

## Research Ethics Bulletin #4: SECONDARY USE (UPDATE)

Secondary use refers to the use in research of information originally collected for a purpose other than the current research purpose. Common examples are social science or health survey datasets that are collected for specific research or statistical purposes, but then re-used to answer other research questions. Examples include health care records, school records, biological specimens, vital statistics registries or unemployment records, all of which are originally created or collected for therapeutic, educational or administrative purposes, but which may be sought later for use in research.

Reasons to conduct secondary analyses of data include: avoidance of duplication in primary collection and the associated reduction of burdens on participants; corroboration or criticism of the conclusions of the original project; comparison of change in a research sample over time; application of new tests of hypotheses that were not available at the time of original data collection; and confirmation that the data are authentic.

### Does secondary use research require ethics review?

Yes, researchers must seek REB review and approval prior to data collection through secondary use research UNLESS the research relies exclusively on secondary use of anonymous information, or anonymous human biological materials, so long as the process of data linkage or recording or dissemination of results does not generate identifiable information (Article 2.4 of TCPS2).

### What ethics application form do I complete for REB review of secondary use?

**Secondary use of data/Chart audit form** is to be used for retrospective data collection only. In order for a study to be considered retrospective, the end date of data collection must be before the date of submission to the REB. Therefore, this research will not involve collecting any information prospectively.

If prospective data collection is involved (i.e. the end date of data collection exceeds the date of submission to the REB), then the **General Application form** must be completed.

### Do I need to obtain consent for secondary use?

- If consent is not being obtained for secondary use of identifiable information, TCPS2 Article 5.5A criteria (a)-(f) must be satisfied.
- If consent is not being obtained for secondary use of identifiable human biological materials, TCPS2 Article 12.3 criteria (a)-(f) must be satisfied.
- Researchers shall seek REB review, but are not required to seek participant consent, for research that relies exclusively on the secondary use of non-identifiable information or biological materials (TCPS2 Articles 5.5B and 12.3B, respectively).

Privacy concerns and questions about the need to seek consent arise, however, when information provided for secondary use in research can be linked to individuals, and when the possibility exists that individuals can be identified in published reports, or through data linkage. The onus is on the researcher to establish to the satisfaction of the REB that, in the context of the proposed research, the information or human biological materials to be used can be considered non-identifiable for all practical purposes.

For further information on secondary use and the concepts of identifiability please refer to Research Ethics Bulletins #3 and 4 from 2015, available on the HREA website: [www.hrea.ca](http://www.hrea.ca).