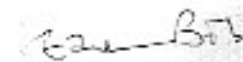


This response was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on *Public Health: ethical issues* between May and September 2006. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Wellcome Trust



Re: Nuffield Council on Bioethics - Public health: ethical issues

The Wellcome Trust welcomes the Nuffield Council's consultation "Public health: ethical issues". The Trust feels that we can add most value by addressing issues relating to public health research at a broad level, rather than responding separately to each of the questions raised in the consultation. We believe that there are a number of issues that should be considered by the Council's working party in its deliberations of the consultation responses, which are outlined below. If you feel it would be useful, we would be happy to meet with you to discuss any of these issues further.

Wellcome Trust support of basic public health research

Public health research is an area of great interest to the Trust. Since 2000 the Trust has spent £200 million on basic research in the areas of vaccination, alcohol, smoking, obesity and food and water supplementation, in the UK and internationally. The Trust is now, through its Population and Public Health stream, seeking to fund excellent research proposals that capitalise on the potential public health benefits of the work already undertaken.

Wellcome Trust support of public health ethics research

The Trust has supported some research that investigates the ethics of public health as part of its Research in Biomedical Ethics grants Scheme. For example, the project of Professor Marteau (King's College London) entitled "Didactic versus informed choice invitations to screening: balancing public health benefits and individual choice" will investigate the relationship between different forms of invitation to screening consultations and the take up rate of screening, as well as intentions to change behaviour to reduce risks following screening appointment. However, public health ethics has not been highlighted as an area for funding within the scheme. At present, the Trust's funding of biomedical ethics is being reviewed and the inclusion of public health ethics as a more explicit area of funding is being considered. We would, therefore, be interested in your views on the need for and the strength of research in this area.

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Understanding public opinion of the ethics of public health

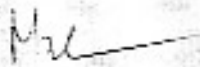
There is currently limited research that investigates public opinion and professional consensus on the ethics of public health and related policy interventions. The Trust hopes that the results of the Council's consultation will go some way to improve this situation. However we are concerned that a full and diverse response should be available to inform the working party deliberations. We therefore encourage the Council to undertake specific targeted consultation with members of the public to ensure that such information is gathered.

Access to data to support basic research for public health

Population based health research has been vital in the past in identifying public health hazards, such as the long term deleterious effects of exposure to ionizing radiations. Recent reports of the Academy of Medical Sciences¹ and the Council for Science and Technology² highlighted the challenges in gaining access to personal data for public health research purposes. These challenges have the potential to limit the ability to conduct basic research that is necessary for public health. The Trust is concerned to ensure that the regulatory framework is proportionate and appropriately balances the protection of personal privacy with the need to access health data for public health research and doesn't inappropriately constrain research for public health benefit. To achieve this we believe it is essential we increase our understanding of public opinion as to where this balance lies. We hope the consultation will contribute to this. The Trust has also commissioned a research project which examines public attitudes to research governance and will investigate aspects of this matter. We would be happy to provide more information on this project if the Council feels it would be useful.

Please do contact us if you would like to arrange a meeting to discuss any of these matters further.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Mark J Walport
Director