



CIHR HIV/AIDS Research Initiative
Draft Strategic Plan
2015-2020

Vision 2020

The CIHR HIV/AIDS Research Initiative's **vision** is:

In 2020, Canadian-led research is having its most significant impact to date on alleviating the burden of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Canada and globally.

Mission

Within the context of CIHR's overall mandate and strategic priorities, the CIHR HIV/AIDS Research Initiative's **mission** is to:

Provide national leadership in the support and facilitation of HIV/AIDS research, research capacity building, research partnerships and knowledge translation that contributes to reducing the transmission and progression of HIV, improving the lives of people living with or susceptible to HIV/AIDS and finding a cure.

Mandate

The **mandate** of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) HIV/AIDS Research Initiative is to identify priorities for and administer HIV/AIDS research support in fulfillment of CIHR's partnership responsibilities within the *Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada*.

Values

The **values** that guide the CIHR HIV/AIDS Research Initiative's decisions, strategies and actions are:

Collaboration: Demonstrate positive, responsible, ethical and mutually respectful relationships with partner organizations, researchers, trainees, stakeholder communities and people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Excellence: Support excellence in scientific research and knowledge translation.

Inclusiveness: Engage individuals, groups and organizations with a stake in HIV/AIDS research, ensuring the meaningful inclusion of those living with and at risk of HIV.

Innovation: Promote and facilitate the introduction of new ideas, approaches, and practices.

Transparency and accountability: Ensure that decision-making processes are fair, open, and grounded in sound ethical principles; that conflicts of interest are disclosed and managed appropriately; and that straightforward approaches to accountability and performance measurement are implemented for all activities.



Strategic Direction 1: Enabling discovery research

Much remains to be learned about HIV, including how the body, individuals, and communities respond to and are protected from infection and its consequences. Strategic Direction 1 emphasizes innovation and creativity in original, hypothesis-driven research with the potential to address critical knowledge gaps. This Direction is relevant across a broad spectrum of HIV/AIDS research. It addresses the long-term requirements of HIV research and ensures that the required capacity exists to meet future challenges. Success in this area will require monitoring and leveraging investments in HIV research and capacity building made through the open and strategic programs of CIHR; working with current and new partners on shared priorities; and promoting the use of existing and emerging research platforms (e.g., cohorts, biological repositories).

Priority Objectives:

1a. Develop new biomedical, behavioural, and systems approaches to reduce HIV transmission

New prevention strategies continue to be essential in achieving significant declines in infection rates in Canada and globally. Biomedical, behavioural and systems oriented strategies are all required, and need to consider both the transmission and acquisition of HIV. While specific areas of focus will continue to be identified through the implementation of Strategic Direction #3 (Promote Leadership in Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability in HIV Research), potential areas of focus include:

- Basic research such as the biology of early HIV infection, pathogenesis and immunology relevant to the identification of new immunogens, correlates of protection and other aspects of HIV prevention;
- Development and testing of preventive vaccines;
- Development and testing of microbicides and other prevention strategies;
- The impact of policy, system and health and social service delivery changes on behavior and HIV transmission;
- Behavioural and social science research that increases understanding of risk and prevention behaviours and the impact of social determinants, stigma and discrimination.

1b. Improve the understanding of HIV to slow its progression and mitigate its impact on the health and well-being of people living with HIV

For those living with HIV, current treatments are effective in improving health and prolonging life. However, these treatments require rigorous adherence to daily treatment regimens and



are not a cure. There are complex interactions due to aging, co-infections and co-morbid health conditions that need to be better understood. And for people living with HIV, there remains a need to further address access to care and determinants of health. This priority will emphasize:

- Understanding HIV persistence (including viral latency) and viral reservoirs; creating models (cellular and animal) of HIV latency and assays to measure persistent HIV infection; and developing and testing HIV cure strategies;
- Increasing knowledge of virological, biological and social aspects of aging and co-morbid conditions (e.g., substance use, chronic diseases and co-infections) for people living with HIV;
- Developing and testing strategies to reduce stigma associated with HIV infection and related issues/syndemics (e.g., associated sexual orientation, substance use) and enhance engagement in the HIV treatment cascade.

1c. Train and support a strong and diverse community of researchers

The Initiative will take a targeted, multi-disciplinary approach to ensure Canada continues to have strong capacity to conduct and apply HIV research. Strategies to train and retain the next generation of researchers may include:

- Supporting workshops and other tools (e.g., on-line resources) that develop and enhance research-related knowledge and skills;
- Integrating multi-disciplinary training as a core requirement within research programs supported by the Initiative;
- Supporting programs that have a specific emphasis on capacity building.



Strategic Direction 2: Mobilizing research evidence

This strategic direction aims to reduce the burden of HIV through translating and applying research evidence. It is focused on creating evidence around practical applications in ‘real-world’ settings and facilitating the movement of existing evidence and new discoveries into practice. The Initiative, in collaboration with key partners, will support programmatic and implementation research embedded in national, provincial/territorial and local programs to provide solutions across the HIV prevention and care cascade. It will build the capacity of researchers, community members and decision makers to work together in new ways to mobilize research evidence.

Priority Objectives

2a. Strengthen the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) in key populations by funding the development, uptake and evaluation of evidence-informed initiatives, programs and practices.

A wide array of front-line programs and services are being developed and delivered, thereby increasing awareness and reducing STBBI risks for individuals and communities. New biomedical approaches to HIV prevention have also recently been developed, including anti-retroviral therapy as pre-exposure prophylaxis and treatment of those infected to reduce HIV transmission. However, there remain significant gaps in the translation of existing evidence into programs and policies, the evaluation of prevention programs, and the appropriate adaptation and equitable scale-up of effective programs in different settings and populations. Under this priority, the Initiative will:

- Develop research funding programs that support the full engagement of communities and decision makers in the assessment of community needs and the development and evaluation of multi-faceted prevention programs;
- Strengthen investments in implementation science focused on the culturally appropriate adaptation and equitable scale-up of effective programs for the prevention of HIV and other STBBIs.

2b. Improve health outcomes for people living with HIV by supporting the development, uptake and evaluation of models of care

There is significant opportunity to improve the health and well-being of those infected with HIV by addressing barriers to access and uptake of STBBI testing, and enhancing engagement and retention in quality care. Improvements can also be made by engaging individuals and communities in developing and testing appropriate health care models to meet their needs. This priority enables the Initiative to:

- Support implementation science across the HIV care cascade that addresses gaps, maintains engagement and enhances access, particularly for those most affected;



- Support integrated research and knowledge translation projects on different models of care that: are tailored to the needs of specific populations; consider the full range of complex needs of people living with HIV over their lives; and consider issues of sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

2c. Strengthen the capacity of researchers, decision makers, front line workers and organizations to apply research evidence

Further capacity is required across sectors to enhance knowledge translation and the systematic translation of research evidence into policy and practice. In addition to supporting research that is integrated within HIV programs and services, the Initiative will work in collaboration with a range of partners and stakeholders to:

- Support the synthesis and sharing of existing knowledge to inform planning and decision making;
- Develop and support capacity building tools (e.g., on-line resources, training materials) that inspire innovative and effective approaches to knowledge translation and increased access to research findings;
- Advance the development and management of harmonized data platforms through participation in national discussions and encouraging the engagement of the research community in these efforts;
- Ensure strategic investments focused on training researchers emphasize the development of knowledge translation skills.



Strategic Direction 3: Promote Leadership in Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability in HIV Research

Strategic Direction 3 will contribute to the success of Strategic Directions 1 and 2 and is closely aligned with values of the CIHR HIV/AIDS Research Initiative. This direction challenges us to become more effective and collaborative leaders while building on the historical strength of HIV research in Canada: the engagement of people living with HIV, those at high risk, and a myriad of partners and stakeholders. Through this Strategic Direction, the Initiative will support and promote the development of research funding models that foster collaboration and a strong community role in research and knowledge translation. It also focuses on enhancing partnerships and ensuring the transparency and accountability of the Initiative.

Priority Objectives

3a. Foster shared leadership across sectors through effective community-academic-decision maker partnerships

The Initiative will promote shared leadership and foster effective community-academic and decision-maker partnerships by:

- Enabling different sectors to come together to discuss priorities and evidence and to develop collaborative approaches;
- Ensuring funding opportunities foster and support partnerships among academics, community members, service providers and decision makers;
- Providing support to enhance the capacity of community members to fully participate in and contribute to a range of HIV research activities and the capacity of researchers to meaningfully engage with decision makers and community stakeholders.

3b. Understand and address the perspectives and priorities of key populations

The HIV epidemic in Canada disproportionately affects certain populations. Addressing the epidemic and improving the health and well-being of those affected requires their meaningful engagement. CIHR will ensure that the priorities of key populations are addressed by:

- Working closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada and others to ensure research programs are guided by the best epidemiological evidence available;
- Involving people living with HIV, populations at risk and community organizations in the governance of the Initiative;
- Engaging people most affected in identifying research priorities and ensuring their involvement throughout the research process.

3c. Continue to enhance the Initiative's leadership in national and international partnerships



The Initiative is strengthened by its valuable and diverse partners. It will continue to engage partners and establish new linkages in order to meet its goals and maximize its impact. Partnerships will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of capacity building efforts as well as the creation and sharing of information to address the HIV epidemic nationally and internationally. Through its partnership work, the Initiative will:

- Enhance collaborations with Federal Initiative partners in order to better align research investments with investments in HIV programs and services;
- More actively engage with other jurisdictions (e.g., provinces/territories and local governments) in identifying and addressing shared priorities;
- Continue to work with strong and diverse domestic and international partners on capacity building and research funding initiatives;
- Seek partnerships with new organizations.

3d. Refresh the Initiative's performance measurement and accountability framework in support of the strategic plan

It is critical that the Initiative continue to monitor and report on its progress and outcomes. This fosters strong accountability for public funds as well as informed decision making on future activities and investments. To fulfill this priority, the Initiative will:

- Implement a performance measurement and evaluation plan aligned with the priority objectives of the strategic plan and accountability requirements of the Federal Initiative and CIHR;
- Report regularly to stakeholders on both progress in implementing the strategic plan and outcomes related to the Initiative's investments.