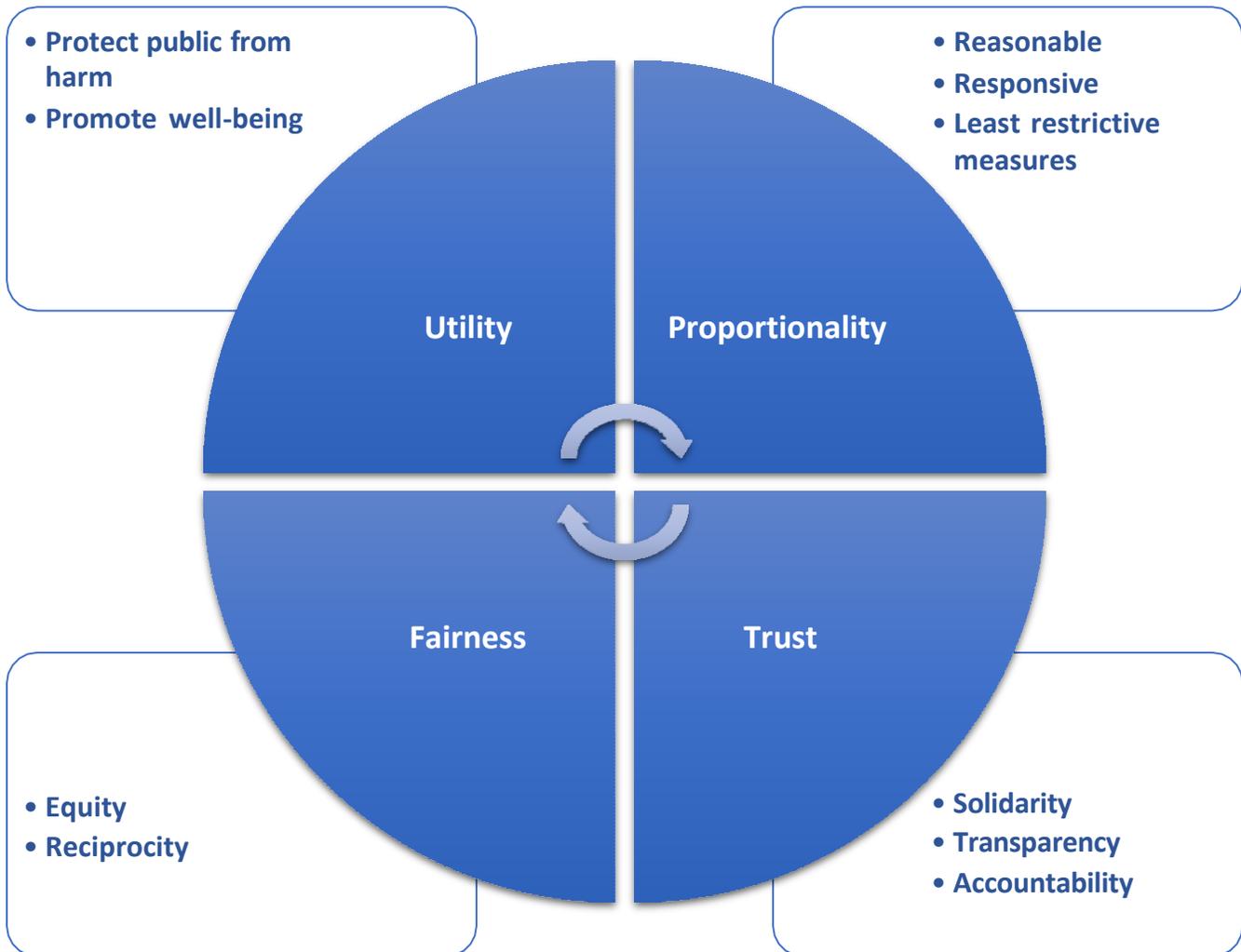


Ethical Framework for Pandemic Response

Created by the Public Health Ethics Working Group – Ottawa Public Health

1. Guiding Principles that Justify Public Health Policies



2. Goals of the Pandemic Response



a) Protect and Promote Public Health

- i. Reduce overall morbidity and mortality by implementing restrictions to reduce transmission
- ii. Protect health system capacity to respond to pandemic surge, inclusive of all health sectors
- iii. Restore function of the health system to provide standard of care, inclusive of all health sectors
- iv. Ensure vulnerable populations continue to have access to necessary health services despite “ramping down” in health sector that will be done to create capacity
- v. Advocate for resources to protect those who remain at elevated level of risk despite restrictions (essential workers, high risk populations, vulnerable populations)
- vi. Distribute benefits and burdens equitably across the population – meaning those who are the least advantaged should be prioritized for protection from the pandemic, as well as protection from direct or indirect harms associated with restrictions

- vii. Identify and propose remedies to redress inequities and structural deficiencies that impact disadvantaged populations and that compromise the public health response
- viii. Identify emerging harms associated with the pandemic response, with a focus on already vulnerable populations whose disadvantage may be exacerbated

b) Foster Public Trust and Engagement

- i. Ensure clear, continuous and transparent communication about the status of existing measures, including restrictions
- ii. Remain transparent about uncertainties that challenge informed decision-making
- iii. Seek input from stakeholders, with priority on those who are most likely to be further or newly disadvantaged from the pandemic response
- iv. Ensure information base for decisions is high quality, and includes consideration of epistemic justice, including perspectives and information from those who have less access to power and platforms
- v. Commit to robust data-gathering, analysis and critical reflection to inform decision-making

c) Restore and Maintain Social and Economic Functioning

- i. Ensure restrictions are proportionate and do not unnecessarily disrupt societal functions, including important economic activities, education, and social services
- ii. Maintain proportionality and foster trust by identifying reasonable measures that would signal opportunities to relax restrictions

d) Proportionate Restrictions on Civil Liberties

- i. Ensure restrictions on civil liberties are rationally connected to the policy objective, are the least restrictive means available, and are proportionate to the objectives
- ii. Ensure privacy is respected to the greatest extent possible when conducting surveillance, including monitoring of digital information to identify movement
- iii. Prioritize public education regarding restrictions. Enforcement should be used judiciously and with appropriate oversight to maintain civil liberties

3. Justificatory Conditions for Relaxing Public Health Restrictions

While the same guiding principles should be used to justify relaxation of restrictions, these decisions may need to be rendered under less certain and predictable conditions and will necessitate more ethically contentious tradeoffs between harms and benefits. This may challenge solidarity. As such, further justificatory conditions can be articulated to support decision-makers. While these conditions do not provide operational guidance, they can serve as a threshold test for an ethically credible response.



Authorship

This framework was developed by the Public Health Ethics Working Group, which was created to support Ottawa Public Health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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