

NORTHERN HEALTH STANDARDS OF CONDUCT



Consistent with direction by the BC Provincial Government, the Taxpayer Accountability Principles and Northern Health's core organizational values of Integrity and Stewardship, this document provides an overview of the Standards of Conduct required of all persons and entities associated with Northern Health.

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I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND APPLICATION OF THE NORTHERN HEALTH STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

A. Statement of Purpose

Northern Health's Vision and Mission Statement comprise our statement of purpose, and set the broad context of our beliefs and desired way of doing business:

Northern Health leads the way in promoting health and providing health services for Northern and rural populations.

Through the efforts of dedicated staff and physicians, in partnership with communities and organizations, we provide exceptional health services for Northerners.

The residents of northern BC look to us for health care services and they also expect that we will deliver those services in an ethical manner that meets their expectations. This is expanded upon in the Board approved organizational values for Northern Health which guide our decisions and actions:

We will succeed in our work through:

Empathy – seeking to understand each individual's experience.

Respect – accepting each person as a unique individual.

Collaboration – working together to build partnerships.

Innovation – seeking creative and practical solutions.

These Standards of Conduct provide explicit direction in unambiguous language to ensure that everyone associated with Northern Health clearly understands what is expected of them, and what behaviours are not condoned.

The NH Standards of Conduct adhere to the Taxpayer Accountability Principles and comply with the BC Government Standards of Conduct Guidelines for the BC Public Sector.

B. Application of the Standards of Conduct

The Standards of Conduct apply to:

- **The Board of Directors of Northern Health.**

The Board has approved, adopted and follows the Northern Health Integrated Ethics Framework. This Framework provides guidance and direction for the Board. It also sets forth the expectations the Board has of the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for setting the ethical requirements of the operations of the entire organization, including standards of conduct.

The Board has developed Board Policies¹, which the Board is required to follow. They can be viewed on Northern Health's public website.

Adherence to the Standards of Conduct is a condition of continued Board appointment.

- **All staff members** including: The President and CEO, the Executive Team, Senior Managers, Managers and all other non-contract and unionized staff members employed by Northern Health whether full-time, part-time or casual.

Adherence to the Standards of Conduct is a condition of continued employment.

- **The Medical Staff.**

Adherence to the Standards of Conduct is required for maintenance of privileges.

- **Volunteers, contractors and other stakeholders** with whom Northern Health has a business, contractual or informal relationship and anyone else within Northern Health's sphere of influence and affiliation.

Adherence to the Standards of Conduct is required as a condition for a continued relationship with Northern Health.

¹ <https://www.northernhealth.ca/about-us/leadership/board-policies-best-practices> (accessed 2018-01-12)

II. DOMAINS

A. Integrity, Impartiality and Accountability

Avoiding and preventing situations that could give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest, is one of the primary means by which Northern Health maintains public confidence in the impartiality and objectivity of our services.

Inadequately managed real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest on the part of employees have the potential to weaken citizens' trust in public institutions.

a) Conflict of Interest

Northern Health shall ensure that it fulfills its mission with honesty and integrity and to a high ethical standard of accountability in its decision-making. This requires that employees or agents of Northern Health avoid situations in which their interests are, have the potential to be, or are perceived to be, in conflict with the interests of the organization. Northern Health and its agents seek to develop and implement its policies and processes with optimal openness and transparency.

Conflict of interest situation or individuals include acting on behalf of an enterprise that seeks to supply goods or services to Northern Health, or an enterprise that competes with Northern Health directly, indirectly, or any activity that compromises the objectives of Northern Health in its delivery of services to the public.

Conflicts of interest cannot always be avoided or prohibited. Unavoidable conflicts of interest need to be identified, disclosed and effectively managed.

b) Conflict of interest definitions

Actual Conflict of Interest: A person has the opportunity be in a conflict of interest situation and acts on it.

Perceived Conflict of interest: A reasonable apprehension that a conflict exists.

Potential conflict of interest: A person is in a situation in which some personal interest could influence the exercise of their public duties although the person has not yet exercised such duty or responsibility.

c) Conflict of interest principles

Conflicts of interest include both pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.

A pecuniary interest is an interest that a person has in a matter because of the reasonable likelihood or expectation of financial gain or loss to the person or another person with whom the person is associated. Associated persons include friends, relatives, partners and employers.

A non-pecuniary interest may include family relationships, friendships, positions in associations, holding public office, and other interests that do not involve financial gain or loss. Non-pecuniary conflicts of interest are just as important as pecuniary interests.

Conflict of interest generally means any situation in which an employee, Board Director, or agent of Northern Health has or promotes an interest which results in or may be reasonably perceived to result in:

- An interference with how the responsibilities and duties to and on behalf of Northern Health are exercised and/or
- An advantage or material gain to the employee or agent, and/or to other persons not dealt with at arm's length, by virtue of the relationship to Northern Health.

Legislation in British Columbia specifically states that:

- Staff are prohibited from persuading or inducing patients, residents, or clients to make a bequest or gift to their benefit; and
- Any employee who receives a bequest or gift from a patient, client, or resident is required to renounce (the legal step of declining a gift in a will) the gift.

Further considerations include:

Internal Activities

1. PURCHASING / SIGNING AUTHORITY

Northern Health staff members should not participate in a purchasing process if they feel they have a conflict of interest. If they are uncertain about whether they have a conflict of interest, they should discuss this with the Vice President Human Resources and/or the Vice President Finance and Chief Financial Officer. Where a staff member's interest can be identified through any of the criteria in the definition of conflict of interest, that staff member will not participate in the purchasing selection process.

The Northern Health Signing Authority Policy outlines that an individual cannot approve a transaction that will confer a benefit on that same individual or that individual's family members or related parties. In cases of doubt, it must be assumed that there is a potential or perceived conflict of interest. Where a conflict, or potential conflict, exists the signing authority on purchasing must receive one-up approval.

All employees are subject to the Signing Authority policy and must ensure they commit resources only to the extent allowed by policy.

The CEO is subject to the Executive Limitations² policy.

2. STAFF AND RECRUITMENT

Relatives of current employees will be given the same opportunities for employment that are available to the public. A family member will be refused employment or transfer where a conflict of interest occurs.

Staff members should not participate in a recruitment process where, the staff member, a relative or friend stands to or may gain or lose from the outcome of the process. Staff members should immediately notify the person overseeing the recruitment if they feel they may have a conflict of interest.

An assessment will be done of that person's ability to participate in the recruitment and will be reviewed and approved by the Vice President Human Resources prior to any participation of that person in the recruitment process.

3. GIFTS, BENEFITS AND HOSPITALITY

Staff members must never accept any gift or benefit if:

- The person offering it, or another person, would reasonably expect the staff member to be influenced in the way the staff member does their job or carries out their duties such that they would feel a sense of obligation or debt to the person offering the gift or benefit; or
- The staff member is likely to be compromised by accepting a gift/item or benefit of significant value for personal use. Gifts and benefits that are not token in nature must be refused. The following issues must be taken into account when determining whether a gift, benefit or hospitality is token:
 - the scale, lavishness or expense/cost/value of the gift or benefit
 - the frequency of occurrence
 - the degree of openness surrounding the occasion or gift
 - traditional practices, examples: Sharing The Wealth / Potlatch

Staff must disclose to the Executive member for their area prior to accepting or immediately after receiving any gift, benefit or hospitality.

Gifts, benefits and hospitality include but are not limited to: gift certificates/gift cards; giveaways or prizes personal items; tickets to cultural or sporting events; and trips etc.

Northern Health also uses the Health Shared Services BC Vendor Guidelines³ which outline principles around gifts and research funding.

² https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/about-us/leadership/documents/brd-230.pdf (accessed 2014-10-28)

³ <http://www.phsa.ca/our-services/support-services/supply-chain/information-for-vendors/vendor-guidelines> (accessed 2014-10-28)

Travel Points: Participation in air miles, frequent-flyer and other loyalty programs is permissible as long as the cost to Northern Health is not adversely affected. In any case Northern Health's expense policy must be followed, which requires staff to employ the most economical form of travel.

4. USE OF NORTHERN HEALTH FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Staff members should not use Northern Health facilities or property, including computers, for private use without prior approval of the Executive member for their area.

5. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Staff must be aware that it is ethically unacceptable for investigators to receive personal or family financial benefits (either direct or indirect) for participation in studies.

The Northern Health Research Review and Approval policy references the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2)* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Any research requests must undergo a thorough review by the Research Review Committee, which includes an investigation into possible conflicts of interest.

External Activities

While it is expected that staff members will devote their full attention to the duties of their employment and the business of Northern Health during normal business hours, it is also recognized that opportunities for external activities will arise. External activities includes outside employment, business activities, teaching, private consulting, and political activity.

Staff members shall consult the Executive member for their area before undertaking any external activity that could place them in an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest.

The external activity or venture will make no use whatsoever of the name of Northern Health without the advance express written permission of the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or designate.

1. OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

Outside employment is acceptable where there is no actual or potential conflict of interest provided that it:

- a. doesn't interfere with the work of the staff member nor their duties to Northern Health;

- b. doesn't call into question the ability of the staff member to perform their duties in an objective manner;
- c. doesn't involve the use of Northern Health property or equipment or intellectual property; or
- d. cannot be reasonably considered to be a Northern Health activity. A Northern Health activity is one in which Northern Health is normally engaged in the pursuit of its mission.

2. SECONDARY EMPLOYMENT

Staff will require the approval of the Executive member for their area prior to undertaking paid work outside of work hours that may conflict with current work obligations. No approval for paid work outside of work hours will be allowed if it meets any of the criteria in the definition of conflict of interest.

3. BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Business activities include positions in other organizations, such as:

- volunteer organizations;
- positions on Advisory Committees, Advisory Boards, or Boards of Directors;
- shareholdings or other forms of equity ownership, sole proprietorship, partnership or investments; and
- all activities associated with spin-off and start-up companies.

In general, business activities where there is no actual or potential conflict of interest are acceptable provided that they do not:

- a. interfere with the staff member's work and duties for Northern Health
- b. jeopardize the ability of the staff member to perform their duties in an objective manner;
- c. conflict with Northern Health obligations to or relationship with another organization, whether existing or contemplated;
- d. involve the use of Northern Health property, equipment, or intellectual property; or
- e. appear to be a Northern Health activity, as previously defined.

4. TEACHING

Teaching at publicly financed institutions in British Columbia is encouraged when there is a shortage of readily available specialist knowledge and if it will not interfere with work of the staff member or Northern Health's priorities. Similarly, presenting lectures, seminars, workshops, or other short courses are encouraged unless it interferes with work of the staff member.

Modest amounts of teaching for a fee are acceptable provided that:

- a. such teaching could not reasonably be considered to be a Northern Health activity, and
- b. the Executive member for the area grants advance approval.

5. PRIVATE CONSULTING

Consulting is defined as the provision of professional or expert advice or service, for a fee or other benefit or advantage, in a person's field of expertise. The general policy is that members should not undertake private consulting in areas which might reasonably be considered to be Northern Health activities, or which would negatively impact the staff member's ability to perform their duties for Northern Health.

Staff members must discuss potential private consulting activities with the Executive member for their area. Executive staff will need to discuss with the CEO.

Where Northern Health approves the activity for the staff member, the following must be reviewed to prevent perceived conflict of interest:

- i) there will be no use of Northern Health facilities and equipment;
- ii) there will be no use of Northern Health intellectual property;
- iii) the work is done on the member's own time and with the sole resources of the member; and
- iv) no legal liability or covenant attaches to Northern Health.

6. POLITICAL ACTIVITY⁴

Political activity includes pursuing or holding federal or provincial office, and pursuing or being elected to municipal city council or similar offices, and includes appointment to special committees of the city or municipality, regional hospital district boards or other similar office.

- a. Subject to sections b. and c. (below) there is no restriction upon participation in political activity by staff members on their own time except as follows:
 - such activity must not occur on Northern Health property;
 - they must not participate directly in the solicitation of contributions within the meaning of *The Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act* or the *Canada Elections Act*, except in (b) below; and
 - they are precluded from participating on municipal health advisory committees or regional hospital districts, and are further precluded from participating in debate or voting on health matters.
- b. Staff who wish to run as candidates in a provincial or federal election must take a leave of absence without pay commencing on the day after the writ for the election is issued or on the day that their candidacy is publicly announced

⁴ Refer to the guidelines developed by the Northern Health Communications department regarding official election campaigns and referenda.

whichever is the latest and the restriction of solicitation in section (a) above, shall not apply to such member after a public declaration of candidacy has been made.

- c. A staff member that is elected to federal or provincial office shall be granted unpaid leave of absence per the provisions outlined in the applicable collective agreement.

d) Conflict of interest disclosure – including investment activity

Pursuant to the Conflict of Interest principles outlined in this document disclosures shall be made in writing to the person's direct supervisor.

e) Future employment restrictions

Employees will not divulge, disclose or otherwise use confidential information or proprietary material obtained through their employment with Northern Health following the conclusion of their employment with Northern Health without written permission of Northern Health.

Written permission must be obtained:

1. For Staff from the Executive Team member for that area;
2. For Executive staff from the CEO;
3. For the CEO from the Board Chair.

Until one year after their employment ends, employees in senior leadership roles will not:

- a) Lobby or otherwise make representations for, or on behalf of, an outside entity to Northern Health, or to any ministry or organization of the government they were involved with through their employment with Northern Health,
- b) Accept an offer of employment, or an appointment to the Board of Directors, or a contract to provide services to an outside entity in circumstances that would give rise to a reasonable apprehension that they may use, divulge or disclose confidential information obtained through their employment with Northern Health without prior discussion of potential concerns with Northern Health, and receiving written approval from the CEO, or in the case of the CEO by the Board Chair; or
- c) Act for or advise an outside entity in connection with any ongoing proceedings, transactions, negotiation or case in which the outside entity, Northern Health and/or the government are involved if:
 - a. During their former employment with Northern Health, they acted for or advised Northern Health concerning the proceedings, transaction, negotiation or case; and

- b. Acting for or advising the outside entity in that connection would result in the receipt by the outside entity of a private or commercial benefit or any other benefit not for general application.

f) Personal Conduct

Northern Health supports a workplace that is free of discrimination and harassment, not only the specific conduct prohibited by the BC Human Rights Code, but of any form of personal harassment which may cause embarrassment, insecurity, discomfort, offence, or humiliation to another person or group. The Respectful Workplace policy outlines expectations for respectful conduct and defines unacceptable behaviour.

B. Protection of Privacy

Northern Health policies provide consistent standards and practices to ensure that Northern Health Staff and Agents are aware of and acknowledge the legal and ethical obligations, and consequences of not adhering to such obligations, to protect the personal, proprietary and other confidential information under the legal control of Northern Health or of any other Health Authority, which Northern Health employees have access to.

As a condition of employment with Northern Health, all new staff members must read the privacy and confidentiality policy and sign the employee confidentiality acknowledgement. In addition such information must be held in confidence even after their employment comes to an end.

Failure to comply with policy may result in disciplinary action including, but not limited to, the termination of employment, loss of privileges, prosecution and restitution for damages.

a) Client/customer

All staff members and agents of Northern Health have the responsibility to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to protect personal information at all times. They must ensure that their practices in collecting, accessing, using or disclosing personal information comply with Northern Health policy as well as with statutory requirements and their professional codes of ethics and standards of practice. Staff members are expected to report to the Northern Health Privacy Office any concerns with, or recommended improvements to, information privacy and security procedures, and provide any information required to help resolve problems.

b) Contractors & Suppliers

Northern Health will conduct business transactions in an ethical and business-like manner and in accordance with the Code of Ethics and the Principles and Standards of Purchasing Practice of the Purchasing Management Association of Canada.

It is Northern Health policy to maintain and practice the highest possible standards of business ethics, professional courtesy, and competence in all dealings with suppliers.

It is essential that confidential information relating to third parties is handled with integrity and discretion in accordance with applicable legislation relating to freedom of information and protection of privacy.

Except with the consent of the party that is the subject of the information, confidential information must not be communicated to anyone other than those who are authorized to receive it. Depending on the circumstances, those who are authorized to receive it may include other persons, representatives of Northern Health (including Board Directors, outside lawyers, consultants, and other external advisors) when those persons and individuals have a legitimate right to know the information in connection with their duties.

Staff members are expected to honour the obligations required by any non-disclosure agreements with contractors, suppliers or others and uphold Northern Health's obligations under such agreements.

When confidential information is legitimately communicated to someone, he/she should be clearly informed that the information is confidential and be given instructions about the limitations on further dissemination and use of the information.

Care must be taken when discussing, handling, or storing confidential information or materials. If information is the subject of a confidentiality agreement, care must be exercised to be sure the terms of the agreement are followed.

C. Protection of General Corporate Information

All data and information held by Northern Health, in whatever form, is the property of Northern Health. Anyone who has access to this information must not use it for personal benefit or in any way that could be detrimental to Northern Health. Individuals are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all corporate information and must not disclose it to anyone inside or outside of Northern Health except as required by legitimate and sanctioned business duties.

These provisions apply both while employed by Northern Health and post-employment.

D. Commitment and Compliance

The requirement to comply with these standards of conduct is a condition of employment. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action including, but not limited to, the termination of employment, loss of privileges, prosecution and restitution for damages.

Administration of the Standards of Conduct is monitored by individual managers for their staff. For questions around compliance, and for issues management, the Standards of Conduct are administered and adjudicated by the Human Resources Department of Northern Health.

E. Reporting & Whistleblowing (Safe Reporting)

Northern Health is committed to fostering integrity in our workplace and is committed to minimizing opportunities for all forms of theft, fraud, corruption and activities not compliant with policy or these Standards of Conduct. Northern Health expects all individuals associated with it to act honestly, with integrity, in good faith, and to safeguard Northern Health resources for which they are responsible.

Participation in, or concealment of, illegal activities, including those which might benefit the organization, are not tolerated. Northern Health expects all individuals to report irregularities. Reports must be made in good faith and based on reasonable grounds.

If an individual believes they have identified an irregularity, the concern should be reported to their direct supervisor. Individuals that are members of the medical staff should report their concerns to the Chief of Medical Staff, the Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA) Medical Director or where concerns involve non-medical staff, the senior site administrator.

When a suspected irregularity may involve an individual's direct supervisor, or the individual is not comfortable in reporting the irregularity to the direct supervisor, the report should be made to Human Resources.

In occasional situations where an individual is convinced that the normal internal process for such disclosure is inadequate or has failed to respond adequately to their concerns, the allegation should be directed to the Regional Director, Internal Audit (safe.reporting@northernhealth.ca). Irregularities reported directly to Internal Audit will be evaluated and investigated in accordance with the Safe Reporting Decision Support Tool (DST).

An individual who reports in good faith and on the basis of reasonable belief any situation that they believe contravenes the law, misuses public funds or assets, represents a danger to public health and safety, contravenes these Standards of Conduct, or could otherwise cause serious loss of public faith in the integrity of Northern Health will be protected from reprisal for such reporting.

Any such reprisal will, in itself, be considered a serious breach of policy. Individual(s) who attempt to or execute an act of reprisal toward the Individual may be faced with disciplinary action. Such action may result in termination of employment or suspension, or in the case of medical staff, discipline up to and including suspension of medical staff privileges in accordance with the Medical Staff Bylaws and Medical Staff Rules.

The right to protection from reprisal does not extend to or in any way include immunity for an individual found to be involved in perceived wrongdoings reported under this policy or that form part of related investigations.

In all instances, Northern Health has exclusive authority and discretion to determine if and when reports of perceived wrongdoing warrant a formal investigation using the

processes outlined in the Safe Reporting policy, and to determine the nature and extent of the investigative process to be employed.

Nothing in these Standards of Conduct shall interfere with other established processes such as collective agreement grievance procedures, performance management, workplace safety and accident investigation, etc. nor does it replace or supersede reporting obligations as described in legislation (e.g. Health Professions Act). It is not intended to interfere with or replace reporting, investigating and resolving complaints or problems via other Northern Health policies.

F. Other

Any suspected or known activities not compliant with policy or these Standards of Conduct will be investigated and dealt with appropriately. Where an investigation substantiates the allegations, Northern Health will take corrective action as promptly and consistently as possible. The specific action taken in any particular case will depend on the nature and gravity of the issue. Where appropriate, disciplinary action will be taken, up to and including the termination of employment or the termination of the individual's relationship with Northern Health.

Northern Health will seek restitution for misappropriated resources, using legal means as required.

III. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Standards of Conduct Guidelines for the BC Public Sector

A. Introduction

Following the release of the new taxpayer accountability principles in June 2014⁵, government issued the [Standards of Conduct Guidelines for the BC Public Sector](#), with detailed guidance to standardize codes of ethics/standards of conduct for employees in public sector organizations, which includes Northern Health and the other health authorities.

The purpose of the standardized codes of conduct is to improve transparency and enhance public sector agency accountability to taxpayers

B. Objective

Each public sector entity must have a code of ethics/standards of conduct for employees in the public sector. Codes of conduct are approved by the Minister responsible for the *Public Sector Employers Act*.

C. Purpose

Integrity is a core value of the B.C. public sector. It is a fundamental principle that all public sector entities are accountable for their actions, and ensure they demonstrate integrity in their behaviour and general conduct of business, and that they act in an honest and ethical manner at all times. Public sector entities must ensure the decisions they make reflect the priorities and values of government and their shareholders—the citizens of B.C.

Each public sector entity will develop its own code of ethics/standards of conduct to set out certain principles and standards of conduct that all personnel are expected to follow in their day-to-day dealings with customers, suppliers, fellow employees, investors, governmental agencies, other stakeholders, competitors, and with the communities in which their organization does business.

D. Scope

The scope of the standards of conduct will vary depending on the nature of the agency. At a minimum, each public sector entity must consider the headings in the Standards of Conduct Guidelines for the Public Sector: July 2014 document as they revise or develop their code of ethics/standards of conduct. In the event these headings do not apply, public sector entities should inform and discuss this with the Public Sector Employers' Council (PSEC).

⁵ See Appendix 2

Appendix 2 – [Taxpayer Accountability Principles](#)

Taxpayer accountability principles	
1 Cost consciousness (Efficiency)	Strengthen cost management capabilities and foster a culture of cost-consciousness at all levels of public sector organizations. Provide public services and programs as efficiently and effectively as possible to “bend the cost curve” and support sustainable public policies and programs as a lasting legacy for generations to come.
2 Accountability	Transparently manage responsibilities according to a set of common public sector principles in the best interest of the citizens of the province. By enhancing organizational efficiency and effectiveness in the planning, reporting and decision making, public sector organizations will ensure actions are aligned with government’s strategic mandate.
3 Appropriate Compensation	Comply with a rigorous, standardized approach to performance management and employee compensation, which reflects appropriate compensation for work across the public sector that is consistent with government’s taxpayer accountability principles and respectful of the taxpayer.
4 Service	Maintain a clear focus on positive outcomes for citizens of British Columbia by delivering cost-efficient, effective, value-for-money public services and programs.
5 Respect	Engage in equitable, compassionate, respectful and effective communications that ensure all parties are properly informed or consulted on actions, decisions and public communications in a timely manner. Proactively collaborate in a spirit of partnership that respects the use of taxpayers’ monies.
6 Integrity	Make decisions and take actions that are transparent, ethical and free from conflict of interest. Require the establishment of a strong ethical code of conduct for all employees and executives. Serve the citizens of British Columbia by respecting the shared public trust and acting in accordance with the taxpayer accountability principles.

UPDATES

This is a work-in-progress. Please send suggestions for improvement to:

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