5. Setting and shifting norms and values

Governance for UHC calls for strengthening incorporation of health ethics in all aspects of health policy and practice. The core principles of health ethics – including respect for people, beneficence, justice, utility and solidarity – underpin the essential attributes of UHC.

National ethics committees may be established by governments to ensure robust assessment of issues and to identify ethical solutions. The Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting for National Ethics/Bioethics Committees was convened in October 2017 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, with representatives of national ethics committees and ministries of health from 21 Member States.

A health ethics framework helps to provide systematic analysis and evidence-based application of ethical principles. Policy-makers often must balance public good against individual liberty, health promotion and equity, the implications of public health surveillance, and public accountability. Researchers, meanwhile, must consider the value of their research for participating communities, how participants are chosen, and how the rights and well-being of participants are protected. Professionals must respect rules: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and equitable access to services.

Despite individual country differences, participants at the regional meeting agreed that countries need to strengthen governance arrangements for health ethics and integrate ethics training in curricula for public health, clinical care and research. This would ensure ethical norms and values among health professionals, researchers and policy-makers.

WHO has started to align and optimize national health research ethics review processes across Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.