

Ethics & Conflict of Interest Policy

This policy applies to all INNOVAPATH™ stakeholders, authors, editors, reviewers, and publishers for all article types. INNOVAPATH™ aligns with the principles of ICMJE and COPE and follows relevant reporting standards (e.g., CONSORT, STROBE, PRISMA, TRIPOD, ARRIVE, CHEERS). The core components of this policy are scientific rigor, human-subject protection, data integrity and transparency, unbiased peer review, editorial independence, and timely corrections when needed.

Research Ethics & Compliance:

- **Human Participants:**
 - Studies must state IRB/IEC approval (name of board and approval number/date) **or** provide a clear justification for exemption.
 - Confirm informed consent (and assent where applicable) and describe privacy safeguards (de-identification; HIPAA/GDPR-aligned handling).
 - **Patient images/identifiers:**
 - Written consent is required for any potentially identifiable material; otherwise, images must be fully anonymized.

Animals and Biosafety:

- State/Country IACUC (or equivalent) approval and adherence to ARRIVE guidelines.
- Declare biosafety approvals for recombinant DNA, pathogens, or select agents; describe containment levels.

Clinical Trials & Prospective Registrations:

- Interventional trials must be registered in a public registry before enrollment (include registry, ID, and date).
- For systematic reviews, provide a PROSPERO ID when available.

Dual Use Research of Concern (DURC):

- Authors must disclose if work could reasonably enable misuse (e.g., pathogen enhancement, security-sensitive algorithms) and describe risk-mitigation steps. The journal may decline publication where risks outweigh benefits.

Data Integrity, Availability & Reproducibility:

- Analyses and results must be accurate, honest, and reproducible. Statistical methods, software (version), and thresholds should be fully specified.
- Data/Code availability statement required for research articles. Share data/code in trusted repositories where legally and ethically permissible; otherwise, provide access conditions and a justified restriction statement.
- Image processing must not change meaning; any adjustments (e.g., brightness) require disclosure and identical treatment across the image.

Required Statements in the Manuscript:

- Ethics approval & consent
- Data and code availability
- Funding statement
- Author contributions (CRediT taxonomy)
- Competing interests (see below)
- AI-use disclosure (see below)

Plagiarism, Text Recycling & Use of Generative AI:

- Plagiarism and redundant/duplicate publication (including text recycling and “salami slicing”) are prohibited. All submissions are screened with similarity tools; substantial unattributed overlap leads to rejection or retraction.
- Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) cannot be authors.
 - Permitted with disclosure: language editing, grammar/style, or code linting with full human oversight and verification.
 - Not permitted: generating or altering data/images, fabricating citations, or undisclosed AI-written sections.

- Disclosure format (add to Methods/Acknowledgments): “We used [tool, version] for [scope]. The authors verified outputs; no data or references were generated by the tool.”
- Do not upload confidential, proprietary, or patient-identifiable data to public AI systems.

Authorship & Changes to Authorship:

- Authorship follows ICMJE criteria (substantial contributions; drafting/revision; approval of final version; accountability).
- Use CRediT roles for transparency.
- Changes (add/remove/reorder) after submission require written agreement from all authors and a reason; the Editor will adjudicate disputes.

Conflicts of Interest (COI) & Funding:

- Author COI
 - Disclose all relationships/activities/interests (financial and non-financial) relevant within 36 months, including funding, consulting, equity, IP/licensing, paid travel, leadership roles, and close personal/professional relationships.
- Provide funding sources and the role of the funder (study design, data collection, analysis, publication decision).

Reviewer & Editor COI:

- Reviewers/editors must recuse themselves from manuscripts where a COI exists (recent collaboration, same department, mentor/mentee, financial ties, or personal relationships).
- Reviewers must not share manuscript content or upload it to external tools; they may use local tools to polish their review text only and should disclose such use to the editor if material.

Forms:

- INNOVAPATH requires completion of the Comprehensive COI Disclosure at onboarding and per manuscript (available from the Editorial Office).

Peer Review, Confidentiality & Editorial Independence

- Model:
 - Single-blind (reviewers anonymous to authors).
- Confidentiality:
 - Manuscripts and peer review materials are confidential and may not be shared outside the editorial process.
- Reviewer Conduct:
 - Provide objective, evidence-based critiques; avoid discriminatory or demeaning language; declare any COI immediately.
- Editorial Independence:
 - Decisions are made solely on scientific merit and ethical compliance, independent of sponsors, advertisers, or institutional affiliations.

Preprints, Prior Dissemination & Data Reuse:

- Preprints allowed. Authors must disclose the preprint DOI/URL in the cover letter and manuscript. Upon publication, authors should link to the Version of Record.
- Conference abstracts/posters and thesis chapters do not count as prior publication but must be cited.
- Reuse of datasets is encouraged with proper citation and compliance with license/consent terms.

Copyright, License & Open Access:

- INNOVAPATH™ publishes open access with a no-fee policy (no APCs or page charges).
- Default license: CC BY 4.0 unless otherwise stated. Authors must secure permissions for third-party materials and credit them appropriately.

Misconduct, Investigations & Sanctions:

- What Counts as Misconduct?
 - Fabrication/falsification, plagiarism, undisclosed duplicate submission, image manipulation, undisclosed COI, authorship manipulation (ghost/guest authorship), unethical research conduct, and peer-review manipulation.

Process:

- Initial assessment by the Editor and Research Integrity Lead; similarity and image-forensics checks may be used.
- Author query with opportunity to respond and provide data/documents.
- If concerns persist, the journal may contact institutions/funders and suspend the review process.
- Outcomes may include rejection, correction, expression of concern, or retraction following COPE flowcharts. Severe cases may lead to submission bans for a defined period.

Corrections, Expressions of Concern & Retractions:

- Corrections (erratum/corrigendum):
 - For honest errors affecting but not invalidating results.
- Expression of Concern:
 - When serious questions remain unresolved.
- Retraction:
 - For unreliable findings due to misconduct or major error, redundant publication, unethical research, or legal issues.
- Notices are free to read, linked to the article's DOI, and explain the reason transparently.

Appeals & Complaints:

- Authors may appeal editorial decisions by writing to the Managing Editor within 30 days, providing a concise rationale and addressing reviewer points. A senior editor not involved in the original decision will adjudicate.
- Complaints about editorial conduct or policy application should be sent to contact@innovapath.us and will be handled according to COPE guidance.

Editorial Metrics & Service Levels:

Target timelines (business days):

- Triage: 3–5
- Reviewer invitations/acceptance: 3–7
- Review period: 14 (extensions by request)
- First decision goal: 28–35
- Production after acceptance: 7–14 (copyedit, proofs, DOI assignment, ORCID update)

The journal publishes annual metrics on time-to-decision, acceptance rate, corrections/retractions, and diversity of authors/reviewers.

Required Declarations - Templates

Ethics Approval & Consent:

- “This study was approved by [IRB/IEC name, approval #, date]. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants [or waiver granted because ...].”

Data Availability:

- “Data and code are available at [repository/DOI] under [license]. Restrictions apply to [reason]; requests may be sent to [contact].”

Funding:

- “This work was supported by [funder, grant #]. The funder had [no role/roles in ...].”

Competing Interests:

- “Author A reports [type]; Author B reports none; all others declare no competing interests.”

AI-use Disclosure:

- “We used [tool, version] for [grammar editing/language polishing]. No text, data, images, or references were generated; the authors verified all outputs.”

Author contributions (CRediT)

- “Conceptualization: A,B; Methodology: A,C; Investigation: B,C; Writing—original draft: A; Writing—review & editing: A,B,C; Supervision: D.”

Effective Date & Revisions:

This policy is effective immediately and reviewed annually. Updates will be posted on the journal website and apply prospectively unless stated otherwise.