



# National Health Research Policy of Nepal

*Published by*

**Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC)**

## FOREWORD

As per Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) Act 1991 section 6 sub-section "chha", it has been mentioned to publish and disseminate the knowledge, experience and achievement of research undertaken in Nepal. It is my immense pleasure to update and bring out the updated national health research policy of Nepal, which will serve as guidelines for future direction of the research activities to be carried out.

It has been revised and updated the earlier published National Health Research Policy of Nepal 2003-2008. During the process of revision several consultative meetings were organized among the senior policy makers and pioneer researchers of health sector.

The National Health Research Policy comprises of vision, mission, goal and it aims to promote health research in all areas including biomedical, clinical, public health, behavioral, traditional and health economics research so that the priority health problem which has been identified by Ministry of Health and Population could be addressed and could lead for the promotion of health research culture in the country. The description in the policy definitely adds the growing focus on health research systems with various additional dimensions in the research. This policy may eventually lead to desired outcomes that might be the milestone for the health gains.

I want to pay my heartiest gratitude to the members of task force committee Prof. Dr. Gopal Prasad Acharya, Prof. Dr. Ramesh Kant Adhikari, Dr. Laxmi Raj Pathak, Dr. Baburam Marasini, Dr. Shanker Pratap Singh, Ms. Pearl Banmali, Dr. G. P. Bhandari, Dr. Rajendra Kumar BC for their indelible input and unforgettable contribution through their tremendous experience, efforts and knowledge during preparation of this policy document. My special thanks go to Mr. Meghnath Dhimal, Chief Research Officer, NHRC who coordinated this activity from the beginning phase to completion with his tireless efforts and labor for accomplishing it in time. I am grateful to Mr. Surya Acharya, Joint-secretary and Mr. Bal Sagar Giri, Under-secretary of MOHP for their valuable comments and suggestion during finalization process.

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At last but not least, I acknowledge the World Health Organization for the financial support to accomplish this activity.

**Prof. Dr. Chop Lal Bhusal**  
**Executive Chairman**

## ACRONYMS

EDPs	-	External Development Partners
ENHR	-	Essential National Health Research
ERB	-	Ethical Review Board
ERBs	-	Ethical Review Boards
GoN	-	Government of Nepal
INGOs	-	International Non-Governmental Organizations
IRC	-	Institutional Review Committee
IRCs	-	Institutional Review Committees
MFB	-	Maryknoll Father and Brothers
MoF	-	Ministry of Finance
MoHP	-	Ministry of Health and Population
NGOs	-	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHP	-	National Health Policy
NHPs	-	National Health Policies
NHRC	-	Nepal Health Research Council
NHRP	-	National Health Research Policy
NHRPr	-	National Health Research Priorities
NHRS	-	National Health Research System
NPC	-	National Planning Commission
SAFHeR	-	South Asian Forum for Health Research
TCAM	-	Traditional Complementary and Alternative Medicine
UN	-	United Nations
WHO	-	World Health Organization

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## **1. Background**

Good health is an important asset for every citizen to improve their living standard. Health has been accepted as a fundamental right of all people by the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) and in the International Declaration of Human Rights. The Article 16(2) of Interim Constitution of Nepal 2006 states that "every citizen shall have the right to get basic health service free of cost from the State as provided for in the law". This indeed is a historical manifestation of the state's responsibility towards ensuring the citizens' right to health. It is believed that with good health, the living standard of the people will improve and thereby contribute to the cause of poverty alleviation and economic prosperity. Health research is an integral component of overall health development of a nation. With this thought, Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) was established in 1991 by an Act of Parliament as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health and Population and was given the responsibility to promote and coordinate all kinds of health research activities for improvement of the health status of the people of Nepal. This reflects the commitment of the Government of Nepal (GoN) in health research in Nepal. In order to operationalize such commitments into action, the NHRC has already developed National Health Research Policy 2003-2008 (NHRP 2003-2008), which is felt to revise and update in present context. In this context, the present efforts have been made to revise and update the NHRP and publish it with incorporating the flavor of National Health Policy (NHP) for Nepal, which strived for the achievement of better health for all through health research with an emphasis on equity, social justice and ethics. This NHRP aimed to establish linkages between health research and the NHP of GoN.

## **2. Past Efforts**

Since the establishment of NHRC, it has focused its attention on research capability strengthening through training of individual on research methods in order to develop a critical mass of people who can develop good quality research proposals. The aim of NHRC has been to maintain high levels of technical and ethical standards of various health research carried out in Nepal.

NHRC has been able to trap nationally as well as internationally available funds for strengthening the health research capacity in the country. With such supports, it has played a pivotal role in promoting coordination and networking in health research and development of National Health Research System (NHRS), which is a system for planning, coordinating, managing, monitoring and evaluating health research activities and resources for equitable national development. Although NHRC tried to establish the NHRS, it couldn't able to expedite the process due to the lack of final endorsement of NHRP by GoN.

However, GoN has clearly indicated its commitment to promote health research in the series of national plans. National Health Policy 1991 states "Research in health sector will be encouraged

and the outcome of research will be applied in decision making for better management of health services". The Second Long Term Health Plan (1997-2017) has clearly addressed the issues for the development of Essential National Health Research (ENHR) and its implementation. The ninth five year plan (1997-2002) of National Planning Commission (NPC) also lays emphasis on development of priority list and promotion of quality of research. The statement on health research reads as follows "The research priority list for health research will be prepared for quality research. Such research projects will focus on objectives of poverty alleviation by solving major health problems of majority of people". Similarly, Three Years Interim Plan (approach paper 2064/65 – 2066/67) of NPC has mentioned "researches in health sector will be encouraged, promoted and expanded".

Other health related national level documents also reflected the issues of health research, which is given as follows:

National Reproductive Health Research Strategy (2000) developed by Family Health Division, Department of Health Services recognized that "**research** is essential in measuring effectiveness of ongoing activities, whereas situation analysis and operational research help to design new programmes". A number of priority activities mentioned in the above said strategy document such as "infertility, abortion, adolescent reproductive health issues, elderly women's reproductive health problems, are the areas in which intersectoral research will have to explore the nature, extent and context of the problems to help design intervention suitable for Nepal".

National safe abortion policy (2003) advocated for "abortion related **research** will be conducted and research results and recommendations will be used to improve the policy and programme management practices.

National nutrition policy and strategy (2004) clearly mentioned "carry out **research** and feasibility study to analyze the current nutritional situation to identify the major factors of nutritional problems and to clarify the possibility of new approaches".

Nepal Health Sector Implementation Plan (2010-2015) also highlighted about the monitoring and evaluating of various health studies. This is required for evidence-based health policy formulation.

As various documents talked about research, it is an utmost important step to be initiated right from the beginning to advocate for the development of national health research policy which needs to be endorsed from the GoN.

### **3. Present Situation**

#### ***3.1 Conduct of Ethical Research***

Previously a large number of health researches carried out in Nepal had been done by individual researchers in their areas of interest, but now that trend has gradually been changing, and the health research is being undertaken through universities, institutions, medical schools, research institutes, NGO, INGO and the Government.

Most of the research scientists, many institutions, national and international organizations are utilizing the national ethical guidelines of NHRC, which has functioned as a guidebook for all those involved and interested in promoting good ethical practices in health research.

NHRC has facilitated and approved various ethical / institutional review committees and is committed to continue to work with these institutions / organizations to promote good ethical practices in health research in Nepal.

#### ***3.2 Current Provision for Resource Mobilization in Health Sector***

With continued dialogue with MoHP, NPC and Ministry of Finance (MoF), NHRC has been successful in getting a regular budget directly from MoF from the year 2000. This has now been documented in the Government's Red Book also, which definitely contributes towards sustainability of NHRC. Sometimes, matching funds has also been mobilized from Government. Not only this, NHRC is able to receive regular funds from WHO and Maryknoll Father and Brother (MFB), and utilizes these funds for the research promotion activities in Nepal.

The council is equipped with full-time and part time qualified technical human resources.

#### ***3.3 Current Health Research Networking Mechanism***

Nepal Health Research Council library is networking with other health libraries of Nepal, for which a networking mechanism has already been identified and set up. Networking in health research has been promoted at different levels. In order to promote linkage with MoHP, and to promote research in the development regions, the NHRC had designated five focal points at regional health directorate office of MoHP located in Dhankuta, Makwanpur, Pokhara, Surkhet and Dipayal. The council is regularly providing health research grants in order to uplift the capacity of regional researchers. Fourteen institutional review committees have been formed in various medical colleges and approved by NHRC for maintaining the ethical issue in health research which are in the networking of NHRC. The council is functioning as a central coordinating body and playing a pivotal and catalytic role in coordination, collaboration and networking with other research institutions in Nepal.

Health Research Network has not only been extended within Nepal, but also in the South Asian Region by forming South Asian Forum for Health Research (SAFHeR), which is being operated

under the NHRC since its establishment. Thereby, Nepal has broadened its horizon in terms of health research not only at the national level but also at the global level.

#### **4. Problem and Challenges**

In the past, a number of studies have been conducted without much co-ordination or even without implementation of the results. It has increasingly been recognized that a coordinating mechanism would be useful to avoid duplication of research efforts, to assess adequacy of recommendations resulting from research and to promote their implementation. Furthermore, the possibility to pool resources of government and NGOs/INGOs in case of shared interests should be considered. One of the components of the national health strategy is therefore the development of a research strategy in the form of policy, which will optimally match the information needs of policy makers, planning and service providers, with available data, and with the human and material resources for further research.

Expansion of our knowledge base is a key challenge in national health, and is achievable through appropriate research. So, research in health is taken to be an important area of concern because it provides evidence for policy makers to make the right decisions. Research should serve as the “brain of the health system,” providing evidences for the directions that the national health system should take.

Research in health as a means of improving the health care delivery mechanisms and the health status of the populations. In this context, one of the big challenges of this country is to improve upon technologies that are available to tackle illnesses experienced by poor communities. Similarly, another challenge would be as how to develop a coherent approach to research priority setting and governance of health research.

There are several organization/center/polyclinic/institute/hospital that have written the word “Research Center ” in their title name but most of them didn’t conduct any kind of health research. It seems that putting the word “Research” in their signboard may be to deduct the government tax, compete with other agencies, and make the word fancy and catchy for public to draw their attention towards them. The MoHP has all the right to stop such agencies to write the word ‘Research Center’ in their title name if they happen to found out not conducting any kind of health researches within two years period, but such things have not been expedited. The NHRC also couldn’t initiate action regarding this due to lack of such policy, so how come this kind of problem needs to be addressed becoming a challenges since a couple of years.

Good ethical practices in health research are important to ensure that the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of research participants are promoted, but again question comes how to maintain such practices without having appropriate government owned health research policy.



The policy needs to be developed taking into consideration of not only national but also international community appeals for a strategic approach to improve research governance and stewardship, and strengthen essential public health functions.

### **5. Objectives of Policy**

- To promote health research culture in the country,
- To enhance the capacity in health research in the country,
- To conduct the health research for generating the evidences for health policy and planning,
- To promote networking and collaboration in health research in the country,
- To develop synergy in health research development in the country,
- To communicate the research findings to health policy makers, and stakeholders, and
- To implement ethical norms and standards in health research in the country.

### **6. Policy Aims**

1. To align national health research policy to national health policy.
2. To generate evidence from research that can be used to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness of health system.
3. To build national health research capacity including that of academia, research institutions, health service institutions and the community to conduct health research and utilize the findings for program/services development.
4. To promote health research culture in academia, research institutions, department of health services and creating an ethos of evidence based decision making amongst senior level civil servants and policy makers.
5. To emphasize ethical practice in health research.
6. To promote health research in the broad dimensions–biomedical, clinical, social sciences, public health, health economics, Traditional Complementary and Alternative Medicine (TCAM) and health policy research.
7. To develop a mechanism for effective communication of research to ensure that the benefits of research are effectively translated into practice.

8. To generate and mobilize financial resources for health research, capacity development and NHRS strengthening.
9. To promote national and international partnership collaboration and networking in health research.

## **7. Policy**

The NHRP of Nepal strives for the achievement of better health for all through health research with an emphasis on equity, social justice and ethics.

## **8. Vision**

To promote health research that contributes to the improvement of health and the welfare of people in Nepal.

## **9. Mission**

To strengthen the national health research system for the holistic development and improvement of health systems of Nepal.

## **10. Strategies and Working Policies**

- 10.1 The NHRP will function in Line with the NHP of the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP). The short term and long-term plan for the NHRP will be developed and the mechanism for monitoring and evaluation will be strengthened.
- 10.2 The health research capacity for Nepal will be continuously developed and maintained to provide better health for all with judicious utilization of available resources. The mechanism to further strengthen the health system will be developed.
- 10.3 The health research database will be improved by networking/collaborating with all the stakeholders involved in health research. Evidence based health research findings will be utilized by policy makers.
- 10.4 Financial resources from GoN, INGO's, NGO's, donor agencies, private institutions, and community based organizations and other sectors will be mobilized for health research promotion.
- 10.5 The NHRS will provide the structure and function for networking/collaborating with all stakeholders.
- 10.6 The mechanism for planning, coordinating and managing health research resources and activities will be strengthened. At the same time, emphasis will be given to policy/system analysis, communication, resource flow and mobilization and management of resources.

**The working or operational policies for accomplishing policy aims are as follows:**

**Policy Aim 1:**

**To align health research to National Health Policy and National Health Research Priorities.**

**Operational Strategies**

1.1. To develop a mechanism for close collaboration with the MoHP.

1.1.a. Nepal Health Research Council will collaborate with the MoHP to promote health research.

1.1.b. A joint team of NHRC and the MoHP will be formed to promote health research in policy development, priority setting, research process and dissemination and utilization of research findings.

1.1.c. National Health Research Priorities (NHRPr) will be revised and updated focusing on NHPs of GoN.

1.1.d. Nepal Health Research Council will continue to promote health research by collaborating/networking with regional focal points along with agencies involved in health research.

1.2. Health Research grants and approval will be given focusing on NHRPr Areas.

**Policy Aim 2:**

**To generate evidence from research that can be used to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness of the health system and health services.**

2.1 Nepal Health Research Council will analyze the quality of health research and determine their authenticity.

2.2 NHRC will communicate the major research findings developing policy briefs to policy and decision makers to facilitate evidenced-based policy development.

**Policy Aim 3:**

**To build national health research capacity including that of academia, research institutions, health service institutions and the community to conduct health research and utilize the findings for program/services development.**

**Policy Aim 4:**

**To promote research culture in academia, research institutions, Department of Health Services and creating an ethos of evidence based decision making amongst senior level civil servants and policy makers.**

**Policy Aim 5:**

**To emphasize ethical practice in all health research to achieve equity and social justice for all.**

5.1 To ensure broad based participation of the vulnerable and marginalized member of the society in priority setting.

- 5.1.a. Discussions at the local level will take place to identify the needs of the vulnerable population. Local public health workers and community leaders will also be involved.
- 5.1.b. The public health issues of the vulnerable members of the society will be identified.
- 5.1.c. Steps will be developed and implemented to ensure participation and benefits. This will need to involve the local population, various ministries and other aid groups.
- 5.1.d. Public health research priority at the local as well as at the national level will be reviewed and revised.
- 5.1.e. Mechanism will be developed to capture, protect and exploit the knowledge, innovation and resources at the local level.
- 5.2 To conduct research with a special emphasis on respect for dignity of persons, justice, beneficence, respect for the environment, and ethical responsibility in the use of animals for health research.
  - 5.2.a. International ethical health research guidelines will continue to be incorporated into Nepal's ethical guidelines.
  - 5.2.b. National Ethical Guidelines for Health Research in Nepal will be updated and followed.
  - 5.2.c. Nepal Health Research Council, as the apex body, will continue to promote Institutional Review Committees (IRCs) in all appropriate research institutions.
  - 5.2.d. Ethical Review Boards of NHRC will be strengthened.
  - 5.2.e. The present National Ethical Guidelines for Health Research in Nepal will continuously be evaluated for their effectiveness and usefulness.
- 5.3. To protect intellectual property rights.
  - 5.3.a. A mechanism will be developed to protect, exploit and capitalize intellectual property rights issues related to health research.

**Policy Aim 6:**

**To promote health research in the broad dimensions—biomedical, clinical, social sciences, public health, health economics, TCAM, environmental health and health policy research.**

- 6.1. To promote research on biomedical, clinical and behavioral sciences, public health, health economics, health policy, traditional medicine, environmental health and other areas.
  - 6.1.a. More research proposals and reports will be invited.
- 6.2. To accelerate the development of the health research culture at all universities, hospitals, medical colleges, health system providers, and other health related institutions.
  - 6.2.a. Health research grants/awards will be allocated to improve the health research culture. Undergraduate grants, postgraduate grants, young scientist's grants, experienced researcher grants, and outstanding research awards will be provided.
- 6.3 To simplify the process of health research approval, while at the same time maintaining the technical, scientific and ethical excellence required.

**Policy Aim 7:****To promote multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral research in health.**

- 7.1 To collaborate/network with those in education, environment, ecology, social and behavioral sciences, population, agriculture, trade and commerce, science/technology, forestry, and others.
- 7.2 To promote multi-disciplinary research on cross-cutting issue such as gender, vector borne diseases, climate change, influenza, nutrition, Road traffic Accidents, Domestic violence, disabilities etc.
- 7.3 A core group of experts from various disciplines will be identified to support health research.
- 7.4 To develop a research culture wherein policy makers and the community are sensitive to the value of research and are supportive of science and scientists.
- 7.5. Awareness programs taking place on the local level with the community and policy makers.
- 7.6 To encourage public/private partnership to promote health research.

**Policy Aim 8:****To develop mechanism for effective communication of research to ensure that the benefits of research are effectively translated into practice.**

- 8.1 Health Policy research unit will be established at NHRC to bridge researchers and policy makers for communicating research findings.
- 8.2 National forum for health research will be created and facilitated for interaction and dialogue between researchers and policy/ decision makers.
- 8.3 To ensure that health policy is evidence based.
  - 8.3.a. Health issues to be addressed will be identified using reliable data.

**Policy Aim 9:****To enable, support and sustain human, financial, technical and other resources required for health research.**

- 9.1. To address the existing gaps and constraints in health research.
  - 9.1.a. A critical mass of health researchers will be developed.
  - 9.1.b. Training/updating workshops on health system methodology will be conducted on a regular basis.
  - 9.1.c. Necessary financial resources will be generated for health research.
  - 9.1.d. Funds/sponsorships for qualified health researchers will be actively sought.
  - 9.1.e. The compatibility of local health issues with Nepal Government health programs will be assessed.
- 9.2. To determine the feasibility for a National Health Research Laboratory.
  - 9.2.a. Analysis and assessment of existing Health Research Laboratories will be carried out.

- 9.2.b. Feasibility study on establishing a National Health Research Laboratory will be conducted. This will include the total financial cost, personnel required, plan for sustainability as well as a list of possible donors.
- 9.2.c. Various divisions of health research laboratories that may be required for Nepal will be determined based on analysis, assessment and feasibility reports.
- 9.3. To update NHRC National Health Research Library.
  - 9.3.a. NHRC library will be developed into digital library for facilitating the researcher, policy makers and students in research works
- 9.4. To establish a mechanism for networking and sharing of resources among stakeholders in health research.
  - 9.4. a. The stakeholders involved in health research will be listed.
  - 9.4. b. The stakeholders will be requested to identify their research resources.
  - 9.4.c. A database of resources for health research will be established.
  - 9.4.d. Collaborating and sharing of resources will be promoted to strengthen the health research culture in Nepal.
- 9.5. To have gradual increment of GoN and External Development Partners (EDPs) contribution in health research. (As per International Conference for Health Research Development", Bangkok, 10-13 October 2000, recommendation, Mexico Ministerial level summit 2004 endorsement and Bamako Mali Ministerial Summit 2008 commitment i.e. 2% of the total National Health Sector budget and 5% of all EDPs health sector budget contribution in health research)
- 9.6. To actively seek funding from donor agencies interested in health research development in Nepal.
- 9.7. To develop a mechanism whereby Nepalese resources in health research can be identified and utilized to strengthen health research capacity inside as well as outside of Nepal.

**Policy Aim 10:**

**To promote national and international partnership, collaboration and networking in health research.**

- 10.1 To develop a National Health Research Information System.
  - 10.1.a. A national data base center will be identified for the collection of data.
  - 10.1.b. Health research data will be made available to all qualified personnel, e.g. researchers, policy makers, etc.
  - 10.1.d. A national data base center will be established on traditional medical practices, knowledge, recipes, manuscripts and medicinal plants.
- 10.2. To strengthen the capacity to utilize health research data for health policy development.
  - 10.2.a. Policy makers and all stakeholders will be involved for health research.
  - 10.2.b. Research data will be transformed into a language that is useful and understandable to the community and to policy makers.
- 10.3. Networking and coordination of all national libraries of health will be developed.

- 10.4. Network of all IRCs and Ethical Review Boards (ERBs) will be developed and operationalized.
- 10.5. To develop a mechanism for the successful collaboration/networking for the transfer of technology and capacity building for health research.
- 10.6. To further develop and strengthen partnership with EDPs including WHO, UN Agencies and others.

## **11. Organizational Structure**

### **Institutional Framework**

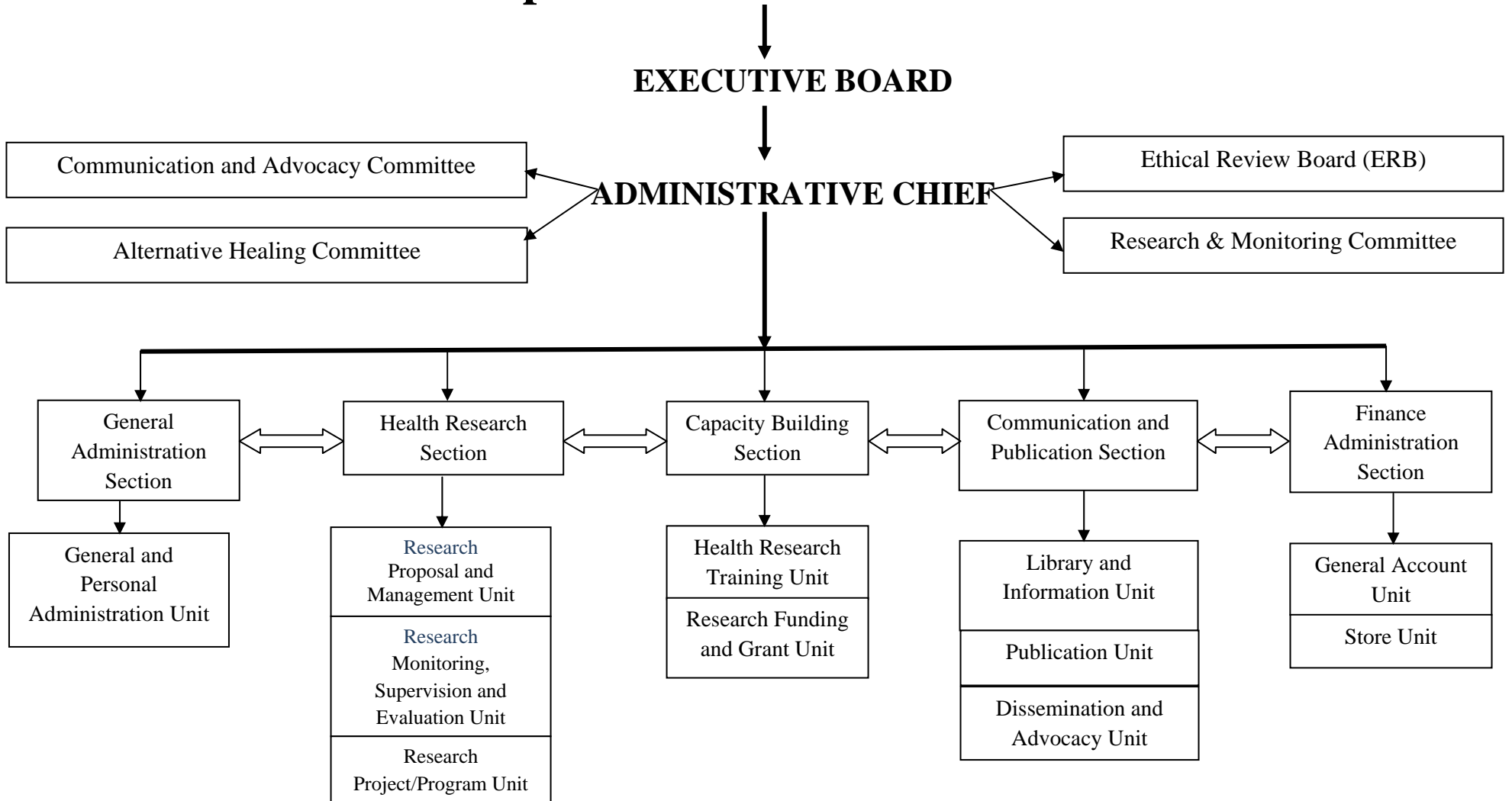
There Executive Board of NHRC which consists of following members will executive this policy.

Seven persons appointed by GoN from among the physicians of modern medical system and Ayurvedic medical system having experience in the study and research relating to health

	- Member
Representative, MoF	- Member
Representative, NPC	- Member
Representative, MoHP	- Member
Chief, Research Committee, Institute of Medicine	- Member
Chairman, Nepal Medical Council	- Member
A person appointed by GoN	- Member-Secretary

**Total: 13 Board members**

# Organization Structure Nepal Health Research Council





The existing regional focal points for health research will be gradually upgraded into regional office for health research in Nepal. In order to decentralize the health research approval process and facilitate the researchers, number of IRCs will be promoted and increased in all medical colleges and research institutes in Nepal.

## **12. Financial Aspect**

In order to implement the above mentioned policies, the research fund will be consisted of regular grant amount received from GoN, Foreign Government, INGOs and EDPs. Besides these, research budget can also be generated from proposal approval fee from researchers. In order to fulfill the international commitment made by the Government and EDPs, health research budget need to gradually increase to meet two percent of national health sector expenditure and five percent of EDPs.

## **13. Legal Provision**

This policy has been formulated and issued as per the provision in NHRC Act 1991 6(b) which has given right to the NHRC to formulate policies concerning both basic and applied study and research relating to health.

## **14. Monitoring and Evaluation**

To ensure that resources are used efficiently and in line with agreed priorities there is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation. The NHRS will develop explicit policies and procedures for reviewing proposals, and for monitoring and evaluating the output and impact of those that are funded. Indicators will be developed to monitor the development and effectiveness of the NHRS. Indicators would also be defined for assessing health status, health system effectiveness, efficiency and affordability, in order to capture the contribution of research in reducing inequities. Direct indicators of National Development, would serve as indirect indicators of the efficacy of Health System Research as a vehicle for development.

## **15. Risks**

In order to implement the policy there may be the constraint of budget because of resource allocation for health research is very low (less than 1%).



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