

Dr. Rose Goldstein, Chair
Remarks to the Membership
Annual General Meeting
June 8, 2022
1:30 pm – 3 pm
Quebec Suite – 1st Floor

Since we last met virtually in June 2021, the world got vaccinated, albeit not in equal measure. Coronavirus variants surged across the globe and hospitalization rates went up and down and up again. Year two of the pandemic brought resilience, though. The world emerging from the worst of the pandemic focused a new concentration on the intolerable inequities brought into high relief by lockdown, and climate change that made itself more evident by the day. While we continued to witness the strife that now defines our politics, we also seemed to know how to recognize the best in one another. The Liberal/NDP “supply and confidence” agreement to get things done on healthcare, climate change, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and economic growth was, indeed, a case in point.

Financial well-being became the top-of-mind issue for Canadians over the past year. In October 2021, inflation hit its highest rate since 2003 — a whopping 4.7 per cent — driven by high gas prices, soaring housing costs and rising food prices. The COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the mental health of Canadians. One in four working Canadians, in a recent poll, indicated that their personal and work lives have worsened since the pandemic.

At the same time, there was some good news for research: 2021 was a banner year for Canadian research excellence, with a record 25 Canadians winning 26 major international awards, including the Canada Gairdner International Award to Dr. Daniel J. Drucker, the Shaw Prize to Dr. Vicky Kaspi, the VinFuture Grand Prize to Dr. Pieter Cullis, and a number of Guggenheim and Sloan Research Fellowships. This is recognition that Canada’s scientists, mathematicians, artists, anthropologists and scholars are tackling some of the world’s greatest and most pressing challenges.

In 2021, the House of Commons of Canada unanimously agreed to set up a new permanent committee on science to give MPs more opportunities to engage with science and research. Although the Science and Research Committee is still establishing itself, an important process and dialogue between policy makers and the science community has begun.

There have also been important wins for Canadian science in the area of equity, diversity and inclusion over the past year. The Canada Research Chairs programme, which helps universities to attract and retain researchers with funding for salaries and research, has strengthened its targets and supports for underrepresented groups. Budget 2022 proposed to provide \$40.9 million over five years, starting in 2022-23, and \$9.7 million ongoing to the federal granting councils to support targeted scholarships and fellowships for promising Black student researchers. Apart from this, the Tri-Council has also implemented an action plan to support and improve collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Canada's strength in fields such as clinical medicine, genomics and computer science continued over the past year to underpin the country's status as a global competitor in high-quality research. Canada produces about 3.8% of the world's research publications, which attract a higher-than-average number of citations.

But we lag behind in core areas of the natural sciences and engineering, including chemistry, physics and mathematics. We are also losing ground in artificial intelligence (AI) and regenerative medicine, despite some recent investments in these areas. This languishing is due to a lack of funding for R&D, relative to other nations. The country's gross expenditure on R&D, or GERD, as a percentage of GDP dropped from a peak of just over 2% in 2001 to 1.6% in 2019. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average, by comparison, rose to almost 2.5% over the same period.

Several attempts by successive governments to develop a clear research and innovation strategy have done little to fortify science in Canada. We remain in need of a framework and clear and comprehensive strategy. Finders continue to put money into a fragmented system, which is not the strongest for ensuring the results we need. One major effect is that our colleagues are struggling to manage the myriad of grant applications to which they must apply to undertake their research. And now, we must also worry about national security guidelines in our applications without the necessary resources, up until now, to properly assess security risks.

Federal Budget 2022 did very little to shore up investments in health research save for some important strategic investments in the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and dementia and brain health research. The Canada Excellence Research Chairs also saw support for a further 12 to 25 CERCs. Overall, though, it was a budget focused on commercialization. That's not to say there were not some important steps taken towards creating a better investment environment for health and biosciences companies; however, without robust investments in investigator-led fundamental science, these companies will certainly worry about whether Canada is on a pathway to build a strong knowledge-based economy where these companies can thrive.

Although the pandemic brought big investments in research (more than CAD \$250 million since March 2020) it's not clear whether that level of investment will be sustained. Whereas countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have made significant commitments to increase long-term funding for science, Canada has not. The latest budget did not indicate any continuation of using the 2017 Naylor science review as a roadmap for policy, as was indicated in the past, and did not indicate a research budget plan.

Over the past year, Research Canada has come to the conclusion that while our advocacy needs to continue to be about increased investments in health research and better policies in support of health innovation, it also needs to be focused on urging the government to create a framework or strategy for investments and policy supports that consolidates and aligns our federal research funding and policy enterprise. Continuing to create new envelopes and agencies will not give us a whole-of-government approach to research and innovation. We need to identify our greatest risks right now, and within the system we have stop the bleeding, after which we need to begin a process of restructuring our funding and policy model for research and innovation. It will not be easy, but it is necessary to transform us into a global leader in health research and innovation.

I will let our President and CEO, in her report, delve a little deeper and provide you with more details on our advocacy efforts over the past year and our next moves.

On the governance front, I wanted to share with our Members that over the past year we began the process of refreshing our Strategic Plan 2020, establishing a Strategic Planning Task Force, led by our Vice-Chair, Dr. Tarik Möröy and developing a Membership Survey to which our Members can respond over the summer. The lion's share of our work will be over the next year where we will present a renewed plan to the Membership that reinforces our three strategic commitments of amplifying our influence, diversifying our alliance and broadening our public reach.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairs of all of Research Canada's Standing Committees and Task Forces for their significant efforts over the past year—Dr. Tarik Möröy, Chair of the Governance Committee and the Strategic Planning Task Force, Ms. Ellen Chesney, Chair of the Finance Committee, Ms. Lori Spadorcia, Chair of the Membership Development and Programs Committee, Dr. Ryan Wiley, Special Policy Advisor to the Board and Chair of the Policy Engagement Committee and Dr. Abraham Rudnick, Chair of the Task Force on Indigenous and Racial Justice in Health Research and Related Innovation.

I would also like to thank the Board of Research Canada for its important work over the past year. It is such a pleasure to serve with all of you.



I would also like to thank Research Canada’s Staff for all of their hard work over the past year—our President and CEO, Deborah Gordon-El-Bihbety, Director of Operations, Brittany Faulkner, Manager of Policy and Public Affairs, Christie Tomkins, Manager of Membership and Development, Danielle Flieler, Administrative Coordinator, Michaela Purdon and Administrative Assistant, Gillian Hogerland.

Finally, I would like to thank our Members for your continued commitment to Research Canada: An Alliance for Health Discovery and for your tremendous work in advancing Canadian health research and innovation.