Research Ethics Board

2025-2026 Annual Report

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Research Ethics Office and Research Ethics Board
Research Department
Insights for Better Health
Digital Transformation and Information for Better Health

Table of Contents

Introduction **3**

I. Mission of the Research Ethics Board *3*

II. Background *3*

III. Reporting Period 4

IV. Research Ethics Office (REO) 4

V. REB Membership 5

VI. Metrics and Review Activity 6

a. Total Requests for Ethical Review *6*

b. Characteristics of New Study Applications *7*

c. Study Amendments *8*

d. Approval Timeline *8*

e. Research Community Outreach *9*

f. Continuing Education for REO Staff *10*

VII. Future Considerations and Infrastructure Needs 10

Report Summary **10**

Glossary of Terms **12**

Introduction

The 2025–26 Annual Report summarizes the activities of the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) Research Ethics Office (REO) and Research Ethics Board (REB) for the period April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026. Building on the inaugural SHA REB Annual Report published for the previous fiscal year, this report focuses on current-year research ethics review activity, key performance metrics, operational developments, and future system needs.

The report provides accountability and transparency regarding the ethical review and oversight of research involving human participants within the SHA. It also recognizes the contributions of REO staff and REB members and identifies opportunities to strengthen research ethics infrastructure, review capacity, and process quality.

I. Mission of the Research Ethics Board

The SHA REB is responsible for the ethical review and oversight of research involving human participants conducted within SHA facilities or by SHA-affiliated investigators. The REB evaluates research proposals to support scientific soundness and ensure adherence to institutional ethical and national standards, and applicable professional guidelines.

The SHA REB continues the work of the former Regina Health District REB, established in 1997, and remains responsible for safeguarding the rights, dignity, and welfare of research participants.

The SHA REB operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2, 2022) and adheres to all relevant provincial legislation, national regulations, and institutional policies. The Board has been formally approved by the Saskatchewan Minister of Health under Section 29 of the Health Information Protection Act (HIPA) to fulfill its mandate in protecting personal health information within the context of research.

II. Background

The SHA REB's mandate, historical development, and foundational operating principles were described in the inaugural SHA REB Annual Report. The 2025–26 Annual Report maintains continuity with that first report while placing greater emphasis on current-year activity, year-over-year trends, operational performance, and future priorities.

The SHA REB is responsible for the ethical review of both biomedical and behavioural research involving human participants, including studies involving clinical interventions, access to health information, biological specimens, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other research methods. Detailed definitions of key terms are provided in the glossary.

New applications submitted to the SHA REB are assessed based on the level of risk posed to participants as a result of the research procedures involved. Minimal-risk studies are generally reviewed through a delegated review process, while studies involving greater than minimal risk are reviewed by the full Board at a convened REB meeting.

Following review, the REB issues formal correspondence outlining the outcome of the review. This may include a Notice of Ethical Review, Certificate of Approval, Letter of Exemption, Letter of Acknowledgement, or other determination, depending on the nature and status of the submission. This process supports alignment with TCPS2 as national ethical standards and the protection of research participants. For projects requiring revisions, the REB provides detailed feedback to guide researchers in addressing ethical considerations. A final approval is granted once all outstanding issues are resolved to the satisfaction of the Board. This process ensures that all research conducted within the SHA aligns with national ethical standards and supports the protection of research participants.

The REB convenes monthly meetings to review applications that involve greater than minimal risk. Approval decisions require quorum and a majority vote, in accordance with applicable SHA REB Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Minimal-risk studies, including many applications involving access to existing health information, are reviewed through a delegated process.

The SHA REB reviews research spanning a broad range of clinical specialties and investigator expertise. In the 2025/26 reporting period, the SHA REB received 89 new study applications across more than 20 distinct clinical specialties. The most active areas included pharmacy, gynecology and obstetrics, cardiosciences, quality improvement, and community health. This distribution reflects continued research activity across medication management, maternal and women's health, cardiovascular care, service delivery improvement, and population and community-based health initiatives.

III. Reporting Period

This report outlines the activities and accomplishments of the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) Research Ethics Office (REO) and Research Ethics Board (REB) for the period April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026.

IV. Research Ethics Office (REO)

The REO team operates within the Insights for Better Health portfolio under the Digital Transformation and Information for Better Health division. The REO supports the SHA's commitment to ethical research by facilitating and coordinating the research ethics review process.

The REO team includes 1.0 FTE Research Ethics Senior Specialist and 1.0 FTE Research Ethics Associate, both of which are out of scope positions. Both positions provide direct support to the SHA REB and the REB Chair, ensuring the effective coordination and administration of the ethics review process. The REO is overseen by a 1.0 FTE Research Services Manager, who reports to the SHA Director of Research and is responsible for the operational leadership of the office. The REO was fully staffed during the 2025/26 reporting period.

Effective September 17, 2025, the REB Chair formally delegated signing authority to the Research Ethics Office (REO) for select administrative review activities in accordance with N2/CAREB SOP 106.004, section 5.1 (Delegation of Signing Authority). The delegation authorizes the REO to act on behalf of the Chair for:

- Simple annual renewals where no substantive changes are proposed and researchers are requesting continuation of ethical approval;
- Administrative amendments whose sole purpose is to add or remove study personnel, provided all required certifications and documentation are on file; and
- Administrative closure of studies that have remained expired for six months or longer.

This delegation was implemented to improve operational efficiency, reduce administrative burden on the REB Chair, and support more timely processing of low-risk administrative submissions while maintaining compliance with established REB policies and procedures.

V. REB Membership

The SHA REB is composed of members who collectively bring expertise in research, clinical practice, ethics, law, and community perspectives. Members are appointed by the REB Chair and serve defined terms to ensure continuity and a broad representation of knowledge and experience.

As of 2025/26, the REB is chaired by Dr. Tracy Wilson, whose term runs from April 22, 2024 to April 22, 2027. The Board did not have an active Vice-Chair during this reporting period following the end of the previous Vice-Chair term.

Given the ongoing workload and time commitments required of the Chair, the SHA REB and REO are actively seeking to recruit one or two additional Vice-Chairs to support operational continuity.

The current REB membership roster is available online under SHA REB Membership – January 2026 (PDF).

Member	Term	Term Dates	Affiliation with REB	SHA Affiliation
Dr. Tracy Wilson, Chair	1	22-Apr-2024 to 22-Apr-2027	Chair, Research Ethics Board	No
Caitlin Roy	1	01-Jun-2022 to 01-Jun-2027	Knowledgeable in Research	Yes
Dr. Mustafa Andkhoie	1	01-Oct-2022 to 01-Oct-2027	Knowledgeable in Research	No
Julia Bareham	1	01-Oct-2022 to 01-Oct-2027	Community Member	No
Dr. Jarol Boan	1	01-Feb-2022 to 01-Feb-2027	Clinician	Yes
Kirsten Fox	1	24-Oct-2023 to 24-Oct-2028	Knowledgeable in Research	Yes
Dr. Eric Sy	1	21-Oct-2025 to 21-Oct-2030	Clinician	Yes
Dr. Jeffrey Irvine	1	01-Mar-2023 to 01-Mar-2028	Clinician	Yes
Eric Miller	3	01-Aug-2022 to 01-Aug-2027	Legal Representative	No
Dr. Jessica Minion	3	01-Feb-2023 to 01-Feb-2028	Clinician	Yes
Sherri Pooyak	1	01-Apr-2023 to 01-Apr-2028	Community Member	No

Dr. Paul Simard Smith	1	01-Feb-2022 to 01-Feb-2027	Knowledgeable in Ethics	No
Heather Dyck	1	30-Oct-2025 to 30-Oct-2030	Community Member	No
Jason Jacobson	1	09-Mar-2026 to 09-Mar-2031	Legal Representative	Yes

VI. Metrics and Review Activity

a. Total Requests for Ethical Review

The SHA REB processed a total of 337 requests for research ethical review in 2025/26. These requests included the review of:

- 89 new study applications
- 105 amendments to studies currently in progress,
- 106 renewal of studies in progress, and
- 37 requests to close studies that had been completed.

Between 2023/24 and 2025/26, the SHA REB experienced fluctuations in overall submissions. After peaking at 412 in 2024/25, total submissions decreased to 337 in 2025/26. New study applications settled at 89 in 2025/26. Amendments and renewals remained robust at 105 and 106, respectively, indicating active oversight of ongoing studies. Study closures remained stable at 37, consistent with the completion of multi-year projects. Given that many research studies require multiple years to complete, the SHA REB maintained active oversight of 194 ongoing studies during this period.

Table 1. Number of REB submissions received in the past four fiscal years, by review type.

	2022/23	**2023**/24	**2024**/25	**2025/26**
New applications	80	94	122	**89**
Amendments	26	112	136	**105**
Renewals	29	99	118	**106**
Closures	65	14	36	**37**
TOTAL SUBMISSIONS	**200**	**319**	**412**	**337**

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the number of studies qualifying for delegated review remained relatively stable in previous years but increased notably during the 2025/26 period, reflecting a recent shift toward a higher volume of minimal risk research projects.

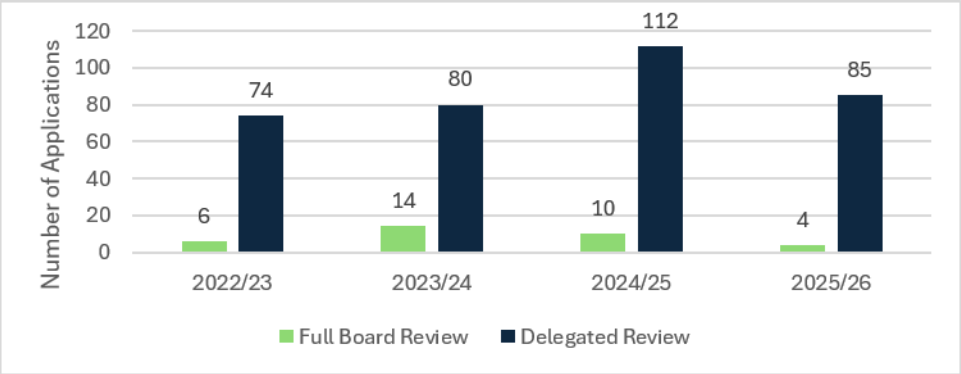


Figure 1: Number of REB applications received in the past four fiscal years, by review type.

b. Characteristics of New Study Applications

In 2025/26, the SHA REB received a total of 89 new study applications (**Table 2**). These included 37 that were determined to be exempted from REB review, 8 involving access to existing health information, 28 involving biomedical research, and 16 involving behavioural research. All non-exempt applications underwent REB review and were issued REB correspondence, including a Notice of Ethical Review where revisions or additional information were required. In terms of outcomes issued during the reporting period, 40 applications received a Certificate of Approval, 37 received a Letter of Exemption, 5 received a Letter of Acknowledgement acknowledging REB approval from another university or research institution, and 2 were deemed not meet exemption criteria. The remaining 5 applications were issued Notice of Ethics and remained pending response from the study team at the end of the reporting period. Certificates of Approval represented approximately 45% of all new applications, while Letters of Exemption represented approximately 42%.

Note: Throughout this report, the term "new study applications" refers to all submissions to the REB, including those later determined to be exempt. However, analytical breakdowns may distinguish between exempt and non-exempt studies where relevant.

Table 2. Number of new REB applications received in the past four years, by application type.

Application Types	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Access Existing Health Information	25	26	29	**8**
Biomedical Research	10	21	15	**28**
Behavioural Research	33	27	25	**16**
Exemption	12	20	53	**37**
TOTAL APPLICATIONS	**80**	**94**	**122**	**89**

Note: Application types were reconciled following REO review. Some applications submitted as biomedical, behavioural, or access to existing health information were later determined to be exempt

following review. Therefore, the application-type categories reflect the reconciled reporting categories for the 89 new applications received in 2025/26.

c. Study Amendments

Once a study receives research ethical approval, any subsequent changes must be reviewed and approved by the REB before implementation. Over the past four fiscal years, the number of submitted study amendments has increased overall, although amendments decreased from 136 in 2024/25 to 105 in 2025/26 (**Table 1**). Most amendments submitted during this fiscal year, 103 of 105 (98%), were classified as minor and were approved through a delegated review process. Two amendments required full Board review and approval.

During the reporting period, a delegated signing authority process was established to allow the REO to approve administrative personnel-change amendments, further streamlining review of low-risk submissions.

d. Approval Timeline

The target median turnaround time from receipt of a complete study application by the REO to issuance of the NER was 14 business days for both delegated and full Board reviews. During the 2025/26 fiscal year, turnaround times varied by review pathway and application outcome. For applications undergoing formal REB review, the median time to issuance of the first NER or equivalent REB correspondence was 9 business days for delegated reviews and 28 business days for full Board reviews.

As shown in **Table 3**, for applications that received a Certificate of Approval through delegated review, the median time from initial receipt to Certificate of Approval was 13 business days. For applications reviewed by the full Board with available approval data, the median time from initial receipt to approval was 134 business days. Letters of Acknowledgement were not included in the Certificate of Approval timeline calculation. The longer full Board timelines likely reflect the complexity of above-minimal-risk studies, the need for convened Board discussion, multiple rounds of revisions, and variable researcher response times.

Exemption requests were processed more quickly than formal REB reviews. For exemption letters issued in 2025/26, the median turnaround time was 7 business days, with an interquartile range of 4 to 11 business days. This reflects the efficiency of the delegated exemption determination process while maintaining appropriate oversight under TCPS2.

Overall, of the 89 new study application submissions, 61 met the 14-business-day target for issuing the NER or exemption determination, representing approximately 71%. Among formal REB reviews only, 30 of 52 (58%) applications with an issued NER or equivalent correspondence met the 14-business-day target.

To address these challenges and support ongoing improvements, the REO has initiated several key efforts. A Vice-Chair is currently being trained to enhance REB capacity and improve timeliness of reviews. Additionally, the REO has launched the development of value stream maps (VSMs) for above-minimal-risk, minimal-risk, and administrative reviews. These process mapping exercises aim to identify

bottlenecks, reduce variability, and support continuous quality improvement in research ethics review workflows.

Table 3. Median number of business days from submission to issuing the NERs and final approvals for new delegated and full board reviews approved between April 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026. Data are reported as medians with interquartile ranges (IQR) and total ranges.

	Median days to NER issued (IQR, Range)	NER Change from 2024/25	Median days to approval (IQR, Range)	Approval change from 2024/25
Delegated	9 (6, 15), 24	**47% Faster**	13 (7, 24), 92	**70% Faster**
Full Board	28 (26,46), 21	**26% Faster**	134 (97,169), 123	**17% Slower**

Note: Percentage change is calculated against the 2024/25 median turnaround times reported in the previous annual report.

Compared with the 2024/25 reporting period, delegated review approval timelines improved substantially in 2025/26. The median time from submission to NER issuance decreased from 17 to 9 business days, representing a 47% faster turnaround. The median time from submission to final approval decreased from 43 to 13 business days, representing a 70% faster turnaround. Full Board timelines also improved at the NER stage, with the median time to NER issuance decreasing from 38 to 28 business days, representing a 26% faster turnaround. However, the median time from submission to final approval/determination for full Board reviews increased from 115 to 134 business days, representing a 17% slower turnaround.

Approval timelines remained variable. Delegated approval timelines ranged from 2 to 93 business days, while full Board approval timelines ranged from 62 to 185 business days for applications with available approval data. This variability likely reflects study-specific factors, including incomplete submissions, delayed responses from study teams, multiple rounds of revisions, and the complexity of above-minimal-risk research.

e. Research Community Outreach

In 2025/26, the REO remained committed to strengthening engagement with the research community by providing education, guidance, and ethics-related consultation. The REO delivered four invited presentations on research ethics principles and processes to internal SHA departments and external audiences, helping to increase awareness and alignment with national ethical standards across various programs.

In addition to group presentations, REO staff conducted one-on-one consultations with researchers and teams to address project-specific guidance, clarify submission requirements, and enhance understanding of the ethics review process. By fostering two-way dialogue, these outreach efforts aimed to improve the overall research ethics experience for both applicants and the REO/REB members responsible for reviewing submissions.

f. Continuing Education for REO Staff

REO staff did not attend the 2026 Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards (CAREB) Annual Conference either in person or virtually. CAREB session recordings remain available to CAREB members after the conference.

The REO staff have completed/have participated in training in the following areas:

- TCPS2 CORE-2022 (Course on Research Ethics)
- Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HiREB) Privacy Tutorial
- Fundamentals of the First Nations Principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®)

VII. Future Considerations and Infrastructure Needs

The SHA REB and REO currently conduct research ethics reviews using standardized tools available uniformly across SHA, such as Outlook, Word, Excel, and SharePoint. Additionally, the REO manages a custom-built database to track applications and issue certificates. However, this database lacks automation and integration capabilities, resulting in a largely manual review processes and highly reliant on staff time for tracking and reporting.

As the volume and complexity of research activity in Saskatchewan grows, particularly with the increasing number of projects requesting exemption from ethics review, these manual processes are becoming unsustainable. This trend reflects a broader national pattern with other REBs across Canada also facing increased administrative burden.

Investing in a secure, modern research ethics information system with enhanced automation and workflow management capabilities could significantly reduce administrative burden, improve operational efficiency, and minimize the risk of human error. Such a system would also enhance audit readiness and support the long-term sustainability of REB operations. Securing resources for this infrastructure upgrade will be essential to support the REO and REB in delivering timely, high-quality ethics reviews that meet all regulatory and institutional standards.

Report Summary

The 2025–26 fiscal year was marked by steady research activity and ongoing commitment to supporting ethical and high-quality research across the SHA. The REB reviewed 89 new study applications, alongside a significant volume of amendments, renewals, and study closures. This reflects the continued diversity and complexity of research in the province, spanning multiple clinical specialties and investigator expertise.

The REO played a critical role in coordinating timely and thorough reviews, facilitating clear communication with researchers, and delivering outreach and educational sessions. A notable operational enhancement during 2025/26 was the implementation of delegated signing authority from the REB Chair to the REO for select administrative review activities, including simple renewals, personnel-only amendments, and closure of long-expired studies. This change strengthened operational

efficiency, supported timely processing of routine submissions, and allowed Chair and Board resources to remain focused on reviews requiring greater ethical oversight.

Compared with the 2024/25 reporting period, delegated review timelines improved substantially in 2025/26. The median time from submission to NER issuance or equivalent REB correspondence decreased from 17 to 9 business days, representing a 47% faster turnaround. The median time from submission to final approval/determination decreased from 43 to 13 business days, representing a 70% faster turnaround. Full Board timelines also improved at the NER stage, with the median time to NER issuance decreasing from 38 to 28 business days, representing a 26% faster turnaround. However, the median time from submission to final approval for full Board reviews increased from 115 to 134 business days, representing a 17% slower turnaround.

This variation reflects the continued complexity of above-minimal-risk studies, which often involve extensive discussion, clarification, and multi-stage revision cycles. Delays attributable to researcher response times, incomplete or unclear submissions, and REB limited Chair capacity also contributed to variability in timelines. To help address these challenges and strengthen overall review capacity, the REO and REB are developing additional REB support to assist the REB Chair. Additionally, the team has initiated internal process reviews, including updates to REB application forms, templates, and guidance notes, as well as the development of VSMs for ethics review processes. These efforts aim to identify inefficiencies, promote standardization, and support continuous quality improvement, ensuring the review process remains both efficient and ethically rigorous.

Looking forward, the SHA REB and REO recognize the need for infrastructure improvements, particularly the transition to a modern, automated ethics review system to enhance operational efficiency, tracking, and reporting. Continued investments in staff training, stakeholder engagement, process optimization, and information system improvements will remain priorities to ensure the REB can meet the evolving needs of the research community while upholding rigorous ethical standards.

Glossary of Terms

Active (ongoing) Studies
Research projects that have received REB approval and are currently in progress. These studies may be actively recruiting participants, collecting or analyzing data, or undergoing follow-up procedures. Active studies remain under REB oversight until they are formally closed by the researcher or reach the end of their approved duration.

Amendment
A change to an approved research study that requires review and approval by the REB before it is implemented. Amendments may include changes to the protocol, consent form, study personnel, or data collection methods.

Certificate of Approval
A formal document issued by the REB confirming that a study has been ethically reviewed and approved in accordance with applicable policies and guidelines.

Delegated Review
An ethics review process conducted by the REB Chair or a designated member for studies involving minimal risk. This allows for timely processing without the need for full Board review.

Exemption
A formal REB determination that a project does not require REB review under TCPS 2 guidelines. Often applies to program evaluations, quality improvement or assurance, or administrative surveillance data reviews.

Full Board Review
A review of research applications involving greater than minimal risk, conducted at a convened meeting of the full REB. Approval requires quorum and a majority vote.

Health Information Protection Act (HIPA)
Saskatchewan legislation governing the collection, use, and disclosure of personal health information. The SHA REB operates under Section 29 of HIPA for research purposes.

Interquartile Range (IQR)
A statistical measure of variability that describes the range within which the middle 50% of values fall. It is the difference between the 75th percentile (upper quartile) and the 25th percentile (lower quartile) in a data set, providing insight into the spread of the central portion of the data.

Median
The middle value in a data set when the values are arranged in ascending order. It represents the point at which half the observations fall below and half fall above, offering a measure of central tendency that is less affected by extreme values than the mean.

Minimal Risk
Defined in TCPS 2 as risk no greater than what participants encounter in their everyday lives. Studies deemed minimal risk may qualify for delegated review.

Notice of Ethical Review (NER)
A formal notification from the REB summarizing the outcome of the ethics review. This may include approval, a request for revisions, or an exemption determination.

Principal Investigator (PI)
The lead researcher responsible for the conduct of the study, including ethics compliance and data stewardship.

Range
The difference between the minimum and maximum values in a data set, showing the full spread of observed values from lowest to highest.

Research Ethics Board (REB)
An independent committee responsible for reviewing and overseeing research involving human participants to ensure it complies with ethical and legal standards.

Research Ethics Office (REO)
The administrative office supporting the REB. It coordinates application intake, communication with researchers, and operational processes related to ethics review.

Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA)
The provincial health authority responsible for delivering healthcare services in Saskatchewan. It oversees the REB and REO.

Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2)
Canada's national guidelines for the ethical conduct of research involving humans, jointly issued by three federal research funding agencies in Canada: The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). It provides the framework for REB review.

TCPS 2 - Article 2.1–2.6
Sections of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS 2) that outline categories of research exempt from REB review, including publicly available data and quality improvement activities.

Value Stream Mapping (VSM)
A visual tool used to map and analyze the flow of information and activities involved in a process from start to finish. In research ethics, VSM helps identify each step in the review process, distinguish value-added from non-value-added activities, and support efforts to improve efficiency, reduce delays, and enhance process quality.