RAPP

RESEARCH APPROVALS PROCESSES PROJECT

Streamlining Research Approvals Processes Across BC's Health Authorities

Project Overview

The Research Approvals Processes Project (RAPP) is a joint Ministry of Health/Health Authority initiative to standardize and coordinate research approvals for multi-site research studies across the following approval streams: ethics, data access, privacy, operational reviews, and contracts/agreements. The project seeks to improve the timeliness of conducting health research in British Columbia, to:

- improve care quality and patient outcomes;
- provide patients greater opportunities to participate in research;
- increase British Columbia's competitiveness as an environment for testing innovative interventions and processes; and,
- build a research positive health system.

Background

The majority of health research in British Columbia takes place in health authority sites including hospitals, long-term care facilities, and community sites and programs. All research taking place within a health authority requires health authority approval. This approval is designed to ensure patient safety, privacy, and data protection, as well as ensuring the health authority has the capacity to support the research occurring in its facilities and that it is aligned with priorities of the organization.

In British Columbia there are five regional health authorities as well as an affiliated health care organization (Providence Health Care), the Provincial Health Services Authority, and the First Nations Health Authority. Although health authorities are guided by the same legislation and requirements, each health authority has unique local processes to approve studies. This can make obtaining study approvals across multiple health authorities complicated and complex. Most of the effort to streamline and standardize approvals has focused on the ethics' approval, with a harmonized ethics model advanced by Research Ethics BC in partnership with the health authorities.

Process

Initial information to inform the project components and approach was gathered via multiple methods:

- an international literature review,
- a jurisdictional scan including all Canadian provinces and other countries,
- interviews with individuals working in British Columbia's health research approvals space; and
- large group engagement sessions primarily with health authority staff in the targeted project areas.

These activities informed project components and deliverables. A governance model with Ministry of Health/Health Authority co-leadership was implemented and formal engagement activities with a research advisory committee has begun. Next steps include process mapping the work streams and developing draft products which will inform the changes health authorities will adopt as part of the implementation of RAPP.

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Workstreams

1. **Ethics:**
   Ethics reviews are conducted by Research Ethics Boards (REBs) to ensure that studies meet high ethical standards, and that the research participants are appropriately protected from harms. In British Columbia, there are eight REBs for health authorities or health authority agencies; each secondary academic institution also hosts their own REB. Streamlining initiatives have been underway in BC since 2007, with harmonized review models and adoption of a provincial platform for multi-jurisdictional studies spanning 2015-2018. However, there is room to build on the system strengths already established by the expertise, creativity and successful accomplishments of the research ethics community over many years. This work is being led by Michael Smith Health Research BC, with the support of consultants, through continued collaboration and engagements with key interested parties from health authority and academic REBs, as well as subject matter experts and research ethics leadership. For more updates on this initiative, see Research ethics model design initiative.

2. **Operational Approvals:**
   Health authorities conduct Operational Approvals to ensure that research happening within a health authority does not disrupt staff, space or equipment needed for the delivery of care and that the research aligns with health authority and community priorities. RAPP will reduce the number of distinct forms required within health authorities to streamline researcher and health authority experience and will offer resources (primarily information/documents) for process improvements in accordance with best/successful practices being used in British Columbia and other jurisdictions.

3. **Privacy:**
   Health authorities conduct privacy reviews to ensure that data collected in the course of a research study is protected and individual privacy is maintained. RAPP, through process mapping and use cases, will be recommending streamlined approval processes for privacy reviews.

4. **Data Access:**
   Each health authority maintains numerous data holdings which may be of interest to researchers. Through partnership with the Health Data Platform BC (HDPBC), RAPP will be supporting more standardized access to health data.

5. **Contracts & Agreements:**
   Before a health study can be launched, legal contracts and agreements must be signed between the researcher/industry partner and the health authority and universities involved. RAPP will be exploring the development of common terms and conditions, as well as common templates, to make this process more predictable and less burdensome.

6. **Front Counter**
   Currently, in most cases, a researcher requesting study approval in multiple health authorities works with each health authority separately. The concept of a provincial research Front Counter is intended to provide one point of contact and entry to the system for multi-site studies to enable simpler access to submission information, early feasibility assessment, and approval tracking.