Canadian Association of
Genetic Counsellors

CAGC Code of Conduct (for Events and Activities)

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Disclaimer

This Code does not constitute a legal document but serves as a guiding framework for professional conduct.

Terminology

Code of conduct: A code of conduct is a set of guidelines and rules that outline expected behaviors, ethical standards, and responsibilities for individuals or within an organization. It defines what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior within a specific context, helping to create a clear understanding of expectations and promoting a positive and productive environment.

Discrimination: Discrimination is an action or a decision that treats a person or a group unfairly or negatively for reasons such as their race, age or disability.

Diversity: Diversity refers to the demographic composition of a specific group of people, encompassing various elements of human difference, such as racial and ethnic groups, income levels, rural and urban settings, faith communities, 2SLGBTQIA+ populations, individuals with disabilities, gender, and relationship to the natural environment. It is important to note that an organization can possess diversity without achieving inclusivity.

Equity: Equity involves promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Addressing equity issues requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of disparities that exist within our society. Equity should not be confused with equality, which is when individuals are given the same access or resources, regardless of need.

Professional Boundary: A boundary is the implicit or explicit demarcation separating the professional relationship from one that is personal.

Purpose

The Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors (CAGC)'s mission is to strengthen the genetic counselling profession in Canada by providing education, community, support, and leadership as the trusted voice of Genetic Counsellors in Canada.

Members and others who attend CAGC (or joint) events or activities organised as part of this mission are expected to adhere to the CAGC Code of Conduct for Activities and Events.

This document ('The Code') sets out the framework and dimensions of appropriate conduct in any CAGC environment, as well as the process to follow in the event of a breach.

The Code aims to ensure safe, respectful, and professional environments to align with the stated values of CAGC-Certified Genetic Counsellors (CAGC Strategic Plan 2024-2029). While this document cannot anticipate every circumstance or situation, sound judgement is expected of all CAGC members, attendees, presenters, agents and vendors, conducting CAGC business and/or participating in CAGC activities at all times wherever The Code applies.

The Code does not address professional genetic counselling practice. Governing standards of practice for Certified Genetic Counsellors is the remit of the Canadian Board of Genetic Counselling (CBGC).

Scope

This Code applies to all CAGC members, attendees, presenters, agents and vendors, conducting CAGC business and/or participating in CAGC activities (in-person or virtual) including but not limited to:

- CAGC events, (joint) conferences, and meetings
- CAGC committees and working groups
- Professional interactions associated with CAGC activities

The CAGC Code of Conduct is designed to supplement, but not to supersede other legal or regulatory codes, policies and procedures that are relevant to this context.

The Code

The CAGC expects participants to maintain appropriate professional and ethical conduct whether in person, by telephone, by videoconference or other means of communication to:

- Ensure an inclusive environment free of harassment or discrimination (verbal, physical, sexual or other).
- Support and promote equality and diversity.
- Be mindful of their own and others' physical and mental health and safety.
- Behave in a manner that respects the rights of others.
- Treat everyone fairly and with consideration, dignity and respect.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect peoples' right to privacy.
- Communicate in an open and courteous way.
- Maintain honest and transparent behaviour.
- Act with integrity, recognising conflicts of interest and managing them appropriately.
- Follow CAGC bylaws, policies, guidelines, procedures, and processes.

Acknowledgment

By participating in CAGC activities events or as a CAGC member, individuals, CAGC members and other attendees agree to abide by this Code of Conduct and uphold the principles of professionalism, respect, and ethical conduct.

Expectations

All attendees of CAGC events are expected to:

- Contribute to a safe physical and psychological environment.
- Respect differing viewpoints and engage in discussions with professionalism.
- Abide by event rules, venue or platform policies, and CAGC guidelines.
- Obtain permission before recording or taking photographs.

Presenters at CAGC events, in addition to the above, are also expected to:

- Ensure that their content is professional, accurate, and inclusive.
- Disclose any conflicts of interest or commercial affiliations.
- Respect intellectual property rights, fully and properly citing sources.

Vendors at CAGC events, in addition to the above, are also expected to:

- Adhere to this Code and commit to do so in vendor contracts.
- Employ respectful, ethical, and considerate sales tactics and promotional behaviour.
- Present products and services in alignment with ethical and healthcare standards.

Breaches of The Code

Complaints Process

Individuals who witness or experience a breach of The Code may report concerns to designated CAGC representatives. The process is as follows (see Appendix A - Flowchart):

1. Anyone seeking information or advice may contact the Complaints Officer for guidance, with or without progressing a formal complaint.
2. Formal complaints must be submitted in writing with relevant details using the form provided (see Appendix B). Assistance or accommodations can be requested.
3. Completed forms are to be sent by email to the Complaints Officer. An acknowledgement will be sent within 2 weeks of receipt outlining the next steps. These steps may include:
    - Gathering further information.
    - A meeting to discuss with the complainant.
    - Provision of a timeline for resolution.
    - Investigation in accordance with CAGC guidance and policies.
    - Dismissal of unwarranted or vexatious complaints at the discretion of the Complaints Officer and/or CAGC Board of Directors.

Anonymous complaints

An anonymous complaint can be submitted through the Complaints Officer but may not be acted upon if they lack sufficient evidence or detail to properly investigate. In some cases, a complainant can identify themselves but request their name and any other identifying information be kept confidential. A complainant's concern around confidentiality may be addressed by the confidentiality statement below.

Complaints Committee

See the Terms of Reference for the CAGC Complaints Committee [LINK]

The Complaints Committee will be made up of at least 3 members:

1. The CAGC Executive Director will act as Complaints Officer and convene the remaining members of the committee upon receiving a complaint, or to review The Code (see Appendix C - Review Process).
2. A member of the Board, as nominated by the Board
3. A CAGC Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Committee member nominated by the DEIJ Committee.
4. Any other member as determined by the other committee members, as necessary to the management of the complaint (e.g. subject matter expert, previous Complaints Officer, general CAGC member).

Confidentiality

All parties involved in the Complaints Process are required to maintain strict standards regarding confidentiality and will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix C - Confidentiality Agreement).

Conflict of Interest

Anyone involved in the complaint as a Committee Member, complainant, respondent, or witness MUST declare any potential, perceived, or actual conflict of interest (COI). The Committee will assess the COI

and determine the most appropriate management. Committee Members with a COI may be required to recuse themselves from any or all aspects of the complaints management process.

Any COI must be declared in writing and in a confidential COI Register (stored securely and accessible only to the Committee and the BOD). See the Committee Terms of Reference for more detail.

If a complaint pertains to the conduct of the Complaints Officer, it will be directed to a member of the BOD.

Decisions of the Committee

Decisions will be made by a majority consensus (three or more) of the Committee Members (as described above). In the event that a consensus cannot be reached, the case will be presented to the Board for a final determination (see Outcomes).

Outcomes

The Complaints Committee will make a recommendation to the Board, who determines the final outcome and any consequences. The Board may determine at their absolute discretion if a complaint is vexatious or unsubstantiated. This category of complaint will be dismissed without further investigation.

The Complaints Officer will prepare a written summary of the complaint to the Board. This report will include the composition of the Complaints Committee, a review of the complaint, all evidence considered, and a summary of their recommendation(s) to the Board.

The Board will set the outcome (complaint upheld or not upheld) with time-limited, none, or indefinite sanctions based on the investigation, circumstances and their jurisdiction. Both the complainant and respondent will be informed in writing when this stage is complete. At the Board's discretion, the written outcome may be sent to relevant third parties, such as the respondent's employer or regulatory body.

Sanctions

For CAGC members (all categories)

Sanctions may include, but are not limited to:

- Warnings or reprimands.
- Membership suspension (length determined by the Board) or termination (permanent).
- Other disciplinary measures as determined by the Board.

Sanctions are based on current CAGC Bylaws:

- (9.) "The Board may suspend or revoke the rights and privileges of any member, may impose fines or penalties, may expel members from membership…or may impose such sanctions as it may deem just in the circumstances and consistent with the objects of the Corporation".
- (66.) "Any chairperson of a committee or committee member may be removed by the President, subject to the concurrence of a majority of members of the Board then in office".

For all other event attendees (including non-members)

Breaches of The Code may result in:

- Removal (barring) from the event.

- Restrictions on future participation in CAGC events or activities.
- Further actions based on the severity of the breach, and as determined by the Board.

Acute complaints

In the event of an acute complaint requiring urgent and timely action, any two of the three essential members of the Complaints Committee (Complaints Officer, nominated Board Member (or Executive Director), DEIJ nominated representative (or DEIJ Chair)) will convene to assess and deliver an interim determination.

Outcomes of interim determinations will be limited to warnings, reprimands, and/or expulsion from an event. For non-CAGC members this may include referral to the respondent's employer/organisation if and as it relates to their attendance at the event.

An interim action is not intended to replace or truncate the formal process described above.

Appeals

CAGC Bylaws state that members subject to disciplinary action have the right to appeal decisions to the Board. The Complainant or the Respondent may appeal the outcome of the Complaints Process (See Appendix A: Flow Chart)

Appeals must be:

- Submitted in writing within 30 days of the outcome notification date. *See Appendix XX: Appeals Form)
- Considered in accordance with CAGC's governing documents.
- Evaluated fairly, taking into account the facts and circumstances.

Referral of the complaint

Serious breaches may be referred to relevant professional, regulatory, or legal bodies, or to the respondent's employer/organisation as appropriate.

Legal action

CAGC reserves the right to take legal action in cases of severe misconduct.

Review process

The Complaints Committee will be convened every 2.5 years (with both the incoming and outgoing Complaints Officer to be included) to review the Code in conjunction with the Board of Directors. This will follow the review cycle of the CAGC Strategic Plan to ensure alignment of these documents and adapt to changing contexts. The Committee and/or Board of Directors may also trigger an earlier review if needed (for example if they identify any concerns with the process while dealing with a complaint) to ensure the process remains current and functions as intended.

Appendices

CAGC Complaints Flow Chart (Appendix A)

Complaint Form (Appendix B)

Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix C)

Appeal Form (Appendix D)

Sources

NSGC (National Society of Genetic Counselors) Code of Conduct – https://www.nsgc.org/Education-and-Events/Annual-Conference/Code-of-Conduct

EACR (European Association for Cancer Research) Conference Code of Conduct – https://eacr.org/conference/cancermultiomics2024/conduct

EMBL (European Molecular Biology Laboratory) Course and Conference Code of Conduct – https://www.embl.org/about/info/course-and-conference-office/information-for-participants/code-of-conduct/

GA4GH (Global Alliance for Genomics & Health) Code of Conduct – https://www.ga4gh.org/code-of-conduct/

CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) Conference Code of Conduct – https://www.case.org/conferences-training/conference-policies/conference-code-conduct

Links

1. Canadian Human Rights Commission https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals
    a. https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/human-rights
    b. https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/accessibility
2. CAGC Bylaws
3. CAGC Strategy
4. CAGC Website
5. CBGC Website
6. Policy on External Support for Educational Programs, Webinar Endorsement, and Publications https://www.cagc-accg.ca/doc/BOD/Policies/CAGC%20Policy%20on%20External%20Support%20for%20Educational%20Programs%20Webinar%20Endorsement%20and%20Publications%20-APPROVED%20April%2012%202017.pdf