

Date:	June 17, 2020
To:	Northern Health Research Community
From:	Julia Bickford, Regional Director - Research Evaluation & Analytics
Re:	Research Processes During COVID-19

In March 2020, Northern Health began pausing research and evaluation activities, with some case-by-case exemptions.

Northern Health is implementing a multi-phase approach, in alignment with provincial requirements and public health guidance, to resume clinical services and access to facilities with a focus on safety, standards and maintaining capacity to respond to potential future waves of COVID-19.

The resumption and initiation of research is aligned with Northern Health's COVID-19 recovery plans and includes two concurrent processes that **together, when approved**, comprise Institutional Approval to proceed.

1. Research Ethics Review: *to assess current ethical acceptability*
2. Operational Review: *to assess current capacity to support*

PRINCIPLES:

1. Ensure the safety of research participants, their families, staff, students and research team members and all Northern Health staff working in areas where the research occurs.
2. Confirm that research studies have plans¹, or procedural amendments, to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19.
3. Reduce the risks of delays in start-up or resumption of non-COVID-19 research
4. Optimize efforts to conduct the research remotely wherever possible (in-person behavioral research, focus groups and interviews)².
5. Continue to monitor COVID-19 as the pandemic evolves and provide updates to this policy on a regular basis.

Service and Program Capacity

Northern Health has implemented COVID-19 Recovery and Response procedures for its hospitals, surgical services, ambulatory care, emergency department, community health services, long-term care and mental health and substance use departments.

The desired outcomes of these procedures are:

¹ [Work Safe BC/Academic Institution requirements](#)

² [BC SUPPORT Unit/virtual tools for research](#)

- The thoughtful recovery to normal levels of operation with an emphasis on keeping patient care limited to safe care spaces; and
- Continued and diligent practices to limit the spread of COVID-19 until community immunity has occurred or a vaccine is developed and implemented.

The resumption of research activities in a given department or facility, or research that requires specific clinical or diagnostic services, is dependent on:

1. Alignment of the study requirements with the area Recovery and Response plan, including safety considerations.
2. The scope and intensity of services required.
3. Capacity to support (staffing, procedures/services, equipment or supplies).

Research must not introduce additional risk of COVID-19 transmission to staff, patients or families who are working in, or receiving services at Northern Health facilities.

Researchers, research team members and research participants will be required to follow [Northern Health Essential Visitors Policy](#). In rare circumstances where research cannot be conducted remotely, researchers will be required to provide their own appropriate [Personal Protective Equipment](#). Researchers who cannot access the Northern Health policies may contact policiesstandards@northernhealth.ca for a copy.

PRIORTIZATION CRITERIA

Northern Health is committed to timely review of non-COVID-19 research and the time required is based on the capacity within the Research Department.

Prioritization criteria for the order of review of non-COVID-19 research include:

- Risks of delaying research to participants
- Mitigation strategies in place for resuming research to minimize risks to participants
- Risks to the integrity of the study, including funding
- Risks associated with meeting degree completion timelines
- Capacity of required Northern Health facilities/services to restart
- Availability of a safety plan or study-specific COVID-19 related safety and operational amendments
- Mandated regulatory requirements
- Alignment with the strategic and operational priorities of Northern Health and the Ministry of Health

APPLICATIONS TO RESTART RESEARCH

To restart a current research study that was paused due to COVID-19 restrictions:

Step 1: Ethics Approval

- For studies on RISE, submit a Post-Approval Activity (PAA) amendment informing of any updates to the application and confirming that the research team will remain in compliance with all applicable policies and guidance
- For studies that are not on RISE, complete the [operational approval form](#) and submit it by email to: researchcommittee@northernhealth.ca

Step 2: Northern Health Operational Approval

- Notify the Northern Health Research Review Committee of the intention to initiate or restart research activities by sending an email to: researchcommittee@northernhealth.ca
- Complete the [operational approval form](#) and submit it by email to: researchcommittee@northernhealth.ca
- The form will be reviewed by the Northern Health Research Review Committee and you will be contacted regarding the status of operational approval to restart research activities

Research Application Guidelines found [here](#).

Operational Approval Information Sheet found [here](#).

Operational Approval Form found [here](#).

For questions, please contact: researchcommittee@northernhealth.ca

Northern Health values its research community and recognizes and appreciates the impact of COVID-19 on researchers. We are committed to supporting a safe restart process aligned with our organizational capacity to support.

Future waves of COVID-19 may require Northern Health to scale back research again.