

ACHA Guidelines

General Statement of Ethical Principles and Guidelines

Fifth Edition

As the principal advocate and leadership organization for college and university health, the American College Health Association (ACHA) is dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of college students. ACHA serves, supports, and represents a diverse group of professionals and students who provide health promotion, mental health, and clinical services at institutions of higher education and who serve and advocate for students seeking these services. In accordance with our [core values](#), ACHA is committed to supporting health and well-being while affirming the value, worth, and dignity of each individual whom ACHA serves:

- Social justice, human dignity, and respect for all
- Provision of student-centered services
- Professional excellence, responsiveness, and ethical practice
- Multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to health
- Commitment and participation of those who advance health
- Active involvement of students

All members of ACHA are expected to adhere to the principles and standards of ethical conduct set forth in this General Statement. Throughout this document, “student” or “students” is used as the primary population who utilizes college health services. ACHA recognizes that some campuses serve staff and faculty, and some also serve community members. In those cases, please adjust the language to represent the populations served by the institution.

Ethical Principles

These principles are designed to assist ACHA members in making informed decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas and are a resource when responding to dilemmas and conflicts in daily practice. The principles serve as a framework for dialogue about moral situations among all those involved in advancing the health and

well-being of college students and the campus community. This document is not intended to anticipate all possible situations with ethical implications.

Provide beneficial and caring services. Commitment to compassionate, empathetic, and equitable behavior towards students is essential to meet their physical, psychological, cognitive, and interpersonal needs. As college health professionals, it is our responsibility to provide care and services designed to benefit the health and well-being of individuals and campus communities.

Do no harm. Engaging in activities that cause or result in physical, psychological, or social harm to any individual student or groups of students is unacceptable. Risk of harm must be managed and weighed against the potential benefit to the individual student or groups of students. Aligning institutional policies, programs, and practices to maintain and support a student’s or a group of students’ health and well-being ensures their self-worth and dignity and safeguards them from illegal or unethical acts and behaviors.

Ensure respect and autonomy. Autonomy addresses individual freedom and the right to choose what will happen to oneself. The student has an inherent knowledge of their own personal needs and is the person most affected by any decision made. Therefore, students should be informed of their options and permitted to make decisions regarding the education and services they receive, including prevention strategies, medical treatment, and therapeutic and counseling treatment and care. Supporting autonomy mitigates against undue influence to choose a particular course of action.

Protect privacy. Safeguarding privacy of the student includes respecting confidentiality of non-reportable information and protecting against disclosure of information. Exceptions may include when required by law or mandated by the institution to disclose information or when non-disclosure is waived by the individual. Protecting privacy is essential to foster a trusting relationship that preserves the dignity and autonomy of the student.

Promote justice. Promoting justice encourages and advances equity and fairness in policies, behavior, and services. Justice requires the appreciation and validation of human differences and the opposition to all intolerance and discrimination concerning those differences. These differences may include but are not limited to age; gender identity; gender expression; marital status; body type and size; neurodiversity; developmental stage; visible and invisible disabilities; race; ethnicity; color; national origin; cultural identity; religious, spiritual, or nonsecular beliefs; sex; affectional or sexual orientation; socioeconomic status; or veteran status. Maintaining human dignity with a social justice framework supports the development of health disciplines responsive to the needs of all.

Ethical Guidelines

ACHA expects that all ACHA members adhere to these ethical guidelines and seek to work with individuals and organizations that behave in accordance with them. Actions that conflict with these guidelines are incompatible with membership in ACHA and may result in sanctions being imposed on the charged member.

1. Responsibility in the Provision of Services.

Commit oneself to excellence in college health and well-being programs. Provide services in a compassionate, equitable, and unbiased manner to all students.

- a. Obtain informed consent before performing a procedure, providing treatment, enrolling students in a research study or obtaining data from students, and, when appropriate, presenting an educational program. Provide students with all unbiased information needed to ensure they can make an autonomous decision. With the consent of the minor, obtain parental permission for the evaluation and treatment of minors, whenever legally and/or ethically appropriate.
- b. Routinely inform individuals of their rights and responsibilities. Share confidential information only in accordance with professional ethical standards and mandated by the institution or required by the law. Limit access to information, data, and records, including electronic records, only to authorized personnel. Appropriate levels of security must be established, with levels of access defined and restricted to identified users. College health professionals should be aware of exceptions for disclosure permitted by law, e.g., when a student is threatening harm to self or others or if the professional is a mandated reporter as defined by the institution. Students have the right to request and receive a copy of their medical records.

- c. Identify one's own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors through an ethical lens. Treat others with dignity and respect. Both implicit and overt biases should always be examined with the recognition that personal values may conflict with the ability to provide services in an objective and compassionate manner. When biases are recognized, seek consultation to determine what is in the best interest of the student, which may include skill building for the provider or an appropriate referral.
- d. In personal and professional relationships, accept human differences and combat prejudices, intolerance, and oppression.

2. Professional Responsibility and Competence.

Maintain an appropriate level of knowledge, skills, and judgment to provide competent health-related services based on the established needs of the population. Accept ultimate responsibility for the consequences of one's action or inaction.

- a. Promote acquisition of new knowledge, improve skills, and seek opportunities for professional development. Encourage colleagues and co-workers to enhance their own training and skills and assist them in identifying opportunities to do so.
- b. Monitor personal and professional activities and effectiveness. Accept feedback from colleagues, co-workers, and individual members of the community. Seek appropriate assistance from professionals when warranted.
- c. Accurately represent one's professional credentials, abilities, and limitations and correct any intentional or accidental misrepresentation of these qualifications by others or oneself.
- d. Conduct one's professional work according to sound theoretical principles based on scientific research and in accordance with the basic tenets of the profession.
- e. Contribute to the development of one's own professional discipline and to the field of college health.
- f. Obtain appropriate institutional approval (i.e., institutional review board) for any research studies involving human subjects, including securing the applicable informed consent of all research subjects. Conduct, report, and represent research studies accurately. Submit research to peer review, and communicate results judged to be valid and of value to other professionals even if they reflect unfavorably on specific institutions, programs, services, or practices. Share original research data with qualified others upon reasonable request.

- g. Acknowledge contributions by others to programs, reports, papers, articles, and presentations. Respect the rights of others, including students, to their intellectual property. Cite previous works on a topic when writing or speaking. Acknowledge major contributions to research projects or professional writing through joint authorship and minor or technical contributions through notes or introductory statements.
- h. Disclose all conflicts of interest, including sources of funding; ownership of referring or referral facilities; and other affiliations, incentives, or remuneration that could bias or otherwise influence decision-making.

3. Responsible and Ethical Relationships.

Treat all members of the community as individuals who possess intrinsic worth; dignity; and the right to privacy, autonomy, and respect. Work to prevent harm to others in relationships.

- a. Identify and work to eliminate discriminatory, unjust, or inequitable policies, attitudes, and practices.
- b. Take appropriate steps to explore and address with all members of the campus community the ethical implications of attitudes, communications, and behaviors and their impact on others.
- c. Seek to resolve conflicts in a manner consistent with the ethical principles in this document. In communicating with others, engage in respectful and constructive dialogue with a willingness to listen.
- d. Renounce acts or behaviors that are belittling, dismissive, oppressive, threatening, exploitative, coercive, or deceptive.
- e. Do not engage in inappropriate behavior in all interactions, including but not limited to harassment, inappropriate sexual or romantic relationships, or inappropriate touching. Do not engage in any behavior that uses positions of power over students, subordinates, or patients.
- f. Refrain from using one's position to seek personal gains, advantages, or goods and services. Refuse gifts from consumers or vendors that influence or may appear to influence professional decision-making and responsibilities.
- g. Avoid dual and conflicting personal or professional relationships that may involve or appear to involve incompatible roles or opposing responsibilities. For example, a health promotion employee who is also a half-time nurse or half-time counselor may have obligations to their profession as a nurse or

counselor that puts them in an incompatible role within health promotion. As a nurse or counselor, students will be able to expect confidentiality, while as a health promotion employee, confidentiality may not be upheld due to the designation of the institution as mandated reporter. Since a student may know the person in both roles, the student may not be able to delineate the differences between the roles, which could cause harm to the student.

- h. Refrain from abusing one's authority, job, or position either to hinder or to assist others in seeking financial gain or career advancement.
- i. Honor personal and professional commitments.
- j. When making referrals, ensure continuum of care that is timely and mindful of possible gaps in care or services and ensures individual safety.

4. Responsibility to the Institution.

Work to promote the mission of the institution by enhancing the health and wellness of the campus community and participating in the educational process.

- a. Fulfill professional and institutional responsibilities to the best of one's ability and capacity.
- b. Advocate for constructive change in support of health and well-being on behalf of the campus community.
- c. Report to appropriate authorities any condition, policy, activity, or practice that may impair the health of the campus community while also preserving confidentiality of information in accordance with professional, ethical, and legal standards.
- d. Recognize personal views and actions as a private citizen and distinguish them from those expressed or undertaken as an official representative of the institution.
- e. Support student empowerment and intentionally seek student voices and ideas. Encourage the institution to develop formal plans to act on and respond to student ideas, concerns, criticisms, and complaints.
- f. Uphold fiduciary responsibility to the institution. When overseeing funds, follow established institutional policies and procedures. This includes using funds appropriately and in a cost effective manner that contributes to the institution's mission and purpose. Assure that physical resources and personnel are dedicated to promoting the welfare of students and upholding the mission of the institution.

- g. Recognize that conflicts can arise between duties as an employee of an institution, responsibilities to the students served, colleagues at the institution and within the field, and professional standards of practice. Discuss issues or concerns in a respectful and open manner, with intent to resolve conflicts fairly and explicitly. When appropriate, seek advice and counsel in dealing with such conflicts.

5. Responsibility to the American College Health Association (ACHA) and to the Field of College Health.

Work to promote the highest ethical standards in the field. Share responsibility with others in ACHA to fulfill the mission of this organization.

- a. Contribute to the work of ACHA by supporting its mission, vision, core values, goals, policies, and by upholding and abiding by the association's code of conduct.
- b. Recognize personal views and actions as a private citizen and distinguish them from those expressed or undertaken as an official representative of ACHA.
- c. Collaborate and share professional expertise with others in the academic community and the field of college health.
- d. Uphold fiduciary responsibility to ACHA. Assure when overseeing funds that established procedures are followed, optimizing value. Assure funds are appropriately documented and that expenses contribute to accomplishing ACHA's mission and purpose. Assure that physical resources and personnel are dedicated to promoting the welfare of members and constituents and uphold the reputation of ACHA.
- e. Strive to avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts by prioritizing ethical, clinical, educational, scientific, and legal obligations over or above personal, political, economic, or professional interests and advantages. Resist personal, social, financial, political, and organizational pressures to use influence inappropriately; make professional judgments without consideration of personal gain.

Summary Statement

ACHA recognizes that these guidelines are a work in progress and will change as law and professional standards in the field of college health continue to evolve. At this time, ACHA expects that all members actively uphold the principles and guidelines detailed in this document, as a guide for conduct in professional activities and situations when breaches in these practices are evident or even overt.

Acknowledgements

The members of the American College Health Association Ethics Committee express their sincere gratitude and acknowledge contributions from various professional organizations in the drafting of the original General Statement in 1990; the 1996, 2002, and 2010 revisions; and this current document. The structure of this statement and some sections of text are derived or adapted from similar documents adopted for use by the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Psychological Association (APA), ACPA: College Student Educators International, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. In addition, the work of the Institute for Global Ethics informed our understanding and appreciation of the essential role of shared values as a basis for ethical decision making. The outstanding work done by our colleagues in these associations has expedited our efforts and contributed to the overall quality and coherence of this document.

2022 Revision Authors

A special thanks to the members of the American College Health Association Ethics Committee who contributed to the revision of these guidelines: Joleen M. Nevers, MAEd, CHES, CSE, CSES; Heather Eastman-Mueller, PhD, CHES, CSE, CSES; Carol A. Griggs, PhD; La' Tesha Hinton, MSPH, CHES; and Michele F. Richardson, M.Div., Th.M., MBA



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