

Declaration on Evidence, Equity, and Independence in Humanitarian Health

July 1, 2026

Introduction

We, the directors and next-generation scholars of academic centers and programs dedicated to humanitarian health, met at a consequential moment. Armed conflict, forced displacement, and attacks on health care are intensifying alongside the collapse of research funding, the increased politicization of humanitarianism, and growing institutional constraints on independent scholarship. Together, these forces do not merely strain individual centers and programs; they challenge the conditions under which rigorous, independent, and equity-focused humanitarian health scholarship and knowledge production can occur.

In this context, academic centers such as ours bear profound and distinct responsibilities grounded in five mutually reinforcing domains: 1) generate evidence; 2) train future leaders and collaborative practitioners; 3) engage in evidence-based practice and public debate; 4) advocate based on generated evidence; and 5) protect academic freedom.

Our credibility, independence, and partnerships must meet the highest standards of integrity and equity. This declaration was drafted at an initial convening of seven academic centers and programs. We treat this as a living document to be reviewed and developed periodically with other institutions and scholars who will continue to join this group. We will make a concerted effort to expand our reach to institutions in crisis-affected settings, including those working in and led from humanitarian and fragile contexts. Meeting high standards of integrity and equity requires us to recognize and reckon with the ways that academic institutions have historically concentrated, and continue to concentrate, knowledge, funding, and decision-making power. It requires a commitment to partnerships with shared authority and governance over research agendas, humanitarian action and outcomes, informed and led by the communities that we serve.

Our Commitments

We, the undersigned, commit to the following:

1. **Generate evidence.** We commit to producing evidence transparently and communicating it with integrity, even in contested and polarized public debates, and particularly where powerful actors or systems are implicated. Our conclusions must follow the evidence, regardless of political or institutional pressure.
2. **Train future leaders and collaborative practitioners.** We commit to educating the next generation of humanitarian health scholars and practitioners. This includes conducting rigorous, ethical and scientifically sound research in addition to challenging inequities and reshaping power dynamics. Training must prepare learners not only to conduct research and deliver care, but to remain steadfast in contested environments, share authority with stakeholders, engage in solidarity with affected populations, and sustain the field's independence over time.
3. **Engage in practice and public debate.** We commit to engaging actively and responsibly in humanitarian practice and in public debate. We will bring evidence to bear on the decisions that shape the lives of affected populations. This requires clarity about what the evidence shows, humility about what it does not, the courage to speak when silence would allow misinformation or harmful narratives to prevail, and the discipline to leave our echo chambers by engaging audiences, institutions, and critics who disagree with us. We will treat these exchanges as essential to sharpening evidence and broadening its contextual reach.
4. **Advocate based on evidence.** We commit to advocating on the strength of the evidence to protect health, dignity, and rights in humanitarian settings. Our advocacy must be transparent about its aims, faithful to the evidence behind it, and accountable to the communities it claims to serve.

5. **Protect Academic Freedom.** We commit to protecting, individually and collectively, the conditions under which rigorous humanitarian health research can be funded, conducted and published with true independence - free from donor capture, institutional risk aversion, and political interference, intimidation, or retaliation against researchers or institutions.

Partnership and Accountability

Meeting these commitments requires a fundamental change in how we conduct research, design and implement programmes, and train. We will build multinational academic partnerships based on shared authority and governance over research agendas, joint ownership of evidence, and genuine respect for the knowledge each partner contributes. We will establish trust with the communities we serve by conducting research relevant to their needs and sharing real power over the use of data. We will support communities in translating the evidence generated into contextual policies and sustainable programmatic interventions, in the hope that those collective efforts will improve the health and well-being of crisis-affected populations.

A Call to Collective Action

No single humanitarian health center or program can meet this moment alone. We will aspire to act together, through joint education, coordinated advocacy, shared research infrastructure, mutual accountability and honest dialogue. We are seeking to develop this declaration further in partnership with other academic centers and scholars, especially those leading from crisis-affected settings, whose perspectives must shape its terms, not merely its signatories. The communities most affected by humanitarian crises deserve a field whose evidence is rigorous, whose partnerships are equitable, whose leadership is shared, and whose voice is independent. These commitments are our contribution to that field - and our obligation to communities who must hold us to them.

Signatories*

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* As directors of academic centers and programs working on humanitarian health research, training, and policy engagement, we write and sign this declaration in our individual capacity and not on behalf of our individual institutions.

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