

Western University Research Ethics Board Metrics Report 2025

May 2026



**Western
Research**

Executive Summary

- Western's Research Ethics Boards oversee approximately 3,500 active studies annually.
- Both Non-Medical and Health Sciences Research Ethics Boards have experienced 15% increases to overall volume since 2021.
- Western undertook an external review of its human research ethics operations last year, including review processes and administrative supports.
- Subsequent operational changes have focused on upstream process improvement, clearer communication and greater coordination.
- Review timelines improved or remained stable last year.
- On average, Western provides some of the shortest review timelines for Clinical Trials Ontario projects.

Purpose of the Research Ethics Boards (REBs)

Western's REBs exist to impartially ensure the safety, welfare and rights of human participants in research and are guided by the ethical principles outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

Authority and Jurisdiction

Western and its hospital affiliates authorize Western's REBs to review the ethical acceptability of all research involving humans (including their data and/or biological material) undertaken under Western's jurisdiction or auspices by faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows or students, regardless of where the research is conducted.

The institutions have also authorized Western's Health Sciences Research Ethics Board to act as an REB of Record for multi-site research that is reviewed through Clinical Trials Ontario.

Western's REBs are accountable to the Board of Governors concerning the processes the REB follows in pursuit of its mandate; however, they must act independently of the Board of Governors when making decisions regarding the ethics of research. Neither the Board of Governors nor any other entity may override an REB decision to approve, reject, request modifications to or terminate any proposed or ongoing research.

REB Membership

Western has two primary REBs:

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (HSREB)

Reviews research that takes place inside a medical or health care environment or that involves medical patients or medical patient data/biological materials.

- **Full Board Review**
Prospective research > minimal risk
- **Delegated Level 1 (DL1) Review**
Retrospective research ≤ minimal risk
- **Delegated Level 2 (DL2) Review**
Prospective research ≤ minimal risk

Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB)

Reviews research that includes social, behavioural and cultural research in a non-clinical, non-patient-based population.

- **Full Board Review**
Prospective research > minimal risk
- **Delegated Review**
Research ≤ minimal risk

Western also has a Cadaveric Research Ethics Sub-board (CREB), which is responsible for the oversight and review of research using cadaveric material obtained through Western's Bequeathal Program. The CREB operates under the oversight of the HSREB.

Each REB meets the REB composition requirements set out in the various regulations, policies and guidelines that govern research. Membership comprises scholars, clinician scientists, community members and affiliated and non-affiliated members from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise.

Office of Human Research Ethics (OHRE)

Western's REBs are supported by a dedicated team of research ethics specialists, whose tasks include:

- Facilitating REB approval and monitoring of all research processes involving human participants.
- Serving as the primary liaison between REBs, the researcher and their research team.
- Ensuring prompt processing of research protocols and conformity with Western and regulatory guidelines.
- Providing guidance and acting as subject matter experts regarding research ethics processes and requirements and delivering client-oriented services supporting the university's research initiatives and endeavours.
- Attending board meetings and participating in discussions (as non-voting members) and performing delegated reviews as authorized by REB chairs.
- Providing timely and satisfactory solutions to problems and issues arising among investigators, the REBs and funding or regulatory agencies.
- Establishing and maintaining standard operating procedures, guidance documents, templates and educational resources relating to human research ethics.
- Providing access and support for the REB management system (WREM).

Research ethics specialists are required to have human research ethics-related knowledge, experience and training comparable to what is expected of REB members.

Key Comparisons with Historic Data (2021–2025)

At any given time, Western’s REBs oversee **approximately 3,500 active, REB-approved studies**, representing a stable ongoing portfolio.

This distinction between new applications and active studies is important for understanding overall REB workload, as ethics oversight extends beyond approval, encompassing continuing review, amendments, reportable events and study closures, researcher consultations and training.

NMREB amendment volumes have remained relatively stable over the past five years, with modest year-to-year variation and **an overall increase of approximately 15% between 2021 and 2025**.

The HSREB receives a substantially higher number of amendments, as studies are often initially approved with preliminary protocols and subsequently require one or more amendments as the study design is finalized. Amendments increased from 1,542 in 2021 to 1,859 in 2025, **representing overall growth of approximately 21% over five years**.

The volume of student applications submitted to the HSREB has remained relatively consistent year over year.

Student research activity is often conducted under established research programs, with individual students added through amendments rather than submitting new applications. As a result, changes in student involvement may be reflected in amendment activity rather than in new application counts. Additionally, multiple students take part in student applications, further obscuring the level of student involvement.

Figure 1. Number of New Applications, 2021-25

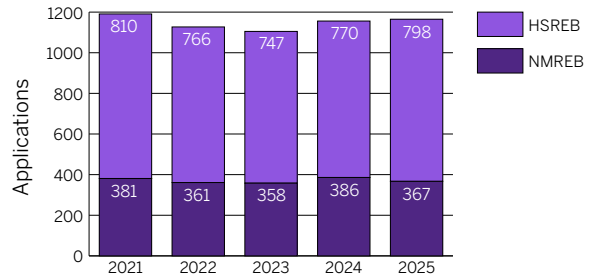


Figure 2. Number of Amendments, 2021-25

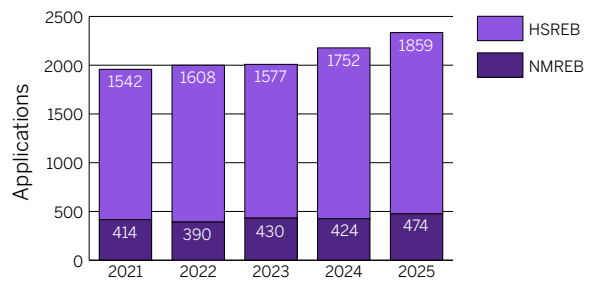
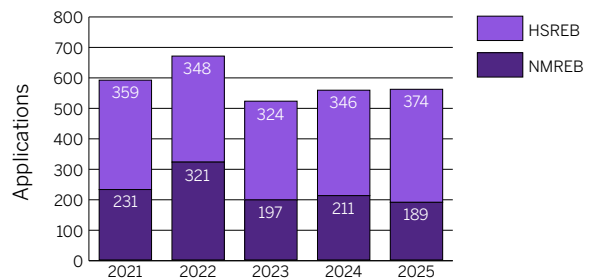


Figure 3. Number of Student Applications, 2021-25



2025 External REB Review & Operational Changes

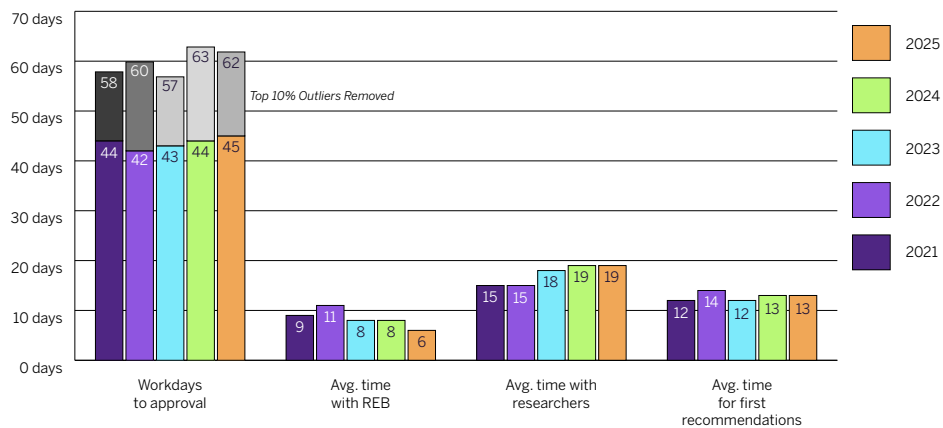
In spring 2025, Western underwent an external review of its human research ethics operations, including REB review processes and administrative supports. Overall, the review was balanced and constructive, identifying important opportunities for improvement for both the REBs and the OHRE, while also emphasizing the shared responsibility of researchers to submit timely, complete applications and to engage constructively in the ethics review process.

In response, the REB program implemented targeted short-term operational changes focused on upstream process improvement, clearer communication and strengthened coordination across REB leadership and staff. Initial performance metrics suggest that some of these changes are already contributing to improved review timelines.

The external review recommendations continue to guide both ongoing operational refinements and longer-term planning to support a sustainable, proportionate and effective ethics review program.

HSREB Response Times

Figure 4. Researcher vs. HSREB Average Response Times (New Applications), 2021-2025

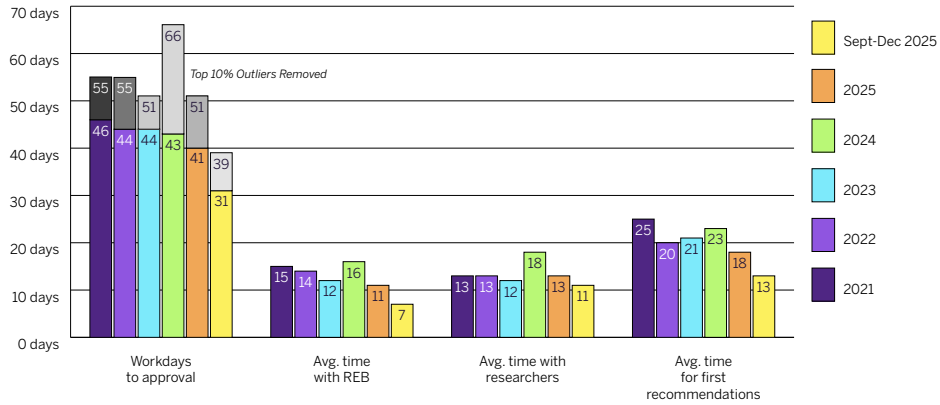


These data suggest that **improvements to investigator guidance, application quality at submission and pre-review support are likely to have a greater impact on overall timelines** than changes to HSREB operations alone.

This pattern of stable or improved REB processing time was observed despite a period of sustained reduced OHRE capacity in 2025, indicating that staffing constraints did not translate into longer average REB review times.

NMREB Response Times

Figure 5. Researcher vs. NMREB Average Response Times (New Applications), 2021-2025



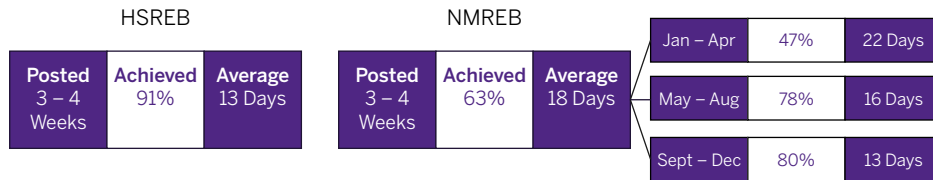
Overall, **NMREB approval timelines improved in 2025**. In the final third of 2025, following operational changes in NMREB supports based on the review, there was a 36% reduction in average REB review time, dropping from 11 to 7 days, and a nearly 28% improvement in the time to initial recommendation letters, decreasing from 18 to 13 days.

These trends also suggest that improvements in process may have contributed to faster researcher response times through clearer expectations and reduced back and forth between researchers and the NMREB.

Continued improvement is expected into 2026.

First Review/Recommendations Timelines

Figure 6. Posted vs. Actual Workdays to First Review/Recommendations in 2025



While HSREB posted versus actual workdays remained relatively stable throughout the year, segmented analysis shows substantial improvement in NMREB timeliness in the second and final thirds of the year. This is evidence that sufficient staff resources and operational adjustments are translating into real performance gains.

Overall New Application Approval Timelines

Figure 7. Proportion of New Applications Approved in a Given Time Period (Months) in 2025

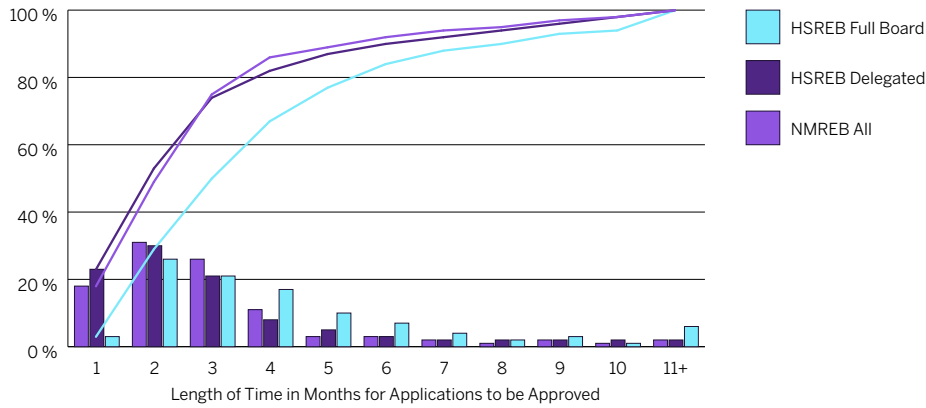


Figure 8. Comparing Proportion of New NMREB Applications Approved in 2024 vs. 2025

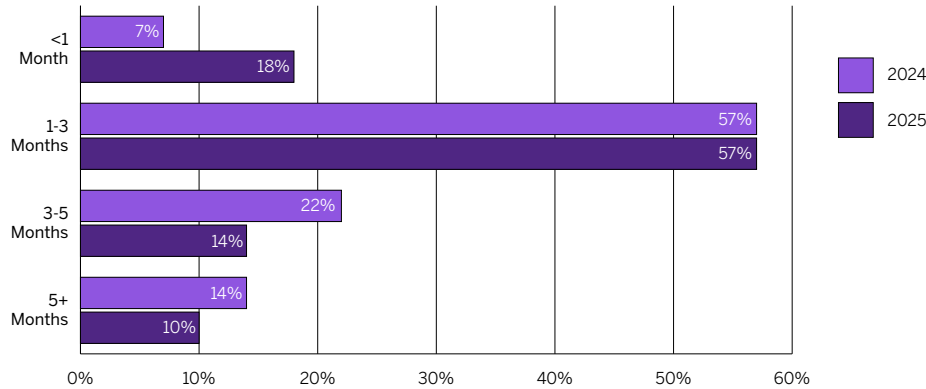


Figure 8 shows substantial improvement in early NMREB timelines between 2024 and 2025

Approvals in less than one month increased from 7% to 18% (≈186% relative increase).

These improvements reflect meaningful operational progress. While increased staffing supported these gains, the pattern also strongly aligns with both workflow improvements and more targeted review practices that were implemented during the second half of the year.

HSREB approval timelines remained consistent between 2024 and 2025 (comparative graph not shown but is on the [Western Research website](#)), despite sustained staffing constraints.

Overall Amendment Approval Timelines

Figure 9. Proportion of Amendments Approved Within a Given Time Period (Business Days) in 2025

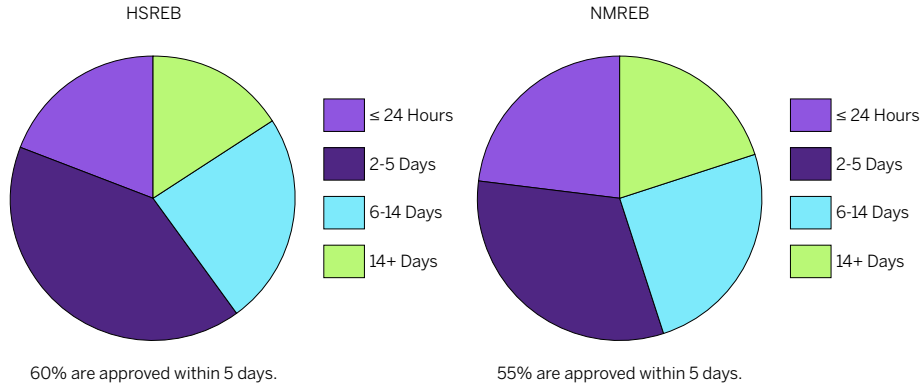


Figure 9 reflects that the majority of amendments are approved very quickly, with many approved on initial submission. Over half are approved within five business days.

This reflects risk-based review, clear thresholds, and efficient workflows.

Industry-Sponsored Protocols

Table 1. Industry-Sponsored Protocols at Western and Hospital Affiliates, 2021-2025

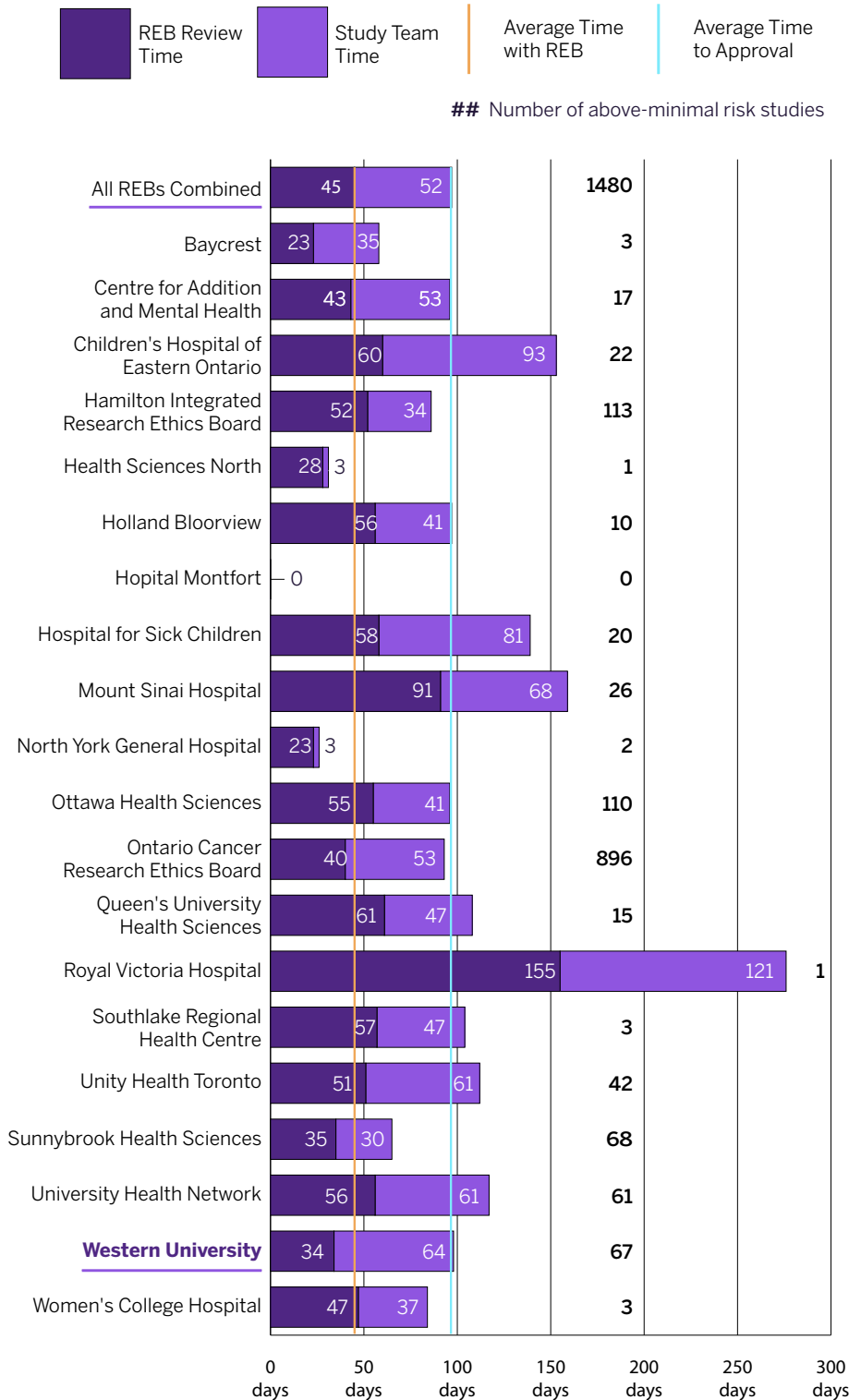
	Western					London Hospitals					Total				
Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total	5	4	5	4	4	105	75	77	93	91	110	81	82	91	95

Across the period from 2021 to 2025, the volume of industry sponsored studies remains heavily weighted toward the London hospitals.

Western-based activity is comparatively small and stable year to year (4–5 files annually), while London hospitals show higher volumes with modest year-to-year fluctuation. Overall totals remain relatively stable over time, ranging from 81 to 110 files annually.

Clinical Trials Ontario – Provincial Benchmarks

Figure 10. Researcher vs. REB Response Times (New Provincial Applications for Above Minimal Risk Projects), 2021–25



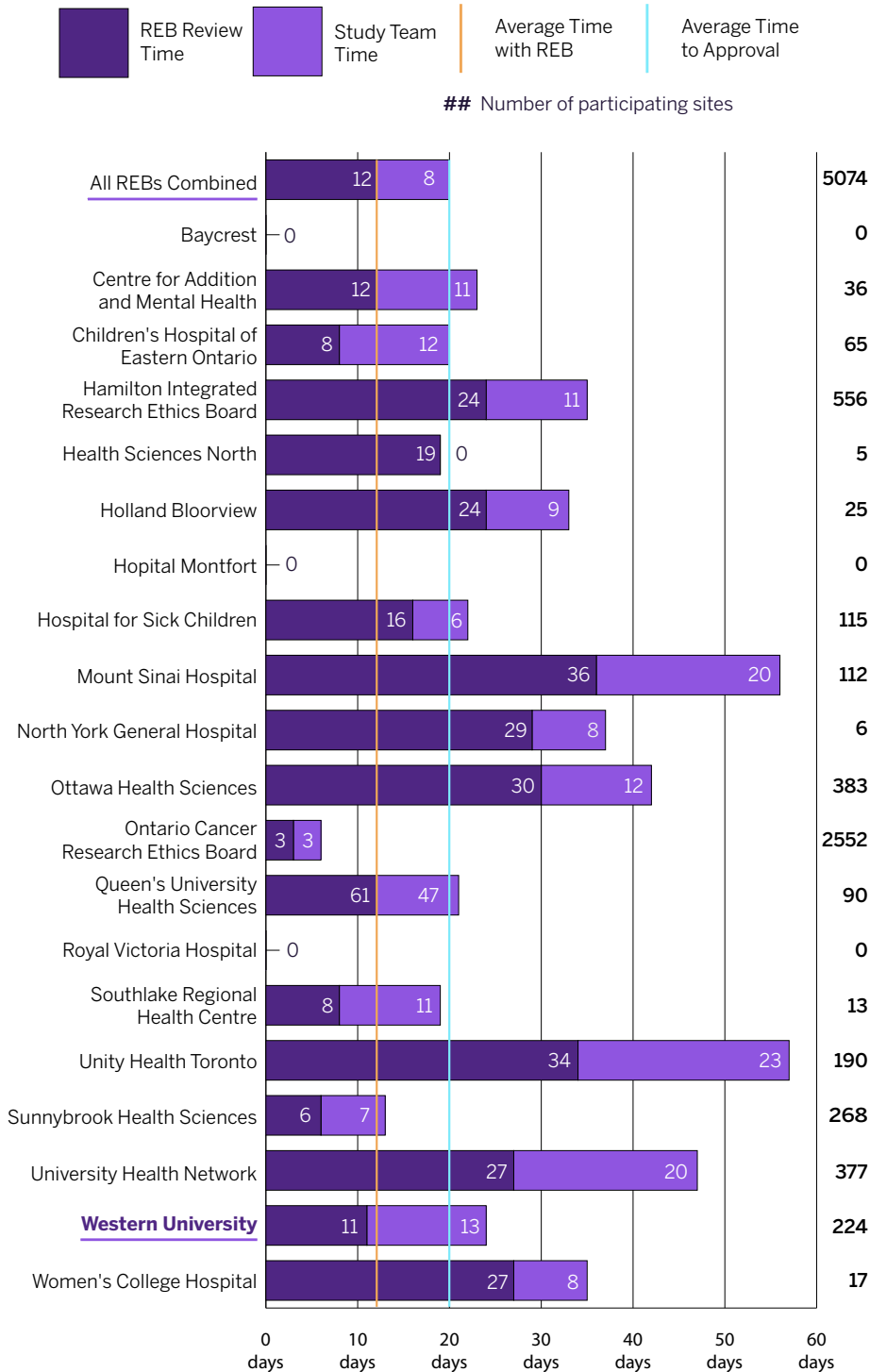
This data compares Western's HSREB to other Clinical Trials Ontario (CTO)-qualified boards.

Western's HSREB is the REB of record for 67 above-minimal-risk studies that required full-board review.

As shown in the figure, Western's average REB review time is approximately 34 calendar days, which is **substantially lower than the combined provincial average** of approximately 45 days and shorter than many peer REBs

While there is variability across institutions, Western's position toward the lower end of the distribution indicates strong REB-of-record performance in completing ethics review.

Figure 11. Researcher vs REB Response Times for New Centre Level Applications (i.e., Participating Sites) for Above Minimal Risk Projects. 2021–2025



Across these 67 above-minimal-risk provincial studies, there are 224 participating sites whose ethics approval is overseen by Western's HSREB. Average REB turnaround time for Western's HSREB is approximately 11 calendar days, slightly faster than the combined REB average of 12. Western's HSREB demonstrates strong performance within the CTO framework as a whole, with efficient review timelines relative to peer REBs. This performance is achieved while HSREB concurrently manages a substantial volume of non-CTO local ethics reviews for Western and affiliated institutions outside the CTO model, suggesting that this is not about limited workload but rather efficiency being built into day-to-day operations.

Table 2. HSREB Submission by Department

Department	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Arts & Humanities - Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies			2		
Arts & Humanities - Philosophy	1		1	4	
Education	3	1	6	5	4
Engineering - Electrical and Computer Engineering	2	1	1	2	2
Engineering - Mechanical and Materials Engineering	6	7	7	10	3
Information & Media Studies - Media Studies	1				
Information & Media Studies - Media, Information & Technoculture			1		
Information & Media Studies - Health Information Sciences				3	
Health Sciences - Brescia Food & Nutritional Science	3	2	5	3	4
Health Sciences - CSD	11	11	13	17	16
Health Sciences - Health & Rehabilitation Sciences	17	21	18	23	18
Health Sciences - Health Studies	4	13	22	23	21
Health Sciences - Kinesiology	30	31	28	22	30
Health Sciences - Nursing	13	16	15	27	28
Health Sciences - Occupational Therapy	7	4	8	8	3
Health Sciences - Physical Therapy	22	31	42	27	47
Law - JD Program	1				
Ivey	1	2	4	4	1
Schulich - Anatomy & Cell Biology	2		5	5	11
Schulich - Anesthesia & Perioperative Medicine	14	17	16	12	15
Schulich - Biochemistry	3	4	4	5	1
Schulich - Clinical Neurological Sciences	51	59	39	37	35
Schulich - Dentistry	14	15	7	11	11
Schulich - Epidemiology & Biostatistics	10	10	6	5	8
Schulich - Family Medicine	24	30	22	33	22
Schulich - Medical Biophysics	3	9	13	11	18
Schulich - Medical Imaging	9	15	14	12	12
Schulich - Medicine	161	105	159	139	159
Schulich - Microbiology and Immunology	2	9	11	11	4
Schulich - Obstetrics & Gynaecology	11	11	6	8	6
Schulich - Oncology	24	30	25	31	26
Schulich - Ophthalmology	10	11	12	10	15
Schulich - Otolaryngology	28	16	17	29	18
Schulich - Paediatrics	90	76	70	60	75
Schulich - Pathology & Laboratory Medicine	19	9	6	7	22
Schulich - Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation	10	8	5	11	6
Schulich - Physiology and Pharmacology	8	5	1	3	3
Schulich - Psychiatry	27	17	18	16	26
Schulich - Surgery	140	110	95	109	99
Science - Computer Science	1	4	1	4	3
Science - Physics and Astronomy	1	1			
Science - Biology					1
Science - Chemistry	1		1	1	1
Science - Earth Science					
Science - Statistical and Actuarial Science	1	1			
Social Science - Anthropology	3		1	1	2
Social Science - Geography	1				
Social Science - DAN		1	1	1	
Social Science - Psychology	13	9	10	14	8
Social Science - Sociology				1	4
No Affiliation (Lawson exception)	6	5	7	4	6

Table 3. NMREB Submission by Department

Department	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Arts & Humanities - Centre for Theory & Criticism				1	
Arts & Humanities - English	2	3	1	2	2
Arts & Humanities - French Studies	3	1			
Arts & Humanities - Linguistics Program		3	4	1	2
Arts & Humanities - Modern Languages & Literature	7	6	4	7	4
Arts & Humanities - Philosophy	1	1			
Arts & Humanities - Visual Arts	1		2	3	
Arts & Humanities - Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies	2	3	4	4	2
Arts & Humanities - Centre for Theory	9				
Brescia - School of Behavioural & Social Sciences				7	2
Brescia - School of Food and Nutrition			3	5	
Music	9	11	11	5	12
Education	66	57	61	54	59
Engineering - Chemical and Biochemical Engineering			2	1	1
Engineering - Mechanical and Materials Engineering					1
Engineering - Electrical		1	1		3
Information & Media Studies - Health Information Sciences		1	1		1
Information & Media Studies - Journalism		1		2	1
Information & Media Studies - Library and Information Science	6	3	6	7	4
Information & Media Studies - Media Studies	8	12	2	11	7
Information & Media Studies - Media, Information & Technoculture	2	2		2	2
Health Sciences - CSD	2	2	2	3	3
Health Sciences - Health & Rehabilitation Sciences	3	3	2	3	2
Health Sciences - Health Studies	12	12	10	8	11
Health Sciences - Kinesiology	22	15	8	17	12
Health Sciences - Nursing	15	10	10	4	10
Health Sciences - Occupational Therapy	6	6	15	6	15
Health Sciences - Physical Therapy			2		2
Law - IPIT				1	
Law - JD Program	1	5	2	2	
N/A	5	2	1	6	1
Ivey	35	37	35	39	37
Schulich - Anesthesia & Perioperative Medicine					
Schulich - Anatomy & Cell Biology	3	2	6	4	8
Schulich - Biochemistry	1				
Schulich - Epidemiology & Biostatistics	2		1	1	3
Schulich - Dentistry	1	1		4	1
Schulich - Family Medicine	1			2	
Schulich - Medicine			3		3
Schulich - Paediatrics	2	1	1	1	
Schulich - Physiology & Pharmacology	6	7	9	8	8
Schulich - Otolaryngology					
Schulich - Oncology		1			1
Schulich - Ophthalmology			1		
Schulich - Pathology & Laboratory Medicine	3	3	7	2	2
Schulich - Psychiatry		4	2		1
Schulich - Surgery			1	2	
Science - Applied Mathematics		1			
Science - Biology			1	2	2
Science - Computer Science	3	1	3	3	6
Science - Chemistry		3	2	1	1
Science - Earth Science				1	1
Science - Physics and Astronomy					1
Science - Statistical and Actuarial Science	3		3	1	6
Social Science - Anthropology	18	9	5	12	11
Social Science - CAM					
Social Science - DAN	18	19	23	22	21
Social Science - Economics		2	1	1	1
Social Science - Indigenous Studies			1	1	
Social Science - Geography	11	24	19	20	17
Social Science - History	4	3	3	3	1
Social Science - Migration and Ethnic Relations	3	2	2	2	
Social Science - Political Science	12	7	9	8	9
Social Science - Psychology	73	73	52	72	58
Social Science - Sociology	5	12	17	16	11
Western Libraries	3	2	1	1	2