



Supporting Health Researchers in Canada: another piece of the puzzle

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance

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Executive Summary

Since the election of the current government, Canada has seen a decidedly strategic approach to research funding; the principles laid out in *Advantage Canada* and our national *Science and Technology Strategy* outline a vision for future research investments and a clearly articulated set of desired national outcomes.

Canada is not in a position to rest on its laurels. To reach our true potential and become global leaders in health and biomedical research, further investments in health and biomedical research are required. These investments would enable the translation of research into improved health outcomes, cutting-edge clinical interventions, improved models of health services delivery, and commercial and economic activity.

We must provide Canadian researchers with a competitive advantage by increasing the resource available for research endeavour. This will also enhance our ability to attract the best and the brightest from around the world to improve our international competitiveness.

AFMC recommends that Canada increase its investments in health and biomedical research, in a balanced and strategic way, by \$350 million. This will capitalize on our past investments and enable us to reach the objectives set out in Advantage Canada and Canada's Science and Technology Strategy, Further, we recommend that a significant portion of this increase be allocated to programs aimed at enabling those who conduct world-class research in this country to create and sustain productive and transformative research careers, and to apply their research to the betterment of Canada.

Strategically Increasing Research Support

Since its election, the present government has shown enthusiasm in the support of health and biomedical research, implementing a particularly strategic approach to funding with a focus on moving the results of research into our hospitals, marketplace and ultimately to the community to improve the health of Canadians and to benefit our economy.

Advantage Canada and the recent *Science and Technology Strategy* are clear signs that this government wishes to take an approach to research that is based on outcomes and value to Canadian society. We believe this is a well-founded approach and are confident that with adequate resourcing, our community of health and biomedical researchers are well poised and prepared to deliver on our national objectives.

The government's focus on increasing the competitiveness of Canadian health research and researchers is already bearing fruit. Investments made through SSHRC, CIHR and NSERC, as well as the various Networks of Centres of Excellence initiatives, the Canada Research Program and the Canada Foundation for Innovation are enabling Canada to become increasingly able to address the unique healthcare needs of Canadians and to solve crucial problems such as timely access, delivering care to difficult to serve populations, and the monumental challenge of reducing unacceptable wait times. Canadian researchers are also directly applying research to areas such as clinical genetics, cancer treatments, diabetes and infectious diseases, and we are building a foundation of world-class health researchers.

A Balanced Approach to Growth

AFMC is supportive of Canada's National Science and Technology Strategy as a mechanism to help Canada set national priorities and to ensure an international competitive advantage. As we further refine and implement this national strategy, particularly as it directs resources to priority areas, there will be a need for careful deliberation to maximize the impact of our vision and minimize any unintended negative consequences.

Canada must invest in the entire spectrum of health research. While biomedical and clinical research is vital, health services research and broader social science research, as they relate to health, are also critical for the health of the nation. Innovations in health services delivery, for example, will save lives as well as money.

A balance must also be struck between the funding of fundamental and applied research, both of which are essential to achieve the government's goals. While the latter is most obviously tied to the commercialization agenda, it cannot be forgotten that great discoveries and innovations also stem from investigator-driven, fundamental research. It is essential that as we increase the targeted nature of our research funding enterprise that we do so in a manner that does not jeopardize quality, innovation and original discoveries.

Priority research areas identified in any focused strategy must take into consideration both current and emerging research areas that are on, or just below, the horizon. The latter is particularly important to recruit and retain the best and the brightest researchers –

those in the decade ahead who will be conducting innovative, groundbreaking research with enormous potential for return.

Finally, Canada must continue to make investments in science and technology that are balanced between direct and indirect costs, infrastructure, and funding for researchers and their research operations. Ensuring the right balance, derived through consultation with a broad cross-section of the Canadian research community and considering international comparators, will enhance research opportunities for Canadian scientists and allow them to stay in Canada while remaining at the leading edge of their fields.

Reaching our goals with a strategic focus on people

Canada's faculties of medicine, attracting health research funding that exceeds 50% of the total research revenues of their parent universities, play a pivotal role in the health and biomedical research enterprise in this country. While research happens in multiple settings - university faculties, teaching hospitals, research institutes and R&D labs in private sector organizations - the common denominator for the research undertaken in all of these and other settings is that it is conducted by researchers who are, by and large, trained in our faculties.

Each of our member-Faculties has a critical tri-partite mission comprised of research, education and clinical care. While public attention is paid primarily to our role in training our future medical workforce, each of the three elements of our mission is equally important and critical to the success of the others; in particular, a healthy and strong research base situated in our faculties of medicine is of paramount importance to the health of our healthcare system and of Canadians.

Research is critical to our Faculties of Medicine for several reasons. The pedagogical value of research is often overlooked, but our faculties are the spawning ground of Canada's future research community. To train the best and the brightest researchers of tomorrow, faculty-based researchers of today need active and world-class research programs to train new and emerging researchers.

In addition, Faculty-based clinician scientists are able to bridge the gap between research and the delivery of healthcare. These individuals provide us with leadership in evidence-based healthcare and are agents of change through translational research and the commercialization agenda.

The tripartite mission of our Faculties means great demands on the time of faculty members. Teaching, clinical care and academic research all compete for attention in their schedules. Perhaps the single major barrier to the government achieving its goal of increasing the competitiveness of Canadian research and research applications is providing a *competitive environment in which the researcher can acquire the time needed to develop their research programs and implement their results*. This is particularly true in the clinical setting, where investment in developing innovation takes second place to the immediate challenge of providing health care. Canada often loses out on the ability to fully apply the intellectual capital we create in our faculties to new innovation due to the lack of avenues that will directly support their participation in the full spectrum of the research enterprise.

Canada must ensure that health research is not only a *viable career option*, but is seen as such. To create and recruit dedicated researchers of international caliber that make a difference in moving research findings into the public domain, we need supportive research funding programs. The best and the brightest will shy away from a career in health and biomedical research if they sense that the Canadian society and its government do not value and commit to sustaining their work.

Significant investment aimed at enabling researchers to conduct world-class research in Canada will create and sustain productive and transformative research careers, and the application of discovery to improve the health of individuals and populations. We need a robust clinical and applied health research program that will provide competitive salary support awards for our most outstanding applied health researchers to bring their research to fruition. This support would be focused on highly competitive, yet targeted areas of strategic priority for Canada, and would be delivered through our existing research funding agencies. They would target new, intermediate and senior researchers by providing support to tenured academic researchers and through research training studentships and fellowships with salary support for clinician scientists and doctoral students pursuing research in health-related areas. This support would also include indirect costs in scholarship to allow institutions to provide the infrastructure and operational support required by the researchers.

About Us

Founded in 1943 in response to the Canadian government's need to accelerate medical school programs to increase the number of graduates to meet wartime requirements during the Second World War, the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) represents Canada's 17 Faculties of Medicine and is the voice of academic medicine in this country. AFMC supports medical education, research, and clinical care in our Faculties.

Currently our Faculties of Medicine enroll just over 2,500 first-year medical students annually and supervise the postgraduate education of 8,942 residents funded through Ministries of Health and an additional 3,019 residents and fellows funded from non-Ministry sources. Over 9,600 graduate students (masters, PhDs) are enrolled in medical faculties. Medical schools attract funding that generally exceeds 50% of the total research revenues of their parent universities.

AFMC contributes to the improvement of medical education in Canada in a number of ways. With our partner, the Canadian Medical Association, we accredit programs leading to MD degrees, a process done conjointly with the Liaison Committee on Medical Education of the United States of America, a unique international collaborative effort. With a number of partners, we also accredit offices of continuing medical education located in our faculties across the country. We play an active role in the accreditation of programs leading to certification in family medicine and in the more than 60 specialties sponsored by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. We are an active partner in the Canadian Residency Matching Service (CaRMS), and we direct the Canadian Post-MD Education Registry (CAPER), a tracking system that allows us to predict entry into practice of our residents and fellows.

Vision: National and international leadership in health education, research and care to meet the needs of all Canadians.

Mission: To ensure the health of Canadians by promoting and supporting excellence in health education and research.

Strategic Goals:

1. To be a leading advocate and an expert voice on issues relating to health education, health research and clinical care.
2. To respond to changing societal needs with innovative educational programs.
3. To provide leadership in the development of a health human resource plan.
4. To define and advocate for appropriate funding to achieve the education and research missions of the Faculties of Medicine.
5. To enable and sustain academic careers for health and biomedical researchers through capacity building, education and funding.
6. To provide leadership in enhancing our accreditation programs and in developing a world class Canadian Conference on Medical Education.

Appendix 1: Our Faculties of Medicine

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. James Rourke

Dalhousie University

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. Harold Cook

Université Laval

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. Pierre Durand

Université de Sherbrooke

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
Dean: Dr. Réjean Hébert

Université de Montréal

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. Jean L. Rouleau

McGill University

Faculty of Medicine
Vice-Principal (Health Sciences) &
Dean: Dr. Richard I. Levin

University of Ottawa

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Jacques Bradwejn

Queen's University at Kingston

Faculty of Health Sciences
Dean: Dr. David M.C. Walker

University of Toronto

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. Catharine Whiteside

McMaster University

Faculty of Health Sciences
Dean & Vice-President: Dr. John Kelton

University of Western Ontario

Schulich School of Medicine and
Dentistry
Dean: Dr. Carol Herbert

Northern Ontario School of Medicine

Dean: Dr. Roger Strasser

University of Manitoba

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. J. Dean Sandham

University of Saskatchewan

College of Medicine
Dean: Dr. William Albritton

University of Alberta

Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry
Dean: Dr. Thomas J. Marrie

University of Calgary

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. Thomas Feasby

University of British Columbia

Faculty of Medicine
Dean: Dr. Gavin Stuart