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Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

CIHR's Equity Strategy

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CIHR's Equity Strategy

Vision

- To create an equitable funding system by identifying and eliminating systematic biases towards any individual or group that would hinder access to CIHR funds
- To influence the larger health research enterprise to adopt more equitable practices

Objectives:

- To identify whether and where systematic biases exist in CIHR's application and adjudication processes
- To discover the variables and dependencies of the systematic biases
- To identify and implement specific solutions to address the systematic biases
- To raise awareness amongst other stakeholders who control other levers related to systematic biases

CIHR's Equity Strategy

Gender

Career
Stage

Language

Indigenous
Status

Size/Locale
of Institution

Contributing Variables:

- **Peer Reviewers:** gender, career stage, pillar, language
- **Applicants:** gender, career stage, language, pillar, etc.
- **Institutions:** support practices, hiring and promotion policies
- **CIHR Programs / Processes:** program assessment criteria, instructions to reviewers, etc.



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CIHR Gender Equity Framework



Development of CIHR's Gender Equity Framework

- Environmental scan of equity practices nationally and internationally
- Literature review (to lead to a potential review paper)
- Deep dive into CIHR competition data



Led to the development of the actions in CIHR's gender equity framework

- **Ongoing Analyses:**

- **Referee Letters:** Gender assessment of Vanier/Banting referee letters (how are men and women described by male or female referees ?)
- **Description of Leadership:** How men and women describe their leadership abilities, and how male/female reviewers assess leadership in Vanier/Banting applications
- **Description of Scientific Leadership:** How men and women describe their leadership, productivity, and significance of contributions in Foundation grant applications, and how male/female peer reviewers score these descriptions

Gender Equity Challenges

Competition Success Rates

Gender inequities in competition success rates exist in certain CIHR and tri-agency programs.

Amount of Funding

Gender inequities in the amount of grant funding received exist in certain CIHR programs.

Health Research Enterprise

Gender inequities exist in the broader health research enterprise.

Gender Equity Challenges

Challenges:

Competition Success Rates

Gender inequities in competition success rates exist in certain CIHR and tri-agency programs

Amount of Funding

Gender inequities in the amount of grant funding received exist in certain CIHR programs

Health Research Enterprise

Gender inequities exist in the broader research enterprise

Future CIHR actions must:

Mitigate unconscious biases

such that applicants are adjudicated in an equitable and gender-neutral fashion.

Identify and implement targeted solutions

such that applicants receive equitable funding from CIHR, regardless of their gender.

Influence equity practices and policies of stakeholders

such that the hiring, promotion, and nomination processes of institutions reflect the gender diversity in the health research enterprise.

To mitigate unconscious biases that can influence success rates, CIHR aims to:

Short-term

Raise awareness to avoid gender bias in peer review, through:

- Mandatory completion of an unconscious bias module for all peer reviewers before gaining access to applications
- Analysis of impact of any developed training modules, allowing for course corrections where necessary

Implement targeted solutions for program-specific problems, such as:

- Examining options for proportional or targeted success rates
- E.g. Foundation Grant program: Proportionately equalize the number of male and female applicants moving from Stage 1 to 2

Longer-term

Ensure CIHR processes do not introduce biases, through:

- Assessment of peer review recruitment processes, procedures, and literature
- A qualitative review and assessment of funding opportunity adjudication criteria
- Implementation of a tool for use during funding opportunity development

Progress Made To-Date

- **Mandatory unconscious gender bias training for Foundation Grant Competition**
 - Estimated 256/290 reviewers/chairs completed the gender bias training
 - The majority of respondents (94%) reported the training module as being useful.
- **Proportionate Equalization of Stage 1 Foundation Grant Results**
 - CIHR committed to proportionately equalize the number of men and women who are successful at Stage 1 of the 3rd Foundation Grant competition if required.
 - CIHR did not need to intervene to ensure proportionate success rates.

NPL Gender	# App. Sub.	Submitted % of Total			# App. Appr.	Approved % of Total		
		NI	Mid/Sr.	Overall		NI	Mid/Sr.	Overall
F	172	32.76%	27.69%	28.67%	69	36.84%	27.12%	29.49%
M	428	67.24%	72.31%	71.33%	165	63.16%	72.88%	70.51%
Total	600				234			

To identify and implement targeted solutions to funding amount biases, CIHR aims to:

Short-term

Raise awareness and avoid gender bias at the application stage, through:

- Training for applicants and institutions regarding funding requests (acceptable levels and durations)
- Reporting regularly on peer review outcomes, funding-level decisions, and progress on the equity action plan

Longer-term

Equip peer reviewers with resources necessary to recognize funding issues (unconscious bias) during peer review, through:

- Training and awareness/education activities
- Documenting common and potential budget-related biases

Implement targeted solutions for program-specific problems, such as:

- Examining options for proportional funding
- Exploring new funding mechanisms to enable flexible career paths such as supplemental funding

To influence the gender equity practices of individuals and organizations in the health research system, CIHR aims to:

Short-term

Raise awareness of the gender bias that exists in the health research ecosystem, through:

- Publications and educational communication material (e.g. how to write unbiased reference letters, highlighting equity trends and data in Canada and internationally, empirically exploring proposed actions to address equity issues)

Ensure CIHR structure reflects the equitable practices being promoted to others, such as:

- Publicly and regularly releasing application and funding data to increase transparency of CIHR processes and procedures
- Exploring potential biases that may exist in both the internal operation of CIHR, as well as the committees whose membership CIHR controls/influences

Longer-term

Influence the equity practices/policies of institutions by requiring institutions to report on how equity issues are being managed, through:

- Equity resources for institutions regarding guidelines and best practices for supporting gender diversity in hiring, promoting, and nominating practices
- Recognition awards for institutions that demonstrate exemplary equity practices
- Requirement to receive equity certification from a recognized body (e.g. Athena Swan) to be eligible for federal funding

Progress Made To-Date

- **Publicly and regularly releasing application and funding data to increase transparency of CIHR processes and procedures**
 - Wave #1 of the data, along with CIHR's Gender Equity Framework, has been released on our website
 - <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50068.html>
 - Wave #1 contains data related to:
 - CIHR and tri-agency competition success rates by gender
 - Gender data in the broader health research enterprise
 - The anonymized competition data by gender will be available on CIHR's website in Excel format shortly (open government section)
 - Work on Data Wave #2 is underway



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Thank you!

