

LETHBRIDGE HIV CONNECTION SOCIETY

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

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SECTION 1
INTRODUCTION

Section 1.1 FOREWORD

PURPOSE

The Lethbridge HIV Connection Society (the Agency), the Board of Directors (the Board), and the Executive Director recognize that every employee and volunteer serves an important role in achieving our mission. The following policies are intended as guidelines and references for ensuring an optimal work environment and equitable treatment of all employees, volunteers, and Board members. In hiring and employment practices, the agency conforms to all applicable provincial and federal statutes and regulations. The Agency does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual preference, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, marital or family status.

This manual has been developed as a communication tool for all employees, volunteers, and Board members associated with the Agency by providing a reference of the rules and regulations governing the Agency and an opportunity to inform all employees, volunteers, and Board members as to the benefits and/or privileges that are provided to the employees, volunteers, and Board members.

No set of policies however, comprehensive or specific, can provide a direct response to every kind of situation or problem that might occur in the conduct of day-to-day business. Accordingly, the Agency may change or terminate its plans, policies, and procedures, at any time, with or without notice of these changes. This manual is a general guide to the Agency regulations, policies and benefits; it does not constitute an employment agreement, nor does it confer any special rights or guarantee continued employment. The Board can make changes to this manual at any time.

APPLICATION

These policies apply to all employees, volunteers, and Board members of the Agency, unless stated otherwise.

DISTRIBUTION

This manual will be available to all employees, volunteers, and Board members via the Executive Director. This manual will be distributed to all new employees, volunteers, and Board members as part of the orientation procedure.

HOW TO USE THE MANUAL

This manual should be read entirely so that employees, volunteers, and Board members familiarize themselves with the policies and procedures of the Agency, thus avoiding the unintentional contravention of same.

NEW OR REVISED POLICIES

Policies presented in this manual are conforming to Alberta Statutes and Regulations and to the Employment Standard Code. A copy of the code can be found at www.qp.gov.ab.ca/document_print.cfm

Policies will be reviewed periodically and revised to reflect new or changed circumstances. All employees, volunteers, and Board members will be notified and will receive a copy of all new or revised policies.

Section 1.2

MISSION, VISION AND BELIEF STATEMENTS

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Lethbridge HIV Connection Society is a volunteer-based non-for profit organization that provides leadership in building individual and community capacity to respond to and reduce the harm associated with HIV and Hepatitis C.

VISION STATEMENT:

The Lethbridge HIV Connection Society envisions a healthy community that:

- Respects and embraces diversity, and seeks to uphold the human rights of all members;
- Actively promotes equitable access to resources and supports;
- Provides sustainable, competent, and comprehensive care accessible locally to those in need;
- Is committed to lifelong learning that facilitates the practice of healthy lifestyles;
- Cultivates the capacity to respond to new challenges in a positive and nurturing manner; and
- Is committed to enabling citizens, regardless of their health circumstances, to have the means to live comfortably and with dignity.

BELIEF STATEMENT:

We believe in the development of a compassionate society in which HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C are understood as psycho-social, economic, societal, political and global phenomenon as well as a medical issue.

We believe in a holistic approach to wellness that encompasses physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects characterized by respect for human dignity and diversity.

We believe that our roots are in the community and that we must be accountable to all the diverse communities that we serve by being accessible and responsive to their needs.

We believe in addressing issues surrounding HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C – such as injustice, ignorance, poverty, violence, drug use, racism, sexism and homophobia – through advocacy, education and by creating partnerships in the community.

We believe that people living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C are key stakeholders and significant partners.

We acknowledge and celebrate diversity, and we believe in an individual's ability and opportunity to make informed choices.

PROCEDURES:

The Mission, Vision and Belief Statements will be reviewed as necessary by the Board as part of the management and Agency performance monitoring process.

Section 1.3 CODE OF ETHICS

Date Issued: September 3, 2003

Distribution: All employees, volunteers and Board members

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1.0 **Introduction**

This policy establishes the standards of business practices and personal conduct for the Board members and employees of the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society and provides a practical set of guidelines for their implementation. It also enunciates the general principles of ethical behaviour to which all Board members and staff should adhere as a fundamental part of their duty to members, management and colleagues.

The Lethbridge HIV Connection Society is required to comply with its policies on business conduct. These policies may be summarized in a letter from the Chair, issued from time to time as required.

2.0 **Ethical Behaviour**

Ethical behaviour is a matter of spirit and intent, characterized by the qualities of truthfulness and freedom from deception and fraud. Ethical behaviour requires Board members and employees to act in accordance with principles of honest dealing, respect for justice and constant regard for the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society's good name.

Management must ensure that these principles are clearly enunciated in a manner designed to ensure that employees take them seriously and comply with them. The Board Chair must ensure that these principles are clearly enunciated in a manner designed to ensure that Board members take them seriously and comply with them.

Within the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society, the general principles of individual ethical behaviour include:

- The scrupulous avoidance of deception, fraud and of any behaviour which is or might be seen to be less than honourable in the pursuit of the Agency's Mission;
- Loyalty and honesty in dealings with the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society as employer, above any and all intention to pursue personal gain or advantage;
- Honesty and loyalty in dealing with fellow employees (or fellow Board members);
- Respect for the trust placed in the individual including proper use of the Agency's resources or information;
- Avoidance of behaviour or situations which may reflect badly on the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society while recognizing individual rights and freedoms.

3.0 **Business Practices**

3.1 **Laws and Regulations**

Employees and Board members must at all time observe the laws and regulations of each jurisdiction in which the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society operates or has any contractual association. The use of the funds or assets of the Agency for unlawful or improper purposes is prohibited.

3.2 **Political Contributions**

No political contributions are made by the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society.

3.3 **Relationships with Government Officials, Customers and Suppliers**

The relationship of the Agency and all employees and Board members with others, generally, and persons with whom there is a contractual relationship should at all times be such that neither the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society's integrity nor its reputation would be damaged if the details became a matter of public disclosure.

In this respect, extraneous payments may not be made to or received from such persons regardless of amount and whether directly or indirectly. Furthermore:

- No gifts should be given or received if they are of material value; and
- No entertainment should be extended or received if it could be considered to be extravagant.

In each case having regard to all relevant circumstances, the amount expended on such gifts or entertainment must be properly entered in the accounting records.

Key questions which may help in understanding the ethical aspects of our dealings with others include:

- Do our actions or proposed actions fall comfortably within the Agency's guidelines, the consensus view of what constitutes ethical behaviour and generally accepted concepts of fairness and honesty?
- Might our actions mislead or raise expectations which cannot be fulfilled?
- Would others have any cause for ethical grievance if the full extent of our actions were apparent to them?
- Would we have any sense of ethical grievance if we had been treated similarly?
- Would an impartial observer regard our dealings as fair and honourable?
- Would you be prepared to explain to the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society members at the annual meeting what benefit accrued to them as a direct result of your action?

3.4 **Gifts and Entertainment**

The same general guidelines on the ethical aspects of dealings with others apply equally to the offer and to the acceptance of gifts and entertainment.

Gifts of material value and extravagant entertainment should neither be offered to outside parties, nor accepted from them.

The difficulty lies in the definition of 'material value' or 'extravagant', especially as this will vary depending on the circumstances. Employees and Board members may find it helpful to consider individual cases against the following criteria:

- The gift or entertainment should not be of such value as to constitute a personal enrichment for the recipient;
- It should not be such as to appear excessive, given the full nature of the context, to an objective observer.

If any employee has any doubt about how to act in a particular situation, he/she should seek the advice of a supervisor or manager. Board members should seek the advice of the Board Chair.

Any employee or Board member involved in the falsification of invoices commits an indictable offence which carries a penalty of up to five years imprisonment. It is also a criminal offence to use, with intent to deceive or mislead the Agency, any receipt, account, or other document containing false, erroneous or defective information.

3.5 Contracts

Procurement procedures should reflect ethical business practice in that:

- They should be based on fairness and equality of treatment of tenders;
- They should be set out clearly and unambiguously and be made readily available to tenders;
- They should encompass sufficient recording of negotiations;
- All contracts must be reviewed and signed by the Executive Director or designate.

3.6 Commissions, Fees and Similar Payments

If commissions, consultants' fees, retainers and similar payments are required to be made and can be justified in the normal course of business, the sum paid shall be clearly related to and commensurate with the services to be performed. No payment that is not so related or that could be seen to be an improper inducement shall be made.

3.7 Proper Control and Accounting

Compliance with prescribed controls, accounting systems and rules is required at all times. The accounts must accurately reflect and properly describe the transactions they record. No secret or unrecorded fund of money or other assets is to be established or maintained.

4.0 Personal Conduct

While the Agency fully respects the privacy of employees in the conduct of their personal affairs, each employee owes a duty to the Agency. The following sections attempt to define that duty in the context of situations where doubt may exist.

4.1 **Conflicts of Interest**

Conflicts of interest may arise in a wide range of situations. In some cases, for example where an employee or Board member has an interest in an outside party with which the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society has dealings, the individual must respect the obligation under the contract of employment to put loyalty to the Agency first, to declare the interest and to seek advice from the Executive Director (or, if a Board member, from the Board Chair). In some cases, the conflict may be more apparent than real, in that the individual concerned may have no desire to pursue his/her own interest at Lethbridge HIV Connection Society's expense; nevertheless, both the individual and the Agency are vulnerable to embarrassment if the individual's interest is not disclosed.

4.2 **Outside Activities**

The Agency does not encourage secondary employment. Management will normally approve such employment where it does not:

- Interfere with the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society's prior claim on the individual's time and energy;
- Involve the application of knowledge or experience gained in the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society's service simultaneously to the potential detriment of Lethbridge HIV Connection Society and to the benefit of an outside contractor or employer;
- Involve a conflict of interest.

For these reasons, individual employees should discuss their intentions with the Executive Director before undertaking any engagement in outside activities. Board members should discuss any similar concerns with the Board Chair.

4.3 **Disclosure and Use of Agency Information**

Employees and Board members who have access to confidential information (program, financial, technical and /or fund raising information) about the business of the Agency are in a position of trust. They must look for guidance on the disclosure or use of such information outside the normal requirements of their paid employment or voluntary service; especially, where the dissemination of such information in publications or through the media is contemplated.

The general principles applying to the disclosure or use of information include:

- No disclosure or use of Agency information outside the boundaries of Agency business;
- The conduct of relations with the media should be guided by the Executive Director or designate;
- Amounts or gifts (other than personal tokens of appreciation) received for public speaking, publication or media appearance where Agency information is involved must be returned to the Agency.

4.4 **Misuse of Resources**

The Agency has valuable resources both in the form of tangible assets such as materials, equipment and cash, as well as intangible assets such as programming or fund raising information, computer systems and confidential information. Access to all such assets is made available to employees and Board members in confidence and trust so that they may use them within the limits of their authority for no purpose other than for the business of the Agency.

Employees (and, if applicable, Board members) have a stewardship role with regards to the assets under their control and should not use them for personal gain. Particular areas are photocopying, long distance telephone use, travel advances, use of petty cash, travel reimbursements, office materials, bank accounts and office equipment.

4.5 **Personal Conduct Outside Work**

In general, the Agency has no wish to dictate the personal conduct, morals and lifestyles of individual employees or Board members outside working hours. Nevertheless, it expects employees and Board members to be law-abiding and to conduct their personal affairs as responsible citizens, especially when any indiscreet or antisocial behaviour could affect the individual's performance or reflect badly on the Agency.

4.6 **Use of Computer Systems**

The Agency's computer hardware, networks, databases and software are Agency property and access to them is made available to employees (and, if required, Board members) in trust.

Improper access, manipulation, alteration or other interference with computer systems and the information held on them is a serious offence.

All irregularities must be reported to the Executive Director or the Chair of the Board to protect the integrity of the Agency's systems and the interests of individual users.

Electronic Mail

Employees and Board members must respect the confidentiality of e-mail communications and must not transmit information which would violate the confidentiality of the Agency service users, donors, members, employees, Board members or volunteers.

Confidential materials are not to be sent to non-authorized individuals within or outside the Agency.

E-mail messages are not private and are not necessarily read by the receiver only. If information is critical or confidential, it must be hand delivered or sent via courier rather

than transmitted electronically. Faxing is appropriate when sufficient measures have been taken to protect confidentiality.

Users are to ensure correct e-mail addresses when sending confidential material to an outside or inside recipient.

If printing an e-mail message with confidential aspects, confidentiality of the printed copy must be maintained.

The Agency's employees and volunteers (including Board members) may not transmit messages:

- Which violate or infringe upon any person's right to privacy (e.g. HIV status, Agency user status) or
- Time wasting, abusive, offensive, threatening, or harassing.

Agency employee and volunteer (including Board members) e-mail transmissions must:

- Be professional and
- Be in keeping with other Agency expectations of behaviour.

Agency employees or Board members may not use Agency e-mail:

- For any illegal activity or
- To misrepresent themselves or the Agency.

The Agency may access employee e-mail accounts if deemed necessary and authorized by the Executive Director.

Internet Use

Although occasional uses of the internet for personal reasons are to be expected, employees are expected to keep their use of the internet to work related needs as much as possible. The downloading, viewing and/or storing of obscene, illegal or pornographic material are not allowed.

Agency employees are expected to be responsible and informed in their use of internet facilities.

Users must ensure their conduct reflects appropriately on the reputation of the Agency.

The Executive Director or the Chair of the Board may revoke internet facilities at any time for unacceptable behaviour.

Employees (and volunteers working in the Agency environment) are not to:

- Use internet facilities for unlawful/malicious activities, personal gain or commercial activities such as unsolicited distribution or advertising materials;
- Attempt to break into the Agency's computer systems;
- Misrepresent themselves or the Agency.

5.0 **Non-Compliance**

Non-compliance with the Agency standards on ethical behaviour can range from outright criminal activity, through breaches of specific rules and guidelines, to personal indiscretion and other failures to observe the spirit rather than the strict letter of the Agency policies. It can include errors of omission as well as of deliberate intent.

Management (in conjunction with the Board Chair if necessary) is responsible for:

- Instituting appropriate preventative measures;
- Initiating investigations of any incidents which come to light;
- Dealing with offenders by disciplinary action and/or prosecution.

The following paragraphs offer guidance on the appropriate management response to the circumstances of different cases.

5.1 **Serious Acts by the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society Employees or Board Members Against the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society and/or its Employees or Board Members**

Examples of serious acts would include fraud, the theft or improper use of money and materials, or malicious damage. In such cases, subject to senior management review, the local police should be informed. Consideration should be given to taking disciplinary action, including dismissal, in respect of any misconduct which has been shown to have occurred.

5.2 **Serious Acts Relevant to Employment or Board Involvement with the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society**

This category would include criminal acts (fraud or theft away from the workplace) not directed against the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society or its employees or Board members, but which affect others and might also reflect badly on the good name of the Agency. Management (and the Board Chair, if necessary) will need to decide, after consultation with appropriate professional advisers, whether or not to inform the police; they will also need to consider appropriate disciplinary action, including dismissal if warranted.

5.3 **Breaches of the Lethbridge HIV Connection Society Rules or Guidelines**

These would include acts such as the disclosure of confidential information without authority, or the acceptance of gifts of material value or extravagant entertainment. The disciplinary procedures will be as follows:

- 1st offence – Reminder of applicable code of ethics.
- 2nd offence – A formal warning.
- 3rd offence – Grounds for dismissal.

Management has the right to dismiss an employee on any offence, depending on the flagrancy of the act. Similarly, the Board Chair has the right to dismiss a Board member for similar reasons.

5.4 Improper or Indiscreet Personal Behaviour

The relevance to the Agency, whether at work or elsewhere, of cases of personal indiscretion or socially unacceptable behaviour should be judged by the extent to which those concerned have put themselves in a position where they are vulnerable to pressure that could affect them in their work, or are likely to have prejudiced the good name of the Agency. Management (and the Board Chair, if necessary) will need to use its discretion in deciding on the appropriate course of action, depending on the specific circumstances of the case. An oral or written reprimand may be all that is necessary initially and more severe disciplinary action if the act is repeated or persists.

5.5 Errors of Omission

In cases where the Executive Director is satisfied that an employee (or the Board Chair is satisfied that a Board member) has fallen short of the required standards due to ignorance or poor judgment, for example by neglecting to disclose a minor conflict of interest because it is not apparent to them, the Executive Director (or the Board Chair) should take steps to remind employees (or Board members) of the procedures and their obligations to follow them.

6.0 Conveying the Message

The Agency's reputation rests on both its capacity to formulate policies, and on its ability to ensure that they are effectively applied. It is the responsibility of the Executive Director to ensure that the general principles of ethical conduct and their application in specific contexts are understood and taken seriously by all employees. To achieve this, the Executive Director need to secure the cooperation of employees and to promote positively the Agency's policy and expectations, both by personal example and clear guidance. It is the responsibility of the Board Chair to convey the same message to the Board of Directors.

Employees and Board members should be encouraged to:

- Learn and respect the consensus view of what constitutes ethical behaviour;
- Appreciate the benefits of well-administered ethical standards;
- Understand the possible consequences or implications of the individual's actions from an ethical standpoint;
- Consult with the Executive Director (or the Board Chair, if the inquiry is coming from a Board member) in any case of uncertainty or concern.