*Version 4 (January 2019)*



NS EMS Research steering committee:   
an inter-agency committteE chaired by dalhousie university

**Terms of reference**

# **VERSION HISTORY**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Action | Author |
| 2009 | Drafting of terms of reference | Ed Cain |
| 2012 | Version approved | Ed Cain |
| January -July 2017 | Review/edits of terms of reference | Corinne DeMone  Alix Carter  Jan Jensen  Mete Erdogan  Judah Goldstein |
| February 2018 | Updating/refresh of terms of reference | Michelle Harrison |
| April 2018 | Draft TOR edited | Alix Carter  Corinne DeMone  Judah Goldstein  Mete Erdogan  Kirk Magee |
| ??? | Version approved | Alix Carter |

# **ACRONYMS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| EM | Emergency Medicine |
| EMS | **Emergency Medical Services** |
| DHW | Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness |
| EHS | Emergency Health Services – A division of the DHW |
| EMC | Emergency Medical Care Inc., the private contractor known under the title “EHS Ambulance Operations” |
| HPO | Health Privacy Office – A mandated service of the DHW |
| NSHA | Nova Scotia Health Authority |
| PI | Principal Investigator |
| PHIA | Personal Health Information Act |
| TNS | Trauma Nova Scotia |

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# **Vision**

# To support the advancement of the science of EMS, bringing together a balance of academic and operational expertise, protection of privacy, and conducting research for the advancement of health care practice.

# **Mission**

The mission of the NS **EMS Steering Research Steering Committee** (hereinafter referred to as “the RSC”) is to facilitate and co-ordinate access to Emergency Health Services (EHS) data, personnel, and resources, and the conduct of emergency medical services (EMS) research in Nova Scotia.

# *Objectives*

The NS EMS Research Steering Committee review serves two purposes;:

1) Data Access: Research requiring access to NS EHS data, personnel, and/or resources including but not limited to ground and air ambulance, communications, and support, requires review by the Research Steering Committee (RSC) for access, a separate process from research ethics review;

2) letter of collaboration for NSHA REB review/waiver: The letter of collaboration from RSC is provided to accompany correspondence with the NSHA REB to confirm that EHS/Dalhousie will support and undertake the study once it is approved or a waiver is granted by the NSHA REB.

Specific objectives of the Steering Committee include:

1. To serve as the first point of entry for EMS research proposals seeking access to EHS (DHW) data, resources, or personnel by bringing together representatives of key stakeholder organizations including:

* Dalhousie Department of Emergency Medicine;
* Dalhousie Division of EMS;
* Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Emergency Health Services Division (EHS);
* EHS Ambulance Operations (Emergency Medical Care Inc. (EMC);
* EHS LifeFlight;
* Trauma Nova Scotia (TNS);
* Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness (DHW) Health Privacy Office (HPO); and
* Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA).

1. To provide critical appraisal and feedback for the purposes of operational feasibility and methodology
2. To serve as a Data Access Committee:

* Review applications from researchers for access to EHS (DHW) data, personnel and resources for research purposes;
* Provide feedback to researchers and/or seeks clarification, as appropriate; and
* Make recommendations to EHS at DHW, in accordance with legislation*,* regarding the approval or denial of applications from researchers.

1. To maintain transparency of EMS research.
2. To review and update research priorities for the province (e.g., EMS Research Agenda for Nova Scotia).
3. To ensure senior leadership in stakeholder organizations represented on the committee are informed regarding research activities in NS.
4. To promote opportunities for collaboration, growth and development of the EMS Research program in NS and across the Maritimes.

# *Function*

The function of the RSC is as follows:

1. Review study protocols to ensure:

* Privacy principles and legislative requirements are followed;
* Proposed studies are feasible, for example, ensuring availability of requested data, resources, and/or personnel, avoidance of overlap or duplication; and
* Proposed studies are reasonable, for example ensuring adequacy of funding, appropriateness of timing and timelines, alignment of study question with methods, data, and existing literature.

1. Advise on management of research projects competing for the same resources, through such avenues as prioritization, alignment, or timing, as appropriate.
2. Promote collaborative research within the Maritime provinces (NS, NB & PEI) by EMS Researchers.
3. Support research involving paramedics.

# **MEMBERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITIES**

# *The Chair*

The RSC is chaired by the Director of the Dalhousie Division of EMS. In the event the Director is unable to act as Chair, the Director will appoint an alternate until such time as the Director is able to resume duties or another Director is appointed by the Head of the Department of Emergency Medicine, Dalhousie University. The Chair holds the following responsibilities to:

1. Coordinate meetings

* Set and present the agenda for each meeting
* Ensure supporting materials are available to support the meeting
* Lead the meeting and ensure items are given adequate time for discussion
* Facilitate discussion and ensure all members are given equal opportunity to contribute/participate in discussions
* Close the meeting ensuring decisions/actions and next steps are clear to all members

1. Communication

* Communicate with PIs in a timely manner, regarding the protocol/submission,
* Provide constructive feedback including specific suggestions to address areas of improvement re feasibility and reasonableness.
* Send a letter of support to PI to include with the submission to the research ethics board, within 2 weeks of receipt of the final protocol addressing all feedback provided, as confirmation of support to undertake the proposed research (including access to data, personnel, resources) as outlined in the approved protocol.
* Recommend data access approval to DHW
* Assist/guide PI’s with other approval such as DSA

Communication with Steering Committee members and Stakeholders

* Forwarding copies of correspondence with PI (letters of support/denial) to Steering Committee members
  + - Communicate with senior leadership of stakeholder organizations

1. Overall Administration

* Review and keep up-to-date the EMS research database, and track studies through the grant application and review process.
* Maintain an up to date file of REB approval letters or copies.

1. Membership Administration
   * + Review and appoint new members as required

# *Committee Membership*

Many of these positions are filled by virtue of the role they represent, and the term will be considered the duration of employment in that role. Institutional representatives are selected by the institution. Members may send proxies to a meeting if approval has been obtained by the Chair prior to the meeting.

The following table lists the membership of the EMS Research Steering Committee

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Role | Organization | Voting? |
| Medical Director | Provincial Critical Care Transport Program | Yes |
| Medical Director | TNS | Yes |
| Medical Director of Research | EHS | Yes |
| Director (\*Steering Committee Chair) | Dalhousie Division of EMS | ?yes or only if tie |
| Research Director | Department of EM, Dalhousie University | Yes |
| Research Manager | Department of EM, Dalhousie University | Yes |
| Paramedic Research Coordinator | EHS | Yes ?NO |
| Knowledge Translation Paramedic Coordinator | Dalhousie Division of EMS | Yes?NO |
| Performance Manager | EHS Ambulance Operations | Yes |
| Medical Director | NSHA Emergency Preparedness | Yes |
| College of Paramedics Liaison | Nova Scotia College of Paramedics | No?YES |
| Dalhousie Division of EMS Fellow/subspecialty resident | Dalhousie EM senior resident or diploma candidate in EMS | No |
| Privacy Officer | DHW | Yes |
| PEI Liaison | Dalhousie EM faculty on PEI | No |
| NB Liaison | Dalhousie EM faculty in NB | No |
| Medavie HealthEd liaison |  | No |
| Holland College Liaison |  | No |
| Oulton College Liaison |  | No |
| Administrative Support/recording secretary | Dalhousie EM Division of EMS | No |

# *Ad hoc Participation*

The Committee will invite/engage researchers with specific expertise and/or establish ad hoc working groups as required.

# *Responsibilities*

Membership holding a seat on the Steering Committee have the following responsibilities:

1. Meeting attendance (a minimum of 2 per year) and participation.
2. Review research protocols and provide feedback in a timely manner. Emailed communication/review outside of set meetings may be required.
3. Liaison with their stakeholder organization regarding relevant Steering Committee activities.
4. Members not attending regularly will be asked to provide a designate.

***Conflict of Interest***

If the proposal under review is being submitted by a member of the Steering Committee, including the Chair, that member shall recuse themselves from the decision.

# **COMMITTEE OPERATIONS**

# *Logistics and Governance*

The RSC will meet every two months and as needed at the call of the Chair. The committee may not meet over the summer months (July/August). Efforts will be made to schedule with maximum notice to facilitate attendance. The RSC is a committee of Dalhousie University, in the Department of Emergency Medicine. The Committee is chaired by the Director of the Division of EMS. Through inter-sectoral membership and collaboration, the RSC provides a single joint review on behalf of the multiple stakeholders (see membership). Through this review, recommendations regarding data access are made to the DHW, and also a letter of collaboration is provided to the researcher indicating agreement to execute the protocol once other required approvals (eg REB) are in place. Committee administrative support will be provided by the Division of EMS. Meetings will be held at the Department of Emergency Medicine or associated facilities, with a remote (eg teleconference) option available for each meeting. Each organization will bear all costs for their representatives to attend the meetings. Meeting minutes will be taken and sent out to members in the following meeting’s materials package. Minutes will accurately record discussions, decisions, deliberations and results. Members will have an opportunity to request revisions to the minutes. Final meeting minutes will be approved by the Chair and two other Steering Committee members.

Changes or cancellations of meetings may be done at the decision of the Chair with efforts made to provide notice to members as soon as possible.

# *Quorum*

A quorum will be 50% of the voting membership or greater. If a quorum does not exist, then no votes/decisions shall be made, although discussion and updates can proceed and minutes will be circulated. except to adjourn the meeting. Decisions will be made by consensus. If the Committee is unable to reach consensus, then agreement by a majority of Committee members (50% plus one) will be required. In an ‘emergency situation’, the Chair will correspond with Committee members via email and decisions will be made by majority vote (50% plus one).

# *Voting*

It is understood that members with a vote are acting on behalf of a larger organization and need the opportunity to review and consult with their organization before voting. As such, documents will be provided in advance of meetings if there is a vote to be taken, and if any changes are made, the vote will be delayed until the liaison has the opportunity for appropriate consultation. Electronic voting is permissible. Proxy voting is permissible. It is understood that, regarding access to data, the resulting vote results in a supportive recommendation to DHW EHS, with which the final authority on data access rests.

# *Finances*

The Steering Committee has no budget of its own. Members do not receive any additional financial incentives or reimbursement for participation on the Committee. Expenses associated directly with the operation of the Steering Committee are supported in kind by the Division of EMS. If an exceptional expense were anticipated, the Division of EMS would seek support from stakeholder organizations and/or outside funding.

# **RESEARCH PROTOCOL REVIEW**

# *Process*

Research requiring access to NS EHS (DHW) data, personnel, and/or resources, including but not limited to ground and air ambulance, communications, and support, requires review by the Research Steering Committee. Research ethics review is by the Nova Scotia Health Authority Research Ethics Board. The Principal Investigator (PI) will need a letter of support from the Research Steering Committee in order to receive approval from the NSHA REB and is advised to complete the Steering Committee review and any necessary changes to the protocol prior to submitting to the REB.

\*this process also applies to NS Trauma Program data requests by researchers other than the NSTP medical director??

Research is defined by the A pRoject Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI) tool (<http://www.aihealthsolutions.ca/arecci/screening/364149/5353a40b34046342f04887b15ffeeffe>). Note that even if you are seeking a waiver from the research ethics board as a “quality review” you may screen as *research* by ARECCI, and you still require a review by the Steering Committee. A few key questions in ARECCI are: Is the project designed to test a specific hypothesis or answer a specific quantitative or qualitative question? Does the project involve a comparison of control groups?

Is the primary purpose of the project to produce the kind of results that could be published in a research journal? If you are answering YES to these questions, you meet the definition of Research and require review by the Steering Committee.

This process also applies to research studies already approved by a Research Ethics Board other than the NSHA. Researchers with approval from another REB are advised to contact the NSHA REB directly regarding the potential for a waiver from the requirement to complete a full application with the NSHA. Regardless of the outcome of that conversation with the REB, the protocol must still be reviewed by the Research Steering Committee for access to NS EHS personnel, data, or resources.

Please submit the following electronically to the Division of EMS Administrative Assistant ([ems@dal.ca](mailto:ems@dal.ca) ) at least two weeks in advance for review at the next meeting:

* Your protocol
* A completed Research Project proposal form (add online link…..)
* Any other approval if reviewed elsewhere
* EHS Data Request Form
* A completed ARECCI screening tool http://www.aihealthsolutions.ca/arecci/screening/364149/5353a40b34046342f04887b15ffeeffe

The PI (and supervisor if a student) will be invited to present their proposed study at the meeting.

Once all documents are received and complete, and it is agreed that review by the RSC is appropriate, protocols will be emailed to all RSC members, along with a standardized review form to facilitate the review.

Members of the RSC who represent stakeholder organizations will take any protocols with operational or privacy impact on their organization for further discussion and recommendations by their organization.

Feedback will be received from these organizations, and any other members who have comments, will be incorporated by the chair into a response to the PI, in a timely fashion.

# *Communicating with the Investigator*

If further clarification is requested, RSC members should provide feedback to the RSC Chair or designate, who will contact the PI. For minor revisions, the RSC Chair will review the revised protocol and determine whether it needs to go back to the Steering Committee or whether the revisions have satisfied the recommendations of the RSC. For major revisions, the protocol will be brought forward for further discussion and final decision at the next Steering Committee meeting. The PI will be notified in writing by the Chair.

Note that further agreements/approvals such as a Data Sharing Agreement and/or legal contracts, memoranda of understanding may be required and are in addition to this process.

# *Reporting*

Study PIs who receive a Steering Committee letter of support must report the following for tracking/entry into the database:

* REB submissions/approval letters
* Conference presentations or peer reviewed publications

Any use of the data beyond the research questions/objectives outlined in the original protocol is prohibited without the approval of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee must also be notified of any amendments. The PI is reminded to share any upcoming publications with the Steering Committee.

# **ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

The expected organizational contributions to support the studies approved by the EMS Research Steering Committee are summarized in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| *Dalhousie University Division of EMS* | * Chair the research steering committee. * Provide administrative support to the research steering committee. * Maintain a database of all NS EMS research (proposed, active and completed). * Track REB submissions and renewal dates. * Assist PIs as needed to meet REB requirements. * Maintain an up-to-date file of REB approval letters or copies. * Develop research capabilities of paramedics through ensuring inclusion of research-related competencies in protocols, and training sessions. * Reviewing study protocols with the lens of research ethics and scientific methods expertise. * Maintain regular communication with leadership of stakeholder organizations and ensure they are aware of upcoming publications * Assist researchers with necessary data sharing agreements |
| *EHS Ambulance Operations (EMC Inc)* | * Support opportunities for employees to learn about and participate in EMS research. * Ensure data is of high quality, secure and readily available to the PI. * Fulfill research data requests in a timely manner * Follow approved data sharing processes for release of data * Supervise investigators who perform chart reviews * Advertise and promote research opportunities to employees. * With EHS, develop necessary training programs related to research to meet both the needs of the research project and the continuing education of the paramedics. |
| *EHS* | * Ensure conducting research remains a priority within the EHS system, on the part of both the contractor and the operator. * With EHS Ambulance Operations, develop necessary training programs related to research to meet both the needs of the research project and the continuing education of the paramedics. * Work to connect new research activities with EHS Ambulance Operations and Department of Health budget cycles. * Anticipate major protocol or practice changes as potential research. * With DHW leadership/privacy, provide final approval to release EHS data * With DHW leadership/privacy, provide DSA when needed * Work with DEM on deliverables associated with funding for academic work supported by EHS |
| *Dalhousie University Department of EM* | * Liaise between this Committee and the Department(s) at Dalhousie University that are involved in a proposed study. * Note that research occurring in the QE II Emergency Department will also require review by the QE II Research Committee; * Liaise between this Committee and the QEII Research Committee. * Provide input as to the availability of resources from the Emergency Department. |
| *DHW Privacy* | * Review study protocols with a privacy lens. * Liaise with other Data Access Committees.   Final approval for release of data (Provincial Medical Director/ HPO/?)   * OIPC reporting of data use * breach investigation in cases of row-level and/or identifiable data release * audit/follow up as required by legislation |
| *College of Paramedics* | * Provide CEU for research-related activities. * Distribute recruitment emails. * Provide re-registration credit for participation in appropriate research and research related activities. * Develop research capabilities of paramedics through ensuring inclusion of research-related competencies re-registration requirements. |

# **COMMITTEE OPERATIONAL PLANNING**

On a yearly basis, the RSC, with its stakeholder organizations, will review:

* RSC membership;
* Policies regarding research reviews and prioritization; and
* RSC terms of reference