

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Health Research System Recovery: Strengthening Canada's Health Research System after the COVID-19 Pandemic

April 2024

An RSC Policy Briefing

The COVID-19 pandemic tested health research systems. Although rapid research and evidence use took place, the pandemic revealed gaps and inefficiencies in the health research system. Together, the Royal Society of Canada Working Group on Health Research System Recovery, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Health Research BC, and the Knowledge Translation Program at St. Michael's Hospital-Unity Health Toronto partnered to develop actionable recommendations that a range of organizations can act on, individually and collectively, to strengthen Canada's health research system in the short, medium, and long-term. These recommendations were based on knowledge exchange sessions and surveys that took place between August 2022 and October 2023 with participants from G7 countries as well as Australia and New Zealand. Participants included leadership from health research funding agencies; leadership from research institutes; health, public health, and social care policymakers; researchers; and members of the public.

The 12 recommendations, which represent opportunities for a range of organizations individually and collectively, were categorized into the four functions of the World Health Organization's framework for health research systems and are as follows:

Governance/Stewardship:

1. Outline research logistics as part of emergency preparedness to streamline research in future pandemics.
2. Embed equity and inclusion in all research processes.
3. Facilitate streamlined, inclusive, and rigorous processes for grant application preparation (e.g., by research institutes) and review (e.g., by funders).
4. Create knowledge mobilization infrastructure to support the generation and use of evidence.
5. Coordinate research efforts across local, provincial, national, and international entities.

Financing:

6. Reimagine the funding of health research.

Capacity Building:

7. Invest in formative training opportunities rooted in equity, diversity, and anti-racism.
8. Support researchers' career development throughout their career span.
9. Support early career researchers to establish themselves.

Producing and using research:

10. Strengthen Indigenous health research and break down systemic barriers to its conduct.

11. Develop mechanisms to produce novel research.

12. Enhance research use across the health research ecosystem.

Taken together, these recommendations represent 12 actionable items for the post-pandemic advancement of Canada's health research system, which will strengthen our health systems and embed health in all policy.