

RESEARCH ETHICS ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Research Ethics advances Dalhousie's strategic research goals by providing knowledgeable guidance and timely research ethics review and oversight of research involving humans.



Annual Report 2024/25

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Fast Facts

- 5,000+ reviews of research involving humans conducted by Research Ethics Boards and staff.
- 611 new project submissions, 255 amendments, 722 continuing reviews, 234 final reports received. 72 projects terminated for non-compliance.
- 20 workday median turnaround time for initial REB review to researchers for new project submissions; 4 workday median turnaround time for acknowledgement of other boards of record.
- 3 workday median turnaround time for administrative screening feedback for submissions withdrawn for quality control prior to ethical review.
- 2 Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities); 22 Board meetings scheduled.
- 48 Board members.
- 1,720 researchers completed the TCPS online course on research ethics (15,438 researchers have completed it since 2011).
- 1,192 consultations held with researchers.
- 43% of new projects reviewed were funded research (funding held at Dalhousie); 16% were tri-agency funded.
- 96% of new submissions involved prospective research; 4% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
- 9% of new submissions to the University REBs were eligible for Board of Record Acknowledgement (multi-jurisdictional).
- 17,270 website page views.
- 114 release of funds agreements with researchers issued to permit research-related activity to proceed prior to the requirement for research ethics review.

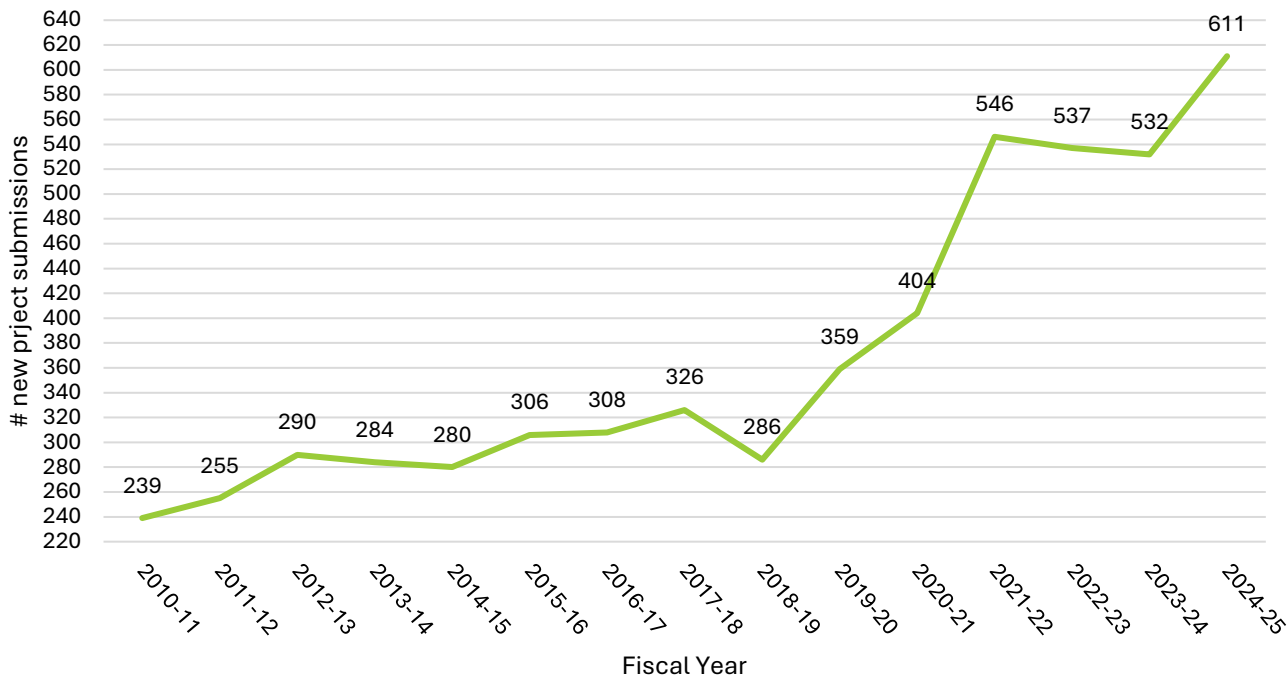
Core Principles:
Respect for Persons
Concern for Welfare
Justice

Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 4 full-time staff: a director, two managers, and a support specialist. The staff coordinated and supported the work of two Research Ethics Boards: Health Sciences and Social Sciences & Humanities. There were 22 Board meetings scheduled (7 Health Sciences REB meetings and 5 Social Sciences & Humanities REB meetings held) and 48 Board members (40 of whom were members of the University (37 faculty and 3 students); 8 were community members). The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 5,000 reviews of project submissions, including review of 611 new research projects, 255 amendments, 722 continuing reviews, 234 final reports and 72 ethical approval terminations for non-compliance with continuing review reporting requirements, quarterly reports from research ethics boards at affiliated hospitals (IWK Health Centre, Nova Scotia Health, and Horizon Health) and annual reports from unit-level research ethics committees. Research Ethics authorized 114 release of funds agreements with researchers to permit research-related activity to proceed prior to the requirement for research ethics review; the office also coordinated the peer review process on behalf of the University Committee on Laboratory Animals.

This report offers an overview of the activity of Research Ethics for the period April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025.

Historical - New REB Submissions (2011-2025)



Notable this year

The University **Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans** was approved by Senate on April 8, 2024.

The **research ethics process review** led by the associate vice-president research concluded in April 2024 on the recommendation of the working group.

Terms of reference for the research ethics boards were revised and approved in January 2025.

Board leadership. Dr. John Cameron served as chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board. Dr. Jennifer Isenor served as chair of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board.

Staff complement was improved when the manager (health sciences) position was changed from a term position to a permanent position on August 1, 2024 and the support specialist hours of work were increased to 35 hours per week (from 32.5 hours).

Catherine Connors (director) was **nominated** for the Dalhousie Professional and Managerial Group (DPMG) **outstanding career achievement** award (May 2024).

There was a significant update to the Research Ethics **website** to align with the University's web renewal initiative.

The director initiated **quarterly meetings** with the director of information security and the privacy officer (Apr 2024).

Dalhousie participated in a province-wide university/ **Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch** information-sharing meeting (Nov 2024) and coordinated a follow-up meeting (Feb 2025).

Staff developed and implemented an internal **education tracking tool** to record their education, outreach and consultation services to researchers.

The director contributed to office of the vice-president research and innovation **Guidance for use of Generative AI tools in Research** (Jan 2025).

Improved **process efficiency** for colleagues in the office of research services post-award unit through a minor update to the release of funds request form (Mar 2025).

Office of the **vice-president research and innovation changes.** Dr. Alice Aiken ended her term as vice-president research and innovation in December; Dr. Jennifer Bain served as interim vice-president until Dr. Graham Gagnon was appointed as acting vice-president effective March 2025.

Research Ethics re-positioned in the **office of the vice-president research and innovation** (rather than the office of research services).

The University announced a **hiring freeze** effective September 2024.

The demands on the REBs continue to be substantial, and some members were challenged to meet the review demands despite an increase in Board size and administrative support. Board membership faced shortfalls; one Faculty was not able to meet its membership obligations. The **volume and complexity** of inquiries to staff has also been high. Recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of experienced faculty to serve as board members with the diversity of experience and relevant qualifications are a continued challenge.

*“The REB is STILL my favourite role at Dal - which has everything to do with the staff and chairs.”
(Faculty REB member)*

Educational Activity

Dalhousie supported educational opportunities for Board members and staff. The Research Ethics Board chairs, members, and staff were involved in presentations and discussions regarding research ethics principles and the review process with members of the University research community, especially students. Staff engaged in 1,192 opportunities to support researchers, primarily through one-on-one consultations. Researchers' primary mode of communication was email (81%) and meetings or phone calls (16%) as well as using the website (17,270 page views).

Boards

- REB members are required to complete the TCPS online **Course on Research Ethics** and *The Fundamentals of OCAP®*.
- REB **orientation program** for incoming members held throughout the year by the Board Chairs and staff.
- Director successfully advocates for **continuing professional development credit** for physician members of the REB from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (Sep 2024)
- Presentation to the social sciences and humanities research ethics board on the ethical implications of **artificial intelligence in research** (Dr. Christian Blouin, Dal AI Strategy Lead, Sep 2024)

Researchers

- 1,720 Dalhousie researchers completed the TCPS online **Course on Research Ethics**; 15,438 researchers completed the tutorial since its inception in June 2011.
- Staff engaged in 1,192 opportunities to support researchers, primarily through **one-on-one consultations**.
- Launched monthly virtual Research Ethics **Drop-In Hours** (Sep 2024)
- Created **guidance on participant misrepresentation in research** to outline ethically acceptable strategies for preventing participant misrepresentation in research as well as mitigation strategies for situations in which researchers suspect that participants have misrepresented their eligibility for a research study (April 2024)
- Outreach with managers of the **Lab2Market program** about activities that require REB review. Co-develop a tool to clarify distinctions between academic research vs market research (customer discovery) (May 2024)
- Updated guidelines for **distinguishing research from evaluation** (May 2024)
- Updated guidance document: **Protecting Electronically Stored Personally Identifiable Research Data** Quick Reference for Dalhousie Researchers (Nov 2024)
- **Role of the Supervisor in Research Ethics** – guidance describing the responsibilities of supervisors with respect to research ethics, along with recommendations for supervisors on how to help their students throughout the research ethics review process (updated Apr and Nov 2024)
- **Updated confidentiality agreement template** for transcriptionists/research staff to incorporate guidance on limits to use of artificial intelligence (Feb 2025)
- Research Ethics participated in Dalhousie's **new academic staff orientation**
- Manager (social sciences) held **in-person drop-in sessions** for research ethics at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Nov 2024 – Feb 2025)

- **Presentations** to students (including resource and environmental studies, kinesiology, dentistry, and medicine)
- Updated **unit-level research ethics review reporting** standard operating procedures and posted on website (Aug 2024)

Staff

- Research Ethics Boards chairs and staff attended the **Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards** national conference virtually (May 2024)
- The manager (health sciences) attended the **Canadian Bioethics Conference** (Apr 2024)
- The manager (social sciences) completed **GDPR for Research and Higher Ed** course, Collaborative Institutional Training Institute (CITI) (Jul 2024)
- The director and managers attended the Dalhousie **AI Symposium** (May 2024)
- Staff participated in Dalhousie **Privacy Policy training** sessions (Jan 2025)
- Staff completed Dalhousie **Cybersecurity Training** (summer 2024)
- The director attended Dal's **Love Data Week** (Feb 2025)
- Managers attended a webinar on "**AI in Research Design**" hosted by CITI (Mar 2025)

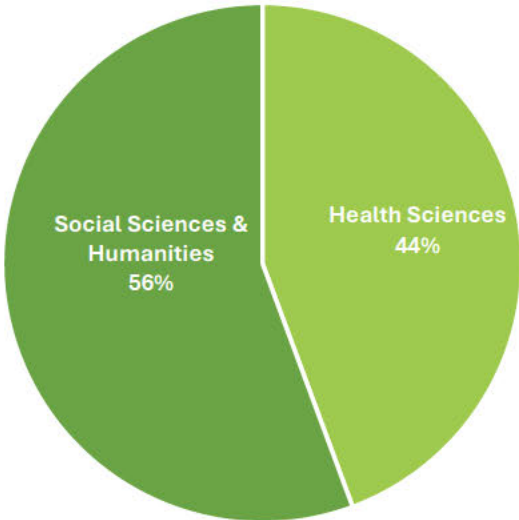
External

- Board and staff members invited to speak at IWK REB Retreat on **blanket versus broad consent** (Dec 2024)
- REB chair from another Maritime university asked to borrow questions from Dal's secondary use application form (May 2024)
- Dalhousie participated in a province-wide university/ **Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch** information-sharing meeting (Nov 2024) and coordinated a follow-up meeting (Feb 2025).

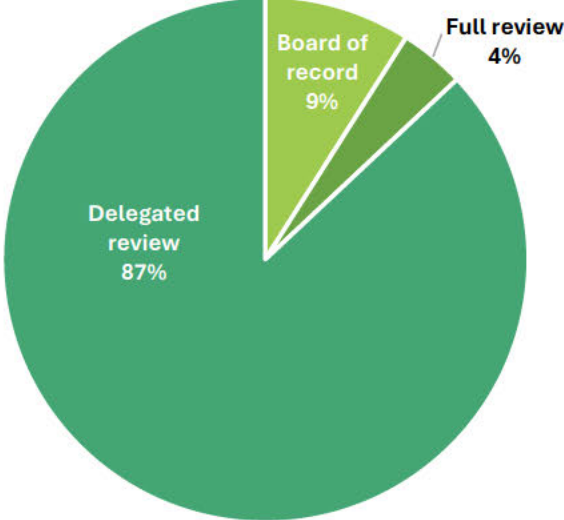
"I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude for your review of my research proposal submitted to the Ethics Research Board (sic). Your valuable feedback and suggestions have significantly contributed to the ethical considerations of my study. I appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to reviewing my proposal during the summer term... Once again, thank you for your contribution, your suggestions are much appreciated in improving the integrity of my research."
(Faculty researcher)

Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

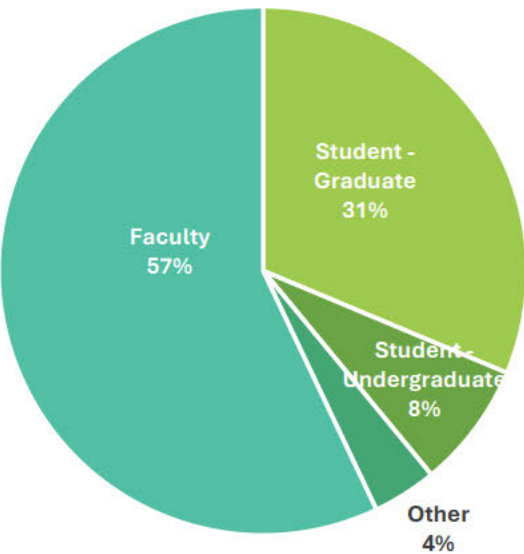
Board Assignment



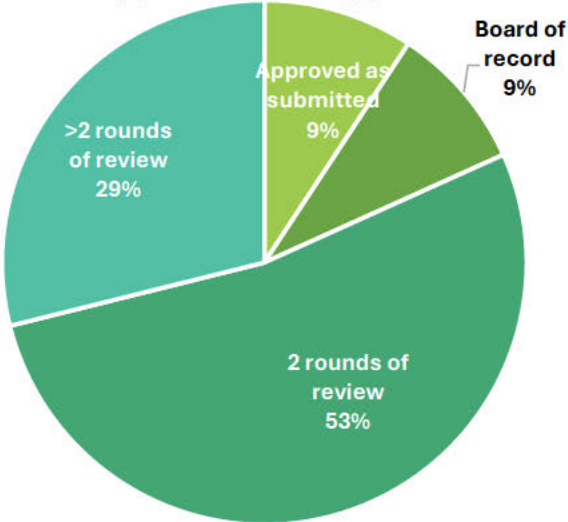
Proportionate Review



Researcher Profile

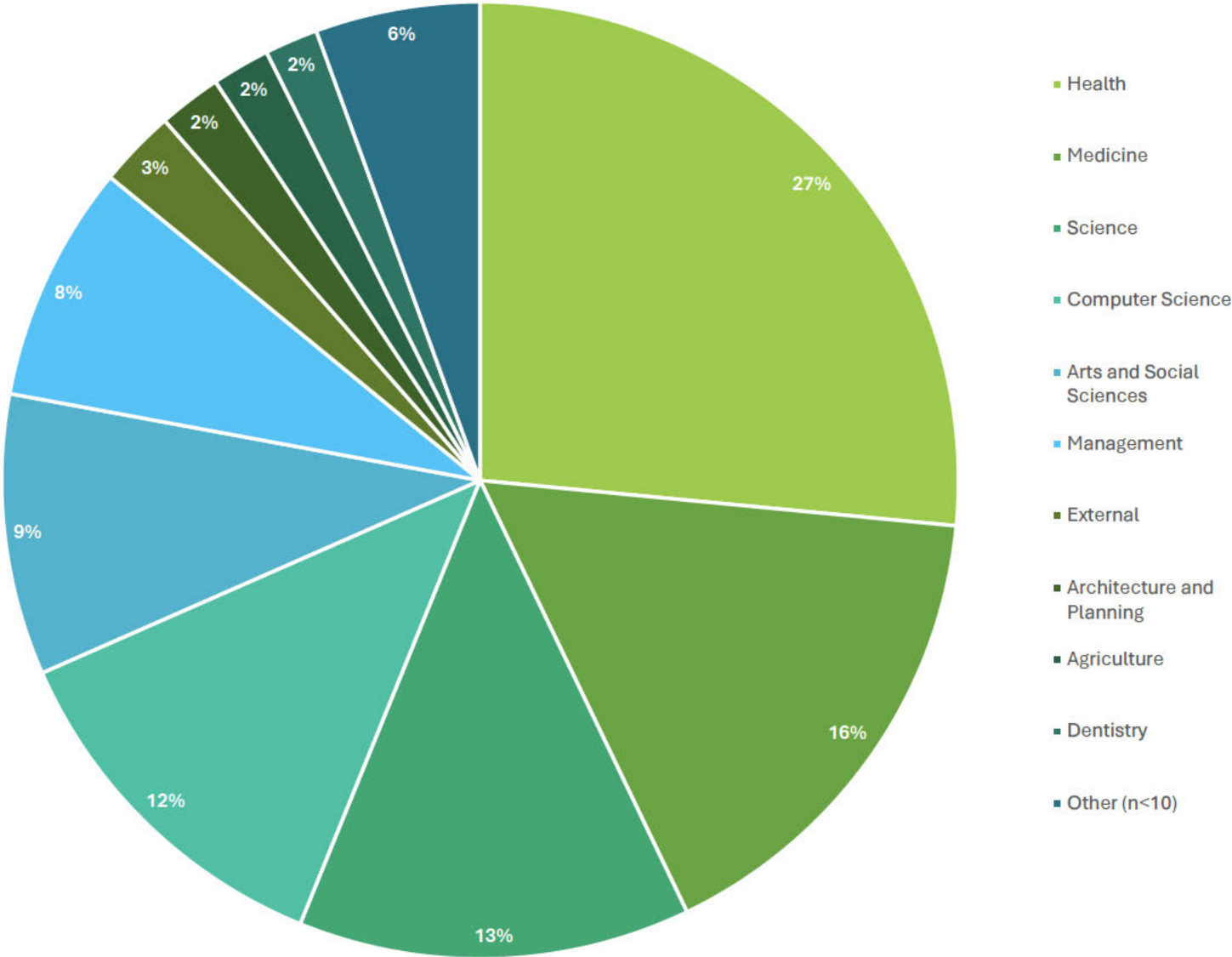


Rounds of Review (Application to Approval)



Note: 37% of submissions were withdrawn for quality control prior to review by the REBs

Submissions by Faculty



"I credit you and all the staff at the research [ethics] office for making this a collegial working environment that brings out the best in everyone!" (Faculty REB member)

Board Membership*

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

Jennifer Isenor (Chair)

Sarah Burm

Ben Capps

Heather Casavechia

Violet D'Souza

Lizbeth Escobedo Bravo

Theresa Gaughan

Adrian Gee

Jess Gibson

Louise Gillis

Gordon Gubitx

Melanie Keats

Derek Kimmerly

Ruth Lavergne

Elaine Moody

Suzanne Morris

Stephana Moss

Vicki Munro

Simon Sherry

Jean Shoveller

Dan Stevens

Nicholas Stewart

Samuel Stewart

Michelle Stone

Jeff Waugh

Lori Wozney

Ashley Zahavich

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

John Cameron (Chair)

Samantha Adema

Megan Bailey

Mayra Barrera Machuca

Rachel Cadman

Luc Cousineau

Michael Fournier

Christopher Giacomantonio

Hannah Harrison

Christopher Helland

Dana Kabat-Farr

Niki Kiepek

Ji Lu

Lisa MacDougall

Sean Mackinnon

Joseph Malloch

Keahna Margeson

Paul Meade

Chris Moore

Kate M. Thompson

Valerie Trifts

Staff*

Catherine Connors (Director)

Hillary Ferguson (Manager)

Angela Hersey (Manager)

Jaime Pike (Support Specialist)

* as of March 31, 2025