

# MEMORANDUM

**Date:** October 14, 2020

**To:** Human ethics researchers at Western and its affiliates

**From:** Erika Basile, Director, Research Ethics and Compliance

**Subject:** New human research ethics guidance documents

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The Office of Human Research Ethics has developed two new guidance documents:
  - [Ethical considerations for remote consent and assent](#) 
  - [Western Qualtrics for electronic documentation of consent](#) 
- If unable to move from in-person contact, projects may have to remain on-hold until physical distancing measures are removed.

Dear Colleagues,

With the continued risk of COVID-19 exposure and as Public Health and institutional directives such as physical distancing continue to be mandated, researchers must think about converting studies involving in-person contact into remote methods of data collection. Modified study procedures may be carried out with Research Ethics Board approval when feasible (and only when appropriate).

The Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE) is aware of the urgency to provide our research community guidelines to support continued research activities. To that end, we have developed two new guidance documents:

- [Ethical considerations for remote consent and assent](#) 
- [Western Qualtrics for electronic documentation of consent](#) 

## Ethical considerations for remote consent and assent

This guidance document was developed by the OHRE in collaboration with six other institutions, including local hospitals, Western's privacy office and the Lawson Health Research Institute. It provides guidelines for our research community for alternative consent processes, as opposed to the traditional in person consent process. In addition, it also provides a board framework for different consent options and documentation.

## Western Qualtrics for electronic documentation of consent

Working closely with Western's privacy office as well as Western's Technology Services we have developed a guidance document that addresses specific requirements for the use of Western Qualtrics to document consent (electronic consent). NOTE: The use of Western Qualtrics for eConsent is not available for Lawson affiliated studies. Lawson researchers are directed to REDCap.

## When conversion isn't possible

There may be instances when it is not appropriate to make a specific change to your data collection (e.g. conducting in-person interviews about a sensitive topic and with a vulnerable population). In these instances, study activities may have to remain on hold until physical distancing requirements are not required.

Please remember that during these times, the logistics for any prospective research must be carefully considered. For more information, please see our past communication, [Considerations for New Initial REB applications and Amendments for ongoing studies](#). 

If you would like to review any previous memoranda or other communications, you can find them on our website under [Communications and Memos](#). To review all guidance and template documents, please visit our [Guidance and Templates page](#), or go to [WREM](#) (under HELP > Templates).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the office at [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca) or 519-661- 3036.

Sincerely,

Erika Basile,  
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Western University