

# ethical principles in health care

Setting a Universal Foundation for Trust





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# Foreword

On March 27, 2019, IFC unveiled a bold initiative to help private sector health care providers improve delivery of health services and build more sustainable business models by enshrining ethical principles into their operations. Developed in collaboration with the World Bank, these ten Ethical Principles in Health Care (EPIHC) cover the issues that health care organizations need to address to build transparent, resilient systems that meet the highest ethical principles in global health care delivery.

IFC works with the private sector in developing countries to create markets that open up opportunities for all. There is a clear connection between ethical operating principles and the development of sustainable business models that can positively impact the countries in which private companies operate.

The World Bank Group has the twin goals of ending extreme poverty by 2030 and promoting shared prosperity. To help achieve these goals, the Bank supports universal health coverage, aiming to ensure that all people have access to the health care they need without suffering financial hardship. Access to high-quality, affordable health care is the foundation for individuals to lead productive and fulfilling lives and for economies to develop the human capital they need to grow.

Ethical principles are important for reaching the promise of universal health coverage. Private sector health care providers play a vital role in advancing global access to high-quality, affordable care. Their success in supporting the growth of stronger health systems relies in part on their capacity to demonstrate they have earned the trust and confidence of the communities they serve.

It is also clear that health care enterprises have a long-term business interest in adherence to ethical principles. Why is that? Because by operating in an ethically responsible manner, a health care organization attracts more patients, retains better-performing staff, reduces operational risks, and consequently performs more effectively as a business.

# Foreword

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Recognizing that private providers operate in many different contexts and with varied challenges, IFC launched the EPIHC initiative to develop a broadly applicable set of guidelines to promote ethical conduct and support daily decision making. Extensive and diverse input was sought from health care providers, policy experts, and other stakeholders. After defining the key operating issues likely to involve decisions, practices, or questions with an ethical component, the next step involved shaping principles that would be clear and universally applicable—and readily adoptable by organizations large and small, operating independently or as part of a system.

Early EPIHC signatories represent every facet of the private health care sector, from clinics to insurance companies to investors. Some operate globally, while others have a national or local focus. All share a commitment to growing worldwide access to high-quality health care.

While some EPIHC signatories already have their own codes of conduct or equivalent internal ethical frameworks, their public adoption of EPIHC is still relevant and can send a strong signal to the market about their commitment to these issues. Other organizations may not have thought through these important issues and we hope these principles serve as a useful guide as they seek to scale up and professionalize their operations.

As the EPIHC initiative moves forward, we will be watching which businesses make the most concerted effort to implement the principles—and listening to adopters to learn what are the main challenges facing them. The bottom line? Providing health care in an ethical manner is good for patients, good for business, good for staff, and ultimately, is the right thing to do.

# Why EpiHC Matters

Today more than ever before, health care providers across the globe navigate a complex, always-changing landscape—and face scrutiny from every angle. Additionally, local regulations may be underdeveloped, may not be enforced, or may not have kept abreast of rapid technological advances.

The EpiHC initiative offers a relevant, transparent, and accessible platform to instill the highest ethical principles for health care delivery.

The intent? To guide private sector providers, investors, and payors, and unify the health care ecosystem, so that all stakeholders can **trust** both the process and the system.

In the big picture, EpiHC promotes ethical and responsible conduct to advance shared global health goals: improved access to health care, better quality of care, and better health outcomes.

At the level of individual organizations, EpiHC can support and improve overall performance and risk management, and create opportunities for providers to learn and share best practices.

Every EpiHC signatory joins a global cohort committed to operating in ways that promote ethical conduct, in order to make a stronger contribution to the lives of their patients, their staff, the environment, and the communities they serve.

Clear Standards to Guide Decisions  
and Foster a Culture of Trust

# Ten Operating Principles to Ensure Ethical Conduct

EPIHC is ten fundamental principles to be shared across the health care ecosystem, from front-line providers to top leadership, adding welcome clarity to decisions, transactions, practices, and encounters that affect every aspect of operations.

Adopted voluntarily, openly, and with pride, these principles help to shape values and behaviors, and strengthen the bonds of trust between health care providers and their stakeholders—trust that's essential to effectively deliver the best possible care to the greatest number of patients.





## Respecting Laws and Regulations

The organization conducts its business legally and responsibly. It ensures that staff understand and respect the laws, regulations, policies, and standards that affect its business.

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## Making a Positive Contribution to Society

The organization considers its impact on society and the broader health system when planning and delivering services. This includes consideration of quality, efficiency, access, and affordability. It does not knowingly engage in activities that undermine the goals of the health system or the overall health and wellbeing of the population. It initiates and sustains strong and effective partnerships within the communities it serves and with other actors in the broader health system. This includes actively engaging with stakeholders on efforts to improve access to affordable care and to advance health for all.

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## Promoting High-Quality Standards

The organization provides the highest possible quality of care, including for patient safety. This includes implementing formal processes for continuous quality improvement. The organization refers to evidence-based internationally recognized practices to support patient care. It makes treatment and care decisions based on the best-quality outcome for the patient.

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## Conducting Business Matters Ethically

The organization accurately and honestly represents and explains the services that it provides. It does not take unfair advantage of anyone through manipulation, concealment, abuse of privileged information, or misrepresentation of facts. It acts honestly and does not engage in any activity intended to defraud any individual or organization of money, property, or their time. It avoids conflicts of interest. It enacts policies and practices to fight bribery and corruption. It deals sensitively and humanely with all patients, including those who do not have sufficient funds for treatment.

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## Respecting the Environment

The organization works in ways that minimize negative impact on the environment, including making efforts to conserve energy and reduce waste. All waste, including biomedical waste, is collected, stored, and disposed of in a safe and environmentally responsible manner.

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## Upholding Patients' Rights

The organization provides care respectful of patients' personal values and beliefs. It respects patients' rights to dignity, privacy and confidentiality. It supports patients' rights during the care process, including informed consent and the right to refuse treatment. It implements mechanisms to oversee research activities. Any person enrolled in clinical research is fully informed of the risks and benefits, and their right to refuse to participate or drop out without risk of reprisal. All are informed about their rights and responsibilities in a manner and language they can understand.

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## Safeguarding Information and Using Data Responsibly

The organization maintains appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to ensure that information is kept secure, accurate, complete, untampered with, and inaccessible to unauthorized personnel. The organization follows appropriate data standards, including consideration of new and evolving technologies. It maintains confidentiality subject to highest standards, including: data minimization and retention; use for research only when disclosed, on a minimum data necessary basis, and subject to appropriate patient rights and legal standards; and transfer or disclosure as necessary for certain public health and claims processing purposes. Patients have the right to obtain, review, and correct their health-records information.

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## Preventing Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying

The organization promotes a positive and respectful environment for everyone, including patients, visitors, employees, volunteers, physicians, students, and contract workers. The organization does not tolerate any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

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## Protecting and Empowering Staff

The organization promotes a safe working environment. It makes sure that all staff have the training and tools they need to do their jobs safely, to meet patients' and customers' needs, and to meet the standards of applicable professional associations.

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## Supporting Ethical Practices and Preventing Harm

The organization develops formal policies and procedures for areas with ethical concerns, considering accepted international norms in doing so. Staff are trained in these concerns and ways to address them. In addition to activities proscribed by local laws and regulations, the organization does not participate in or condone harmful practices.

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# Governance

The governance structure of EPIHC is designed to facilitate the administration and implementation of the principles.

A Secretariat has been set up to administer the principles.

It promotes the principles, organizes the process of becoming a signatory, and manages communications and publicity around the principles. The Secretariat also addresses procedural inquiries and manages the process of reviewing the principles and issuing proposed amendments.

The Secretariat does not endorse any signatory or certify its alignment to the principles.

Please refer to [www.epihc.org](http://www.epihc.org) for detailed information on the EPIHC governance structure and governing provisions.



# Call to Action

## What can companies do?

We invite health care organizations and investors to adopt EpiHC. For some organizations, adoption will represent a first step toward codifying such principles and for others, it will complement existing corporate codes and statements. By becoming an EpiHC signatory and using the EpiHC logo, organizations are signaling a commitment to high ethical practices to improve the lives of patients and their employees, the environment, and the communities they serve.

## What can governments do?

**Government serves as the steward of the health system and, in doing so, should promote and incentivize ethical behavior. Government can:**

- Encourage all participants in the health system to embrace and adopt ethical principles
- Seek to establish robust & cooperative relationships with the private sector and civil society
- Provide relevant, clear, and stable policies and regulations
- Be clear and transparent about the objectives of these policies and regulations, and administer them in a consistent manner
- Lead the public dialogue and work together with the private sector and civil society to discuss and address prevalent issues and concerns in the system

## What can other stakeholders do?

Everyone has a role to play in promoting equitable, quality health care access. We encourage all stakeholders to speak up about the practical issues they encounter that jeopardize the ethical provision of health care. The need for ethical principles has never been greater and all voices are important for highlighting the challenges and offering solutions. It is also incumbent upon all stakeholders—including patients and staff—to help hold health care providers accountable to their obligations and commitments, and to ground their behavior in the tenets of EpiHC.



# Becoming an EPIHC Signatory

We invite health care organizations and investors to adopt EPIHC. For some organizations, becoming an EPIHC signatory will represent a first step toward codifying ethical behavior. For others, EPIHC will complement existing corporate codes and statements.

By becoming an EPIHC signatory and using the EPIHC logo, organizations are signaling a commitment to implementing the highest standards for ethical practices—to improve the lives of their patients, their employees, the environment, and the communities they serve.

EPIHC was intentionally designed as a voluntary commitment to best practices, to encourage wide accessibility and foster a “race-to-the-top” among private health care providers, payors, and investors. As such, EPIHC does not maintain an enforcement mechanism or complaints procedure. Each signatory may choose to independently adopt the principles into its governance systems and daily practices as appropriate. The EPIHC Secretariat may regularly communicate with signatories and showcase actions that are driving implementation as well as offer opportunities and access to networks that build signatories’ capacity.

Becoming a signatory is an easy three-step process, which can be completed online.

Please refer to [www.epihc.org](http://www.epihc.org) for instructions and an application form.

# Founding Signatories

ACIBADEM  
HOSPITALS GROUP

EYE

ANDALUSIA  
for MEDICAL SERVICES

Apollo  
HOSPITALS

MAYO  
CLINIC

艾力彼  
Asclepius Healthcare

CENTENE<sup>®</sup>  
Corporation

FHC 复星医疗  
FOSUN  
HEALTHCARE

FULLERTON  
HEALTH

GEORGIA  
HEALTHCARE  
GROUP

IFC  
International  
Finance  
Corporation  
WORLD BANK GROUP

ISC ROYTBORG CLINIC  
MEDICINA

Medtronic

SAUDI GERMAN HOSPITALS GROUP  
مجموعة مستشفيات السعودي الألماني

QUADRIA  
CAPITAL

United Family Healthcare  
和睦家医疗

IDH INTEGRATED  
DIAGNOSTICS  
HOLDINGS

مستشفى العبدلي  
ABDALI HOSPITAL  
Member of Clemenceau Network

LAGOON  
HOSPITALS  
HYGEIA

HHI

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**“Private providers are essential to achieving universal health coverage but have been largely ignored in national and global policies. These ethical principles provide them with direction for delivering high-quality care that is in the interest of the patient and community.”**

**Margaret E. Kruk, MD, MPH**

Professor of Health Systems, Department of Global Health and Population, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

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**“Health care’s compass is not technical; it is moral. The Ethical Principles in Health Care comprise a guiding framework of enormous importance to all stakeholders: governments, commerce, professions, managers, communities, patients, and payors. They should unite us all.”**

**Donald M. Berwick, MD, MPP**

President Emeritus and Senior Fellow, Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Boston, Massachusetts

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**“Access to high-quality, affordable health care is now more important than ever. The Ethical Principles in Health Care provide a pragmatic guide that can help the private sector sharpen decision making processes, promote best practices for ethical and responsible conduct, and ultimately contribute to stronger health systems.”**

**Philippe Le Houérou**

Chief Executive Officer, IFC

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**“The bottom line is that conducting health care business in an ethical manner is good for patients, good for business, good for staff, and, ultimately, the right thing to do.”**

**Chris McCahan**

IFC Global Sector Lead for Healthcare Services

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“In times of fundamental change, trust and values are even more important, especially in the health sector. The 10 ethical principles are a concise and practical guide for private sector health providers to do the right thing in the best way to ensure access to quality, affordable health care for all.”

**Dr. Muhammad Ali Pate**

Global Director for Health, Nutrition and Population,  
World Bank

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“At Lagoon Hospitals, we believe that these ethical principles are the bedrock of patient-centered care and safety. They involve personal accountability and doing the right thing all the time, particularly when no one is watching.”

**Dr. Olujimi Coker**

CEO, Lagoon Hospitals, Hygeia Nigeria Limited

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“EPIHC has a potential for lasting, and—allowing for a pun, even epic—positive impact in transforming quality, behaviors, and people’s experience in health care. Adopting EPIHC is also an excellent business practice: In a global survey we conducted while developing EPIHC, over 75 percent of the sector responders agreed that ethical conduct leads to a positive financial impact for health care organizations and investors, and over 85 percent expected their organizations to adopt EPIHC.”

**Dr. Irina A. Nikolic**

MPhil, PHD, Task Team Leader, EPIHC, World Bank

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“We are extremely pleased to be a Founding Signatory to IFC’s EPIHC which reinforces Quadria Capital’s ethos of building ethical, sustainable businesses that create access to high-quality and affordable health care across developing Asia.”

**Abrar Mir & Dr. Amit Varma**

Founders of Quadria Capital

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“It is an honor having Abdali Hospital as one of the Founding Signatories of the IFC’s EPIHC. We believe that this well-thought-through framework provides a solid foundation to improve integrity and transparency in the sector. This will result in a more effective way of working and improve trust, to the benefit of patients, payors, and the broader community. We look forward to seeing more providers adhering to IFC’s EPIHC.”

**Mr. Ahmad Abu Ghazaleh**  
Vice Chairman, Abdali Hospital, Jordan

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“Centene is honored to be a Founding Signatory and an Early Adopter of the Ethical Principles in Health Care. The 10 principles align with the value we place on sound governance, social responsibility, and environmental consciousness—all which work together to support our mission for better health outcomes at lower costs. Ethical principles are key to the goal of ending poverty, and Centene can assist in this initiative by continuing to focus on vulnerable populations.”

**Matthew H. Snyder**  
Senior Vice President, Internal Audit, Compliance & Risk Management, Centene Corporation







