

# RESEARCH ETHICS

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

*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 2023/24

*Research Ethics, Dalhousie University*

## **Fast Facts**

- 5,000+ reviews of research involving humans conducted by Research Ethics Boards and staff.
- 532 new project submissions, 235 amendments, 744 continuing reviews, 257 final reports received. 93 projects terminated for non-compliance.
- 18 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.
- 2 Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities); 7 Health Sciences REB meetings and 9 Social Sciences & Humanities REB meetings held.
- 43 Board members.
- 1,947 researchers completed the TCPS online course on research ethics (13,858 researchers have completed it since 2011).
- 25% of new projects reviewed were funded research (funding held at Dalhousie); 11% were tri-agency funded.
- 95% of new submissions involved prospective research; 5% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
- 11% of new submissions to the University REBs were eligible for Board of Record Acknowledgement (multi-jurisdictional).
- 19,066 website page views.

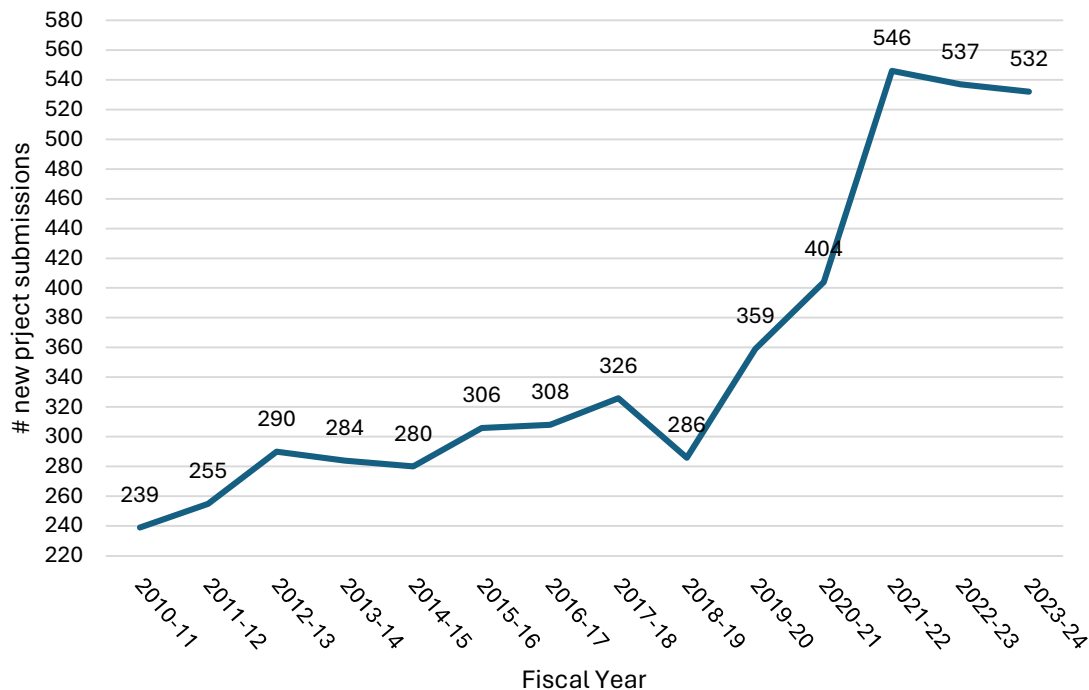
*Core Principles:*  
**Respect for Persons**  
**Concern for Welfare**  
**Justice**

## Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 3 full-time permanent staff positions: a director, a manager, and a support specialist. In addition, beginning in May 2023, a second manager was appointed to a 2-year term (May 2023-April 2025). The staff coordinated and supported the work of two Research Ethics Boards: Health Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities. There were 22 Board meetings scheduled and 43 Board members (35 of whom were members of the University (31 faculty and 4 students); 8 were community members). The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 5,000 reviews of project submissions, including review of 532 new research projects, 235 amendments, 744 continuing reviews, 257 final reports and 93 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 74 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, 2023 to March 31, 2024.

## Historical - New REB Submissions (2011-2024)



## Notable this year

Change in **Board leadership**. Dr. Megan Bailey ended her term as chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board; **Dr. John Cameron** assumed the chair in July. **Dr. Jennifer Isenor** continued as chair of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board.

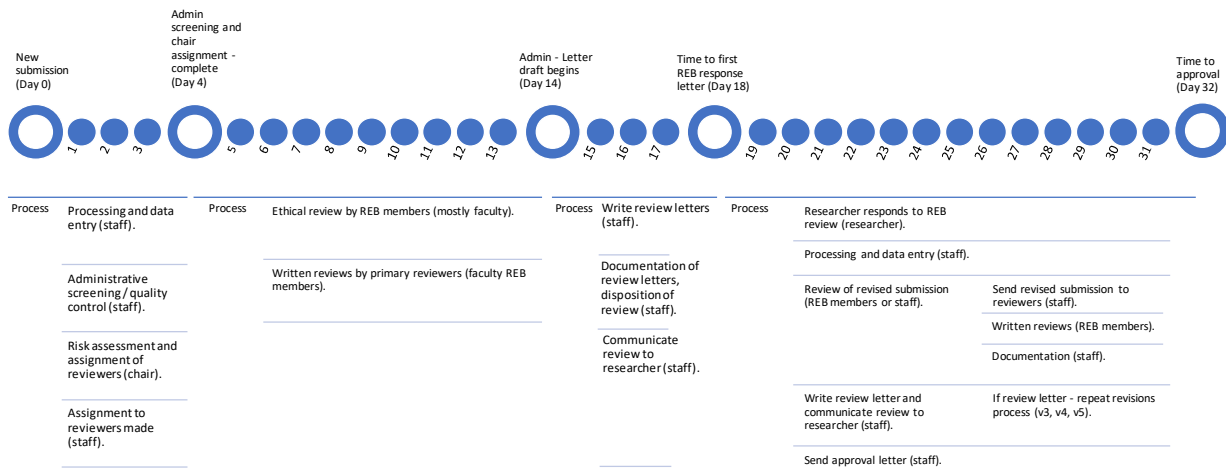
**Staff complement** was increased by 1.0 FTE for a 2-year term beginning in May 2023 through the addition of a second manager position; there is now a manager assigned to health sciences research (Hillary Ferguson) and one assigned to social sciences and humanities research (Angela Hersey).

**Staffing changes** included the search, appointment, and training of a new ethics support specialist (Jaime Pike) as well as the new manager position.

The **Policy renewal process** for the University *Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans* continued. The revised policy was approved by the Senate Academic Programs and Research Committee in June and underwent review by the Legal Counsel Office in the fall and winter.

The associate vice-president research led a **research ethics process review**. The working group from the policy renewal initiative supported this review throughout the fall and winter. Presentations were made to the research ethics boards and the Dalhousie Research Advisory Committee; **Town Halls** were held with the Dalhousie research community in the winter term.

The following **review cycle** was shared. It illustrates the activities and timelines of the research ethics review process and reports the median number of working days from the time an ethics submission is submitted until the project receives research ethics board approval.



Note: based on median timelines for 3 years (2020-2023)

The **application form for prospective research** involving humans was substantially revised and launched (December 2023). The annual/final report form was updated.

A bilateral REB working group convened to strategize on ethical issues emerging from TCPS guidance on **broad consent and data repositories**.

The director contributed to discussions regarding the Office of Research Services initiative to develop a **release of funds process** for Indigenous engagement (fall 2023).

The demands on the REBs continue to be substantial, and some members were **increasingly challenged** to meet the review demands. Board membership faced shortfalls; one Faculty was not able to meet its membership obligations. The **volume and complexity** of inquiries to staff has been very 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.

## Educational Activity

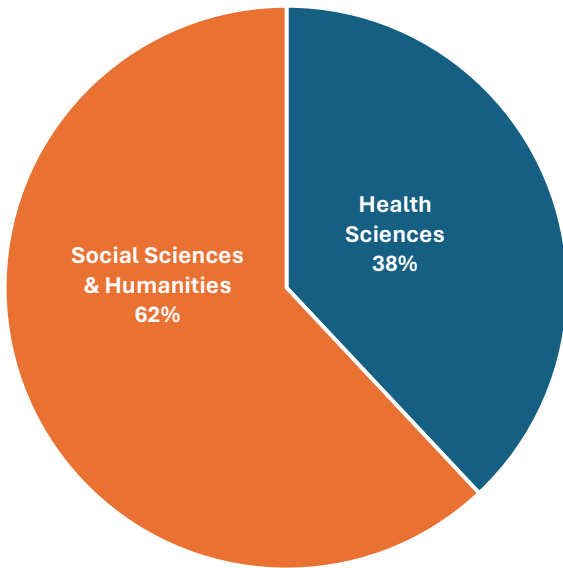
Dalhousie supported educational opportunities for Board members and staff. The Research Ethics Board chairs, members, and staff were involved in presentations and discussions regarding research ethics principles and the review process with members of the University research community, especially students.

Educational activities included:

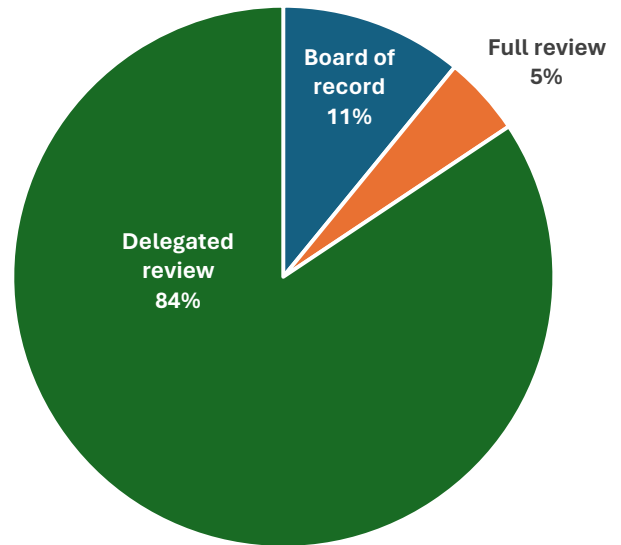
- Research Ethics Boards chairs and staff attended the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards national conference virtually (June 2023).
- REB members are required to complete the TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics* and *The Fundamentals of OCAP*®.
- REB orientation program for incoming members held throughout the year by the Board Chairs and Director.
- 1,947 Dalhousie researchers completed the TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics*; 13,858 researchers completed the tutorial since its inception in June 2011.
- Research Ethics participated in Dalhousie's new academic staff orientation.
- Research Ethics participated in the Centre for Teaching and Learning SoTL Scholars program educational presentation on Ethics in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (October 2023).
- Research Ethics hosted an Ask Me Anything session for colleagues in the Office of Research Services (September 2023).
- Consult with new Dalhousie Centre for Psychological Health regarding patient consent for research (October 2023).
- Engagement with School of Resource and Environmental Studies and Department of Psychology and Neuroscience on their unit-level ethics review processes to comply with university policy (January 2024).

## Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

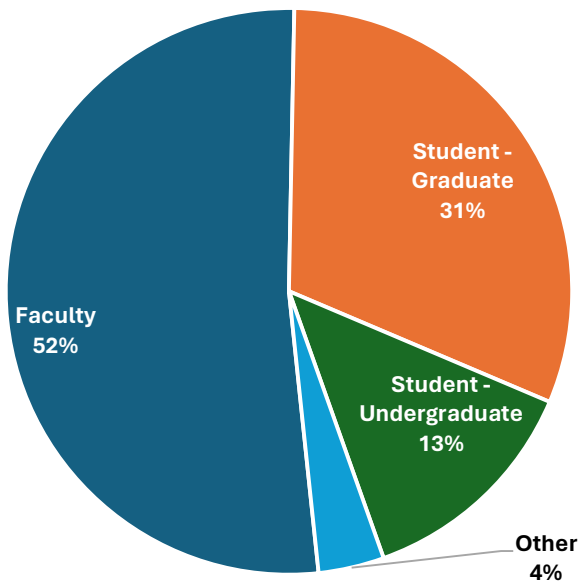
Board Assignment



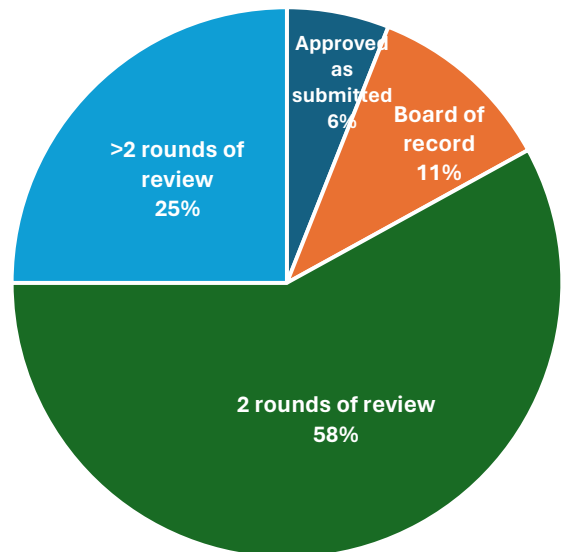
Proportionate Review



Researcher Profile

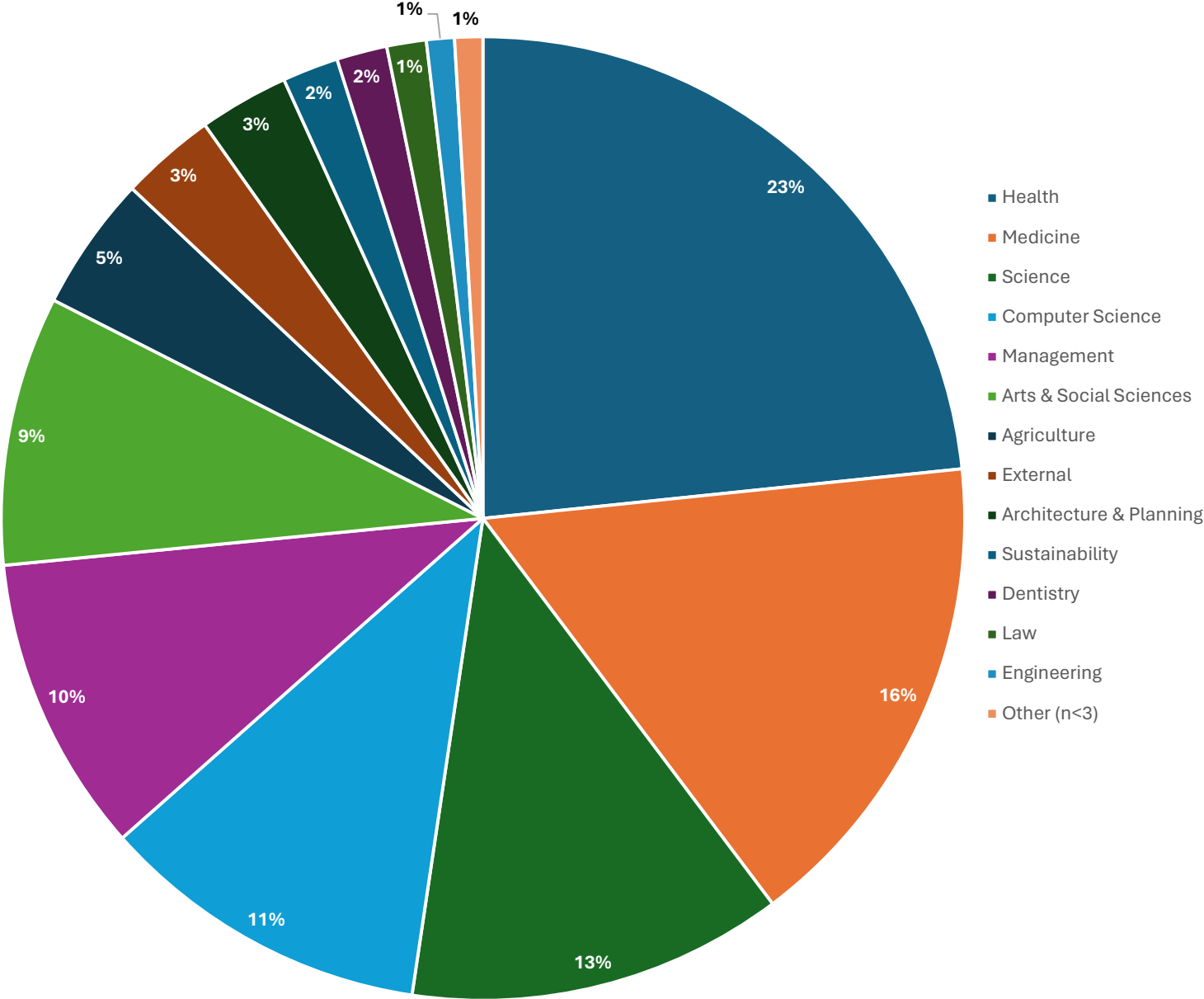


# Rounds of Review (Application to Approval)



Note: 33% of submissions were withdrawn for quality control prior to review by the REBs

# Submissions by Faculty



## Board Membership\*

### Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

#### Jennifer Isenor (Chair)

Kehinde Akintola  
Nichole Austin  
Sarah Burm  
Heather Casavechia  
Violet D'Souza  
Lizbeth Escobedo Bravo

Adrian Gee  
Louise Gillis  
Gordon Gubitz  
Derek Kimmerly  
Elaine Moody  
Cory Munroe

Heather Neyedli  
Amanda Porter  
Simon Sherry  
Jean Shoveller  
Dan Stevens  
Jeff Waugh  
Dinky Udasi

### Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

#### John Cameron (Chair)

Samantha Adema  
Megan Bailey  
Polina Baum-Talmor  
Raluca Bejan  
Drew Bourgeois  
Catherine Bryan  
Rachel Cadman

Heather Casavechia  
Luc Cousineau  
Steven Dukeshire  
Paola Gonzalez  
Dana Kabat-Farr  
Niki Kiepek  
Lisa MacDougall  
Sean Mackinnon

Joseph Malloch  
Keahna Margeson  
Justin McManus  
Paul Meade  
Chris Moore  
Kate M. Thompson  
Valerie Trifts  
Ruben Zaiotti

## Staff\*

Catherine Connors (Director)  
Hillary Ferguson (Manager)  
Angela Hersey (Manager)  
Jaime Pike (Support Specialist)

\* as of March 31, 2024