

Policy 4.3 Harassment and Cyberbullying

Created: 2023/06/20

Last Revised: XXXX/XX/XX

Corresponding [Procedure 4.3](#)

Related Policies:

[Policy 4.2 Social Media](#)

General

The Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario (the Association, or APHEO) is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and inclusive working environment for all members, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. The Association does not tolerate harassment or cyberbullying in any form and is dedicated to preventing and addressing such behaviors. This policy defines procedures for reporting, addressing, and resolving incidents of harassment, which includes any form of unwanted and offensive behavior conducted through digital platforms. This policy applies to all individuals associated with APHEO, and all methods of communication used to conduct APHEO-related business, whether online or offline, and through virtual, telephone or in-person meetings or written communications.

Definitions

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying refers to any form of harassment or bullying, intentionally or unintentionally, that occurs through use of digital communication tools, such as email, social media, instant messaging, message boards or any other electronic means. It involves using technology to offend, belittle, humiliate, or intimidate an individual or group.

Harassment: Unwelcome conduct, comment, gesture or action that offends, belittles, humiliates, or intimidates an individual or creates an unwelcoming, offensive, intimidating, or hostile work environment. This includes harassment based on an individual's protected characteristics (e.g., race, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, educational background, professional role, or affiliation).

Policy

APHEO strictly prohibits cyberbullying and harassment in any form. We are committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and respectful digital environment for all individuals associated with our organization. All members are expected to adhere to this policy and to treat others with dignity, respect, and professionalism when engaging in any digital communication on behalf of APHEO.

Responsible Executive Committee Lead

President

Prior Revision Dates

N/A

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Procedures

Reporting Incidents:

APHEO Executive Committee members recognize the potential for harassment and will make every reasonable effort to identify all potential sources of harassment to eliminate or minimize these incidents. Any individual who believes they have experienced or witnessed harassment and/or cyberbullying should report the incident promptly. Good faith reports can be made to any member of the Executive Committee. Anonymous reports will also be accepted, but individuals are encouraged to provide their contact information to facilitate the investigation process and sufficient information to allow the Executive Committee to assess the incident. If it is determined that there is enough information provided and an investigation is warranted, an investigation will commence within 14 days of notification. APHEO does not guarantee that an investigation will be conducted for every complaint. An investigation team will investigate and address all incidents within 14 days of notification, and in a manner deemed appropriate for the circumstances.

Confidentiality:

The Association is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of all parties involved in a harassment or cyberbullying complaint to the extent reasonably possible. Information will only be disclosed on a need-to-know basis for the purpose of investigation and resolution. Any information provided about the incident or complaint will be held in confidence, except when it is information necessary to investigate the complaint or incident, to mitigate escalation, to take corrective action, or as required by law.

Investigation Process

Upon receiving a complaint, the Association will promptly conduct an initial assessment to determine the appropriate course of action. This may involve appointing an investigator from the Executive Committee, or establishing an investigation team, composed of a subgroup of the Executive Committee. The investigation will be fair, impartial, and thorough. Any members of the investigation team with a conflict of interest will recuse themselves from the investigation. The investigator(s) will interview the complainant, the accused individual(s), and any relevant witnesses. They may also collect supporting evidence, review documents, and conduct any other necessary steps to gather information.

Findings, Resolution, and Corrective Action:

After completing the investigation, the investigator(s) will present the findings to the APHEO Executive Committee to determine whether harassment or cyberbullying has taken place.

Depending on factors such as the severity of the conduct, the number of past occurrences, and the manner in which similar situations may have been dealt with in the past by the Association, the complaint may be addressed through measures including, but not limited to the following:

informal coaching (non-disciplinary), verbal/written warning, suspension of membership, or termination of membership.

The responses below (both formal and informal) outlined below are intended to be guidelines only. The Executive Committee reserves the right to repeat, omit or skip any step in the process depending on the circumstances and nature of the complaint.

- 1) **Informal counseling** - The Executive Committee will bring the incident to the member's attention, as soon as the facts giving rise to the incident become known. The Executive Committee should reference any policy violations, if applicable. The Executive Committee and the member should discuss the concerns and a corrective action plan, if necessary. The Executive Committee is required to maintain a record of any conversations with the member that occur during the informal counseling process.
- 2) **Verbal or written warning** - Verbal/written warnings are issued after informal counseling has failed to correct a concern; or where the situation warrants corrective action that is more intensive than informal coaching. A verbal/written warning shall contain a full description of the facts giving rise to the warning including the date, time, and place of the incident(s) and any policy violations if applicable. The Executive Committee and the member should discuss the concerns and a corrective action plan, if necessary. The Executive Committee is required to maintain a record of any conversations with the member that occur during the verbal/written warning process.
- 3) **Suspension of membership** - Suspension of membership may occur if verbal/written warning(s) have failed to correct the unacceptable behavior. If circumstances warrant, suspension of membership may also occur, without prior warning. While this step is only used in rare circumstances, the suspension will be of indefinite duration, pending an investigation of the events surrounding the suspension.
- 4) **Termination of membership** - Termination of membership may occur in response to a culminating incident as part of a progressive discipline approach. Termination of membership may also occur in response to a single event or incident, if warranted in the circumstances. A termination of membership, for any reason, must be properly documented and approved, in advance, by the Executive Committee.

Appeals Process:

Both the complainant and the accused individual(s) will have the right to appeal the findings and proposed actions within 14 days of being notified. Appeals should be submitted in writing to executive@apheo.ca, for review by the Executive Committee.

Responsible Executive Committee Lead

President

Prior Revision Dates

N/A