



Association of Ontario Midwives – Code of Ethics

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DRAFT – FOR REVIEW

Preamble

The Association of Ontario Midwives' Code of Ethics outlines the virtues of the profession of midwifery and the ethical commitments and responsibilities of midwives in Ontario. [Virtues](#) refer to the moral characteristics that midwives should demonstrate through their actions. The ethical commitments are at the core of midwifery practice and are represented in the responsibilities of midwives. Registered Midwives are required to abide by all applicable laws and by the professional standards of the College of Midwives of Ontario. Indigenous Midwives are recognized and regulated by their own communities. The Code of Ethics does not duplicate legal, regulatory or Indigenous community requirements but instead provides some guidance on how midwives should act when other guidelines are insufficiently clear or when there is tension regarding how guidelines should be applied. Midwives are expected to put into action the virtues, ethical commitments and responsibilities contained in the Code. There may be certain situations when it feels like different elements of the Code of Ethics are competing and midwives may experience some moral distress as to how to act. The code does not attempt to prescribe how midwives should act; however, in times of particular ethical dilemma, it may be helpful for midwives to look at the responsibilities and commitments as a whole and distill the dilemma to the level of the virtues to determine what action should be taken.

Virtues

One. Integrity

Integrity is demonstrated by maintaining honesty in all interactions and acting based on moral principles irrespective of any challenges presented.

Two. Compassion

Compassion is demonstrated by recognizing vulnerability and suffering and seeking to alleviate it.

Three. Courage

Courage is demonstrated by enacting the Code of Ethics and defending the rights of others, especially in the face of adversity and oppression.

Four. Humility

Humility is demonstrated by engaging in critical self-reflection in an effort to understand one's role and positionality, including social locations which can be enriching or limiting, while acknowledging and respecting the perspectives of others.

Five. Respect

Respect is demonstrated by recognizing the equal and intrinsic worth of all people and treating every person with dignity.

Commitments

One. Justice

- Actively work towards equity within the profession of midwifery and the broader health-care system, in relationships with clients, colleagues, students, and within society.
- Advocate for the universal right to culturally safe reproductive health care services and assist clients in accessing needed services.
- Promote the wellbeing of individuals, communities and populations by striving to improve health outcomes and access to care, reducing health inequities and disparities in access to care and health outcomes, and promoting social accountability¹.
- Honour and respect the right of all to receive health care that is free from discrimination and prejudice. Apply understanding of the cultural and social determinants of health and recognize, and work to eliminate, barriers to reproductive justice that are shaped by multiple oppressions such as [racism](#), ableism, sanism, poverty, heterocisnormativity and colonialism.
- Address racial, religious, cultural, linguistic, ableist, gender, economic, and other inequities within the midwifery profession and broader health system, and support midwives, students, and clients who experience oppression and barriers to access and inclusion.
- Commit to provide culturally safe care to Indigenous clients, by working in partnership with Indigenous organizations and communities, respecting their sovereignty,

¹ In 1995, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined social accountability as “the obligation to direct education, research and service of activities towards addressing the priority health concerns of the community, region and/or nation that they have a mandate to serve”. It was a concept initially applied to medical schools but can be applied to all health care providers.

acknowledging the historical inequities and oppressions that have impacted them and mobilize the reconciliation efforts as identified by the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission report](#).

- Recognize and work towards dismantling the systemic oppression inherent in institutional care for clients that have been traumatized by such institutions, including medical, educational, religious, and other.
- Champion gender equity and support the multiplicity of [gender identities](#), gender expressions and possibilities by making room for and celebrating people of any gender/s. Champion equity for people of all sexual orientations and identities and make room for and celebrate people of all sexual orientations, which includes self-definition of sexual identity, sexual behaviour, and sexual attraction.
- Increase awareness of how disability affects access to care and remove barriers for people with disabilities, and recognize that not all disabilities are visible.

Two. Informed Choice

- Uphold the principle of informed choice and support clients as primary decision-makers in their care.
- Engage in individualized and non-authoritarian decision-making that recognizes clients' values, preferences, and lived experience recognizing the systemic barriers to informed choice.
- Uphold Indigenous clients' rights to [free, prior and informed consent](#).
- Support choice of birth place.
- Advocate for clients' right to make choices, even if those choices are perceived to be non-normative or not acceptable to medical or midwifery colleagues. Recognize clients' right to refuse health care recommendations. Provide care that is free from coercion.

Three. A Strong and Healthy Profession

- Cultivate collaborative, safe, and respectful relationships with other midwives, staff, students, clients and interprofessional colleagues.
- Invest in the wellness and professional development of midwives, and support colleagues to demonstrate and promote those values in their everyday work.

- Support the restoration, renewal and sovereignty of Indigenous midwifery.
- Commit to dismantling racism in midwifery and work towards removing barriers for racialized midwives, staff, students, clients and interprofessional colleagues.
- Commit to cultivating representation within the profession that demonstrates a commitment towards equity and inclusion of those who have been excluded due to systemic barriers such as racism.
- Contribute to the growth of midwifery through clinical education, preceptorship, mentorship, leadership, research, community engagement and advocacy.
- Decline incentives to promote or endorse commercial products or services, such as gifts or payments. Ensure that professional judgment is not influenced by commercial considerations.

Responsibilities

One. Towards clients

- Safeguard the wellbeing of clients by ensuring that no action or omission on the part of the midwife is detrimental to their condition, mental health and/or safety. Recognize when one's ability to practice safely, due to illness, injury, sleep deprivation, or other reasons, is compromised and make alternative arrangements for client care.
- Recognize how trauma and/or oppression impact a client's reasons and motivation for seeking midwifery care. Consider how to uniquely accommodate each client in ways which are equitable and free from bias and discrimination, considering intersectionality to provide trauma-informed and aware care.
- Provide equitable and non-discriminatory care that recognizes and respects the human rights, values, dignity, lived experience and the religious, cultural and personal needs of individuals.
- Respect every clients' right to informed choice and work to support them to engage in the process of informed choice at their comfort level.
- Recognize the relationships and division of power inherent in the health-care system. Avoid abuses of power and challenge power imbalances in the interests of clients.

- Critically examine how preexisting interpersonal relationships might impact the ability to provide clients with objective midwifery care. Maintain professional boundaries in the provision of care.
- Maintain strict client confidentiality by protecting client's personal information, including, but not limited to, the use of electronic communication and social media.
- Recognize when a situation is beyond the midwife's knowledge, skills and/or scope of practice and consult and refer to another provider as appropriate.
- Do not abandon clients in labour or in emergency situations, including when the situation is outside of the midwife's scope, comfort level, or not aligned with a midwife's opinion of the client's choices. Provide the best care possible.
- Provide the best care possible in exceptional circumstances such as emergencies, natural disasters, outbreaks and pandemics.
- Communicate accurately and honestly in a manner that facilitates understanding with clients and others involved in client care. Disclose near-misses, errors or omissions.
- Support evidence-based care.
- Acknowledge, disclose, and address any bias or conflicts of interests that could impact care.
- In the case where a midwife cannot continue to provide care, make reasonable efforts to arrange appropriate alternative care.
- When receiving payments directly from clients, set-up a fair system for payment.
- Refrain from requesting payment for services otherwise paid for by another means.

Two. Towards other midwives, midwifery students, staff and the growth of midwifery

- Value and promote a practice culture that supports and responds effectively to colleagues in need. Support colleagues to seek help in improving their mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- Take responsibility for promoting civil interactions and for denouncing incivility, bullying, harassment, and all forms of discrimination and oppression within midwifery and beyond the profession.
- Recognize one's role in conflict and the significance of human interdependence in midwifery and actively seek to resolve conflicts.

- Recognize and address any potential conflicts of interest stemming from dual or multiple roles.
- When concerns arise with colleagues or students, work to address them directly. If unresolved, protect the public by reporting those who do not meet the standards of practice of the profession to the appropriate authority. Avoid making frivolous or vexatious reports. Seek alternative means to resolve disputes when public safety is not at risk.
- Strive for fairness and equity in business and employment practices. Maintain confidentiality in human resources matters.
- Provide a workplace environment which supports the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of employees, midwives, contractors, students, volunteers, etc.
- Support the rights of all to work in just and healthy conditions. Consider the power dynamics between different members of the practice and work to dismantle them.
- Strive for fairness, and kindness, in the sharing of workload, time off from work, and compensation for work.
- Ensure that funds received that are designated by the funder to compensate midwives for work performed are paid out to midwives as compensation, as intended, without delay and in a transparent manner.
- Expend operational funds as intended in order to provide optimal material support to midwives caring for clients.
- Commit to engaging in both formal and informal education, mentorship, and leadership.
- Support midwifery-led research. When engaged in research, ensure that research is conducted ethically and meets appropriate ethical standards.

Three. Towards Students and other Learners

- Recognize how power differentials between teachers and learners can shape the vulnerability of students, and how preceptors play crucial roles in shaping future midwives. Strive to be a positive role model by exemplifying the virtues of the profession.
- Create and maintain a safe, respectful and supportive environment by recognizing the lived experience of students, addressing systemic oppression such as racism and accommodating students with disabilities to maximize learning potential and professional development for all clinical learners.

- Maintain professional boundaries when working with clinical learners.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality related to learner performance in clinical placements.

Four. Towards the community and society

- Contribute to the wellbeing of society by aiding in improving healthcare services and delivery. Address systemic and structural issues that impact both individual, community, and population health, with particular attention to how individuals and communities are made vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalized by systemic and structural oppressions.
- Promote and protect physiological processes of the childbearing person.
- Promote the judicious use of technology and intervention in the provision of care and in advocacy work.
- Consider the public interest with regards to the stewardship of resources and equitable access to health care resources.
- Use the best evidence available to identify and mitigate risks and minimize harms to persons and to oneself.
- Recognize, share and use one's expertise such as providing care in the community, person-centred care, informed choice, physiological birth, out of hospital birth, unmedicated labour, etc.

Five. Towards oneself

- Recognize oneself as a person of worth, including duties of self-respect and the preservation of integrity.
- Recognize the importance of undertaking self-care for personal mental and physical wellbeing and sustainability.
- Appreciate the relational impact of midwives' health on the health and well-being of clients and community.
- Engage in reflective practice, learning, continuing education and the active maintenance of professional competence throughout one's career.

- Make efforts to critically self-reflect on how one's biases and how they have been and continue to be shaped, and how these biases impact one's practice and inter/intra professional relations. □

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