

A Statement from the Chairs of the McMaster Research Ethics Board

Recent events of racially motivated police violence and the groundswell of social activism that has arisen both in response to this violence and to a history of systemic racism, in our community and around the globe, has served as a catalyst for us to look at our role and complicity in institutionalized and structural racism and injustice and our responsibility and obligation to take concrete steps toward its eradication. Anti-Black racism isn't only an American problem, it is part of our history and part of our current institutions in Canada, in Hamilton and at McMaster. We must look deeply within our own practices and work together to eradicate racism and discrimination within our organization.

The McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) mission is "to ensure research involving human participants carried out under the auspices of McMaster University is of the highest quality, is conducted to protect the interests of human participants and of society and is in compliance with the Tri Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans." We are committed to the core ethical principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice, not merely as formal principles but as they apply to lives of McMaster researchers, participants of research, and all members of our wider community.

The research enterprise has a distinct obligation to combat racism in research, in light of the historical abuses of racialized communities and individuals in research. The exploitation of Black men in the US Public Health Service Syphilis Study—the Tuskegee experiment (1932-1971) was an important motivator of the modern-day ethics review process. In Canada, this culminated in our current code of ethical principles that guides the review process (the TCPS2) and aims to enable the advancement of knowledge while protecting and respecting research participants. This cannot be done unless we acknowledge the background of injustice within which we are working.

The general principles we cite of respect, beneficence and justice, and the statement we are making are not meant as empty words but as notice of our commitment to take concrete steps to lead MREB to challenge anti-Black racism in research and recruitment. We acknowledge also that Indigenous communities and other racialized communities have been harmed by discrimination in research, historically and currently, and recognize that it is insufficient for us to carry out ethics reviews without considering the wider institutional and structural injustices we are participating in and the part we can play in combating them.

As a start, we are proposing to:

- Take immediate action to include Black voices on the Student Research Ethics Committees and MREB through targeted recruiting. This will include reaching out to the African Caribbean Faculty Association and the African Caribbean Graduate Student Association at McMaster and also the Equity and Inclusion Office.
- Consider also recruiting an MREB member with expertise in research with racialized groups.
- Engage with McMaster Equity and Inclusion Office to build capacity on the board and provide guidance on developing best practices in addressing racial bias in ethics reviewing particularly in protocols where race and/or ethnicity are involved.
- Review the sections of the TCPS2 that address inclusion and exclusion (and the history and rationale behind them in relation to justice) as well as Indigenous research and consider them in light of recent raised awareness of institutional racism and bias. This will include expanding the notion of justice in our review of research to include structural and social justice and further embracing meaningful community involvement as an important corrective to research injustice.
- Provide and/or share educational opportunities for Board members to spread awareness about racism and discrimination in research. As a start we share links on the PRIM&R website where they provide open access to workshops and sessions on race such as
 - [PRIM&R resources on diversity](#), including webinars on “Race-Based Medicine and Race-Based Research: Ethical Considerations for IRBs” and “Distrust, Race, and Research: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment and Retention of Minority Populations.” (Webinars require creating PRIM&R account).
 - [AER18 Closing General Session: Research Ethics, Race, and Opioids](#)
 - [AER17 Panel VII: Race Matters: Ethical Challenges for the Use of Racial Categories in Research](#)
- Develop templates for researchers for inclusive and respectful collection of data on race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

If you have any suggestions for how we can better advance our goals of eliminating institutional racism and promoting more just and equitable research, please contact one or both of the Chairs, Violetta Ignieski (ignieski@mcmaster.ca), Sue Becker (beckers@mcmaster.ca).