

Introduction to Health Policy and Ethics

Introduction to Health Policy and Ethics
Key concepts, frameworks, and practical implications

1. What Is Health Policy?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A set of decisions, plans, and actions undertaken to achieve specific health care goals within a society.
Scope	Includes financing, organization, delivery, regulation, and evaluation of health services.
Levels	- Global (e.g., WHO resolutions) - National (legislation, national health insurance) - Regional/Local (state Medicaid programs, city health departments)
Stakeholders	Government agencies, insurers, providers, patients, NGOs, industry, academia.

Core Functions of Health Policy

1. **Resource Allocation** – Determining who gets what services and how much funding is available.
 2. **Regulation & Standards** – Licensing, quality assurance, safety standards, and public health mandates.
 3. **Access & Equity** – Removing barriers (financial, geographic, cultural) to ensure fair use of services.
 4. **Population Health Improvement** – Preventive programs, health promotion, disease surveillance.
-

2. Foundations of Health Ethics

Principle	Core Idea	Typical Application
Beneficence	Act in the best interest of patients and the public.	Preventive screening programs.

Introduction to Health Policy and Ethics

Principle	Core Idea	Typical Application
Non-maleficence	"Do no harm."	Safe medication practices, infection control.
Autonomy	Respect individuals' right to make informed choices.	Informed consent, advance directives.
Justice	Fair distribution of benefits and burdens.	Allocation of scarce resources (e.g., organ transplants).
Respect for Persons	Treat individuals with dignity; protect vulnerable groups.	Policies for children, prisoners, or cognitively impaired patients.

Ethical Theories Frequently Cited

- **Utilitarianism** – Maximize overall health benefit (e.g., cost-effectiveness analysis).
- **Deontology** – Follow moral duties and rights regardless of outcomes (e.g., confidentiality).
- **Principlism** – Combines the four main principles above; widely used in clinical ethics.
- **Virtue Ethics** – Emphasizes moral character of health professionals (e.g., compassion, integrity).

3. Intersection of Policy and Ethics

Policy Issue	Ethical Dimension	Illustrative Question
Universal Health Coverage (UHC)	Justice & equity	How should limited funds be distributed to achieve the greatest health impact?
Vaccination mandates	Autonomy vs. public good	When can the state override personal refusal to protect herd immunity?
Pricing of pharmaceuticals	Beneficence & justice	Should life-saving drugs be priced for profit or subsidized for access?
Data sharing & health informatics	Privacy, confidentiality	How to balance research benefits with patient data protection?
End-of-life care policies	Autonomy, beneficence	What safeguards ensure patient wishes are honored while avoiding overtreatment?

Introduction to Health Policy and Ethics

4. Policy?Making Process (Step?by?Step)

1. Problem Identification

- Epidemiologic data, stakeholder reports, health outcomes gaps.

2. Agenda Setting

- Political will, media attention, advocacy pressure.

3. Policy Formulation

- Draft legislation, regulations, or programs; incorporate evidence & ethical analysis.

4. Decision?Making