

Community Engagement and Research Ethics

14-16 October 2025



Report

Background

Community engagement in health research is an ethical imperative and a determinant of research excellence. When conducted meaningfully, it ensures that research is not only scientifically sound but also socially relevant, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the needs of the very communities it seeks to serve. In contexts of vulnerability, where historical inequities and resource constraints heighten risks of exploitation, community engagement provides a pathway to restore trust, uphold justice, and build legitimacy.

Yet, despite its acknowledged importance, global and national guidelines on community engagement remain unsettled, with limited clarity on goals, approaches, and evaluation metrics. This gap often results in uneven practices, missed opportunities, and unintended harms.

Addressing this critical need, the **“Workshop on Community Engagement & Research Ethics”** was convened to strengthen capacities in ethical practices and participatory approaches.

Bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and ethicists from across disciplines, the workshop created a platform for interactive learning, critical reflection, and collaborative drafting of actionable outputs. Participants examined case studies, ethical dilemmas, and lived experiences of community engagement to ask: *How can research truly reflect the voices, rights, and priorities of communities?*

The workshop highlighted the need for clarity, context-sensitive strategies, and robust evaluation mechanisms that can guide best practices and ensure replication across diverse health research settings in India and beyond.

Objectives and Principles

- Strengthen ethical community engagement practices among researchers and institutions.
- Enhance collaborative learning between researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities.
- Promote institutional adoption of CE strategies in research.

- Establish measurable indicators for evaluating CE's contribution to ethical goals.

The Workshop was attended by experts from across the disciplines ranging from public health professionals, community workers, ethic committee members, researchers, legal experts, academicians among others. The 3 day workshop held at IIHMR Delhi made the entire campus vibrant with engaging conversation and discussions with a goal to come up with key ethical consideration for engaging community.

This workshop had been about listening, sharing, and recognizing that communities are not research subjects but partners, co-creators, and teachers.

We learned that true engagement is not a one-time gesture, but a relationship built on trust, respect, and shared benefits. Consent is not a signature; it is an ongoing conversation rooted in dignity and inclusion. Engagement must adapt to the needs of vulnerable populations, using flexible models and culturally relevant tools, ensuring no one feels coerced or excluded.

Respect for diversity and lived experience, whether of tribal, marginalized, or gender-diverse communities, must shape our methods and language. Research must give back: through capacity building, services, or returning results in ways communities can use.

We also addressed data ethics. Communities are the true owners of their data, and they deserve transparency, confidentiality, and a voice in how their data is stored and shared. Equally important, conflicts of interest must be openly disclosed and managed with community oversight to safeguard trust.

The central lesson was clear: ethics is not about forms or approvals but about people's dignity, reciprocity, and justice. Ethical research should leave communities stronger and more empowered.

Glimpses from the Program

Inauguration



Panel Discussions



Discussion

