

WHO Call: Stronger AI Ethics in Health

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Why in News?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for stronger and coordinated ethical oversight of AI-related health research.

Need for Enhanced Oversight in AI Health Research – Key Issues and Associated Ethical Concerns

- **Pace of AI Development** - Research advancements may rapidly transition into real-world healthcare applications.
- **Privacy** - Artificial intelligence systems are capable of detecting unforeseen patterns, even within anonymized or publicly available datasets.
- **Bias** - Artificial intelligence may generate inaccurate or discriminatory results for specific demographic groups.
- **Fairness and Equity** - The distribution of benefits and risks associated with AI may be unequal across different groups.
- **Transparency** - The processes by which certain artificial intelligence systems generate outputs are often difficult to interpret.
- **Accountability** - Responsibility for adverse outcomes resulting from AI-assisted decisions is frequently ambiguous.
- **Transferability** - Artificial intelligence models trained on data from one population may not demonstrate equivalent accuracy when applied to different populations.
- **Rapid Deployment** - Unidentified issues present during the research phase may swiftly impact patient care.

WHO's Three Broad Categories of AI Health Research

Category	Meaning	Example
1 Health research using AI with data 	AI is used to analyse health datasets .	 Identifying disease patterns from large datasets.
2 Research using AI tools & technologies 	AI assists researchers during the research process.	 - Generating hypotheses, - Identifying participants, - Producing research outputs.
3 Research on AI tools & technologies 	Research evaluates the AI system itself .	 Studying AI's safety, effectiveness, utility or implementation .

Role of Research Ethics Committees (RECs)

- RECs are traditionally responsible for protecting research participants.
- However, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) research introduces novel challenges.
 - Research Ethics Committees may require enhanced **technical expertise to adequately assess AI-related studies**.
 - Additional **training and resources** may be necessary to address the complexities of AI research.
 - Certain AI studies do not involve direct interaction with human participants.
 - Studies utilizing anonymized data may not be subject to traditional ethics review processes.
 - The absence of direct human interaction **does not eliminate potential ethical risks**.

WHO's Approach

- Ethical oversight should not rely solely on Research Ethics Committees.
- Comprehensive ethical oversight may also require the involvement of **researchers, funders, data access committees, scientific journals, professional societies, and regulatory agencies**.
- **WHO's Key Recommendations**
 - Enhance **ethics training and certification** for researchers.
 - Identify ethical risks early in the research process.
 - Increase transparency about known risks.
 - Ensure responsible treatment of **data workers**.
 - Strengthen communication with the public.
 - Increase **public engagement**.
 - Strengthen research capacity in developing countries.
 - Promote equitable participation of local researchers and institutions.

India: Existing Ethical Framework

- India has established an ethical framework for the application of artificial intelligence in healthcare.
- **ICMR Guidelines (2023)**
- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has issued ethical guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence in biomedical research and healthcare.
- Key principles include:
 - **Autonomy**
 - **Safety**
 - **Data privacy**
 - **Accountability**
 - **Fairness**
 - **Equity**
 - **Informed consent**

Reference

[Business Standard | WHO Call: Stronger AI Ethics in Health](#)

