



The Catholic Women's League of Canada Position Paper

TITLE: Health Research

POSITION STATEMENT

The Catholic Women's League of Canada believes health research must always be carried out ethically, recognizing the inherent worth of all human beings and the respect and consideration that each person is due. The League:

- looks to the Vatican and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops for direction regarding fundamental moral criteria.
- recognizes that funding for health research will always be a concern as new illnesses and health conditions emerge, and funding sources, both government and private, must take moral issues into consideration.

BACKGROUND

Health research refers to a wide range of studies and experiments that help answer human health-related issues. It includes research involving human participants or their health information and human biological samples, such as blood or tissue. It is usually funded by the government, private foundations and pharmaceutical companies with the hope that the new information will be helpful to patients, the community and other researchers (Interagency, Norris). The Canadian Institute of Health Research identifies four pillars of research that address current and future health challenges: 1) biomedical, 2) clinical, 3) health services, and 4) social, cultural, environmental and population health.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that health research can have positive aims. "Scientific, medical, or psychological experiments on human individuals or groups can contribute to healing the sick and the advancement of public health" (2292). The Vatican Pontifical Council for Culture and the Cura Foundation state, "The innovations in health and technology... help minimize not only disease but also poverty. Worldwide improvements in health lead to fewer preventable deaths, more stabilized economies and more people finding jobs" (Soto).

There are differences of thought in society regarding the ethical and moral aspects of health research (Resnik). Science and technology require ongoing ethical attention. "It is an illusion to claim moral neutrality in scientific research and its applications. On the other hand, guiding principles cannot be inferred from simple technical efficiency, or from the usefulness accruing to some at the expense of others or, even worse, from prevailing ideologies. Science and technology by their very nature require unconditional respect for fundamental moral criteria. They must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, of his true and integral good, in conformity with the plan and the will of God" (Vatican 2294).

The federal government's panel on research ethics states that, "Respect for human dignity requires that research involving humans be conducted in a manner that is sensitive to the inherent worth of all human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due." The panel identifies three core principles for the respect of human dignity: "Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice. These core principles transcend disciplinary boundaries..." (Interagency).

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- Be knowledgeable and support education of Catholic teaching regarding health research and respect for human life.
- Advocate for federal and provincial governments to fund ethical health research.
- Become knowledgeable in investigating and vetting health research from an ethical perspective.
- Advocate for funding and donations for research agencies, organizations and facilities doing ethical health research.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Canadian Institutes of Health Research. “What Is Health Research?” *Government of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research*, 9 Nov. 2022, cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/53146.html.

Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics. “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.” *Government of Canada, Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics*, Dec. 2022, ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2022.html.

Norris, Sonya. “Federal Funding for Health Research in Canada.” *HillNotes*, 22 Nov. 2021, hillnotes.ca/2021/11/22/federal-funding-for-health-research-in-canada/.

Resnik, David B. “What Is Ethics in Research & Why Is It Important?” *National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences*, 23 Dec. 2020, www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/index.cfm.

Soto, Selena. “Top 5 Highlights of the Vatican Pontifical Council.” *The Borgen Project*, 5 Aug. 2021, borgenproject.org/highlights-of-the-vatican-pontifical-council/.

Vatican. “Catechism of the Catholic Church: Respect for the Dignity of Persons.” *The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 4 Nov. 2003, www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P80.HTM

STATUS

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