

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre has adopted an organizational ethical decision-making framework, **Accountability for Reasonableness (A4R)**, to aid decision makers throughout the organization set priorities and reach decisions that are legitimate and fair.

What is Accountability for Reasonableness (A4R)?

Accountability for Reasonableness (A4R) is an ethical framework that describes the conditions of a *fair decision-making process*. It focuses on *how* decisions should be made and *why* these decisions are ethical.

There are five conditions that optimize fairness in the process of decision-making:

DECISION MAKING PROMPT TOOL	ACCOUNTABILITY FOR REASONABLENESS (A4R) Accountability for Reasonableness (A4R) is an ethical framework that describes the conditions of a <i>fair decision-making process</i> . It focuses on <i>how</i> decisions should be made and <i>why</i> these decisions are ethical.
R ELEVANCE	Decisions should be made on the basis of reasons (e.g., evidence, principles, arguments, etc.) that ‘fair-minded’ people agree are relevant under the circumstances.
P UBLICITY	The process, decisions, and their rationales should be transparent and accessible to relevant stakeholders.
R EVISION & A PPEALS	There should be opportunities to revisit and revise decisions in light of further evidence or arguments. There should be a mechanism for challenge and dispute resolution.
E MPowerMENT	There should be efforts to minimize power difference in the decision-making context and to optimize effective opportunities for participation.
E NFORCEMENT	There should be either voluntary or public regulation of the process to ensure that the other four conditions are met.

Accountability for Reasonableness (A4R) Action Steps

It is important not just to identify *what* the decision is, but also to provide an explanation of *why* the decision was made. The goal is to make reasonable decisions that are inclusive, transparent, and fair. To do this, you should:

- **Determine** your mandate and the question you are trying to answer as this will establish the type and scope of the answer you get. The goal is to ensure that the group is working on the same problem and asking the right question to solve it.
- **Identify** your stakeholders (those who will be impacted by the decision) and **include** them in decision-making. Stakeholders may be involved as decision-makers or as consultants in decision-making. The aim is to ensure that decision-making includes a broad range of ideas and stakeholder perspectives. Consider who else needs to be consulted for their perspective after a draft decision is reached.
- **Clarify** your decision-making procedure upfront (e.g., identify organizational values and strategic priorities, develop criteria from those values, prioritize the criteria, generate options, judge quality of your different options against those criteria, and select option). Decision-makers and stakeholders alike need to know and understand a) how decisions will be made and b) how and on what basis they can revisit decisions.
- **Provide** a statement of rationale for each decision. It is not enough that a decision is made. Ethical decision-making requires that reasons be given to justify each decision utilizing value-based criteria.
- **Communicate** the decision and its rationale to stakeholders. The key is access to information and this means *effective communication*. Knowing who your stakeholders are will help to identify who best to communicate with them and how (e.g., websites, email, forums, newsletters). Better yet, ask their input on how to develop an effective communication strategy.
- **Revisit and revise** decisions on the basis of new evidence or argument brought forward either through a formal appeals mechanism or through consultation with stakeholders.
- **Evaluate** how successfully the decision-making process met the conditions of 'accountability for reasonableness'. There may be gaps between *what you do* and *what you should be doing*. To close this gap, you need to be able to evaluate your success.
- **Improve** the decision-making process to make it more ethical. The gaps you identify are areas of improvement for subsequent iterations of decision-making. Learning from experience demonstrates that you take seriously our corporate commitment to being publicly accountable and to seeking excellence in how we do business as a health care institution.

From: Gibson, Martin & Singer. *Evidence Economics and Ethics. Healthcare Quarterly Vol. 8, No. 2, 2005.*
Jiwani & Fraser Health Ethics Service. *Good Decisions, 2008.*