

Journal of Indigenous HIV Research (JIHR): Policies and Responsibilities of Members of the JIHR Peer Review Board

The following types of submissions to the JIHR are peer reviewed: Articles (Research & Development, CBR in the Indigenous community, Ethics, Professional Development, and Dissemination), Student papers and International research that contains a Canadian component. Please see the JIHR Policies <http://www.ahacentre.ca/policies--forms.html> for full description of accepted submissions.

The following types of submissions are not usually peer-reviewed: Correspondence, Letters, Stories, Reviews, and Commentary. Nevertheless, articles published in these sections, particularly if they present technical information, may be peer-reviewed at the JIHR's discretion.

For questions about the journal and its policies not addressed here, or for questions about a specific manuscript, referees can contact the Managing Editors directly: Marni Amirault (marnia@caan.ca) or Sherri Pooyak (sherrip@caan.ca).

1. General Role of the Peer Review Board

The primary role of the Peer Review Board is to evaluate submissions to the JIHR for annual publication, to rate them so that they may be ranked in order of priority and to recommend the successful submissions. CAAN will rarely depart from the priority rating recommendation of the Board.

Board members are asked to flag submissions with special concerns, for example, ethical issues, eligibility, compatibility with the JIHR policies and CAAN's priorities, etc. Such concerns, however, should not prevent a Board member from evaluating the merit of a submission and choosing to make recommendations for corrective action. These concerns should be flagged and will be taken into account when making a final decision on whether to include the submission.

2. Confidentiality

All documents and information provided for the purpose of peer review by the JIHR and any discussion concerning them must be treated as strictly confidential and must not be used for any purpose beyond that for which they are intended. All materials related to the review process must be stored in a secure manner to prevent unauthorized access. They must be transmitted using secure carriers and technologies. When documentation is no longer required, it must be destroyed using a secure method such as file deletion, shredding or returning materials to CAAN for destruction. All inquiries received by members of the Peer Review Board concerning the review of any submission should be referred to the Managing Editors.

3. Conflict of Interest

Full Conflict of Interest Policies can be downloaded from: <http://www.ahacentre.ca/policies--forms.html>

For the purposes of this statement, a Conflict of Interest is a conflict between a person's duties and responsibilities regarding the review process, and that person's private, professional, business or public interests.

Conflict of interest may occur if reviewers:

- Are from the same immediate institution or company as the primary author;
- Are currently co-authoring other materials or working with the author in a collaboration or publication;
- Are a professional associate* of the author;
- Are a close friend or relative of the author;
- Have had long-standing professional/personal differences with the author;
- Are a salaried employee or are negotiating employment with the institution of the author, except in multi-component organizations in which the components are sufficiently independent;
- Have received or could receive direct financial benefit of any amount, from the organization/institution referenced in the article or from the author.

* (professional associate is defined as any colleague, scientific mentor, supervisor or student with whom the reviewer is conducting research or other professional activities at the time of the review.)

4. Selecting Peer Reviewers

Reviewer selection is critical to the peer review process. We base our choice on many factors, including First Nation, Inuit and Métis representation, regional perspectives, expertise, reputation, and specific community recommendations.

We check with potential peer reviewers before sending them manuscripts to review. Reviewers should bear in mind that these messages contain confidential information, which should be treated as such.

5. The peer-review system

It is CAAN's experience that the peer-review process is essential to the publication process and serves to improve the manuscripts we publish. Not only does peer-review provide an independent assessment of the importance and technical accuracy of the results described, but the feedback from reviewers conveyed to authors frequently results in manuscripts being refined so that they are more accessible to readers.

The JIHR is appreciative of its peer-reviewers; it is only by collaboration with our reviewers that we can ensure that the materials we publish are among the most important in the field. We appreciate the time that reviewers devote to assessing the materials we send them, which in turn, ensures that JIHR publishes only material of the very highest quality. We thank our reviewers for their commitment to our publication process.

All submissions to the JIHR are sent for blind peer-review by members of the Peer Review Board. Authors are welcome to suggest suitable independent reviewers and may also request that CAAN excludes one or two individuals or organizations if there is a specific, declared conflict of interest.

As a condition of agreeing to review materials, all reviewers agree to keep JIHR manuscripts confidential, and not to redistribute them without permission from CAAN. If a reviewer seeks advice from colleagues while assessing a manuscript, he or she ensures that confidentiality is maintained and that the names of any such colleagues are provided to CAAN with the final report. By this and other means, CAAN attempts to keep the content of all submissions confidential until the publication date. Although CAAN goes to every effort to ensure reviewers honour their commitment to ensure confidentiality, it is not responsible for the conduct of reviewers.

Reviewers should be aware that it is CAAN's policy to list their names as members of the Peer Review Board. Authors will receive summary feedback from the Board as a whole, individuals will not be identified. Frank comments about the scientific content of submitted manuscripts is strongly encouraged however, CAAN requests reviewers refrain from unnecessarily personally negative comments about submitted manuscripts.

6. Criteria for publication

The JIHR values all submissions therefore; we ask reviewers to keep in mind that every paper accepted could mean that another good paper may be rejected. To be published in the JIHR, a paper should meet five general criteria:

- Demonstrates the implementation of Chapter 9 of the TriCouncil Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), OCAP™ (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession), the Six Principles of Métis Health Research, Inuit Qaujimanituqangit (IQ) and/or other locally enforced protocols that are grounded in CBR in the Indigenous community in Canada as appropriate;
- Provides strong evidence for its conclusions;
- Generates novel information;
- Be of importance and relevance to the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS movement in Canada; and
- Be of interest to the broad audience of the JIHR and researchers in other disciplines.

In general, to be acceptable, a paper should represent an advance in understanding likely to influence thinking in the field and motivate action.

7. Access to the literature

If a reviewer does not have access to any published paper that is necessary for evaluation of a submitted manuscript, CAAN will supply the reviewer with a copy. Under these circumstances, the reviewer should send the publication reference of the paper required to the person who sent them the paper to review. CAAN will obtain the paper, and send it to the reviewer.

8. The review process

All submitted manuscripts received by the deadline date are reviewed by CAAN staff. Late submissions are rarely considered. To save authors and reviewers time, only those papers that seem most likely to meet our editorial criteria are sent for formal review. Those papers judged by the Managing Editors to be of insufficient general interest or otherwise inappropriate are rejected promptly without external review (although these decisions may be based on informal advice from experts in the field).

Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal, blind peer-review. Based on the reviewers' advice there are several possibilities for the submission:

- **Accept**, with or without editorial revisions
- Invite the authors to **revise their manuscript** to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached
- Reject, but indicate to the authors that **further work might justify a re-submission**
- **Reject outright**, typically on grounds of lack of relevance or major technical and/or interpretational problems.

Reviewers are welcome to recommend a course of action, but they should bear in mind that other reviewers may have different technical expertise and/or views, and a decision may be based on conflicting advice. The most useful review reports, therefore, provide information upon which a decision should be based. Setting out the arguments for and against publication is often as helpful as a direct recommendation one way or the other.

Reviewers will meet via teleconference, to discuss recommendations and decide by consensus which submissions will be published. Editorial decisions are not solely a matter of counting votes or numerical rank assessments. Every effort will be made to consider the strength of the arguments raised by each reviewer and by the authors, and we may also consider other information not available to either party. The primary responsibilities of the JIHR is to our readers and to the scientific community at large, and in deciding how best to serve them, we must weigh the claims of each paper against the others also under consideration.

CAAN tries to ensure a maximum load for a Peer Review Board meeting. No more than 10 submissions will be reviewed at one time for a conference call. Should upwards of 20 submissions be received, considerations will be made for a 1 day in-person meeting, provided funds are available. No member of the Peer Review Board will be asked to review more than 10 submissions.

We may return to reviewers for further advice, particularly in cases where reviewers disagree with each other, or where the authors believe they have been misunderstood on points of fact. We therefore ask that reviewers should be willing to provide follow-up advice as requested. We

are very aware, however, that reviewers have multiple demands on their time, so we try to keep consultation to the minimum we judge necessary to provide a fair hearing for the authors.

When reviewers agree to review a paper, we consider this a commitment to review subsequent revisions. However, CAAN will not send resubmitted papers to the reviewers if it seems that the authors have not made a serious attempt to address the reviewers' criticisms.

We take reviewers' criticisms very seriously; we are very reluctant to disregard technical criticisms. In cases where one reviewer alone opposes publication, we may consult with the other reviewers as to whether s/he is applying an unduly critical standard.

9. Writing the review

CAAN aims to support innovative research that makes significant contributions to knowledge, policy development, practice in the field of HIV disease and community mobilization. Evidence of originality, clear thinking and the production of a high-quality publication is sought in preference to elaborations on existing knowledge, lack of focus, or large numbers of less significant papers.

The primary purpose of the review is to provide insight and recommendations regarding which submissions to publish in the JIHR. The review should also instruct the authors on how they can strengthen their paper, if applicable. As far as possible, a negative review should explain to the authors the weaknesses of their manuscript so rejected authors can understand the basis for the decision and see in broad terms what needs to be done to improve the manuscript for publication elsewhere. This is secondary to the other functions, however, and reviewers should not feel obliged to provide detailed, constructive advice to authors of papers that do not meet the criteria for the JIHR.

Confidential comments to the Peer Review Board are welcome, but it is helpful if the main points are stated in the comments for transmission to the authors. The ideal review should consider the following questions:

- Does the paper contribute to a deeper understanding of Indigenous Peoples, HIV and AIDS and related issues?
- Who will be interested in reading the paper, and why?
- What are the major claims of the paper? Are the claims convincing? If not, what further evidence is needed?
- Is there clear evidence of community involvement; consultation, support for the project, benefit from the results?
- Are the claims appropriately discussed in the context of previous literature?
- Is there other information that would strengthen the paper further?
- Would further work improve it? How difficult would this be? Would it take a long time?
- If the manuscript is unacceptable, is the study promising enough to encourage the authors to resubmit? What specific work is needed to make it acceptable?

Other questions for reviewers to consider

We appreciate that reviewers are very busy, and we are very grateful if they can answer the questions in the section above. However, if time is available, it is extremely helpful if reviewers can also advise on the following points:

- Is the manuscript clearly written? If not, how could it be made more clear or accessible?
- Could the manuscript be shortened?
- Should the authors be asked to provide supplementary methods or data on the AHA Centre website? (Such data might include more detail regarding methodology, process utilized for engaging community members or further reading on a specific topic.)
- Have the authors done themselves justice without overselling their claims?
- Have they been fair in their treatment of previous literature?
- Is the statistical analysis of the data sound?
- Are there any special ethical concerns arising from the use of human subjects?

A review form is included as an appendix to these policies.

10. Timing

CAAN is committed to timely editorial decisions and publication, and we believe that an efficient editorial process is a valuable service both to our authors and to the community as a whole. We therefore ask reviewers to respond promptly (normally within 14 days of receiving a manuscript, although this may be either longer or shorter by prior arrangement). A timeframe will be developed with all Peer Review Board members to allow for meeting together to finalize the submissions to be published.

11. Anonymity

CAAN publishes the names of Peer Review Board members however; we do not release reviewers' individual comments to authors or to other reviewers. We ask authors to review the list of members on the Peer Review Board and identify any members they feel may be placed in a position of conflict of interest should they receive a submission even within the blind review process used by the JIHR.

As a matter of policy, we do not suppress reviewers' reports; any comments that were intended for the authors are transmitted, regardless of what we may think of the content. On rare occasions, we may edit a report to remove offensive language or comments that reveal confidential information about other matters. We ask reviewers to avoid statements that may cause needless offence; conversely, we strongly encourage reviewers to state plainly their opinion of a paper. We deplore any attempt by authors to confront reviewers.

12. Ethics

CAAN may seek advice about submitted papers not only from technical reviewers but also on any aspect of a paper that raises concerns. These may include, for example, ethical issues or issues of data or materials access. Very occasionally, concerns may also relate to the societal implications of publishing a paper, including threats to security. In such circumstances, advice

will usually be sought simultaneously with the peer-review process. As in all publishing decisions, the ultimate decision whether to publish is the responsibility of the JIHR.

13. Appeals

If the JIHR declines to publish a paper and does not suggest resubmission, authors are strongly advised to submit their paper for publication elsewhere. If an author wishes to appeal against the JIHR's decision, the appeal must be made in writing, not by telephone, and should be confined to the scientific case for publication. The Editing Managers are unable to assign high priority to consideration of appeals.

Appendix A:

Journal of Indigenous HIV Research (JIHR):
Reviewer Assessment Form



Journal of Indigenous HIV Research (JIHR): Reviewer Assessment Form

Instructions: Please use this form to provide concise feedback for each paper you have been asked to review. Refer to the scale provided at the end of this form for assistance in determining your final score.

Please note: In 2013, expansion of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network's (CAAN) mandate to include a holistic health model became a top priority when discussing HIV, Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted blood-borne infections (STBBIs). CAAN intends to focus its energy on areas such as mental health, aging and chronic diseases associated with HIV and STBBIs from the perspectives of the individual, the family and the community. This will be referred to as the 'expanded mandate' going forward.

Please refer to the **Peer Review Policies – 2018** document for further details.

Submission title:

Final Score /4:

How will this paper benefit the Indigenous HIV and AIDS community?

Relevance to JIHR and CAAN mission, expanded mandate, to HIV and AIDS and Indigenous Peoples, to policy development and supporting action.

Demonstration of implementation of Tri Council Policy Statement with particular attention to Chapter 9

http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

Is direction set by community stakeholders in the development, conduct and dissemination of research?

Ethical issues/concerns?

Is the science in the research sound? Is there an appropriate description of the methods used? What approach was used for analysis? Do the findings match the data presented?
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Comment on the overall academic quality of the content of the paper – is enough information provided to assess the study? Are the conclusions clear and logical? Appropriate references and bibliography?
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Is the paper clearly written – plain language where possible, clear use of terminology, etc.

Summary statement – 100 – 200 word statement (point form is fine) with comments
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Signature: _____ Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Description	Score
Outstanding <ul style="list-style-type: none">Accepted without editorial revisions	4
Very Good <ul style="list-style-type: none">Accept with editorial revisions	3
Acceptable but needs revision <ul style="list-style-type: none">Invite the authors to revise their manuscript to revise their manuscript to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached.	2
Needs major revision <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reject, but indicate to authors that further work might justify a resubmission	1
Rejected <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reject outright, typically on grounds of lack of relevance or major technical and/or interpretational problems.	0