Center for Bioethics and Health Policy
Strategic Plan (Research) 2021-2026
Overview

1. The Center for Bioethics and Health Policy (CBHP) was established as Center of Excellence at Augusta University (AU) in 2016. It is housed within the Institute of Public and Preventive Health. The Center initially had two divisions, one focused on Bioethics, the other Health Policy. The role of CBHP is to: provide clinical ethics consultation and support for policy development; offer educational programs and support for curriculum development; and to conduct interdisciplinary research.

Leadership

2. Initially, CBHP was led by its founding Director, Dr. Bill Strong. In 2019, this leadership was transferred to Dr. Paul Mann. In 2021 Dr. Laura Williamson was appointed as Associate Director. On 1 January 2020 Dr. Williamson became Director of the Center for Bioethics and Health Policy, with Dr. Mann moving to the position of Director of Clinical Ethics.

3. A review of CBHP determined that diversifying the leadership of the Center would strengthen its interdisciplinary, interprofessional and experiential credentials. To this end an advisory Directors’ Team (DT) was established and had its first meeting 28 September, 2020. The DT meets monthly or bi-monthly as required. It is expected an additional member from allied health will be added during 2021.

4. The initial membership (alongside Drs. Mann and Williamson) was Dr. Doug Miller, Professor Jean Pawl, Naomi Williams, Professor Steve Coughlin. In November 2020, in advance of the DTs second meeting, Professor Wendy Turner joined as a representative of the Summerville campus.

Strategic Review

5. Due to multiple changes in faculty and its leadership since the foundation of CBHP and significant changes in the health environment (e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic and increasing focus on racial justice), in summer of 2020 a strategic review of the Center’s research and education provision, goals and personnel was initiated. This document is focused on the Center’s research plans.

CBHP Research

6. Since its foundation in 2016 through to 2020 the research profile of CBHP has primarily been associated with clinical ethics and health professional ethics education. This is because outputs from faculty (and students) working in the field of medical or clinical ethics have more readily self-identified as being accomplished through the Center. The research of CBHP has been constrained by its lack of full-time faculty. Dr. Williamson is the first full-time faculty member of CBHP.
7. In the next phase of its development, CBHP will prioritize the development of research, educational and service endeavors that allow it to deliver on its foundational rationale set out in the policy of Georgia Regents University System; namely, that Centers:

   i) create new interdisciplinary models for research, education, and clinical care,
   ii) create synergies across disciplines, iii) foster a research environment that promotes innovation and interdisciplin ary collaboration, and iv) create a culture of excellence.

8. To help support the required interdisciplinary work, the two separate Divisions of Bioethics and Health Policy have been merged.

9. The Center’s first Research Plan will prioritize the development of work across three broad, overlapping interdisciplinary themes:

   - Ethics and the Health Professions
   - Public Health: Ethics and Policy
   - Community Engagement, Social Justice and Advocacy

10. The selection of these themes has been driven by a number of factors. Firstly, they are sufficiently broad to utilize the diverse skills and interests of faculty affiliated with CBHP. Secondly, they are able to support the development of the interdisciplinary, synergistic ethical and policy work foundational to the remit of CBHP. Thirdly, the themes focus the skills of CBHP faculty on health challenges that are critical to the wellbeing of its local communities. This will allow CBHP to develop a clear, distinctive identity which is meaningful within and supported by its local context.

Outline of Research Themes

11. Ethics and the Health Professions: This theme is a continuation of the Center’s work on clinical ethics and its policy implications. It includes support for AU’s Clinical Ethics Consultation service, faculty research, and the work of graduate and medical students. In its next phase of development, CBHP will prioritize developing ethics and policy support for interprofessional healthcare teams.

12. Public Health: Ethics and Policy: While continuity is important for CBHP as it advances, it is also critical for it to develop in ways that equip it to respond to urgent contemporary health challenges. Issues like substance use disorders, obesity and Covid-19, and the high cost and affordability of health care are public health issues that impact significantly on health and wellbeing. They also require an approach that goes beyond clinical ethics and policy. Examinations of systemic issues that undermine public health and the associated values-based challenges that impede responses to them are essential for providing a
meaningful response to poor health outcomes in Augusta, the State of Georgia and more widely.

13. **Community Engagement, Social Justice and Advocacy**: Health outcomes amongst our local communities are impacted negatively by marked racial disparities and the suspicion/distrust of health systems. These issues have deep historical roots and will not change quickly or easily. However, the CBHP has a responsibility - as the Center for Excellence at AU dedicated to Bioethics and Health Policy - to develop and lead a sustainable work program to effectively engage with its local communities. Ultimately, while Bioethics and Health Policy aim to positively impact health and wellbeing, too often they are viewed as the sole preserve of professionals. As a result, they can fail to have the desired impact. During the period of this Strategic Plan (2021-2026), CBHP will work to identify pre-existing community partnerships at AU and to develop new relationships with local stakeholders to inform a work program focused on trust, social justice and advocacy.

**Research: Output Targets**

14. **Phase One: March 2021 – December 2022**

- The development of interdisciplinary, multi-experience interest groups for each theme that cuts across bioethics and health policy.
- A series of ‘brainstorming’ meetings to identify interests, skills and expertise.
- The identification of key issues around which faculty can develop short papers, commentaries or positions papers. The submission of two papers per research theme by end of year (6 in total).
- The identification of external funding to support interdisciplinary bioethics/health policy work.

15. **Phase Two: January 2022 – December 2024**

- A continuation of the interdisciplinary and community relationships.
- The development and submission of applications for external research funding; a minimum of one bid per research theme (3 in total).

**Research Culture**

16. A key feature of the CBHP research culture is the Roberts Memorial Medical Ethics Lecture Series – four events have been held since 2016. In 2020, it was decided, due to Covid-19, not to hold an event.

17. In addition, in August 2018 the Division of Health Policy held a Planning Retreat ‘Conscious Policy Choices, Unintended Health Consequences’. Other features of the CBHP research
culture include: events arranged by the Medical College of Georgia (MCG) Leadership Through Ethics (LTE) program; AUMC Ethics and Diversity and Inclusion Grand Rounds; and a seminar series.

18. Over the period of this Strategic Plan CBHP will prioritize:

- Cultivating a research culture that promotes the interprofessional and multidisciplinary work critical to addressing contemporary health challenges.
- Initiatives that help to promote its central research themes.

19. Meetings to help grow the research themes identified in this strategy will be central to the research culture of CBHP over the coming years. This will initially take the form of multiple small online meetings to identify issues, collaborators and feasible outputs to help us build working relationships.

20. Once in-person lectures/campus visits can resume CBHP will invite a number of high-profile speakers to give Roberts Memorial Lectures. These events will also be used to help build interest around and create a profile for our research themes. The Center will participate in arranging speakers for the IPPH seminar series once it re-commences. A monthly reading group will be established to allow faculty and students to present their own published or unpublished work to an interdisciplinary audience.

21. New avenues during this strategic period will include: prioritizing and obtaining internal or external funding for PhD studentships; involving the local community in initiatives to address health challenges; and investigating whether the LTE program can grow to include health professionals outside MCG.