only after the prospective subject has adequate knowledge of the relevant facts and of the consequences of participation, and has had sufficient opportunity to consider whether to participate.
- As a general rule, obtain from each prospective subject a signed form as evidence of informed consent.
- Renew the informed consent of each subject if there are material changes in the conditions or procedures of research.

4. *Inducement to participate:* Subjects must be paid for inconvenience and time spent, and should be reimbursed for expenses incurred, in connection with their participation in research; they may also receive free medical services. However, the payments should not be so large or the medical services so extensive as to induce prospective subjects to participate in the research against their better judgment ("undue inducement"). All payments, reimbursements and medical services to be provided to research subjects should be approved by an ethical review committee.
5. *Research involving children:* Before undertaking research involving children, the investigator must ensure that

- Children will not be involved in research that might equally well be carried out with adults.
- The purpose of the research is to obtain knowledge relevant to the health needs of children.
- A parent or legal guardian of each child has given proxy consent.
- The consent of each child has bee obtained to the extent of the child's capabilities.
- The child's refusal to participate in research must always be respected unless according to the research protocol the child would receive therapy for which there is no medically-acceptable alternative.
- The risk presented by interventions not intended to benefit the individual child-subject is low and commensurate with the importance of the knowledge to be gained.
- Interventions that are intended to provide therapeutic benefit are likely to be at least as advantageous to the individual child-subject as any available alternative.

6. *Research involving persons with mental or behavioral disorders:* Before undertaking research involving individuals who by reason of mental or behavioral disorders are not capable of giving adequately informed consent, the investigator must ensure that

- Such persons will not be subjects of research that might equally well be carried out on persons in full possession of their mental faculties.
- The purpose of the research is to obtain knowledge relevant to the particular health needs of persons with mental or behavioral disorders.
- The consent of each subject has been obtained to the extent of that subject's capabilities, and a prospective subject's refusal to participate in non-clinical research is always respected.
- In the case of incompetent subjects, informed consent be obtained from the legal guardian or other duly authorized person.
- The degree of risk attached to the interventions that are not intended to benefit the individual subject be low and commensurate with the importance of the knowledge to be gained.
- Interventions intended to provide therapeutic benefit be likely to be at least as advantageous to the individual subject as any alternative.

7. *Research involving prisoners:* Prisoners with serious illness or at risk or serious illness should not arbitrarily be denied access to investigational drugs, vaccines or other agents that show promise of therapeutic or preventive benefit.
8. *Research involving subjects in underdeveloped communities:* Before undertaking research involving subjects in underdeveloped communities, whether in developed or developing countries, the investigator must ensure that

- Persons in underdeveloped communities will not ordinarily be involved in research that could be carried out reasonably well in developed communities.
- The research be responsive to the health needs and the priorities of the community in which it is to be carried out.
- That every effort be made to secure the ethical imperative that the consent of individual subjects be informed.
- That the proposals for the research be reviewed and approved beforehand by an ethical review committee that has among its members or consultants persons who are thoroughly familiar with the customs and traditions of the community.

9. *Informed consent in epidemiological studies:* For several types of epidemiological research, individual informed consent is either impracticable or inadvisable. In such cases, the ethical review committee should determine whether it is ethically acceptable to proceed without individual informed consent and whether the investigator's plans to protect the safety and respect the privacy or research subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of the data are adequate. (Excerpts from Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences/CIOMS, *International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects,* World Health Organization/WHO, Geneva, 1993.)

C. Review by the Local / Institutional / AD HOC Ethical Review Committee

When studies involve human subjects, an institutional ethics committee in the country where the research will be conducted should evaluate and endorse the research, preferably before it is submitted to the Research Grants Program (RGP). For this purpose, the certification form for research involving human subjects should be filled out, and care should be taken to attach the informed consent form that will be signed by the subjects involved in the study. If the Internal Advisory Committee on Health Research (IACHR) recommends it, the project will be reviewed by the PAHO Ethical Review Committee prior to its final approval by the Director, and RGP will request additional information if necessary.

If no ethics committee exists in your locality or institution, then an *ad hoc* committee should be formed to this end. All ethics committees include members from outside the institution who have no interest in the study. Please have the committee sign off on both of the following sections (A and B).

1. Checklist for the Local / Institutional / AD HOC Ethical Review Committee

The local ethical review committee resolves that this research project complies with the following (to be checked by the President of the local/institutional/*ad hoc* Ethical Review Committee):

- *Conforms to the principles established in the Declaration of "Helsinki V".* ❑
- *Conforms to the standards and ethical criteria established in the national code of ethics and/or current laws.* ❑
- *Satisfactorily indicates how the rights and well-being of human subjects involved in the research will be protected.* ❑
- *Satisfactorily presents the informed consent of subjects and the strategy used to obtain it (Annexes included).* ❑
- *Satisfactorily indicates the reasons for including and/or excluding certain human subjects.* ❑
- *Satisfactorily describes the surveillance procedures that will be used and the provisions made for suspending research when there is sufficient evidence of risks or benefits (if applicable).* ❑

2. Certification of Safety by Local / Institutional/ *Ad hoc* Ethical Review Committee

The undersigned hereby certifies that all research activities involving human subjects in this request were examined and approved by an institutional/governmental/ad hoc committee from the local area that met at

_____

(place and date)

The Ethics Committee consisted of the following members (indicate individuals who reviewed this project):

First and Last Names	Profession	Current Position/Institution

Chairman of the Institutional (or Government, or *Ad hoc*) Committee:

_____ _____ _____

First and Last Names Signature Place and Date

_____ _____

Institution Position

Note: Upon request, the Institution shall submit to PAHO/WHO the documentation on and certification of such a review, together with other relevant documentation, as required, for the review of the proposed project by PAHO Ethical Review Committee (PAHOERC).