



THE ASSOCIATION OF FACULTIES
OF MEDICINE OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FACULTÉS
DE MÉDECINE DU CANADA

Supporting the training of scientists and Indigenous health professionals

Submission for the 2019 Pre-Budget Consultations

August 3, 2018

Executive Summary

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) is the academic partnership of Canada's 17 Faculties of Medicine. An overarching goal of the AFMC is to ensure better health and healthcare of Canadians.

Training today's scientists for tomorrow's cures

AFMC is asking the Government of Canada to support the next generation of scientists. The AFMC in-depth report on the economic impact of Canada's Faculties of Medicine and their health science partnersⁱ clearly indicate how the investment in research and innovation stimulates the Canadian economy, creates jobs and generates tax revenues that benefit all Canadians.

The AFMC commends the current federal government for investing in Canadian scientists in Budget 2018. The AFMC strongly supports the recommendations of the panel on Canada's Fundamental Science Review and urges the Government of Canada to proceed with implementing the recommendations to support graduate students and postdoctoral trainees or fellows (PDFs) through scholarships and fellowships and addressing the full cost of research by increasing funding to the Research Support Fund.

Increasing the number of Indigenous health professionals

AFMC seeks to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous people by training more Indigenous health professionals. AFMC is urging the Government of Canada to initiate a forum of education leads in Indigenous health to consult on the creation of a pan-Canadian system that will enable an increase the number of Indigenous health professionals.

Recommendations

AFMC strongly supports the recommendation in the Fundamental Science Review to bring strategic focus to the system of graduate student and postdoctoral trainees or fellows at a cost of \$140 million per year, phased in over four years, in equal increments of \$35 million per year.

AFMC strongly supports the recommendation in the Fundamental Science Review to increase funding to the Research Support Fund, at a reimbursement rate of 25%.

AFMC recommends that the Government of Canada initiate a forum of education leads in Indigenous health to discuss the creation of a centralized pan-Canadian system to increase the number of Indigenous health professionals at a cost of \$5 million over 3 years.

Support for training future scientists

Erin Degelman is a 4th year MD/PhD student at the University of Calgary studying medical science, specifically cancer biology. She has received awards from CIHR throughout her studies. “The CIHR awards that I have received have allowed me to focus on my studies and not worry about personal finances” says Erin. “In addition to providing financial stability, the awards provided me with the allowances required to attend conferences and purchase software to support my research”. Erin feels fortunate and privileged to have had her own specific funding which allowed her to expand beyond her principal investigator’s research. “If you can’t get funding now as a student, you have a bleak perspective of your future. Funding infuses young investigators with confidence that they can have career success as a researcher”. Erin was also able to take a full year off to care for her newborn child. “In a male dominant field, it was important that CIHR supported me in taking a maternity leave. Without the support, I would not have been able to take the full year off. This sets an example for other agencies and principal investigators to follow.”



AFMC is asking the Government of Canada to implement the recommendation in the Fundamental Science Review to harmonize, upgrade and bring strategic focus to the system of graduate student and PDF supports at a cost of \$140 million per year, phased in over four years, in equal increments of \$35 million per year.

During the past ten years, there has been a growth in the enrollment of graduate and post-doctoral trainees across the country. However, there has not been an increase in the amount and quantity of the awards. The current mix of council-specific and tri-council awards vary considerably by amount, duration, and international portability.ⁱⁱ The fact that the value of the awards has not changed results in a twenty-five percent decline in worth due to inflation. Furthermore, because fellowships are taxed, PDFs may actually receive a lower net amount than students with scholarships. If this is not addressed, the best and brightest young Canadians will pursue better opportunities in other countries.

The next generation of Canadian scientists will be required to compete in a global economy. We want our Canadian trained scientists to stay in our country. Aside from economic benefits, the most important outcome of health research is the maintenance of a high quality health delivery system. Clinician scientists in training are the future leaders whose ideas and discoveries will improve the health of Canadians.ⁱⁱⁱ

In addition, the AFMC supports the recommendation in the Fundamental Science Review to increase funding to the RSF, at a reimbursement rate of 25%, in order to recognize the full costs of research in its programs. Given Budget 2018’s historic investment in support for researchers, it is important that the Government of Canada follow through on also alleviating financial pressures of hosting and supporting federally funded projects.

Support for training Indigenous health professionals

AFMC is encouraging the Government of Canada to hold a forum of education leaders on Indigenous health. This forum would allow leaders to share knowledge and experience as well as discuss the option of creating a centralized pan-Canadian system that would support and coordinate the recruitment of Indigenous health professionals. In 2003, a national secretariat, the Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS), was created to address gaps in French-language access to health care services. The creation of a similar secretariat as the CNFS for Indigenous Health would support a pipeline for Indigenous health professionals. The cost for this secretariat and associated programs would be \$5 million over 3 years. This secretariat and associated program would assist with the recruitment of Indigenous students, provide recommendations on Indigenous health curriculum, curricula on competencies to provide culturally safe care, develop partnerships and engagement with Indigenous Communities for experiential learning and provide career counseling support for students.

“We call upon all levels of government to increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field”.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

In the past decade, progress has been made by the Faculties of Medicine to improve the number of Indigenous students enrolled in medical schools. In 2016, 2.7% of students enrolled in first year were Indigenous vs. a population of 4.3% (2011 census). This is an improvement of 1% compared to 2003^{iv}. More work is clearly required across all health professions to increase the representation of Indigenous students.

Conclusion

AFMC recognizes the commitments of the Government of Canada to supporting young Canadians in gaining the skills, work experience and job opportunities needed to fully participate in the economy and strengthen communities. A strong health research and healthcare environment in Canada will depend on support for our best and brightest young minds. AFMC would like to thank the Finance Committee for the privilege of providing a submission. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further information and rationale for each recommendation and to present to the Committee in person.

References

Umbach, T. (2014). *The Economic Impact of Canada's Faculties of Medicine and Health Science Partners*. Ottawa: The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada.

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The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada. (2016). *A Re-Envisioning of Health Research in Canada*.

Verma, S. (2017). *Report on Indigenous Health Activities*. Ottawa: The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada.

ⁱ (Umbach, 2014)

ⁱⁱ (Naylor, 2017)

ⁱⁱⁱ (The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, 2016)

^{iv} (Verma, 2017)