



March 19, 2020



WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

A message from CIHR President Dr. Michael Strong

Dear members of the Canadian health research community,

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with a health crisis and grave disruptions the likes of which most of us have never seen before. I know that you are facing many challenges: our labs have been temporarily closed, you're adjusting to teaching your courses online, and many of you who are clinicians have heeded the call to lend a hand as resources on the ground are stretched thin. Above and beyond this, you're occupied with the most important job of all: watching out for the health and safety of your family and loved ones.

I know that you have questions about what the disruptions caused by COVID-19 mean for CIHR's programs. Many of you are in the course of applying, have applied, or will be applying for funding competitions, or you've volunteered to peer review, and you're wondering about the status of those competitions.

As you may imagine, this issue has been a critical priority for my senior team and I to address while we assess the evolving challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While I acknowledge that you would like answers right now, the fact of the matter is that this is not going to be business as usual for any of us and our tools to address these challenges are limited. Given this, we have been consulting carefully in order to understand not only the critical needs to be addressed, but also the long-term implications of any approach we use. We recognize that we will need to address not only the ability to offer grant competitions at this time, but also the implications for the current closure of labs across the country. Any package that we will bring forward, and indeed there will be one, will look to mitigate the many impacts on researchers, trainees, lab staff, and research administrators, among others – including ensuring that staff paid from grants will continue to be paid. I can assure you that we will provide the initial aspects of this approach in the next few days.

In the meantime, please regularly consult the [COVID-19 webpage on CIHR's website](#). It will be updated regularly as more information becomes available.

These are extraordinary times, but we will get through them together.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Strong, MD, FRCP, FCAHS, FAAN
President, CIHR

FAQS

Is CIHR closed? Is it business as usual?

No, CIHR is not closed. The agency is continuing to operate and carry out some of its business activities. In order to facilitate social distancing, CIHR employees are working remotely from home. It should be noted that this is not business as usual. For the foreseeable future, CIHR is refocusing its resources to concentrate on the COVID-19 pandemic, including mitigating its effects on the research community.

What is happening with the Spring Project Grant competition?

CIHR is currently assessing how best to move forward with the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition. We are seeking to minimize disruption to the research community, while recognizing the importance of contributing to efforts to help stop the spread of the virus. A decision will be made in the coming days and will be widely communicated to the community next week.

Is CIHR moving to virtual peer review?

Face-to-face peer review continues to be CIHR's standard for peer review. The agency is currently assessing ways of mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on planned peer review activities, and more information will be provided to the community on a competition-by-competition basis.

What is CIHR doing to support researchers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

CIHR is committed to supporting grant- and scholarship-holders, applicants, and peer reviewers as we adjust, together, to these extraordinary circumstances. This could include adjusting program application and reporting dates, extensions to grants, etc. We are currently reviewing the list of all competitions that were recently launched, are in progress, or were to be launched in the coming months, and coming up with mitigation strategies for each one.

Decisions will be made on a competition-by-competition basis and will be communicated early and widely to affected researchers. The Tri-Agencies have also moved to include as eligible expenses [the reimbursement of non-refundable travel fees](#) from agency funds when travel is cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Is CIHR still participating in conferences and events?

The Tri-Agencies are cancelling or postponing non-essential in-person events and travel at least until the end of April. As the situation is still evolving, there is a possibility that events in the spring and summer may also be affected. More information will be available shortly. However, CIHR may still participate in events and conferences where virtual participation is an option.

Furthermore, CIHR's Institutes are determining how to proceed (postponing, cancelling, or moving to a virtual format) on an event-by-event basis in close collaboration with CIHR and their respective host institutions (whose policies they are expected to follow).

Will there be an effect on the development, finalization, and launch of CIHR's Strategic Plan?

While a great deal of progress has been made on the development and finalization of CIHR's new Strategic Plan, the next step in the process – review of the latest draft by several bodies internal and external to CIHR – may be impacted by COVID-19. CIHR will make every effort to avoid disruption to the process. CIHR will postpone the Strategic Plan launch event that had been scheduled for June in Ottawa.

How do I get more information

We encourage the community to consult the relevant Tri-Agency websites and Twitter accounts on a regular basis as we will be providing frequent updates. Individuals may also wish to contact their university administration, or the funding agencies directly. CIHR's Contact Centre remains operational and staff, who are working remotely, can be reached at support-soutien@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

Help us [share](#) the results of *your* CIHR-funded research!

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