

Ethical Collaboration in Health: An International Consensus Framework

Questions & Answers

Revised and Adopted 2025

Q. Who are the Consensus Framework signatories?

A. The Consensus Framework is currently supported by the International Alliance for Patients' Organizations (IAPO), International Council of Nurses (ICN), International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA), International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), World Medical Association (WMA), and International Hospital Federation (IHF), as all partners have a mutual interest in ensuring that the relationship between health stakeholders is based on ethical and evidence- based decision making.

Q. Why was the Consensus Framework established?

A. All signatory partners have a common interest in delivering high-quality healthcare to patients worldwide. The relationship between health stakeholders is necessary in order to provide best solutions to address patients' health needs and the most up-to-date information regarding medicines. It is vital that these relationships are conducted with integrity and serve the best interests of patients. As each partner has a unique role and responsibility in ensuring that patients receive the most appropriate care, the Consensus Framework was established to demonstrate the common commitment to professional integrity and promote ethical interactions worldwide.

Q. What was the process for establishing the Consensus Framework?

A. Since 2011, the signatory partners have convened at least twice a year to discuss developments and main challenges. Through dialogue and information exchange, it became evident that each institution's code and guidelines share some fundamental values. The group agreed to explore a way to collectively highlight the commonalities and contribute to advancing ethical interactions. The Consensus Framework was established to capture the shared values and build trust among partners and the public by demonstrating the collective stance.

Q. What are some of the key components of the Consensus Framework?

A. The Consensus Framework is based on the shared values and principles represented in individual codes and guidelines of each signatory partner. It highlights those values held by all partners and the on-going commitment to protect and promote values such as transparency, respect, trust, clear and independent information about health treatments, and the responsible use of health data and technology.

Q. What is the goal of the Consensus Framework and the envisioned impact?

- A. As the healthcare landscape is rapidly evolving in developing and emerging countries, broader and systematic challenges may have a negative impact on the interactions between the different stakeholders. This is particularly concerning for sectors or countries where there is limited or non-existing regulation and inappropriate enforcement, whether by self-regulation or government. The Consensus Framework demonstrates that trust and integrity are essential in shaping relationships between health stakeholders that truly serve the best interest of patients. In this respect, each partner has a role to play. Although significant progress has been made over the years in the area of ethical interactions between partners, and various joint initiatives exist in some countries, additional efforts are needed to raise awareness of the values embedded in appropriate interactions. The Consensus Framework demonstrates the collaboration between all signatory partners in addressing key issues. This framework aims to serve as a model for similar collective initiatives at national level which would complement individual guidelines, policies and codes and lead to a better understanding among all stakeholders about common values of interactions.

Q. Is the Consensus Framework binding?

- A. The Consensus Framework is not a binding document and has no formal enforcement mechanism. The framework does not intend to set new standards or override existing individual codes and guidelines. Instead, it highlights and reinforces the existing commitments held by each individual organization.

Q. Why is the Consensus Framework not more prescriptive?

- A. The Consensus Framework is not a policy-setting document and does not replace existing individual codes and guidelines. Instead, the Framework highlights and reinforces some fundamental shared values between signatory partners to demonstrate the need for collective action in ensuring appropriate practices related to interactions between health stakeholders.

Q. Can other organizations endorse the Consensus Framework?

- A. It is important that all parties in healthcare delivery operate under ethical standards and principles. In this respect, the signatory partners hope and welcome other health stakeholders to endorse the Consensus Framework at the global level and work together at the national level with all partners to implement high standards of practice. It is essential that all parties commit to ethical conduct and interactions which uphold high standards and integrity to ensure the well-being of patients.

Q. Why was the Consensus Framework updated in 2024?

- A. A decade after the Consensus Framework was released, signatory partners modernized its language and added a fifth principle on upholding responsible use of health data and technology. Recognizing the rapid expansion of health data technology and its critical role in advancing patient care, partners sought to establish the world's first joint ethical principle uniting leading health organizations. The principle promotes responsible data collection and management, transparency, stewardship and monitoring, and collaboration among stakeholders.

For inquiries please contact any of the following:

info@iapo.org.uk; icn@icn.ch; admin@ifpma.org; fip@fip.org; wma@wma.net; ihf.secretariat@ihf-fih.org