

WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL HEALTH RESEARCH COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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FOREWORD BY THE HEAD OF HEALTH

The Health Research Policy in South Africa (2001) has identified Provincial Health Research Committees as a critical tool to coordinate health research and to facilitate the efficient utilization of the limited research resources. The need for research coordination is also in compliance with the statutory imperatives as crafted and provided for in the National Health Act of 2003.

The quadruple burden of disease of HIV/AIDS, TB, chronic diseases and trauma that is largely disproportionately distributed within the poor and marginalized in the context of a public service with limited resources to provide services to about three quarters of the population in the province necessitates that public policy and decision making be strategic and based on the best possible information.

Given the history of a poorly – coordinated and un-regulated health research environment both nationally and provincially, the Western Cape wishes to commit itself to embarking on a path that will enable it to adopt measures to set a health research agenda aimed at fostering firm linkages between research, programme management and service delivery. The Western Cape Province is privileged to have significant intellectual capacity in the form of academic institutions, major national research institutions and a vibrant research community. Even though this resource is a national resource, it is however in our “back yard” and thus the coordination and efficient utilisation of this limited resource becomes critical.

All factors considered, I hereby commit my office to providing the necessary leadership and oversight support to the establishment of a Provincial Health Research Committee whose tasks are intended to achieve collaboration with all our partners in ensuring that health service delivery efforts are informed by empirical evidence that forms the foundation for decision making, healthcare planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities that translate into a positive impact on the improved quality of care and health status for the people of Western Cape.

Prof KC Househam
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PROVINCIAL HEALTH RESEARCH COMMITTEE

1 Background

In the past decade, South Africa has seen an increase in research inputs and outputs in areas such as clinical trials, epidemiological and disease –based studies. On the whole, research activities tended to lack coordination and prioritisation to maximally benefit health sector development and achieve the desired impact on the quality of life of the population. As part of a national health reform agenda, the National Department of Health (DoH) sought to respond adequately to this poorly – regulated developmental approach by formulating and adopting a robust research policy framework summarised hereunder.

National Health Research Policy Framework

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Health System in South Africa¹

National health reform and transformation activities took place during the years of 1995 to 2001 and culminated in the adoption of ‘The White Paper on the Transformation of the Health System in South Africa’ and subordinate policy guidelines for various healthcare management and service delivery areas. The main goal of this policy was to tackle the transformation of the health services with the aim of reducing healthcare provision inequalities and long standing imbalances of past government policies. The White Paper stressed the importance of knowledge, information and empirical evidence as the backbone of health research which must be linked to and integrated into broader health policy planning, health programmes management and implementation. The linkages between health research and healthcare management are captured in the Essential National Health Research (ENHR) Strategy.

Essential National Health Research (ENHR) Strategy²

The Essential National Health Research (ENHR) strategy promotes an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to health related research that improves the health status of the population while supporting development, equity and social justice. This strategy proposes key research fields within which health research priorities need to be determined by national and provincial level departments, namely:

- Epidemiology, including the Burden of Disease (BOD);
- Social and behavioural research;
- Clinical and biomedical research;
- Health systems management and policy research.

The National Health Act (Act No. 61 of 2003)³

Sections 69 and 72 of the National Health Act (Act No. 61 of 2003) establish the National Research Coordination Committee and the National Health Research Ethics Council respectively to further advance a national health research agenda. Provincial departments are required to establish their own research coordinating structures along the lines of the provisions of the National Health Act supported (where applicable) by provincial policy imperatives that may include provincial legislation.

2 Research Policy Statement

The purpose of the Western Cape Provincial Research Committee (PHRC) is to inform and facilitate health research in the province by liaising with all research stakeholders conducting research within the province to ensure that research activities are largely directed towards the greatest health needs in the province.

The Western Cape Provincial Health Research Committee will promote and operate within the South African Health Research Policy⁴, Regulations relating to the National Health Research Committee⁵, the Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes guidelines⁶ and the Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice⁷.

3 Scope of the Committee

In line with Essential National Health Research Strategy the Committee is required to set a research agenda and inform and facilitate research in the following areas:

- Epidemiology, including the Burden of Disease (BOD);
- Social and behavioural research;
- Clinical and biomedical research;
- Health systems management and policy research.

The Western Cape PHRC will initially focus on health research conducted within the range and scope of the provincial health care system and on health systems management, with an intention to expand the scope to other areas of health research on a needs basis.

4 Terms of Reference of the Western Cape Provincial Research Committee

The terms of reference of the Western Cape Provincial Health Research Committee are:

- a) To inform and facilitate the process of priority setting and to develop and continuously review health research priorities (research agenda) for the province;
- b) To facilitate the conduct of relevant research in the province;
- c) To aid the mobilisation of resources for research undertaken in the province;

- d) To advise on the translation of health research findings into policy development and service provision at all levels of the health care system;
- e) In collaboration with research stakeholders, develop and implement a capacity building strategy to strengthen research capacity in the province.

5 Specific Functions of the Provincial Health Research Committee

- a) To use international best practice to provide advice on the provincial research agenda and:
 - i. Aid in identifying provincial research needs and priorities;
 - ii. Aid in developing specific research questions to improve health outcomes.
- b) To facilitate research activities in the province by:
 - i. Advising and communicating with researchers, research institutions and policy makers;
 - ii. Promoting and commissioning health research which is essential and relevant for communities within the province and in line with the provincial research agenda;
 - iii. Lobbying the research community in the province and potential research funders to undertake research which is aligned to the provincial research agenda;
 - iv. Liaising with all ethics and quality assurance structures within research institutions to ensure the development of high quality, relevant research;
 - v. Developing and implementing guidelines and criteria for the review and approval of research undertaken in provincial health facilities;
 - vi. Providing expert opinion, where necessary or on request from Western Cape Department of Health, on research proposals undertaken in provincial health facilities;
 - vii. Identifying potential reviewers who could offer their expertise with regard to the reviewing of proposals and research findings in line with set criteria;
 - viii. Providing progress reports to the Head of the Western Cape Department of Health and other stakeholders;
 - ix. Developing a communication strategy for the PHRC activities.
- c) To mobilise resources for research undertaken in the province by:
 - x. Lobbying for and giving advice to the department on funding for health related research which includes internal departmental and external funding;
 - xi. Advising on the equitable distribution of funding for research.
- d) To promote the use of health research findings in policy development and service provision at all levels of the health care system by:
 - i. Advising on a process of evaluating health related research done in the province, its relation to the provincial health research agenda and its translation into policy and practice;

- ii. Reporting to the National and Provincial DOH on key policy implications emanating from research outputs.

6 Composition of the Provincial Health Research Committee

- a) The Western Cape Provincial Health Research Committee will comprise 15 members who are representative in terms of gender, race and geography of the province drawn from within the Provincial Health Department and other external stakeholders such as other government departments, universities, research institutions, non-governmental organisations, community-based structures, etc.
- b) Members from within Health will be drawn largely from strategic programmes and units that critically require research support to fulfil their statutory mandates.
- c) The term of office for all the members shall be three (3) years and any member who leaves the committee voluntarily or by management's request, shall be replaced immediately.
- d) The Directorate of Health Impact Assessment will provide the secretariat function.
- e) The Committee may form sub committees as required and co-opt other experts and individuals.

7 Procedures of the Provincial Health Research Committee

The Provincial Health Research Committee will meet at least once a month and ad hoc meetings could take place when necessary.

A quorum will comprise 50% of the current membership plus 1 member.

¹ Department of Health. White Paper for the Transformation of the Health System in South Africa. [Online] 2007 April [cited 2009 May 29]; Available from: URL:<http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1997/health.htm>

² Department of Health. Essential National Health Research in South Africa; The Council on Health Research for Development. [Online] 2001 May [cited 2009 May 29]; Available from: URL:<http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/reports/2001/enhr/index.html>

³ Department of Health. National Health Act [No. 61 of 2003] [Online] 2003 [cited 2009 May 29]; Available from: URL:http://www.acts.co.za/national_health_act_2003.htm

⁴ Department of Health. Health Research Policy in South Africa. [Online] 2001 [cited 2009 May 29]; Available from: URL:<http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/policy/healthresearch-2001.pdf>

⁵ Department of Health. Regulations relating to the National Health Research Committee. [Online] 2007 Feb [cited 2009 May 29]; Available from: URL:<http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/comments-f.html>

⁶ Department of Health. Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes guidelines. [Online] 2004 [cited 2009 May 29]; Available from: URL:<http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/index.html>

⁷ Department of Health. South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines [Online] 2006 [cited 2009 August 28]; Available from: URL: <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/index.html>