



Institutional Public Statements – Policy

1. **Intent:** To define the circumstances and context in which the O'Brien Institute will issue public statements.
2. **Context:**
 - a. For the purposes of this policy, a public statement is an official written statement drafted by, or on behalf of, the leadership of the Institute, with society at large as its intended primary audience. This document will be distributed to the greater university community, policy makers, the media and the general public – and will speak on behalf, and with the full weight, of the Institute community – to address, contextualize, or bring attention to issues or events taking place within the sphere of the Institute's values and expertise, with relevance to the greater human condition.
 - b. The Institute is, first and foremost, a research institution. Due to the nature of public health research, however, it is an institution that operates at the intersection of academia and society. As such, its members believe their work does not end at publication, and feel an obligation to directly apply said research, and their professional expertise, to the betterment of society.
3. **Considerations:**
 - a. The Institute recognizes that its members are at liberty to make public statements, based on [academic freedom](#) and the principles of open discussion and free discourse by which the Institute abides. Members are independent of the Institute and are encouraged to engage in free and public discourse in a manner that is thoughtful and professional, and that advances their fields and positively affects public health.
 - b. Considerations for when an institutional public statement may be helpful and can be issued:

- i. When societal tragedies arise from public health-relevant violations of universal humanitarian principles, human compassion, decency and wellbeing.
 - ii. For empathy in the event of disasters, when those disasters have a basis in, or an effect on, public health.
 - iii. Following events of violent racism, misogyny, or any form of bigotry or hate, affecting a societal-level impact on public wellbeing, and the aspirations of public health research.
 - iv. When a statement would offer something new to the discourse, such as novel public health insights, suggestions on how to move forward, or how we are, or will serve, as an example by doing things differently.
- c. Considerations that will preclude the Institute from issuing an official public statement:
 - 1. When organizational-level position statements imply, or are expected to be, a consensus in opinion and ideology among its members.
 - 2. When organizational-level position statements imply, or are expected to, advocate for a particular practice or policy changes.

4. Institute-supported alternatives to issuing a public statement:

- a. One of the Institute's core functions is to support its members through all phases of their work, through to, and including knowledge exchange. Although the Institute is unable to endorse members' public opinions or scientific conclusions, we believe it is important to assist in their dissemination. This approach is based on our belief that free and open discourse is the most honest and equitable path to solving the large and complex problems at the heart of current public health challenges.
- b. As such, without providing a position statement or endorsement, the Institute has other means by which it can support members as they inform and shape practice and policy. These include:
 - i. Assisting in the production of policy briefs or primers generated by members and disseminated by Institute communication assets;

- ii. Assisting members in producing and delivering knowledge exchange initiatives, such as writing and submitting op-eds, rolling out social media initiatives, conducting media relations outreach, building project-specific websites, executing events, and others.

5. An evergreen policy

- a. The aspects determining this policy are subjective, and are rooted in a particular time and place. A “one-size fits all” approach will inevitably have its limitations and may be inadequate. As such:
 - i. The policy will be reviewed periodically;
 - ii. It will be open to discussion and refinement by both Institute leadership and Institute membership.