



OVERVIEW OF REPORT FOR RESEARCH FUNDERS

Research in global health emergencies: ethical issues

Published 28 January 2020

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics has published the findings of an in-depth inquiry on ethical issues relating to research in global health emergencies. The inquiry was run by an international working group which gathered evidence from contributors across the globe.

The report of our inquiry identifies ways that research can be undertaken ethically during emergencies. It presents an ethical compass to guide research conduct at policy level and on the ground, with three guiding values: fairness, equal respect, and helping reduce suffering. A diagram of the ethical compass (overleaf) provides prompts that those involved in the wider research ecosystem should think through.

Several of our recommendations are directed to research funders. We suggest that changes in line with these recommendations would align funders' policies and practices more closely with our three guiding values. The recommendations include:

- Putting in place innovative approaches so that researchers can directly involve communities when applying for grants (recommendation 4);
- Requiring community engagement plans to be included in any funding proposal for research in global health emergencies (recommendation 5);
- Providing a ringfenced budget for researchers to provide feedback to participants and communities about what their research has learned (recommendation 10);
- Expecting the inclusion of plans for partnerships with humanitarian organisations and national health departments when researchers seek funding (recommendation 11);
- Promoting more equitable collaborations in research, following the principles of the Research Fairness Initiative (recommendation 12);
- Taking a long-term approach to funding capacity strengthening (recommendation 14);
- Prioritising research on stakeholders' views of consent and governance mechanisms to create trust and confidence in data and sample sharing (recommendation 17); and
- Exploring how grantees can be required, and supported, to share research findings in accessible and timely ways with key policy stakeholders (recommendation 22).

The full list of our recommendations is published in the long report and executive summary, both available at www.nuffieldbioethics.org. We have summarised these in the following call for action to research funders, governments, and others.

A call for action

We want to maximise the contribution that scientifically robust, ethical research can make to improving the health of people affected by emergencies.

We are issuing a call for action to research funders, governments, and others to:

- Ensure that research is not supported unless the basic health needs of research participants are being addressed through the response effort. Research funders will need to work in partnerships with humanitarian organisations and health ministries to ensure this.
- Invest in putting community engagement mechanisms into emergency research to make them a reality. In the longer term, engagement must be a central part of local healthcare systems to ensure sustainability and preparedness.
- Promote fair and equitable collaborations between research organisations, particularly between external research institutions and their local partners in high- and low-income settings.
- Support emergency planning – including securing robust health and health research systems – given the vital importance of properly resourced preparedness between emergencies.

AN ETHICAL COMPASS TO GUIDE DECISION-MAKING

