

Ontario COVID-19 Health System Response

Bioethics Table

Terms of Reference

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Bioethics Table is an advisory body that provides ethics input and guidance to support decision-making at the Ministry of Health COVID-19 Command Table, Ontario Health COVID-19 Oversight Table, and other Tables as appropriate. It provides expert advice on bioethical issues at the request of, and in consultation with, the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health. The Bioethics Table comprises independent bioethics experts from health institutions, universities, and non-governmental organizations (see membership in Appendix 1). The University of Toronto is the lead institution of the Bioethics Table.

Most if not all issues in a pandemic have an ethical dimension. Bioethics, understood here as the systematic study and application of ethical principles and reasoning in the context of health policy, practice, and research, can play an important role in identifying, evaluating, and proposing solutions to ethical challenges that emerge in this context. With that being said, the Bioethics Table is not a decision-making body and does not *systematically* review or provide ethics oversight for all Ministry of Health or Ontario Health policies, recommendations, or activities. The role of the Bioethics Table is to inform, not approve, Ministry of Health or Ontario Health policies, recommendations, or other activities as appropriate. While explicit ethical analysis provides a key input to health system decisions, ethical analysis is not itself the site of legitimate decision-making. The legitimacy of health system decisions is informed by a number of inputs, including clinical or epidemiological evidence, law, and broader stakeholder perspectives. Attention to ethics and other inputs of ethical importance is a shared responsibility throughout the Ontario COVID Health System Response and is not solely the responsibility of the Bioethics Table.

Requests for more information about the activities of the Bioethics Table should be directed to the Communications Support contacts listed in Appendix 1 or via COVIDUpdates@hqontario.ca.

SCOPE & DELIVERABLES

Item	Description
COMMITTEE SCOPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide bioethics input, feedback, and/or recommendations on public health measures and health system operational management and coordination provincially and regionally• Identify ethical issues for consideration by other COVID-19 Health System Response Tables• Consult with relevant experts and stakeholders, including an Indigenous Bioethics Reference Group established by the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, to inform Bioethics Table deliberations and deliverables• Strike working groups and consult relevant bioethics experts to advance Bioethics Table work streams

HIGH-LEVEL DELIVERABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop bioethics policy briefs, frameworks, and guidelines as appropriate • Ethical reviews of guidance and recommendations developed by other provincial tables as requested and appropriate • Provide ethical advice on process
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GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Bioethics Table reports up to the Ontario Health System COVID-19 Command Table. It works in close collaboration with the Ontario Health COVID-19 Health System Response Oversight Table and other MOH, OH, and PHO Tables. (See Appendix 2. Bioethics Table Governance and Reporting Structure).

COMMITTEE PROCESSES

MEETING FREQUENCY	Every other Friday at 2:00-3:30PM (subject to change based on co-chair availability)
TERM	Committee meetings will commence in March 2020 and are expected to continue for the duration of the pandemic, and as required.
OH SECRETARIAT RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record action items following Table discussions • Add action items to tracking spreadsheet • Track and follow up on assigned action items • Develop, maintain, and update status report for the Table’s activities as defined by co-chairs to track defined activities to conclusion • Maintain document sharing platform for Table members to collaborate on documents and view status report • Other support activities as requested
OH COMMUNICATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the distribution list for communications in collaboration with MOH as appropriate • Craft and fact-check documents as appropriate • Identify who should provide input/feedback and approval • Arrange approval on communication outputs

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF THE BIOETHICS TABLE

Decisions regarding the advice or guidance that the Bioethics Table offers will be made by consensus of the members where possible, informed by health system priorities. If there are any issues on which consensus cannot be achieved, the decision-making approach will be decided upon by the Co-Chairs. Bioethics Table advice or guidance may include a range of ethical considerations that may be of relevance for a particular issue, including those that may be supported by different ethical justifications.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Bioethics Table members must ensure that any actual or potential conflicts of interest regarding any matter under discussion by the Table is drawn to the attention of the Co-Chairs. The Co-Chairs will decide what action, if any, is required arising from the conflicts of interest and will take appropriate action, including but not limited to requesting the member recuse him or herself from participation in discussion on particular matters.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless it is generally available to the public, all data and information acquired or prepared by or for the Table should be treated as confidential. Members should keep data and information confidential and not directly or indirectly disclose them during or subsequent to their term as a member of the Table.

Last Revised: April 16, 2021 (version 7.0) – previous versions: 2021 Jan 27 (ver. 6.0) 2020 Oct 13 (ver. 5.0) Aug 20 (ver. 4.0) June 12 (ver. 3.0) May 29 (ver. 2.0), May 8 (ver. 1.0)

Approved by: Bioethics Table Co-Chairs

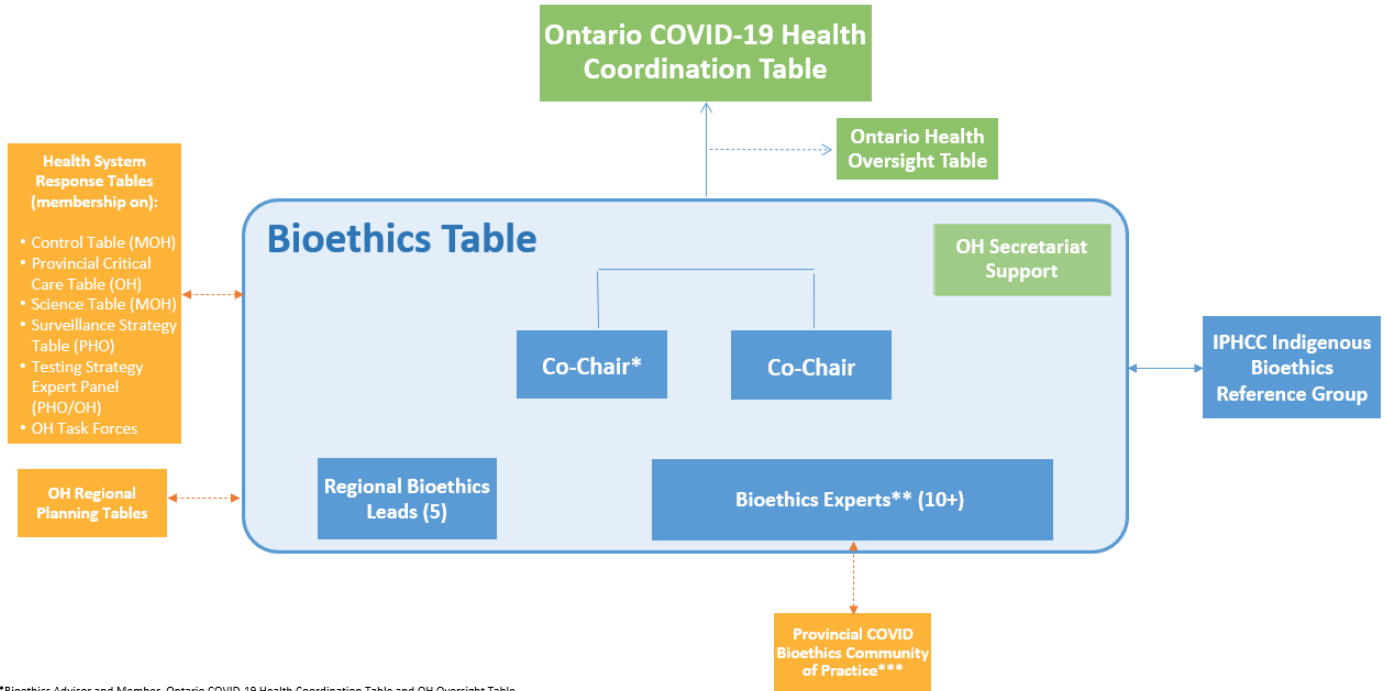
APPENDIX 1: BIOETHICS TABLE MEMBERSHIP

Members are participating as bioethics experts and not as representatives of their respective institutions.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP	RESPONSIBILITY / ROLE	ORGANIZATION
Jennifer Gibson	Co-Chair	University of Toronto
Maxwell J. Smith	Co-Chair (Mar 4-Sep 10, 2020) & Member	University of Western Ontario
Sally Bean	Member & Toronto Region Bioethics Lead	Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and University of Toronto
Cécile Bensimon	Member	Canadian Medical Association
Carrie Bernard	Member	University of Toronto, McMaster University, and William Osler Health System
Nicole Blackman	Member	Indigenous Primary Care Health Council
Lisa Boivin	Member	University of Toronto
Paula Chidwick	Member & Central Region Bioethics Lead	William Osler Health System
James Downar	Member	The Ottawa Hospital and the Ottawa Health Research Institute
Lisa Forman	Member	University of Toronto
Dianne Godkin	Co-Chair (Sep 11, 2020 -) & Member	Regional Ethics Program, Trillium Health Partners
Mary Huska	Member & North Region Bioethics Lead	Health Sciences North
Michael Kekewich	Member & East Region Bioethics Lead	Champlain Centre for Healthcare Ethics, The Ottawa Hospital
Stephanie Nixon	Member	University of Toronto
Nancy Ondrusek	Member	Public Health Ontario and University of Toronto
Lisa Schwartz	Member	McMaster University
Robert Sibbald	Member	London Health Sciences Centre
Alison Thompson	Member	University of Toronto

Ross Upshur	Member	University of Toronto, and Bridgepoint Active Healthcare, Sinai Health System
Randi Zlotnik-Shaul	Member	Hospital for Sick Children
Nicole Blackman	Member	Provincial Director Ontario ICS Program
Julija Kelecevic	Member & West Region Bioethics Lead	Hamilton Health Sciences

APPENDIX 2: BIOETHICS TABLE GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING STRUCTURE



*Bioethics Advisor and Member, Ontario COVID-19 Health Coordination Table and OH Oversight Table

**Public health ethics, clinical and organizational ethics, health policy ethics, research ethics, humanitarian ethics; Indigenous bioethics; law and human rights; clinical medicine

***Based at the Joint Centre for Bioethics, University of Toronto