NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

People Living With Brain Implants Publish Foundational Recommendations for Ethical BCI Research

BCI Pioneers Coalition's "OUR BCI" puts participant autonomy at the center of brain-computer interface trials, giving researchers and industry a foundation for ethical research as the field moves to formalize its standards

Columbus, Ohio, November 10, 2026 — The BCI Pioneers Coalition, a community led by people who have taken part in implanted brain-computer interface (iBCI) trials, today released *OUR BCI: Recommendations for Ethical Implanted BCI Research*. A living document, written from the perspective of the people who volunteer for iBCI research, the recommendations set out a foundation that researchers, sponsors and companies can use to run trials ethically, built on participant autonomy.

Developed through facilitated discussions held between October 2025 and October 2026, with researchers at York University and the University of Ottawa, the recommendations cover 13 areas across the life of a trial: from how people first learn a trial exists, through recruitment, consent and the research itself, to post-trial care. The work was funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Engage Grant.

The recommendations arrive as neuroethics research increasingly treats participant autonomy as central to ethical neural-device research: recognizing participants as key contributors of knowledge whose insights should shape protocols and device design, treating consent as an ongoing process for long-term implants, and holding that obligations to participants continue after a trial ends. New ethics guidance for investigational implantable neural device studies likewise stresses respect for participants' autonomy. Participants are also beginning to shape that research directly: Coalition founder Ian Burkhart co-authored a 2026 study in the journal Neuroethics on the psychological experience of living with a BCI. (See Research background, below.)

Recent events underline the need to formalize how the field works. The World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Neurotechnology recently published Industry Best-Practice Commitments and a proposed NeuroTrust Index for neurotechnology companies, a sign that expectations for neurotechnology are being written down. OUR BCI launches a living set of expectations for research in the field: the autonomy and recognition of the people who take part in research.

"Participant autonomy is a mandatory prerequisite of ethical research. These recommendations are the foundation we are offering every research team and every company running a BCI trial: start with the people who live with the device, and build from there," said **Ian Burkhart**, founder of the BCI Pioneers Coalition.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS ARE ASKING FOR

- **Consent as a continuing conversation.** Plain-language materials, time for questions, a plan to reconfirm consent when a study changes, and regular independent check-ins with someone outside the research team.
- **NDAs with limits.** No confidentiality agreement should ever stop a participant from raising safety, rights, or misconduct concerns with doctors, lawyers, regulators, or ethics boards, and any restrictions should be precise and time-limited.
- **Fair recognition.** No out-of-pocket costs, fair compensation for participants' time, and credit for intellectual contributions, including the chance to help draft and review publications.
- **Brain data that belongs to the person.** Neural data should be treated as the participant's personal information, with researchers as stewards, a right of access, and a say in how it is shared.
- **Clarity on who owns the device.** Ownership and control of implanted hardware, software, and decoders should be settled before surgery, and a company's property interest alone should not decide whether a device is removed or switched off.
- **A plan for the end of the trial.** Device support for a reasonable period after a trial, escrow funds for explantation, and a plan if investigators move or a study ends early.

"We are not just only a participant, but we're also making the science actually happen," one Pioneer contributor says in the recommendations, which include first-person accounts from participants alongside the guidance.

"Consent is not a signature you collect once. In this new era of participant autonomy, it is a conversation that continues for as long as the device is part of someone's life," said **Galen Buckwalter**, a BCI Pioneers lead and trial participant.

"These foundational recommendations crucially come from people who have lived experience in implanted BCI research, and other research participants are invited to contribute to this living document to build an ethical future for BCI research. The next step is a binding code of practice, informed by this lived experience, that ethics boards, funders and regulators can enforce," said **Jennifer Chandler**, Canada Research Chair in the Law and Ethics of Brain Technologies at the University of Ottawa.

A CALL TO THE FIELD

The Coalition calls on investigators, sponsors, manufacturers, funders, research ethics boards and regulators to adopt the recommendations as a foundation for their trials: documented plans, budgets and participant-facing procedures that put participant autonomy first. It asks everyone now writing standards for neurotechnology to build on them, and offers Pioneers as advisers.

OUR BCI is a living document. It reflects the deliberation of six Coalition members and will be reviewed every 24 months as more participants contribute. The Coalition invites people with lived experience of iBCI trials to take part at info@bcipioneers.org.

The full recommendations and an infographic of the 13 categories are available at https://bcipioneers.org/our-bci-recommendations.

ABOUT THE BCI PIONEERS COALITION

The BCI Pioneers Coalition is a digital forum founded and led by people with lived experience participating in implanted brain-computer interface trials. It provides peer support to current and prospective participants and brings the participant perspective to the scientists, companies, and policymakers shaping the field.

ABOUT THE OUR BCI PROJECT

OUR BCI: Outlining user-defined goals for responsible innovation in implanted brain-computer interface technologies is a partnership between the BCI Pioneers Coalition and researchers Amanda van Beinum (York University) and Jennifer Chandler (University of Ottawa), funded by SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant #892-2023-1099. Pioneer leads: Ian Burkhart, Galen Buckwalter, Scott Imbrie and Buz Chmielewski.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Recent peer-reviewed work on participant autonomy and engagement in implanted neural device research. Gilbert, Burkhart, and Morrill (2026) is co-authored by Coalition founder Ian Burkhart.

Goering, S., Brown, A. I., & Klein, E. P. (2024). Brain pioneers and moral entanglement: An argument for post-trial responsibilities in neural-device trials. *Hastings Center Report*, 54(1), 24–33. https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.1566

Güemes, A., Costa, T., & Makin, T. R. (2025). Foundational guidelines for enhancing neurotechnology research and development through end-user involvement. *Journal of Neural Engineering*, 22(1), 012001. https://doi.org/10.1088/1741-2552/adac0d

Levy, L., & Feinsinger, A. (2025). Participant engagement, epistemic injustice, and early-phase implanted neural device research. *Hastings Center Report*, 55(5), 18–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.70022

van Stuijvenberg, O. C., Bassil, K. C., de Vos, C. C., Geleijnse, G., Noordmans, H. J., Broekman, M. L. D., van der Graaf, R., Bertens, R. M., Lázaro-Muñoz, G., & Jongsma, K. R. (2026). Ethical guidance for investigational implantable neural device studies: Recommendations for researchers and research ethics committees. *Neuromodulation: Technology at the Neural Interface*, 29(3), 409–419. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neurom.2025.12.011

Zhao, Y., & Lin, Y. (2026). Consent in flux: When brain-computer interface embodiment undermines informed consent. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 27(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-026-01540-1

Gilbert, F., Burkhart, I., & Morrill, J. (2026). "The brain-computer interface is changing me": The psychological trajectory of becoming more-than-human with a brain implant. *Neuroethics*, 19(2). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12152-026-09656-2

MEDIA CONTACT

Ian Burkhart, Founder

ian@bcipioneers.org

Interviews with Pioneer leads and the research team are available on request.