

Research Canada:

An Alliance for Health Discovery

Access to timely and affordable healthcare remains a top priority for Canadians. In the second part of an informative interview, **Deborah Gordon-El-Bihbety**, President and CEO, elaborates on how Research Canada is helping to tackle these concerns

Firstly, what does your role as President and CEO entail? How do your own skills and experiences contribute to the successful management of Research Canada (RC)?

CEOs of voluntary organisations are first and foremost operational people. We are also business people, but there is something else I have noticed among my colleagues in the not-for-profit sector; we care about the causes we represent and we bring a certain passion to our work. I love what I do. What is not to love when I get to spend my time with some of the brightest people in Canada whose work is essentially alleviating human suffering and improving the human condition?

The researchers I represent, and for whom I carry out advocacy efforts, are true Canadian heroes. They work hard and they contribute to the advancement of our society and civilisation in ways that are not always understood by the public. My commitment to them is to translate what they do to our Parliamentarians, to the media and ultimately to Canadians, so that they are not alone in their knowledge of what science can do for people and for a country.

How are you supporting economic developments in Canada's health and healthcare sectors?

RC is strongly supportive of public-private partnerships, which are the lifeblood of a thriving health innovation system in Canada. As an organisation, we connect the dots for our decision makers, reminding them that they, as our Government, must support the entire cycle of R&D from discovery, through to product development and commercialisation, to the market place and into healthcare settings. This is especially critical in times of fiscal constraint, when Canada needs to be ever vigilant that investments are made in a balanced fashion across the continuum of these activities. If we jeopardise the discovery engine, the innovation system is at risk.

This means that the Government, in asking the private sector to invest in Canadian R&D, must put in place the appropriate policies that support an internationally harmonised Intellectual Property regime with robust tax incentive programmes for the biotech and medical device industries in the country.

Canada must address the health innovation adoption deficit in our healthcare system to answer questions such as: why is it that many Canadian health innovations are not sold here, but are reinventing the future of healthcare in other countries?

What health concerns are prevalent in Canada at present?

Access to timely and affordable healthcare remains a top priority for Canadians. Canada is the second largest land mass in the world so our population of 34 million is spread out over a large territory. With 10 provinces and three territories run by independent governments responsible for healthcare, sometimes it does not seem like we have a national healthcare system. So, equity in healthcare across the country is another issue. People in rural regions are often underserved and not all urban centres are created equal when it comes to healthcare.

A bigger issue; however, is leadership. It used to be that the Federal Government played a critical role in ensuring our national healthcare system was truly national. But the current Conservative Government is not continuing to set these standards. It has devolved this responsibility to the provinces and territories, leaving a vacuum in national leadership on this issue.

Which of Canada's latest health research advancements is RC involved with?

The speed of discovery, the convergence of disparate fields and new countries producing groundbreaking research are combining to create a global revolution in health research. Canada is well positioned to excel during this time of rapid change due to our strength in leading-edge research in areas such as proteomics and nanotechnology. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, our leading health researcher funding agency in Canada, is recognised among international health research leaders as an innovative organisation that has introduced novel approaches such as its unique model of virtual institutes (including those focused on Aboriginal Peoples' Health and Gender and Health), our integrative and inclusive vision, and our problem-based approach with its emphasis on multidisciplinary.

And which of these are you most excited about?

Canada is also proud of both novel medical devices: scalpelless surgery and high intensity focused ultrasound for the treatment of essential tremours, inoperable brain tumours and uterine fibroids. Other advancements include novel biologics for vascular diseases and technologies to define 'druggable targets' in all disease arenas – cancer, heart, central nervous system – capitalising on the understanding of human biology. We are at a remarkable time in our history in this regard. We have the genome and we are moving towards precision medicine, based on understanding individual responses to intervention, and determining whether they are responding in days, rather than months.

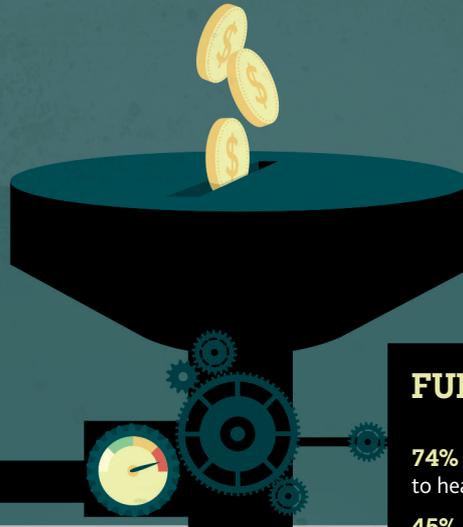
Canada also has advantages on which to build excellent clinical research, including internationally recognised trialists, relatively low costs for conducting trials and the structure of the Canadian health system.

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BASED IN OTTAWA, Ontario, Research Canada (RC): an Alliance for Health Discovery is a national, not-for-profit organisation whose mission it is to improve the health and prosperity of Canadians by championing the country's global leadership in health research.

An advocacy group, RC undertakes regular opinion polls to gauge Canadian opinion on important healthcare issues. The ensuing data is then provided to Federal Government. Their latest 2012 report conducted by Angus Reid Public Opinion revealed overwhelming support for healthcare research: 1,000 Canadian adults were polled.



FUNDING

74% of Canadians rejected the idea of cuts to health research in the 2012 Federal Budget

45% thought that the Federal Government should maintain current funding for health and medical research

30% thought that the Federal Government should increase funding for health and medical research

INNOVATION

92% of Canadians think that health and medical research increases innovation and new technologies

87% believe that health and medical research produces more health and medical advances



THE ECONOMY

78% held the view that health and medical research makes an important contribution to the Canadian economy

45% of Canadians think that Federal investments in health and medical research help create jobs, more so in Alberta (56%) and Atlantic Canada (53%)

