

Nova Scotia COVID-19 Health Research Coalition

Situation

In this unprecedented time of local and global uncertainty, there has never been a greater need to conduct medical and health related research to collect real time evidence to inform practice, policy, and decision making in this new pandemic environment. Together, Nova Scotian researchers alongside healthcare and academic leaders have developed a plan to rapidly and effectively respond to this situation. The mission of this coalition is to lead and facilitate research and innovation excellence to improve the health and healthcare of Nova Scotians. This funding partnership provides the opportunity to catalyze COVID-19 related research initiatives and achieve collective social impact.

Opportunity

A collaborative partnership to develop a COVID-19 response strategy has formed among NSHA Research & Innovation (Nova Scotia Health Authority), Dalhousie University, Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation, the QEII Health Sciences Centre Foundation, the IWK Foundation and IWK Health Centre, the Dartmouth General Hospital Foundation (DGHF) and Research Nova Scotia (RNS). These partners have collectively committed a minimum of \$1.5 million to support the Nova Scotia research community. This research effort will inform the best COVID-19 practices and support healthcare decision making and planning that benefits the population of Nova Scotia. The funding will serve two purposes:

- 1) Deliver world-class COVID-19 research to inform health system decisions, vaccine development, identification of novel treatments, device development, an understanding of virus-host biology, and the and the social impact and social response to the pandemic.
- 2) Leverage existing research capabilities to rapidly respond to the urgent need to support COVID-19 related research.

This funding coalition will serve as the platform to launch a coordinated COVID-19 research response in Nova Scotia focusing on the following themes: health systems improvement, clinical science, social science and discovery science.

Intake & Evaluation Process

Approach: An application template will be circulated broadly targeting research teams and clearly delineating funding priorities from each partner foundation as well as outlining a robust internal peer review process. The DMRF Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) will lead the application intake process as developed in partnership with NSHA, IWK Foundation and IWK Health Centre, QEII Foundation, Dalhousie, Research Nova Scotia and DGHF. The review panel will assess applications and draw on subject matter experts as required during the review process.

Application Process: All applications will be submitted by email to covid19research@nshealth.ca by Wednesday April 22nd at 4:00 pm. Please submit one PDF with all application materials using surname_COVID19Coalition.pdf naming convention. Checklist included in the application template. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.

Applications will include:

1. A maximum of 4 page proposal including:
 - a. The location of the proposed research, the focus area (health systems improvement, clinical science, social science and/or discovery science), and the principal affiliation of the applicant. Each team member must provide a CV in the format of their choosing. For brevity the review committee strongly supports CIHR Biosketch format.
 - b. A lay summary to be shared publicly and with potential donors. (1/2 page)
 - c. The benefits of the proposed research to Nova Scotians and how the proposed work will inform the COVID-19 response. Please list any collaborations or potential funding partnerships that will result from this work should it be approved. (1/2 page)
 - d. An overview of the proposed research with subheadings for supporting evidence, objectives, methodology, and anticipated outcomes. If your work involves access to human participants please outline ethical considerations and contingencies if access to biological materials is limited. Please provide proposed timeline of workflow with milestones. References and figures will not be included in the page limitation. (2 pages)
 - e. A list of research team members including each applicant's contact information, expertise, and role. Provide confirmation of location and access permission to work safely within any required spaces while public health measures are enacted. (1 page)
 - f. Additional attachments to the application are only permitted for budget quotes. All figures and references must remain within the body of the application template.
 - g. Proof of affiliation or appointment to academic institution and/or NSCC and/or NSHA and/or IWK Foundation and IWK Health Centre will be required for successful applications prior to disbursement of funds. *No letters of support are required at this time.* Note: Successful applicants can obtain a single electronic confirmation from their most senior leader (Vice-President, Dean, Senior Director, etc.) that includes location, access approval, and affiliation. *No wet signatures required.*
 - h. Applicants must use the provided template.**
2. A detailed study budget (Grants will be a maximum of \$75,000) including:
 - a. Personnel costs;
 - b. Equipment and space (description, use, need, location);
 - c. Services (healthcare core services, such a lab or imaging, third party);
 - d. Required materials to be purchased;
 - e. A list of other funding, in-kind or material support received or requested related to the proposed research; and
 - f. Estimated delivery timeline for procurement process if applicable.

If applicable, quotes should be included to support all listed purchases or services

Triage/Pre-review Process: Upon receipt, each application will be reviewed to ensure completeness and alignment with competition, budget eligibility, as well as an initial assessment of scientific merit (clear line of inquiry or research question(s), appropriate and feasible methodology and proposed impacts). Emphasis will be placed on studies with rapid deliverables and recognition of each funder's criteria/requirements. Specifically:

1. NSHA - \$150,000 (total available funds)
 - Requirements/criteria: NSHA based research and resources; includes clinical/patient-based research and/or health system improvement research led by NSHA research staff or affiliate scientists.
2. IWK Foundation and IWK Health Centre - \$100,000 (total available funds)
 - [Requirements/criteria:](#) IWK based researchers, staff, and resources; includes health systems improvement research that reflects the strategic priorities identified by IWK Foundation and IWK Health Centre. There will be two priority funding areas (\$50 000/each):
 - i. Priority I: Implementation Science & Digital Transformation of Care During COVID-19
 - ii. Priority II: Quality and Safety Improvement During COVID-19
3. QEII Foundation-\$250,000 (total available funds)
 - Requirements/criteria: Research based out of QEII Health Sciences Centre.
4. Dartmouth General Hospital Foundation - \$100,000 (total available funds)
 - Requirements/criteria: NSHA Researcher conducting researcher at DGH or research with direct benefit to or emphasis on the Dartmouth Community. Priority call for studies focused on social determinants of health and COVID-19 response in African Nova Scotia population.
5. Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation - \$500,000 (total available funds)
 - Requirements/criteria: Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine, Health or Dentistry Researcher; includes clinical/patient-based research, discovery science, population/social sciences, and health system improvement.
6. Dalhousie University - \$200,000 (total available funds)
 - Requirements/criteria: Dalhousie faculty members, who are eligible to hold research grants, from any Dalhousie Faculty.
7. Research Nova Scotia - \$200,000 (total available funds)
 - Requirements/criteria: Researchers at Acadia University, Atlantic School of Theology, Cape Breton University, Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia Community College, NSCAD University, Saint Mary's University, St. Francis Xavier University, Université Sainte-Anne, or University of King's College. Priority funding areas include research on the impact of COVID-19 on: the NS economy, the NS health care system, and/or vulnerable communities and populations. Priority will be given to research partnerships with community organizations and/or industry.

Application Review Process: A peer review panel comprising DMRF SAC and representatives from the funding partner agencies will be assembled to conduct a peer review of each application. The panel will evaluate the merit of the study based on set criteria including scientific merit, feasibility, scale of impact, and alignment with funders' COVID-19 research priorities. Reviewer(s) will assign a score for each application on a scale of 0 to 4.9 (see below). NSHA Research and Innovation and DMRF representatives will collate the notices of decisions. A summary will be sent to each funder and a notice of decision (based on predeveloped template) will be prepared to be sent to the successful and unsuccessful applicants.

Scientific Merit	Range	Potential Impact	Outcome
Outstanding	4.5 – 4.9	Extremely Significant	May Be Funded
Excellent	4.0 – 4.4	Very Significant	
Very good	3.5 – 3.9	Significant	
Fair	3.0 – 3.4	Moderate	Not Fundable
Poor	0.0 – 2.9	Limited	

* Only those applications that exceed the threshold rating of 3.50 on both potential impact and scientific merit will be considered for funding. The mean of the two scores will be calculated for the applications with a rating of 3.50 and above on both criteria to determine the final rating and establish a ranking list.

Timeline

April 17, 2020	Call for Applications – targeted emails and community wide email.
April 22, 2020	Deadline to submit the application by 4:00 pm. No late submissions will be accepted.
April 23, 2020	Triage of applications and review committee assignment.
April 25, 2020	Review Committee meets for sharing of reviews and funding decision.
April 26, 2020	Reviewed and ranked applications provided to funding coalition members.
April 27, 2020	Decision letters circulated to applicants.