

# Why Should My Health Department Start an Ethics Committee?



This handout is designed to help make the case to key stakeholders for why such an entity will benefit the health department and the larger community. The resource accompanies the “So You Want to Start an Ethics Committee” webpage produced by the National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO), with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

To ensure accountability and build community trust, health departments must be able to identify and address ethical issues. A systematic approach built around an ethics committee helps to integrate ethical deliberation into day-to-day public health practice and decision making.

## **Establishing an ethics committee can help your health department to:**

- ✓ Deal with ethics issues using a formal and transparent process
- ✓ Reinforce the credibility of the health department’s decision-making process
- ✓ Meet the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) ethics measure, which calls for:
  - A process or set of policies and procedures outlining strategies for decision making relative to ethical issues
  - A documented example of a specific ethical issue that has been considered, deliberated, and resolved
- ✓ Align with the Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health developed by the Public Health Leadership Society and adopted by the American Public Health Association

## **If you’re unsure how your health department should handle questions like those below, then establishing an ethics committee might be just the thing you need:**

- How should my health department allocate limited resources?
- How should my health department avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest?
- When should my health department order isolation, quarantine, or other measures that restrict individuals to protect the public’s health?