



June 4, 2020

# Research Canada 2020 Annual General Meeting



## Chair's Report to the Membership Annual General Meeting

June 4, 2020  
1:00 pm 2:00 pm

Since we last met in June 2019 our lives have significantly changed due to COVID-19. Our enterprise has been called to the frontline to defeat a pandemic that has had a devastating impact on Canadians and people across the globe in terms of the loss of life, our health, mental health, our economies, political systems, transportation systems, cities, families and I could go on. Suffice it is to say--it has been an unusual year and it is difficult to recall what came before COVID-19.

I will ask for your indulgence, if just for a moment, and take you back to the summer of 2019 where we, at Research Canada, were busy preparing our *Your Candidates, Your Health* campaign for the 2019 fall election aimed at mobilizing our Members to meet with election candidates in their constituencies to reinforce existing relationships with incumbents and to forge new ones with potential new MPs. The campaign was a success and while I will let Deborah provide a few more details in her presentation, I want to take this opportunity to thank our Members for the tremendous support you lent to the campaign through your efforts in providing your stories and in getting out and meeting with candidates. We all know that cultivating relationships with future MPs is one of the most important activities we can undertake during election campaigns. We were heartened to see so many of our Members engaged in their civic duty when it came to promoting health research and health innovation!

Research Canada conducted a Membership Survey following the federal election to solicit our Members' views on the state of our sector and Research Canada's responsiveness to the sector's challenges and our Members' needs. I will let Deborah provide you with more of an overview; however, what I took away from the survey was that Members are satisfied with the value of Research Canada both in terms of its direct benefit to their institutions and its impact on the health research and innovation sector. In particular, Members highly value the Parliamentary Health Research Caucus (PHRC) and the access it provides them to Parliamentarians. Members also clearly have a broader understanding and appreciation of the work that RC does to lobby and advocate on behalf of the sector. Members were also clear in wanting more opportunities for engagement and influence in RC's policy and advocacy activities.

Funding for researchers and research projects and programs continues to be the top challenge for RC Members and what Members view to be the most important advocacy priority for Research Canada.

When Parliament returned in January, Research Canada reached out to the new Minister of Health, the Honourable Patty Hajdu and worked closely with her and her staff to select the new Chair of the Parliamentary Health Research Caucus, which we were able to do right away. Mr. Lloyd Longfield, Liberal MP for Guelph, became the fifth Chair of the Caucus and joined Marilyn Gladu, Conservative MP for Sarnia-Lambton and Carol Hughes, NDP MP for Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing, our Vice Chairs, and Senator Judith Seidman, Conservative Senator from Quebec, our Senate Representative for this 43rd Parliament's Caucus.

We worked with them to organize a series of parliamentary health research caucus events focused on environmental health and climate change, rare disorders, cancer and medical imaging research and we planned a Welcome Reception hosted by the Minister and a Gairdner Award Reception at the outset of our PHRC calendar, all to be postponed when the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

We will not be swayed nor will the Minister and the Chair of the Caucus who have been unequivocal that we will press ahead with these events when the time is right, but for the immediate future we are moving forward with a series of COVID-19 virtual panel presentations in the weeks ahead for Parliamentarians, and we held one recently for our Members, Supporters and Partners which was very well received. Our goal is to keep decision-makers informed and help them to better understand the science of COVID-19, anti-viral treatments and the road to a vaccine--what and who it takes to put us in the driver seat with this virus.

Research Canada rang some alarm bells early on in the summer of 2019 regarding new and emerging infectious diseases in our policy work beginning with our response to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance's Call for Submissions focused on building a low carbon economy. Research Canada recommended that the Government of Canada make a significant investment in research focused on the complex interactions between climate change and emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) in order to strengthen Canada's global leadership in developing solutions for EIDs.

We raised the point in our submission and in subsequent meetings with decision makers that the increasing threat of EIDs required significant investments into fundamental research about pathogens, molecular mechanisms of transmission and their effect on human health. We strongly advised investments in research into harnessing artificial intelligence, as well as modern genomics and bioinformatics, which could have contributed to outbreak detection, source location and identification of predictive genetic changes.

The increasing threat of EIDs also demanded R&D to advance effective and fit-for-purpose tools and technologies, such as vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, personal protective equipment and medical devices. We made the case that having a stable and competitive business environment

in which the health and biosciences sector could innovate was essential to the state of our preparedness.

It continues to be a strong policy priority of Research Canada to invest in research with, by and for Indigenous Peoples. In terms of the unique impact of climate change on the health, wellbeing and economic lives of Indigenous Peoples, we need to recognize the leadership role Indigenous Peoples play in developing mitigation and adaptation actions that sustain the resilience of social and ecological systems. Human encroachment into biodiverse areas is increasingly being shown to increase the risk of spillover of novel infectious diseases by enabling new contacts between humans and wildlife, which is how we came to be in the pandemic we are in now!

When the WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic, Research Canada first focused on ensuring that our Staff were safe and healthy and well set up to work from home. We put in place virtual platforms so that we could continue to meet as a Board and Committees to carry on the business of the corporation. Our President and CEO began to work with her team to develop a strategy focused on digitizing the organization's assets as well as a communications program dedicated to staying in touch with our Members, key decision makers and Parliamentarians and Senators. The team developed a Media Digest not just for our Members, but one also for Parliamentarians to apprise them of the COVID-19 research and innovations taking place in our member organizations across the country.

From the outset, Research Canada worked with its Members and sector-specific leaders to reinforce the "asks" for immediate supports to shore up the critical workforces and much needed programs of our member organizations. We reached out to key decision makers to help them to better understand the vital role each sector plays in our health research and innovation ecosystem and we made the case for health charities, academic health science centres, NCEs, universities and the health and biosciences sector as critical partners in the effort to defeat COVID-19.

We could not carry out all of this important policy and government relations work without the sage guidance of Research Canada's Policy Advisor, Dr. Ryan Wiley. Early on in the pandemic, Ryan and Deborah established an ad hoc policy working group to respond to COVID-19 policy issues as they emerged. The task force has been instrumental in developing a number of letters to Ministers and the Prime Minister, and Deborah and her team have followed up as have members of the working group with these decision makers' offices reinforcing RC's "asks" and messages.

Research Canada greatly values its partnerships with national health organizations like *HealthCareCAN*, the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, the Health Charities Coalition of Canada, Innovative Medicines Canada, BIOTECanada, MEDEC and CICAN and throughout the past year we worked collaboratively with these partners as well as with Universities Canada and the U15 to align policy messaging and present a common front to government.

After we presented our new Strategic Plan 2020 to our Members two years ago at our 2018 AGM, our Board and President and CEO have dedicated themselves to continuing to implement this plan over the past year. We amplified our policy influence through collaborative advocacy efforts, broadened public outreach through our social media activities and diversified our Alliance by broadening our membership and growing our supporter base.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Research Canada's Board and Staff for its hard work over the past year. I would especially like to thank the Vice-Chair of the Board, Dr. Rose Goldstein, soon to be our new Chair, for representing the organization well throughout the year as well as heading both the Governance and Leadership in Advocacy Selection Committees. I would also like to thank Dr. Alain Gratton, who steps down from the Board this year, for his leadership as the Finance Committee Chair over the past year. I would also like to thank Ms. Lori Spadoricia and Ms. Andree Dumulon for co-chairing the Membership Development and Programs Committee and for Lori's stellar work leading the development of the 2019-20 Membership Survey of our Members. We are delighted to still have Dr. Ryan Wiley who, in addition to the COVID-19 Ad Hoc Policy Working Group also chairs the Policy Engagement Committee. A special thank you to Dr. Marla Shapiro for being the Media Advisor to the Board.

I would also like to thank Ms. Megan Wallace, our Honorary Counsel, for her sage advice to the Board, the Governance Committee and to the Staff over the past year. Megan--we are truly grateful to you for keeping us on the right side of the law!

Finally, I would like to thank Deborah for her leadership and hard work over the past year and the team at Research Canada. We know this has been a very challenging time for everyone and we appreciate the team's dedication to supporting all of Research Canada's Members through this crisis.

Thank you.

**Dr. Robert McMaster**  
Chair, Research Canada