



**Michael Smith Foundation for
Health Research**

**About the
BC Ethics Harmonization Initiative**

Health research stakeholders across BC have identified the need for an effective, coordinated, value-add provincial approach to ethical approval – one that improves quality, access, consistency, efficiency and capacity for ethical review of research involving human subjects. Over the past year, a number of organizations have launched separate and, to date, uncoordinated initiatives in an attempt to address concerns at least with respect to their own institutional context.

While many agree that there is a clear need for such a provincial approach to ethics, it is not clear what potential approaches or solutions might be acceptable to stakeholders. Options vary widely from adoption of harmonized core guidelines and institutional review reciprocity to a coordinated, shared, provincial ethics review mechanism.

At the request of provincial health research stakeholders, and with the endorsement and support of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Advanced Education, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research has agreed to facilitate a process to explore options in greater depth. The Foundation has struck a Task Force to provide advice and feedback, and make recommendations to MSFHR as requested, on topics relating to the BC Ethics Harmonization Initiative. The scope of the initiative is:

1. Environmental Scanning – a three stage process:
 - a. *BC REB Scan*: description of mechanisms and structures for ethical review of research involving human subjects in the academic institutions, health authorities and communities of British Columbia, including identification of the issues and barriers related to ethical review that exist in the provincial health research environment (May to July, 2007)
 - b. *Harmonization Scan*: description of processes and structures adopted in other jurisdictions, particularly across Canada but also including selected other countries such as England and Australia (May to July, 2007)
 - c. *BC Investigator Survey*: survey of BC researchers to identify and prioritize the key barriers/areas of concern with respect to quality, access, consistency, efficiency and capacity for ethical review of research involving human subjects (August to October, 2007).
2. Workshop – a gathering of stakeholder representatives (i.e. VPs or Directors of Research and Chairs & Managers of Research Ethics Boards) from key BC health research institutions and organizations to receive the results of the environmental scans, hear from expert speakers, and discuss options for a co-ordinated response in meeting the need for a provincial approach to ethical approval (November 2007 – materials to be circulated in October 2007). Following the workshop, MSFHR would produce and circulate a report that identifies issues, barriers and options for coordinating a provincial approach to improving the quality, access, consistency, efficiency and capacity for ethical review of research involving human subjects in British Columbia (early 2008).