



June 2, 2021

# 2021 Research Canada Virtual Annual General Meeting



## Research Canada Chairperson's Report Annual General Meeting – June 2, 2021

The past year at Research Canada has been a productive one despite the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic. We have worked harder as we know our Members have, pivoting to a virtual operation and delivering our mandate in the face of so many challenges.

Let me begin by saying how proud we are of our community! Research Canada has marvelled over the past year at the resilience of our Members in all sectors who have stepped up and made some of the greatest contributions to our country during this pandemic with your science and your care of patients. We know that so many of you have worked beyond the “Call of Duty” producing the vaccines and therapeutics that are saving lives and giving us hope. We want to recognize, as our Parliamentary Health Research Caucus Leadership recognized last year, how you have pulled together, and through this collective effort, enabled all Canadians to make it this far, and you will likely inspire us all to go the distance!

Fundamental science provided the building blocks for the scientific community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic it and was the foundation for the rapid development of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines to combat the virus.

We all know that fundamental science will also be the foundation for our nation to build back better in the post-COVID-19 period; however, we will have to flex our biggest advocacy muscle in the next six months to ensure that Federal Budget 2022 invests robustly in discovery research and creates policies that welcome all health research and innovation ecosystem partners to the policy table.

While we can all agree that our most recent federal budget made much-needed strategic investments in health research and health innovation, including some important investments in Canada's health and biosciences sector, scientific breakthroughs require sustained financial support in discovery research; and translating research into innovative products and services necessitates a policy environment that strengthens the cross-sector partnerships which are critical to unlocking the potential of Canada's health research and innovation ecosystem. Budget 2021 fell somewhat short of these markers, but I remain confident that we can build upon what has been promised, help to better define these investments and leave a mark on this budget that will continue to advance our endeavour.

Over the past year, Research Canada has articulated, through its national policy program, that a thriving health research and innovation ecosystem, the Members of which our Alliance represents, requires a balanced approach to policy that supports and encourages these partnerships and recognizes the need for new and renewed approaches to them in light of a changing biomedical innovation landscape.

In Research Canada's pre-budget submission to the House of Commons Finance Committee, we urged the government to recognize the inextricable linkages between our economy and the health system, from basic research to commercialization to adoption and scaling of innovation, by continuing to support the integrity of the entire health research ecosystem that enables Canadians to be full economic participants and for Canada to fulfil its potential as an innovation nation.

Our President and CEO, in her presentation will delve into the recommendations we put forward, but suffice it is to say that deepening Canada's commitment to fundamental science, supporting trainees and post-doctoral fellows and implementing the report of the Health and Biosciences Economic Strategy Tables were among some of our more pressing asks deemed essential to our collective goal of improving the health and economic lives of all Canadians.

It has been clear for quite some time that despite our lip service to partnership as health research and innovation ecosystem stakeholders, we have an incomplete understanding of how these partnerships work and are impacted by policy and investment. This gap in understanding among stakeholder groups is a particular challenge well-suited to an Alliance like Research Canada whose collaborative advocacy mandate dedicates the organization to building bridges of greater understanding among sectors which comprise our ecosystem and quite frankly, our Membership.

In the past, for example, we facilitated greater understanding between the health charitable and academic health science centre sectors on the issue of the indirect costs of research. Earlier this year, Research Canada, with the support of Shift Health, convened an Expert Advisory Panel of leaders from across Canada's health research and innovation ecosystem outside of industry to lead an independent study focused on exploring the role of the biopharmaceutical industry within our health research and innovation ecosystem. Our Report shows that we need to encourage much greater industry engagement if Canada is going to be able to meet the health challenges and crises we face today and will experience in the future.

Research Canada mobilized very quickly after the pandemic and organized a series of events through its Parliamentary Health Research Caucus that informed Parliamentarians about the science of the Coronavirus. We brought the best virologists, vaccinologists, infectious disease specialists and epidemiologists as well as mental health researchers from across the country to present and answer questions from Parliamentarians about the virus. Attendance among MPs was very high, and we were told by the Caucus leadership that these events were extremely helpful. In fact, we were able to assist the government with identifying key experts for their COVID-19 Task Forces!

Over the past year, Research Canada's Board and our President and CEO were dedicated to fulfilling the commitments and goals within our Strategic Plan 2020 of 1) Amplifying our Influence with policymakers; 2) Broadening Public Research among a greater number of stakeholder groups and; 3) Diversifying our Alliance. And we did not only increase our Membership by twelve percent, but we also diversified it by engaging Members from across a number of different sectors and regions. We also committed ourselves to our strategic goal of engaging early-career scientists on the standing committees of our Board and hopefully in a few moments bring onto our Board our first young health researcher from the University of Manitoba.

Research Canada's leadership met in June 2020 and expressed its commitment to supporting a culture of inclusion in health research and related innovation and addressing conscious and unconscious biases, prejudices and barriers that perpetuate racial discrimination in the health research and related innovation ecosystem. Late last year, we established a Task Force on Racial and Indigenous Justice in Health Research and Related Innovation in an effort to develop a Research Canada plan of action on racial and Indigenous justice in health research and related innovation, informed by Research Canada's Members, Supporters and Partners, and to be implemented by Research Canada.

We were so pleased to award the Individual 2020 Leadership in Advocacy Award to Dr. Ingrid Waldron, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Health at Dalhousie University whose research, teaching, community leadership and advocacy work are examining the health and mental health impacts of structural racism and other forms of discrimination in Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities.

We also took up the gauntlet for other sectors within our ecosystem. With a huge dip in fundraising due to the cancellation of signature events and programs, health charities saw substantial losses in fundraising dollars over the past year, which ultimately has affected the well-being of Canadians. Research Canada reached out to its health charitable Members, listened to their needs and offered them support during the pandemic. We wrote to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health, calling on the government to give back to a sector that has seen millions of Canadians through the most difficult diseases like cancer and diabetes.

Canada's leading research hospitals account for nearly \$3 billion of this country's biomedical sciences research activity and employ more than 20,000 highly skilled researchers and staff in Ontario alone. Yet, this sector found itself at risk due to the suspension of pre-existing work to re-focus capacity on COVID-19 over the past year. This caused a sudden and substantial loss of funding from industry and charitable research sponsors. Research Canada wrote letters and lobbied key government departments for research hospitals along with HealthCareCAN, the sector's national association, resulting in the extension of emergency wage subsidies to personnel working in these centres. Research Canada has called for direct support and stability for AHSCs in its most recent FINA submission.

It was our pleasure, this year, to award HealthCareCAN, our 2020 Organization Leadership in Advocacy Award in large part for their tremendous and very successful advocacy effort during the pandemic that ensured the economic security of the research hospital sector.

As we have added more Universities to our Membership over the past year, we have developed a more sophisticated understanding of the important role these institutions of higher learning play in the health research and innovation ecosystem and we have raised the challenges this sector is facing during the pandemic with policymakers. We are playing a particularly important role in profiling those Universities with new faculties in health sciences and medicine within our Parliamentary Health Research Caucus and we continue to work closely on the policy front with those Universities within our Membership with established faculties in medicine and health-related fields.

As we look to the future, Research Canada will lobby the federal government for a much more integrated approach to health research and innovation investments and policies at the same time that we prepare for a possible election. Over the coming months, leading up to Budget 2022, Research Canada, through its Policy Engagement Committee and in partnership with its National Partners will make a firm case for greater investments in fundamental science and in the people—our young health researchers—who are the future of our enterprise. We will also call for policies that support our health and biosciences sector. We will continue to set tables with diverse stakeholders from our coveted health research and innovation ecosystem in an effort to broker better understanding among and between these partners, deepening our collective commitment to the big picture which is ultimately to build a better health research and innovation nation that truly readies Canadians for the health challenges that are ahead of us.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Members, the Research Canada Board of Directors, our Past Chair, Dr. Robert McMaster who also chairs our Governance/Nominating Committee, the other Chairs of our Committees, Dr. Tarik Möröy of Finance, Dr. Ryan Wiley of Policy Engagement, and Ryan is also the Policy Advisor to our Board, Dr. Ann Russell and Ms. Lori Spadorcia of Membership Development and Programs and Dr. Rami Rudnick who heads our Task Force on Racial and Indigenous Justice. I would also like to thank Dr. Marla Shapiro who is the Media Advisor to our Board and Ms. Megan Wallace who is our Honorary Counsel. Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Deborah Gordon-El-Bihbety, our President and CEO and the Research Canada Staff for another great year!