



Saskatchewan
Health Authority

Research Ethics Office and Research Ethics Board Survey Report

Researcher Experience, Service Quality, and
Process Improvement

Prepared by Manager, Research Services
Issued April 2026

Research Department – *Insights for Better Health*
Digital Transformation and Information for Better Health

Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary	3
<i>Highlights</i>	3
II. Survey Background and Methodology	3
III. Key Findings: Service Quality and Efficiency	4
Service Quality.....	4
Process Efficiency	4
IV. Qualitative Insights	4
What Is Working Well.....	5
Opportunities for Improvement.....	5
V. Actions Underway	5
Documentation and Guidance Updates	5
Process Streamlining and Capacity Enhancement	5
Administrative Efficiency and Tracking	5
System and Website Improvements	6
VI. Key Recommendations	6
VII. Conclusion	6
VIII. Acknowledgments	6
IX. Appendix	7
Data Report: Descriptive Statistics and Qualitative Summary	7
Word Cloud for Qualitative Questions	11
Collective Qualitative Findings	13
SHA REO and REB Survey.....	15

I. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) Research Ethics Office (REO) and Research Ethics Board (REB) Survey, completed by 53 active researchers.

Overall, researcher satisfaction with the professionalism, expertise, and consultative support provided by the REO and REB is strong. Respondents report high levels of confidence in staff knowledge, respectful interactions, and clarity regarding required application documentation.

The survey also identified a system-level challenge related to efficiency, specifically turnaround times for research ethics review. Turnaround time received the lowest satisfaction rating and showed the greatest variability across respondents, indicating inconsistent researcher experience. Qualitative feedback reinforced this finding, with calls for faster reviews, simplified documentation, and clearer process flow.

Since the survey period, REO has initiated multiple operational improvements, including expanded delegated authority, new exemption determination pathways, updated documentation, improved tracking and intake processes, and planned recruitment of additional Vice-Chairs. These actions directly respond to survey feedback and demonstrate active progress toward improving efficiency while maintaining rigorous ethical standards.

Highlights

- Strong satisfaction with courtesy, respect, and professionalism of REO staff.
- High confidence in knowledge and ethical expertise of reviewers.
- Clear understanding of required documentation across respondents.
- Turnaround time identified as the primary area for improvement.
- Concrete actions underway to streamline processes and reduce delays.

II. Survey Background and Methodology

The SHA REO and REB survey was conducted to establish a baseline understanding of researcher experience, service quality, and process efficiency related to research ethics review within the SHA.

The survey was distributed on September 22, 2025, to a baseline cohort of 175 active researchers included on the SHA REB mailing list. This distribution list represents researchers who were actively engaged with SHA research ethics services at the time of survey launch. The survey remained open until October 22, 2025, allowing a four-week response period.

The primary goal of the survey was to:

- Assess researcher experience with the REO and REB review processes
- Evaluate clarity of guidance, communication, and documentation
- Understand perceptions of responsiveness and review timelines
- Identify strengths, gaps, and priorities for service improvement

The survey was designed to require approximately 5–8 minutes to complete and included a combination of Likert-scale questions, usage and demographic items, and open-ended qualitative questions. Responses were anonymous, unless participants voluntarily chose to self-identify for follow-up or to enter a random draw for one of four \$50 gift cards. Contact information, when provided, was collected through a separate link and could not be linked to survey responses.

A total of 53 complete responses were received. This represents a response rate of approximately 30%, which is strong for an internal service survey of an active researcher population. The respondent group primarily consisted of SHA staff and clinician researchers with multiple years of experience using SHA REO and REB services and regular annual submission activity. This level of engagement supports the validity, credibility, and relevance of the findings for informing service improvements.

The survey preamble emphasized SHA’s commitment to fostering a transparent, fair, and supportive research ethics environment, and highlighted that participant feedback would play a critical role in identifying strengths, addressing gaps, and guiding continuous improvement efforts across the research ethics system.

III. Key Findings: Service Quality and Efficiency

Service Quality

Quantitative survey results demonstrate that the REO and REB are highly regarded for their interpersonal and consultative functions.

- Courtesy and Respect: Highest-rated survey item (Mean = 4.10)
- Knowledge and Expertise: Strong confidence reported across respondents
- Documentation Clarity: Near-unanimous agreement on understanding required submission materials, with minimal variability

These findings confirm that the expertise within the REO and REB is a significant organizational strength.

Process Efficiency

Despite high service quality scores, process efficiency, particularly turnaround time, emerged as the main challenge.

- Turnaround time received the lowest mean score (3.21)
- This item showed the highest variability, indicating inconsistent experience across submissions
- Awareness of the full range of REO/REB services also showed variability, suggesting opportunities for improved communication and outreach

IV. Qualitative Insights

Open-ended survey responses reinforced the quantitative findings:

What Is Working Well

- Professionalism and approachability of REO staff
- Helpful, clear, and constructive feedback
- Value of ethical consultation and guidance

Opportunities for Improvement

- Reduce REB application complexity and administrative burden
- Shorten and stabilize turnaround times
- Enhance website usability and clarity of online guidance

V. Actions Underway

In direct response to survey findings, the following improvements are in progress or recently implemented:

Documentation and Guidance Updates

- Ongoing updates to consent forms and corresponding guidance notes
- Planned revisions to REB application forms and associated guidance
- Introduction of an Application for Exemption Determination, with guidance, to facilitate rapid review of projects that do not require full REB review

Process Streamlining and Capacity Enhancement

- Delegated authority granted to the REO to approve:
 - Annual renewals
 - Simple amendments (e.g., research personnel changes)
- Active recruitment and training of additional Vice-Chairs, enabling:
 - Delegated review of lower-risk applications
 - Greater Board and Chair focus on complex studies and clinical trials

Administrative Efficiency and Tracking

- Hiring and mentoring of a Research Ethics Associate, strengthening:
 - Intake management
 - Email and request tracking
 - Overall process organization and responsiveness

System and Website Improvements

- Recognition of timelines as the most frequent complaint
- Plans to engage professional support to improve website layout and enhance information flow.
- Simplify the application and approval pathway for research within SHA

These improvements collectively represent a significant shift toward a more efficient, transparent, and researcher-centered ethics review process.

VI. Key Recommendations

1. Continue End-to-End Value Stream Mapping Process

Conduct a comprehensive review of the ethics application lifecycle using process-mapping approaches to reduce delays and variability.

2. Complete and Sustain Documentation Simplification

Finalize revisions to application forms, consent form, and guidance to reduce administrative burden and rework.

3. Strengthen Communication and Service Awareness

Improve clarity and visibility of REO/REB services, including exemption determinations and pre-review consultations, through targeted outreach and website redesign.

VII. Conclusion

The SHA REO and REB Survey highlights a system characterized by high-quality process in active transition. While interpersonal service quality is a clear strength, efficiency and consistency remain the primary improvement opportunities.

The actions already underway demonstrate strong organizational responsiveness. Continued focus on process optimization, while preserving ethical rigor and consultative excellence, will be essential to improving turnaround times, researcher experience, and overall system performance.

VIII. Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the research staff within the Research Department for their valuable input and contributions to the development and implementation of the REO and REB Survey. Their insights were instrumental in shaping the survey content and ensuring its relevance to the research community.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Research Ethics Office team for their thoughtful review, and interpretation of the survey findings, and for their ongoing commitment to improving the quality, efficiency, and responsiveness of research ethics review within the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Finally, we thank the researchers who participated in the survey, as well as each Research Ethics Board member, for their continued dedication to producing ethical, high-quality research that advances knowledge and improves health outcomes for the people of Saskatchewan.

IX. Appendix

Data Report: Descriptive Statistics and Qualitative Summary

1. Ordinal Questions

These questions measure demographics and usage patterns using ranked categories. The median indicates the typical response category chosen by participants.

Question	Median	IQR (Q1-Q3)	Mean (μ)	SD (σ)	N
3. How long have you used services from the SHA REO and REB?	3.0	2.0 (2.0-4.0)	2.94	1.20	53
5. Submissions in the past year (approximate number)	2.0	1.0 (2.0-3.0)	2.55	0.80	53
7. Which type of review is most frequently requested and used?	2.0	2.0 (2.0-4.0)	2.53	1.03	53

Key Findings:

- **Experienced Users:** The median usage length of **3.0** corresponds to **3–4 years**, indicating that the typical respondent is an experienced user of the services.
- **Active Researchers:** The median number of annual submissions is **2.0**, with the central 50% of respondents submitting between 2 and 3 applications (IQR of 1.0), confirming the engagement of an active researcher base.

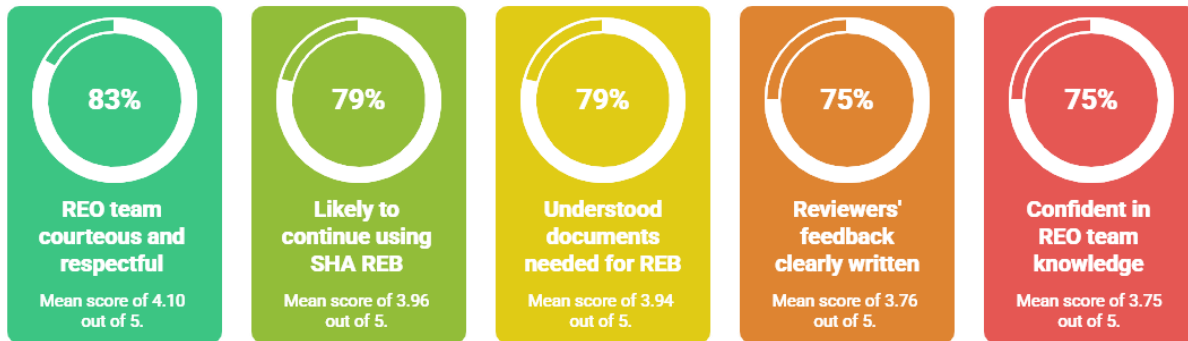
2. Likert-Scale Questions (Agreement and Satisfaction)

The Likert-scale questions use a 5-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). The table below is sorted by mean (μ) to identify the highest and lowest areas of agreement.

Question	Mean (μ)	SD (σ)	Median	IQR (Q1-Q3)	N
13. REO team were courteous and respectful.	4.10	0.82	4.00	1.00 (4.00-5.00)	52
22. How likely are you to continue using SHA REB services or recommend them to others?	3.96	1.05	4.00	1.25 (3.75-5.00)	52
17. I understood which documents I needed to include in my REB application.	3.94	0.83	4.00	0.00 (0.00-4.00)	52

11. The reviewers' feedback in the NER were clearly written and easy to understand.	3.76	0.85	4.00	1.00 (3.00-4.00)	50
15. I am confident in the knowledge and expertise of the REO team.	3.75	1.01	4.00	1.00 (3.00-4.00)	52
16. The guidance provided by the REO/REB... was clear and easy to follow.	3.69	0.88	4.00	1.00 (3.00-4.00)	51
12. I received helpful templates (e.g., consent forms, posters).	3.58	1.09	4.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	52
8. I received timely response(s) to my inquiry(ies).	3.54	1.11	4.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	52
21. The information available through the SHA REB website is useful.	3.52	0.90	4.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	52
18. The research ethics review process added value to my research.	3.50	0.94	4.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	52
10. The reviewers' feedback... were constructive and helped improve quality of my submission.	3.43	0.96	4.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	51
14. The REO and REB helped me identify and address ethical risks I had not considered.	3.43	0.94	3.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	51
20. It is easy to find relevant research ethics information on SHA website.	3.39	1.02	4.00	1.00 (3.00– 4.00)	51
19. I am aware of the full range of services offered...	3.25	0.98	4.00	2.00 (2.00-4.00)	51
9. The turnaround time for the review of my application submitted was reasonable.	3.21	1.19	3.00	2.00	52

SHA REB Survey Results



Most respondents had a positive experience with SHA REB services, with high satisfaction in team courtesy and application understanding.

Made with Napkin

Key Findings:

The above chart visually compares the Mean and Median scores for all Likert questions:

- **Top Strengths (High Agreement & Consensus):**
 - **Courtesy and Respect (Q13):** This item has the highest mean score ($\mu=4.10$), indicating strong satisfaction with staff.
 - **Document Clarity (Q17):** This item has the lowest measure of dispersion, with an **IQR of 0.00** (Q1 and Q3 both at 4.00), showing that majority of respondents agree that they understand the required documentation.
- **Critical Improvement Area (Lowest Score, Highest Variability):**
 - **Turnaround Time (Q9):** This item is the lowest rated by mean ($\mu=3.21$) and median (3.00) indicating neutrality). Crucially, it has the highest standard deviation ($\sigma=1.19$) and widest IQR (2.00), indicating that satisfaction with turnaround time is highly inconsistent and is the single greatest point of friction or dissatisfaction among users.
- **Potential Awareness Gap:**
 - **Awareness of Services (Q19):** While the median is 4.00, the **wide IQR of 2.00** (2.00 to 4.00) suggests a significant portion of the researchers are either unaware or only slightly aware of the full range of REO and REB services offered.

3. Free Text Analysis: Common Themes

Analysis of the open-ended comments (N=48 responses) further contextualizes the quantitative findings. The following are the most common words cited (excluding common filler and organizational terms):

Rank	Word	Theme	Context / Implication
1	forms	Application Burden	Suggests complexity or volume of required documentation.
2	application	Process Difficulty	Directly relates to the submission and review process.
3	feedback	Review Quality	Mentioned in both positive (helpful) and negative (unclear) contexts.
4	turnaround	Efficiency / Speed	Reinforces the quantitative finding that time is the greatest pain point.
5	researchers	Stakeholder Focus	Used frequently when discussing process improvements or support needed.

Summary of Qualitative Themes

- **Praise:** Comments frequently highlighted the professionalism of REO staff, and the helpful feedback received on ethical matters, aligning with the high Likert scores for courtesy and expertise.
- **Criticism (Process):** The overwhelming theme for improvement is process efficiency. Users want shorter turnaround times, simplification of the forms and application requirements, and clearer links between REB approval and subsequent operational approval.
- **Recommendation:** A recurring suggestion is to improve the clarity and structure of the submission package and reduce the overall administrative burden on researchers.

Collective Qualitative Findings

The collective analysis of the qualitative responses (Questions 23 and 24) sharply delineates the REO and REB service's key strengths from its critical weaknesses, directly reinforcing the quantitative findings.

Theme	Prominent Words (Word Cloud Size)	Interpretation
Area of Excellence (What to Maintain)	helpful, support, knowledge, guidance, clear	Researchers highly value the consultative role of the REO team, citing their expertise, helpfulness, and the clarity of their guidance as the primary successful elements of the service.
Area for Improvement (What to Change)	turnaround, forms, application, faster, documents	The primary friction points are centered entirely on process efficiency and administrative burden. Users demand a faster turnaround and simplification/reduction of forms and the overall application package.
Communication Quality	feedback, comments, response	Feedback quality is a double-edged sword: users appreciate receiving helpful comments (Q23) but express frustration over slow or inconsistent response times (Q24).

Synthesis of Qualitative Data

Collectively, the qualitative data presents a clear picture:

1. **High-Quality People, Low-Quality Process:** The REO and REB possess a highly regarded, knowledgeable, and helpful team ("helpful," "knowledge," "support"). The operational efficiency, however, is a major impediment.
2. **Efficiency is the single greatest pain point:** The overwhelming size of the words "turnaround" and "faster" in the "improvement" word cloud, combined with "forms" and "application," confirms that the administrative steps and the time required to complete them are causing the most significant dissatisfaction.
3. **Actionable Focus:** To significantly improve the user experience and align the process quality with the staff quality, effort must be focused on:
 - o **Reducing Turnaround Time:** Implementing measures to achieve more consistent and rapid application review times.
 - o **Streamlining Forms:** Simplifying and consolidating required documentation to reduce the researcher's administrative load.

Qualitative feedback makes it clear that maintaining the knowledge and courtesy of the team is essential, but the path to increasing overall satisfaction and user loyalty lies squarely in process optimization and speed.

Balancing Service Quality and Process Efficiency in REO/REB



Courteous and Respectful Staff



Lengthy Turnaround Time



Confident in REO Expertise



Complex Application Forms



Clear Application Documentation



Lack of System Integration



SHA REO and REB Survey

Survey preamble:

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) Research Ethics Office (REO) and Research Ethics Board (REB) are committed to providing high-quality services and fostering a transparent and supportive research ethics environment.

To better understand and enhance your experience as a researcher, we invite you to complete this survey. Your feedback is vital. It will help us identify strengths, address gaps, and prioritize improvements to ensure we are meeting the evolving needs of the research community.

The survey will require approximately **5–8 minutes** to complete and will remain open until **[insert deadline date]**. Responses will remain anonymous unless you choose to provide your contact information for follow-up. We appreciate your feedback!

SECTION 1: Demographics

1. Are you currently involved in any research project?

- 1, Yes
- 2, No

2. Have you previously submitted an application to the SHA REB?

- 1, Yes
- 2, No

3. How long have you used services from the SHA REO and REB?

- 1, Less than one year
- 2, 1-2 years
- 3, 3-4 years
- 4, 5+ years
- 5, Not applicable

4. What was your role when contacting SHA REO and REB? (select all that apply)

- 1, Medical Undergraduate Learner
- 2, Resident
- 3, Clinician/Physician Researcher
- 4, Research Coordinator/Assistant
- 5, Graduate Student
- 6, SHA Staff
- 7, External or Academic Researcher
- 8, Other (please specify): _____

5. In the past year, approximately how many REB applications have you submitted (including new applications, amendments, closure, renewals, or exemption requests)?

- 1. 0

- 2. 1-2
- 3. 3-5
- 4. 6+

6. What are the types of REB application form(s) you have submitted? (Please check all that apply)

- 1, Access Existing Health Information
- 2, Biomedical Research (New)
- 3, Behavioural Research (New)
- 4, Exemption Determination
- 5, Amendment of Previously Approved Study
- 6, Annual Reapproval
- 7, Study Closure
- 8, Case Study (New)
- 9, Unanticipated Problem Reporting Form
- 10, Other (please specify):

7. Which type of review is most frequently requested and used?

- 1, Full Board Review
- 2, Delegated Review
- 3, Exempted from Review
- 4, Unsure

SECTION II: Communication, Timeliness and Clarity

(Construct: Information Quality, Communication Timeliness and Clarity – measured via Likert Scale)

We aim to provide effective, timely, and consistent communication in all research ethics requests. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. I received timely response(s) to my inquiry (ies).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. The turnaround time for the review of my application submitted was reasonable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Reviewer’s comments in the Notice of Ethical Review (NER) were constructive and helped improve quality of my submission.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. I am aware of the full range of services offered (consultation, pre-review, templates, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. It is easy to find relevant research ethics information on SHA website.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. The information available through the SHA REB website is useful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. How likely are you to continue using SHA REB services or recommend them to others?

- 1, Very unlikely**
- 2, Unlikely**
- 3, Neutral**
- 4, Likely**
- 5, Very likely**

23. What aspects of the SHA REO/REB processes or services are working well and should be maintained?

Open text box

24. What aspects of the SHA REO/REB processes or services could be improved, changed, or discontinued?

Open text box

25. Would you like to be contacted about the information shared in this survey and/or to discuss any suggestions to improve our services?

- 1, Yes (please provide email): _____**
- 2, No**

26. If you are interested in joining the SHA REB committee, please feel free to contact us directly at ResearchEthics@saskhealthauthority.ca.

Thank you for participation! Your feedback is critical in helping us improve the Research Ethics review experience for researchers across the SHA.