



ADVOCATES' TOOLKIT:

---

# Tips for Effective Advocacy



**RESEARCH  
CANADA**  
An Alliance for Health Discovery

**RECHERCHE  
CANADA**

Une alliance pour les découvertes en santé

Fall 2023



## About Research Canada

---

Research Canada is a national, broad-based alliance dedicated to increasing investment and support in health research and health innovation through collaborative advocacy. We believe health research and innovation are a shared benefit and responsibility and an investment in Canada's future. We engage and work with government, academia, industry and non-profit sectors to build support for balanced and long-term health research funding—investments that strengthen Canada's innovation system and lead to better health, sustainable health care, new commercialization opportunities and skilled jobs for Canadians.

**OUR MISSION:** To improve the health and prosperity of all Canadians by championing Canada's global leadership in health research and health innovation.

## Our Members

---

Research Canada is proud to have over 100 member organizations that represent the diverse Canadian health research and health innovation ecosystem. Visit our website to view the full list of Research Canada's Members, Supporters and Partners.

## The Parliamentary Health Research Caucus

---

The Parliamentary Health Research Caucus (PHRC) is a non-partisan, "owned by Parliamentarians" forum established in 2009 by Senator Wilbert Keon and Research Canada to engage elected officials in educational events that showcase Canadian health research and health innovation and to raise awareness about the social and economic benefits of Canada's health research enterprise and health innovation system.

## QUICK TIPS FOR HEALTH RESEARCH ADVOCATES: Advocacy DOs and DON'Ts

### DO

- ✓ Be on time
- ✓ Introduce yourself and your role in health research and/or innovation, and acknowledge that they have taken time out of their busy schedule to meet with you
- ✓ Address Ministers by their title (Thank you, Minister)
- ✓ Give real world examples that demonstrate health, economic or social benefit
- ✓ Know the party's/Government of Canada's platform and record on research; if possible, connect it to your issue
- ✓ Leave brief written materials (2pgs) and your business card if you are able to meet in person, or provide this material electronically if you meet virtually
- ✓ Tell them you plan to follow up, and do so – make sure to ask for the most direct way to connect with them

### DON'T

- ✗ Bring anyone who is not necessary for your presentation
- ✗ Focus only on the Parliamentarian or government official if they bring members of their staff
- ✗ Get sidetracked by introducing extraneous topics
- ✗ Assume that they will know about, or be interested in, health research and innovation – they don't know!
- ✗ Be negative or place blame for the challenges your sector is facing on the government, e.g. if you raise an issue that could potentially be controversial – such as funding or the regulatory regime – do so in a way that presents the issue as a challenge for our ecosystem rather than a government failure
- ✗ Misjudge your time and force them to bring the meeting to a close
- ✗ Criticize their leader, party or colleagues

## Quick Tips For Effective Advocacy

### WHEN MEETING WITH DECISION MAKERS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO:

- Use the meeting(s) to build the relationship
- Use clear, simple and concise messages
- Tailor the message for the target audience
- Use plain language, not scientific jargon

You influence with your message, but mostly with *your passion* for health research, health innovation and your experience. Your influence will grow with every visit.

### WHAT TO EXPECT *DURING* THE MEETING:

- Expect to make the case: Action needed now
- Expect to listen and to ask questions
- Expect tough questions
- Expect to ask what they would be prepared to do

### WHAT TO EXPECT *AFTER* THE MEETING:

- Expect to follow-up with the decision maker and/or their staff
- Plan to debrief following the meeting

## MEETING WITH DECISION MAKERS: Policy Questions and Answers



### POLICY QUESTIONS TO ASK DECISION MAKERS

Below are some questions you may ask Parliamentarians, political staff and civil servants when you raise the importance of health research and innovation as key policy issues for Budget 2024.

- Does your party support increased investments in the Tri-Agency (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) budgets to advance health research?
- Does your party support increased investments to support the next generation of health researchers and innovators—graduate students, trainees and postdoctoral fellows—including young Indigenous and racialized scholars?
- Does your party support increased investments and the development of policies that advance equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in Canadian health research and innovation?
- Does your party support targeted investments to those sectors that have faced significant challenges due to the pandemic—academic health science centres, health charities, post-secondary institutions and networks of excellence?
- Does your party support policies that support an enabling environment for life sciences companies?
- Does your party support investments to help digitalize our health system?



Below are some questions you may be asked by decision makers when you raise the importance of health research and innovation as key policy issues for Budget 2024.

1

**Why should I be concerned about health research when my constituents/Canadians are more worried about inflation/affordability and health care?**

The pandemic has shown just how critical health research is to our economic and health security. In just one year, four different COVID-19 vaccines were approved by Health Canada—far sooner than the likely 10-year timeline predicted by many experts early in the pandemic. Future pandemics and infectious disease outbreaks are inevitable, and reinvesting in health research *now* is the key to our future preparedness.

Health research was already tackling some of this country's greatest health and health system challenges before the pandemic. Health research provides us with the evidence we require to decrease wait times and

provide better access to health services and treatment. We cannot improve our health system without the knowledge we acquire from research that allows us to make informed decisions about new interventions and innovative system strategies. This evidence can only come from research that is rigorous, integrated and based on fact. Research helps to ensure a health system that is adaptable, responsive, innovative, cost-effective and accountable. It also contributes to economic efficiency by identifying practices and interventions which are not adding value and should be discontinued.

2

**How can your organization ask for an increase in public investment in health research when there has been a substantial increase in your sector over the past several years and significant investments made during the course of the pandemic? What about other priorities for government?**

Canada has made a significant commitment to health research over a decade and a half. The health research community sincerely appreciates the substantial investments made in recent years, as well as the investments made in Canadian health research and innovation as part of the country's response to COVID-19. As encouraged as we are, Research Canada remains concerned about the impact of

previous underinvestment on our next generation of fundamental science research and on our ecosystem's capacity to respond effectively to future health crises. The health research and innovation communities want to make sure that the full potential of these investments to propel Canada forward through an extraordinarily competitive global market is realized, rather than merely stabilizing the status quo.

## CANADA'S HEALTH RESEARCH SPENDING IS NOT GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE

- In 2021, Canada's gross domestic spending on R&D as a percentage of GDP was 1.7%, below the OECD total of 2.7%
- Canada ranks 23rd out of the 38 OECD member countries in terms of R&D spending as a percentage of GDP
- Canada is the only nation in the G7 whose R&D spending as a percentage of GDP shrank over the past two decades, and the gap continues to widen as other countries pick up the pace
- The United States spends \$196.23 (Canadian dollars) per capita on health research funding via its National Institutes of Health (NIH). Canada's per capita spending is \$31.80 through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
- Even Canada's Tri-Agency spending, encompassing all research at \$78.41 per capita, is eclipsed by the U.S. NIH alone

### 3

## Where do Canadians stand on the money being spent on health research?

Canadians have not wavered in their commitment to the importance of supporting health and medical research because they recognize the benefits it can bring to our health and to our economy. Canadians continue to be convinced that Canada should be a global leader in health and medical research, according to a national poll on health and medical research released in the fall of 2022 by Research Canada. A majority of Canadians recognize the important contributions of health and medical

research to our health care system and economy and support increased government funding for health and medical research. In a post-pandemic world, Canadians have taken note of the role of health and medical research in Canada's pandemic response.

**The survey, *CanadaSpeaks! 2022* updates the results from landmark surveys in 2006, 2009, 2015 and 2019.**

## SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



The COVID-19 pandemic has led most Canadians to realize the importance of health and medical research. In 2022, 6 out of 10 Canadians said that they now think health and medical research is more important compared to before the pandemic.



There continues to be a strong view among Canadians that health and medical research should be funded directly by the federal government (8 out of 10 Canadians agree that basic research is necessary and should be supported by the federal government). Moreover, the majority of Canadians (59%) believe that the federal government should be spending more than the \$4.3 billion spent in 2022 on health and medical research. Just three per cent (3%) think the federal government should be spending less.



Canadians continue to be convinced that Canada should be a global leader in health and medical research (87% of Canadians say Canada should be a global leader in health research —a slight decrease from the 91% of Canadians who believed the same in 2019).



89% of Canadians say that health and medical research makes an important contribution to the healthcare system, while 80% of Canadians say that health and medical research makes an important contribution to the economy, rates consistent with 2019 (91% and 81% of Canadians said that health and medical research makes an important contribution to the health care system and the economy in 2019, respectively).

# 4

## Why should I make health research and health innovation my priorities?

The benefits of health research and its related innovation are the priorities of Canadians: improved health, an efficient and sustainable health system, access to new health technologies and a prosperous economy that creates jobs. Canadians hold their health

care system near and dear to their hearts. Health research will be critical to facing the most pressing challenges we are currently facing in our health care system.

### HEALTH RESEARCH

- Provides the evidence that facilitates sound decision-making and provides governments with the information required to develop sound public policy
- Drives discoveries that will save lives and enhance quality of life, providing the health care system with the tools it needs to effectively diagnose and treat Canadians when they become ill
- Provides the means to test the effectiveness of new treatments and innovations; first in controlled

environments, through clinical trials, then in actual use, through ongoing surveillance

- Helps us understand and anticipate the needs of Canada's diverse population and evaluate how we can organize and operate our health systems more effectively, more accessibly and more equitably

**The return on Canada's investment in health research is measured not only in terms of health, but also in terms of wealth.**

### INVESTMENT IN HEALTH RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE ENTIRE HEALTH RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

The **health research and innovation ecosystem** is Canada's network of postsecondary institutions, research hospitals, governments, incubators, start-ups, innovative companies, investors, health charities and patient groups, each working in collaboration to advance science and develop innovative solutions to improve the health and wellbeing of all people living in Canada.

A robust health research and innovation ecosystem requires:

- Secure, sustained and sufficient funding;
- Informed and supportive research and innovation policy; and
- A diverse, well-supported and incentivized talent base.

#### **We need a robust health research and innovation ecosystem to:**

- Develop innovative health solutions that will benefit patients, reduce health system costs and protect our health system against future crises
- Support the translation, commercialization and adoption of Canadian innovations
- Attract and retain diverse and globally leading research talent
- Ensure an effective, accessible and equitable health system for all of Canada's diverse populations—

including Indigenous communities, Black Canadians, people of colour, and other underrepresented and equity-deserving groups

- Provide the foundation for Canadian life sciences enterprises
- Drive Canada's economic growth and global competitiveness
- Fulfil the potential of Canada's investments in health research

5

## The Government of Canada has, in recent years, made significant investments in students through programs like the Canada Graduate Scholarship Program. How will increasing research funding to the Tri-Council help students in a way that these program cannot?

Despite recent investments in students, financial supports for our research talent have stagnated and are failing to provide trainees and early-career researchers with livable wages—a problem that is only compounded for researchers from Indigenous, Black, and other underrepresented and marginalized communities who typically face additional barriers and challenges.

Annual stipends provided to PhD candidates by their institution are largely funded by their supervisors through Tri-Council grants, and without sufficient project funding, their wages suffer as well. Minimum stipends for PhD candidates across Canada are generally under \$30,000 annually, an amount that in most cities is not enough to fully support students throughout their training without additional funds.

Federal scholarships can help to supplement trainees' wages, but these too have stagnated. Currently, a master's student can receive \$17,500 per year and a PhD candidate \$35,000 per year through the Canada Graduate Scholarship program—amounts that have not changed in two decades. Moreover, these awards are few and far between, meaning they benefit only a small fraction of Canada's young research talent.

We live in a globally competitive research environment, and other countries are making significant awards available to diverse researchers at all stages of their careers. There is little incentive for graduate students—both Canadian and international—to continue their studies in Canada where they will likely struggle to afford the necessities of life. And the case is similar for postdoctoral scholars and other early-career researchers. A postdoctoral fellow in Canada makes an average of \$51,913 per year compared to the equivalent of \$87,576 Canadian dollars in the U.S.

As such, Canada must ensure that researchers of diverse backgrounds receive enhanced and fulsome support that ensures livable and competitive wages across the career spectrum. Increasing awards like the Canada Graduate Scholarship is important, but it cannot be done without also increasing research funding to the Tri-Council, lest we risk widening the gap even further between the select few who hold these prestigious awards and the majority of young talent who do not.

### FOR EXAMPLE

In the 2020/2021 academic year, there were more than 220,000 students enrolled in master's or equivalent degree programs in Canada. The Canada Graduate Scholarships – Master's Program awards up to 3,000 students per year, just 1.4% of all master's students. More prestigious awards that come with higher levels of funding, such as the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships, are even more exclusive.





6

**Why should the federal government invest in health research—an investment that is not likely to see an immediate return—when our health care system is in such dire straits? Shouldn't investments in health care that will immediately solve these urgent problems be prioritized over health research?**

While renewed investment in health care is certainly welcome and needed, we know that doing so without a corresponding investment in health research will ultimately fail to achieve the goals of an increase to the Canada Health Transfer and any bilateral agreements with the provinces in the long term. **Health research must be part of the solution.** Fundamental science, clinical research, and population and health services research that take place at universities, academic health science centres and hospitals are all necessary to drive life-saving discoveries and ensure an

effective, accessible and equitable health system. Health innovations help to improve patients' treatment outcomes and health system experience, reduce costs for Canada's taxpayers, and improve Canada's competitiveness in the global innovation economy. **Investment in health care alone may alleviate some of the current strains on our health care system, but it will not lead to the improved health care and strengthened health system that is only possible with health research.**

7

**Why is it so important for the Government of Canada to encourage diversity in health research and innovation through its policies and funding programs? Shouldn't we focus on the researchers who are "most qualified" and the research projects that have the best chance of succeeding?**

**Diversity is critical to strengthening Canadian society.** When it comes to health research, the entire research ecosystem benefits from and recognizes the value of a diversity of peoples, approaches and career stages. Novel discoveries and research programs that deliver impact to a wide range of communities depend on nurturing and developing the broadest and brightest talent pool within the health research ecosystem.

A lack of diversity among researchers has been identified as a factor in certain groups being underrepresented in research and clinical trials and therefore being underserved by a system which is supposed to serve them equally. It cannot be this way. Supporting researchers who reflect the population in its entirety can lead to research design and questions that are relevant to all the people of Canada.

Canada has important work before it truly is on the path toward Truth and Reconciliation, which includes supporting health research that will benefit Indigenous communities. Creating a diverse, inclusive and innovative research ecosystem requires a commitment to decolonizing research institutions and systems and an investment in targeted supports and policies that encourage and uplift Indigenous researchers, research priorities and ways of knowing. Similarly, a diverse research ecosystem, with specific supports, is essential to tackling racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination that are barriers to justice and dignity for Black and people of colour researchers, as well as those from other underrepresented and equity-deserving groups.





**RESEARCH  
CANADA**

An Alliance for Health Discovery

**RECHERCHE  
CANADA**

Une alliance pour les découvertes en santé

## USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR Health Research Advocacy



“Canada has one of the most connected populations in the world. For many Canadians, social media is now a part of their daily routine.”

- TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY SOCIAL MEDIA LAB

Parliamentarians and other decision makers in government are increasingly making the most of social media to engage with Canadians. By joining in this conversation, Canadian health research and innovation advocates can have a huge impact on raising awareness about the importance of Canadian health research and health innovation.

Social media is a powerful tool to advocate for health research and innovation. And like any good tool, it works the best when you use it properly. The following tips will help ensure that your use of social media is effective and successful.

**Research Canada: An Alliance for Health Discovery**

401-17 York St., Ottawa, ON K1N 5S7

[www.rc-rc.ca](http://www.rc-rc.ca) | [info@rc-rc.ca](mailto:info@rc-rc.ca) | 613-234-5129



1

## REMEMBER THAT SOCIAL MEDIA IS A CONVERSATION, NOT A MONOLOGUE.

Your use of social media should be clearly focused on raising awareness about key issues in creative and engaging ways that are personal, visual, conversational and persistent without being repetitive or tiresome.

2

## BE STRATEGIC.

- **What are your advocacy objectives?**

Before you even think about a social media strategy, you need to be clear about your advocacy messages. Are you calling for specific actions to improve the health research that will benefit Canadians? Check in with your staff and key stakeholders for their input and to ensure their support.

- **What is your story?**

Think about engaging and interesting ways to get your messages across in the social media context. Remember this may be different than how you promote your message through other channels such as the mainstream media.

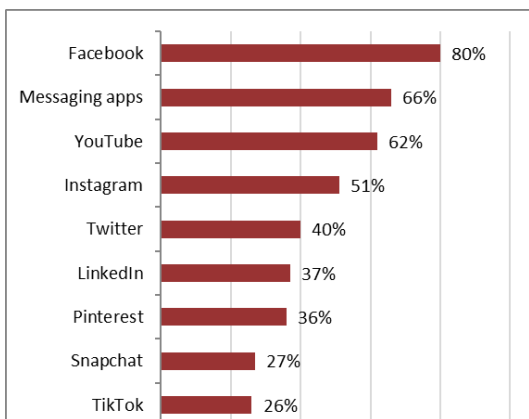
- **Who is your audience?**

Be clear on who you want to engage in the conversation and what social media platforms they use (Chart 1). You can choose to speak directly to decision makers through social media, but it is also important to encourage Canadians to advocate on your behalf.



## CANADIAN SOCIAL MEDIA USE

PERCENTAGE OF ONLINE CANADIAN ADULTS WITH A SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT IN 2022



3

## CREATE COMPELLING "SHARE-WORTHY" MESSAGES AND MATERIALS.

- Make sure your audience will notice your posts and respond to them. It will be important that your posts are shared by those who will resonate with your message.
- Your posts are more likely to be shared if they include personal stories, important facts and data, inspirational quotes, or breaking news.
- High-quality photos and images are critical and so are concise, well-crafted key messages between 40 and 80 characters long.

# 4

## UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

Most online adult Canadians (94%) use at least one social media platform, but gender, age and income influence what platforms they choose. Facebook is the most popular, followed by messaging apps, YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter) and LinkedIn. Consider starting with one or two social media platforms that you are most comfortable with.



### KEY TIPS FOR ALL SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

- **Post often** on different days of the week and at different times of day, but don't post too often or you won't be noticed.
- **Interact with your audience.** Respond to comments and thank those who share your message. Ask your followers to share messages to their MPs.
- **Engage with decision makers.** Post messages, thank them for taking the time to speak with you.
- **Follow other social media users** you would like to have follow you – news reporters and outlets, bloggers, etc.
- **Follow relevant health, research and advocacy organizations** with large lists of followers and access to key decision makers and stakeholders.
- **Follow news sites**, check blogs and pay attention to what decision makers are saying on social media. Support them when their messages are in synch with yours.
- **Use shared hashtags** that your stakeholders and others are using.
- **Track your results** and see what resonates.



### FACEBOOK

- Women (86%) are more likely to use Facebook than men (75%)
- Facebook is the only social media platform - aside from messaging apps - where the oldest generation (55+) crosses the 50% adoption mark (72%)



### YOUTUBE

- Unlike Facebook, men (66%) are more likely to have an account on YouTube than women (59%)
- There is a large distribution of users across the age groups, but adoption lowers with age



### X (formerly known as Twitter)

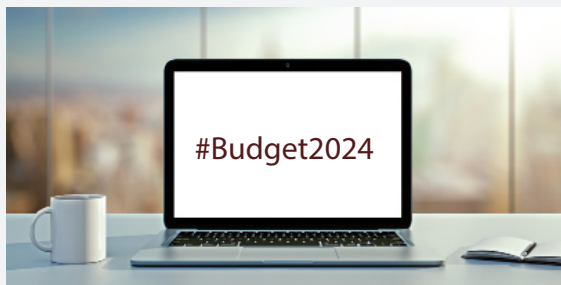
- Men and women have similar adoption rates of X
- Older people are the least likely to adopt X (24%)

### LINKEDIN



- LinkedIn is most popular with Canadians aged 25-34 (50%) and 35-44 (47%)
- LinkedIn is particularly popular with those who are employed full-time (50%)

Source: Toronto Metropolitan University Social Media Lab



### JOIN RESEARCH CANADA'S PRE-BUDGET 2024 CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Use the campaign hashtags: #Budget2024 and #ResearchInTrouble
- Follow Research Canada on X (@ResearchCda), Facebook (@ResearchCanada) and LinkedIn (Research Canada)

## MAXIMIZING YOUR IMPACT:

# How to Organize an In-person or Virtual Town Hall Meeting with Federal Decision Makers



### WHAT IS A TOWN HALL MEETING?

A town hall meeting is an opportunity for health research and health innovation advocates to meet Members of Parliament, Senators and other key decision makers in their research institution/organization/company's region and advance health research and health innovation advocacy efforts, raise awareness among decision makers about the social and economic benefits of Canadian health research and health innovation and build relationships with decision makers in government.



# HOW TO PREPARE

- Start early and schedule the event at a time when it is likely to be most impactful
- Determine the goal of the town hall
- Decide on a desired range of dates for the meeting
- Identify Parliamentarians in your region, other key decision makers, potential partners, sponsors and key contacts
- Create a small planning committee drawn from like-minded organizations that will:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>1</b> Contact all the Parliamentarians and other decision makers you would like to participate as Panellists for a panel discussion</p> <p><b>2</b> Develop a key theme for the event</p> <p><b>3</b> Develop a communications plan including community outreach, media and social media, designate media contacts and spokespeople</p> <p><b>4</b> Liaise with the Panellists' staff to decide upon date, time, length of event, event scenario, Q&amp;As</p> <p><b>5</b> Develop a budget</p> | <p><b>6</b> Check your community's public health guidelines and mandates regarding in-person events and public gatherings to help you decide if an in-person venue or virtual platform is right for your Town Hall event.</p> <p><b>a.</b> If you decide to hold your Town Hall in person, you'll need to secure a venue and organize logistics (room set-up, AV, etc.)</p> <p><b>b.</b> If you decide to hold your Town Hall virtually, you'll need to identify an appropriate platform; there are plenty of options out there, so be prepared to dedicate some time to research and test different</p> | <p>platforms. Once selected, you'll need to organize the logistics and technical details (online registration, instructions to connect, troubleshooting, etc.)</p> <p><b>7</b> Identify a Moderator for the Panel who ensures the event stays on time and ends as scheduled as well as manages the discussion and audience Q&amp;A</p> <p><b>8</b> Approve all event materials, including press releases and messaging</p> <p><b>9</b> Be in frequent contact with Panellists' staff and update them as the event unfolds</p> |
|---|--|---|



### AT THE EVENT

- Ensure key questions are asked to Panellists about priorities for the health research and health innovation sector
- Assign non-partisan questions to the Chair and/or committee members in the live or virtual audience
- Provide relevant hand-outs in-person or via email to Panellists once the town hall is over with key messages, patient stories and contact information of town hall organizers



### FOLLOW-UP

- Send thank-you letters to Panellists and include a contact person for Panellist follow up
- Prepare a Letter to the Editor of the local newspaper on the event
- Develop a summary of the report of the town hall that includes next steps and share it with stakeholders and policymakers



### FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

A town hall meeting is an opportunity for members of the health research and health innovation community to participate in the public policy process and to have some policy influence on decision makers in government.

It is also important to consider the challenges of hosting a town hall. Namely, that it can be difficult to schedule all Panellists and spontaneity at a large public in-person or virtual event can lead to unanticipated results.





## SAMPLE AGENDA FOR TOWN HALL

- 1 Welcome and Introductions
- 2 Overview of Issue: Moderator provides overview of state of Canada's health research and innovation ecosystem and presents challenges
- 3 Perspectives on the Challenges: Moderator and Panellists provide insight/perspective on challenges
- 4 Audience Input/Interaction: Moderator solicits questions on challenges
- 5 BREAK
- 6 Perspectives on Proposals to Address Challenges: Moderator and Panellists provide their insights and policy ideas and commitments if elected
- 7 Audience Input/Interaction: Moderator solicits questions on proposals
- 8 Open Discussion with Panel on Next Steps: Moderator interacts with panel to try to solicit different/common steps Panellists will take to address challenges for health research and health innovation communities
- 9 Summary: Moderator summarizes Panellists' views and their commitments if elected and adjourns the meeting





Research Canada: An Alliance for Health Discovery  
401-17 York St., Ottawa, ON K1N 5S7  
[www.rc-rc.ca](http://www.rc-rc.ca) | [info@rc-rc.ca](mailto:info@rc-rc.ca) | 613-234-5129

