



**CONFLICT OF INTEREST  
IN HEALTH RESEARCH**

# **CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN HEALTH RESEARCH**

**TOOLKIT**

**Introduction and Brief Overview**

Presentation by Dr Amina Jakoet Saban

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# Getting the **green light** for ethical health research

A toolkit to identify, address,  
manage and mitigate  
conflicts of interest

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**FUNDER: IDRC**

## AIM OF TOOLKIT

To provide:

Guidelines to  
identify and  
manage Cols in  
health research


Tools and  
mechanisms to  
strengthen  
institutional  
capacity to  
address Cols



# TOOLKIT TARGET AUDIENCE

Mainly staff of RECs and SGCs in SSA

But, can be used by others/elsewhere  
engaged in health research



## **TOOLKIT IMPORTANCE**

To protect integrity of health research from CoIs

To ensure researcher independence

To preserve the spirit and purpose of science

# TOOLKIT GOALS

1

Increase awareness  
of Col in health  
research

2

Provide access to  
resources to  
manage Col

3

Build/increase  
capacity to address  
Col

# WHY FOCUS ON RECs and SGCs?



These institutions are pivotal in scientific research process



RECs review/assess research protocols, SGCs manage funding



Can determine policies for research engagements and partnerships



Can preserve research integrity and partnership equity



# TOOLKIT SOURCES



1. Project experiences  
and findings



2. Literature



3. Expert opinion



4. Other toolkits

# TOOLKIT STRUCTURE

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Intuitively logical

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**Introduction**

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**Context**

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**Funding sources**

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**Assessment process**

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Step 1: Assess risk of potential internal conflicts of interest

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Step 2: Assess risk of potential external conflicts of interest

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Step 3: Assess for conflicts of interest in the research process

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**Governance processes**

Each section contains a table with strategies for management.  
The tables use a traffic light system, with



**Prohibit**



**Disclose and manage**



**Resolve/mitigate**

Throughout the toolkit icons are used to indicate:



**Definition**



**Case study**



**Checklist**

We have also added resources with links for easy access.






Getting the  
**green light**  
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health  
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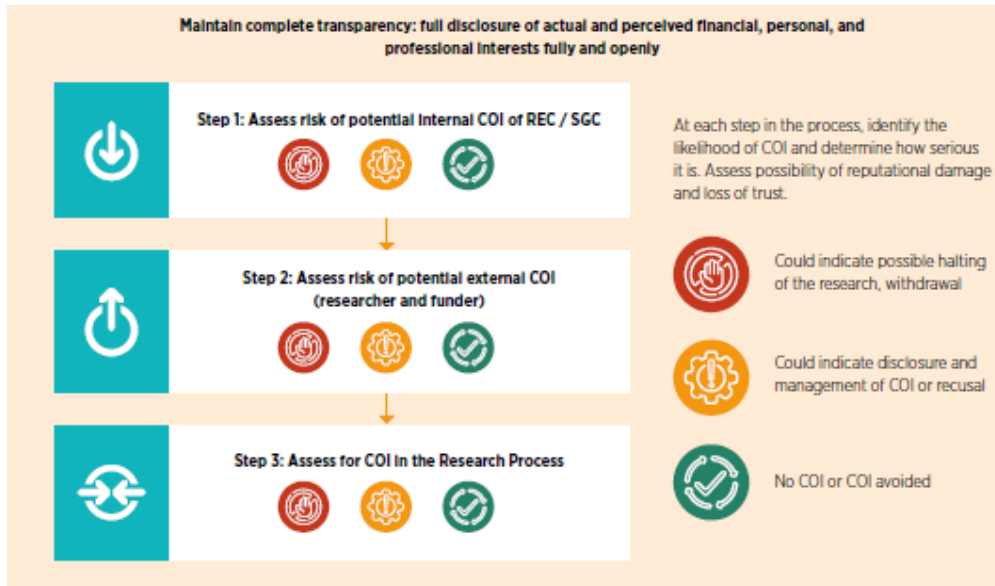
# Toolkit: more details

<https://health.uct.ac.za/school-public-health/conflict-interest-health-research>

- Definitions
- Case examples
- A guide to the assessment process




Red Light 	Amber light 	Green Light 
Moral certainty – No go	Moral uncertainty – make an assessment	Moral Certainty – ok to go
Funding from organisations whose products are health harming; and have interest in outcome.	May have interest in outcome but no financial benefit; or funding topic unrelated to its business	funder has no interest in the study outcome and does not produce health harming commodities

# Assessment – is there any internal COI?pg17/18



- Will anyone on the REC / SGC **benefit financially** from the research or from having the research protocol approved or rejected?
- Is anyone on the REC / SGC associated in any way with the funder or research community?
- Is anyone on the REC / SGC **associated with a third party** (e.g. family member) who stands to benefit financially from having the research proposal approved/rejected and/or having the research conducted/postponed/cancelled?
- Is anyone on the REC / SGC **engaged in research similar to**, or associated with, the content of the research protocol?
- Does anyone on the REC / SGC **serve as a consultant for an organisation involved in the funding or implementation of the proposed research?**
- Will anyone on the REC / SGC **be associated with the drafting and/or dissemination of findings and outputs of the research?**

## Management actions

	Screen members; exclude if employment conflict
	Disclosure, recusal, whistleblower mechanism
	Policies to protect REC independence

# Assessment – is there any external COI?pg20

## **Financial:**

- *Will a third party) benefit financially?*
- *Will anyone avoid a financial loss as a result?*
- *In whose best interest is the research/ contract?*

## **Material:**

- *Is research quality compromised to favour anyone?*
- *Is process to select the preferred product provider fair?*
- *Are the research funder's products known to produce harm?*

## **Opportunity:**

- *Why is a particular community selected?*
- *How were the collaborating partners / funders selected?*
- *What process was followed in selecting research staff?*

## **Outcomes and Outputs:**

- *Who will manage the data analysis?*
- *Who will draft outputs (manuscripts, policy briefs, media statements)?*
- *Will researchers retain independence in the conduct, analysis and write up?*

## Management actions



Disqualify from part / all  
Prohibit problematic sponsor relationships  
Proscribe any funder veto on publication



Disclosure, recusal, whistleblower mechanism



Independent committees to review  
Training to researchers to identify and avoid accepting COI

# Assessment – is there COI in the research process? pg22

- *Is the research question appropriate to the problem?*
- *Is the design likely to give only one result?*
- *Are all the data authentic and accessible?*
- *Does the researcher hold a position in the enterprise likely to benefit?*
- *Does the cost-benefit ratio consider harms or benefits to the broader community and the health system?*
- *Have key stakeholders been deliberately overlooked?*

## Management actions



Exclude funder from participating in study design or write-up  
Exclude researchers failing to follow COI SOPs  
Disciplinary procedures where indicated.



Disclosure to participants; conference audiences; regular reporting by researcher; monitoring by REC; extend to journals in their review process



Independent committees to monitor study; contract must ensure access to anonymised data; capacitate junior researcher(s)



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# TOOLKIT: PERTINENT PAGES

Page 9: Actual/Perceived/Outcome-  
based COI

Page 14: Managing Funding Sources

Page 17: Checklist to Identify COI

Page 18: Internal COI

Page 20: External COI

Page 24: Governance and Policies

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# SOME RESOURCES

Toolkit and online course on COI at <https://health.uct.ac.za/school-public-health/conflict-interest-health-research>

Governance, Ethics and Conflict of Interest in Public Health Network (GECI-PH) at <https://www.aub.edu.lb/fhs/Pages/GECI.aspx>.

WHO: Safeguarding against possible conflicts of interest in nutrition programmes at [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/EB142/B142\\_23-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB142/B142_23-en.pdf)

Attitudes and practices of public health academics towards research funding from for-profit organizations: cross-sectional survey. International Journal of Public Health 2020;65(7):1133-1145 at <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s00038-020-01416-0.pdf>

A call to advance and translate research into policy on governance, ethics, and conflicts of interest in public health: the GECI-PH network. Global Health. 2021 Jan 25;17(1):16 at <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-021-00660-0>

Contact [asaban@mweb.co.za](mailto:asaban@mweb.co.za) for more information

# NEXT STEPS



**PRACTICAL USE OF THE  
TOOLKIT**



**SKETCHED SCENARIOS/  
INTERACTIVE SESSION**