

CAN-ACN Advocacy update – November 2023

The following report covers the advocacy activities of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience from November 1, 2022, to November 1, 2023.

Contents:

The CAN Advocacy Committee	2
Main Advocacy Targets	2
CAN planning of Parliament Hill Day November 7, 2023	3
CAN launches the Canadabrainpower.com, a website promoting Neuroscience research in Canada	4
Advocacy strategic meeting at the CAN2023 meeting.....	4
Joint statement in support of Brain research in Canada produced following CAN2023 meeting advocacy lunch.....	5
Canadian Minister of Health visits the laboratory of Karun Singh, Co-Chair of the CAN Advocacy Committee	5
Read CAN’s submission to the FINA pre-budget consultations.....	6
CAN submits a brief to the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research study on “International Moonshot Programs”.....	7
CAN submits a brief to the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research study on “Government of Canada’s Graduate Scholarship and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programs” ..	7
Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) 2023 Public lecture:	7
CAN supports the publication of the Brain Coloring book.....	8
Publication of key statistics on research funding in Canada	8
CAN outreach and advocacy awards	9
Promoting the economic value of research funding in Canada.....	9
Promoting Canadian neuroscience success stories on our website & Social media accounts.....	9
Partnership building.....	9
Appendix 1: Joint op-ed by CAN, CBRS, CNSF, Brain Canada and NHCC	10

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience's main objectives in the past months have continued to be to

- Engage directly with Members of Parliament, Senators and Parliament hill staff to promote increased investment in scientific research by the Canadian government.
- Advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion in neuroscience research in Canada
- Promote neuroscience research in Canada to the public, to show its importance for all Canadians.
- Work to promote the economic value of basic research in Canada.

The CAN Advocacy Committee

CAN has an active and engaged Advocacy Committee that drives all its advocacy activities. Furthermore, CAN launched a call for new members of the CAN advocacy committee in September 2023, and has renewed its membership. We have highlighted the new members below.

The current membership of the CAN Advocacy Committee is:

Co-Chairs: **Karun Singh**, University of Toronto & **Liisa Galea**, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Committee members:

John Mielke, University of Waterloo (joined October 2023)

Ciaran Murphy-Royal, Université de Montréal

Shalina Ousman, University of Calgary (joined October 2023)

Lisa Saksida, U Western

Tabrez Siddiqui, U of Manitoba

Melanie Woodin, University of Toronto, CAN Vice-President

Haug (Ho) Yu, CAMH – U of Toronto

Trainee members:

Shalini Iyer, University of British Columbia (joined October 2023)

Amy Smith-Dijak, McGill University (joined October 2023)

Leanne Young, McGill University (joined October 2023)

Main Advocacy Targets

Recommendation 1: That the government **double the budgets of the three main federal funding agencies: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)** for the benefit of all Canadians. This recommendation aims to

bring Canadian investment in scientific research to a level commensurate to that of other G7 countries.

Recommendation 2: That the government of Canada **double support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows** by increasing both the value and number of fellowships awarded in the next budget. In conjunction with Recommendation 1, this recommendation will ensure our next generation of scientists have the means to participate fully in Canada's knowledge economy.

Recommendation 3: That the government of **Canada make research on the Brain and Mental Health a national priority** by investing in research to understand the brain through well-established and trusted organizations in the field.

CAN's advocacy targets were developed following consultation with our membership (Survey conducted in the Fall of 2022) and in partnership with other like-minded individuals and societies. Significantly the "Double-Double" for science refers to an expression is meant to resonate with all Canadians. This expression is also championed by Canadian Senator Stan Kutcher, a well-respected science advocate in Canada. Research Canada also advocates for doubling the budget of tri-agency as do many other Canadian associations and organisations.

There has also been an unprecedented mobilisation of Graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, who have rallied behind the "SOS- Support our Science" banner, to request increases to funding for graduate students. *Support Our Science* is a grassroots organization with a clear mandate: improve pay for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars in Canada, with the motto: "Every researcher deserves a living wage". <https://www.supportourscience.ca/learn-more>. CAN has worked to amplify and promote the message of the Support our Science group.

CAN planning of Parliament Hill Day November 7, 2023

CAN held its first in-person Parliament Hill Day in Ottawa on November 3, 2022. This presented an exceptional opportunity for a team of CAN advocates to meet face-to-face or virtually with members of Parliament, Senators, Parliamentary staff members and important senior civil servants to advocate for a increased support for the major federal funding agencies in Canada (Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and graduate student and postdoctoral fellowships and for making research on Brain and Mental Health a national priority. Meetings were held with Parliamentarians of all major political parties in Canada.

The **2022 Hill Day** was a very productive day of meetings and relationship building, with **17 CAN advocates** from across Canada participating in meetings with 21 Members of Parliament, Senators, Senior decision-makers and their staff. We also had the opportunity to participate in a series of virtual meetings with elected officials that were unavailable on our in-person Hill Day, including a meeting with the Canadian Minister of Health, the honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, on November 4, 2023.

Building on the success of the 2022 Hill Day, CAN organized a **Parliament Hill Day on November 7, 2023**. Our ask is summarized in our one-page leave-behind document, available here:

November 2023 Hill Day leave behind document: <https://can-acn.org/docs/one-page-handout-CAN-ACN-2023.pdf>

At the time this report is written, details of the day are unavailable, but an update will be provided in-person to SfN and the GPA.

CAN launches the Canadabrainpower.com, a website promoting Neuroscience research in Canada

(May 2023)

<https://canadabrainpower.com/>



CAN developed a website to promote the economic value of brain research in Canada, modeled partly on the “Impact of NIH Research” webpage (<https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/impact-nih-research>).

The website contains three main sections:

1. Pioneering research, which highlights important discoveries made in Canada
2. Knowledge & Expertise, which spotlights leading Canadian brain researchers, including the trainees who won recent CAN-CIHR-INMHA Brain Star Awards
3. Strengthening the Economy, which shares

how brain research spurs innovation, drives new industry, improves health care, and informs government.

The target audience for this website is members of the public, but also policy makers, to provide concrete examples of brain research and its impact for all Canadians.

Advocacy strategic meeting at the CAN2023 meeting

(May 2023)

Given the growing momentum in support of a concerted effort to increase support for brain research in Canada, and the Canadian Association for Neuroscience organized a panel discussion on this topic at the 2023 Canadian Neuroscience Meeting, on Monday, May 29.

Title of the session: **Advocacy lunch: Stronger together – building capacity for a Brain Moonshot in Canada**

The meeting brought together panelists:

- Adriana Di Polo – CAN Vice-President
- Deanna Groetzinger – Manager, Public Affairs & Partnerships at Neurological Health Charities Canada
- Jennie Young – Executive Director, Canadian Brain Research Strategy
- Vivianne Poupon – President & CEO Brain Canada Foundation

The objective of this panel discussion was to discuss opportunities to work together to increase funding for brain research in Canada. This increase can be through targeted initiatives such as those provided by a brain moonshot initiative, but also through funding for basic research via tri-agency.

Other specific objectives included: Unifying the voices of Canadian Brain Research; Exploring how each partner can maintain their unique character while participating in a joint advocacy effort, with a common message; Engaging CAN members in advocacy and providing opportunities for our members to act in support of brain research and finally, getting community feedback and input.

The session was a very dynamic one, in which our community showed a lot of engagement, enthusiasm, but also some much-needed critical feedback on our advocacy strategy.

Joint statement in support of Brain research in Canada produced following CAN2023 meeting advocacy lunch

(October 2023)

Following the joint meeting held at the CAN2023 meeting, the four panelists and members of their teams came together to write an opinion piece for submission in major Canadian Newspapers, titled

Billions for better brain health: Stronger together – building capacity for a Brain Moonshot in Canada

The President of the Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation, Dr. Michael D. Hill, also joined the list of signatories of the letter, which is currently being submitted for publication.

A copy of the letter is appended, as it has not yet been published (see appendix 1).

Canadian Minister of Health visits the laboratory of Karun Singh, Co-Chair of the CAN Advocacy Committee

(October 2023)



CAN-ACN

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR NEUROSCIENCE
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES NEUROSCIENCES



Mark Holland ✓
@markhollandlib

Had an incredibly insightful visit at Dr. Karun Singh's lab @DKJEI_UHN.

Their research on how genes affect vision disorders and diseases like Alzheimer's and how we could personalize treatments shows how important health research is.

Thanks for the tour!



Karun K Singh and Donald K. Johnson Eye Institute

11:12 AM · Oct 21, 2023 from Toronto, Ontario · 1,954 Views

...

The Canadian Minister of Health, the honourable Mark Holland, visited the laboratory of Dr. Karun Singh, Co-Chair of the CAN Advocacy Committee. Mr. Holland made an announcement of 13 research projects and a knowledge mobilization hub under CIHR's Transforming Health with Integrated Care (THINC) initiative at a news conference at Toronto Western Hospital on Friday, October 20, 2023, and visited Dr. Singh's laboratory after the announcement.

It was an opportunity to showcase the importance of neuroscience research in Canada. Mr. Holland was also interested in discussing with trainees how Canada can

better support them.

Read CAN's submission to the FINA pre-budget consultations.

(July 2023)

The CAN advocacy Committee shared its submission to pre-budget consultations in advance of Budget 2024 of the House of Commons permanent committee on Finances (FINA) (July 2023). View our submission here:

Investing in science will benefit all Canadians. <https://can-acn.org/investing-in-science-will-benefit-all-canadians/>

This submission details and supports the CAN main advocacy targets presented above.

CAN also encouraged all members to submit a brief to this open consultation of the House of Commons finance committee by sharing our submission in advance and providing instructions for submitting a brief via email to all our members.

CAN also published and shared [submissions to 2023 pre-budget consultations](#) (Feb 2023), and a [response to the 2023 budget](#) (April 2023).

CAN submits a brief to the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research study on “International Moonshot Programs”

(February 2023)

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience joined a large coalition of Canadian stakeholders calling for the Government of Canada to invest in a Canadian Brain Research Initiative, to make **Brain and Mental Health Research a National Priority in Canada**.

Read our brief, along with those of many other stakeholders, on the House of Commons website:

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/SRSR/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=11835988>

For this consultation, the executive director of the Canadian Brain Research Strategy, Dr. Jennie Young, reached out to key Canadian brain research stakeholders to encourage submission of briefs in support of a made-in-Canada Brain Moonshot. This resulted in the submission of 15 briefs in support of a Canadian Brain Moonshot program out of a total 28 briefs submitted in total. The momentum for a Canadian Brain Moonshot is growing.

CAN submits a brief to the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research study on “Government of Canada’s Graduate Scholarship and Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programs”

(June 2023)

CAN also submitted a brief for the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research study titled “*Successes, challenges and opportunities for Science in Canada*”.

The brief, titled: “Canada must stop the brain drain” highlighted how much Canada has to lose by not supporting our young emerging scientists. Scientists in training (graduate students and postdoctoral fellows) pursue long careers in training, typically 5-10 years in total, before they can land a more permanent job. Even when the desire to stay in Canada is strong due to our enviable quality of life, our students are attracted by the much higher financial means available to them in the United States, Australia, the EU, and other countries. Indeed, salaries for trainees can be up to triple what is typically given at a Canadian university, making it financially sound to pursue an academic career outside of Canada. If Canada does not increase its support for science, the reality of the brain drain will continue to worsen.

The full brief text is available on our website: [Canada must stop the brain drain](#)

Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) 2023 Public lecture:

CAN hosted the CAN 2023 Public Lecture on **Diet, Eating Disorders, & Obesity** at the Grande Bibliotheque, a central location in Montreal, on Saturday, May 27th, with leading Canadian experts Stephanie Fulton, Alain Dagher and Patricia Pelufo-Silveira. The session was hosted by Natasha



CAN-ACN

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR NEUROSCIENCE
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES NEUROSCIENCES

Rajah, McGill University and Douglas Hospital Research Centre & Alain Dagher, McGill University and Montreal Neurological Institute.



CAN supports the publication of the Brain Coloring book

<https://www.thebraincolouringbook.com/>

CAN was happy to support the launch of the Brain Coloring book at the CAN2024 meeting in Montreal. The Brain coloring book is the initiative of two Canadian neuroscientists, who are passionate about sharing knowledge about the brain and neurons to children, young and old.

"Lady GABA, Yoga neuron, happy astrocytes, and hungry microglia- This colouring and learning book has it all. It opens the eyes and senses to the world of the brain. A must have for kids and adults too."

KEITH MURAI

PhD, Dad, Director, Centre for Research in Neuroscience, Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre, President Canadian Association Neuroscience

CAN distributed copies of the book to attendees of our advocacy lunch at the CAN 2023 meeting.

Publication of key statistics on research funding in Canada

CAN publishes and maintains a list of key statistics on science funding in Canada.

<https://can-acn.org/science-funding-in-canada-statistics/>

According to the latest data from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development <http://www.oecd.org/>) Canada is the only country in the G7 whose investments in Research and Development have steadily declined over the last 20 years.

Another alarming statistic is the stagnation of the budget of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR, the Canadian equivalent of NIH), resulting in dropping success rates in funding competitions.

The statistics compiled by CAN are used to support our asks and to inform the public and elected officials we meet in our advocacy efforts.

CAN outreach and advocacy awards

CAN attributed the following Advocacy and outreach awards in the last year:

- CAN Outreach & Advocacy Award: ThinkSci Outreach Program
Description: <https://can-acn.org/thinksci-outreach-program-wins-a-can-advocacy-award/>

CAN has an open call for applications, and reminders to apply are sent to CAN membership on a quarterly basis.

Promoting the economic value of research funding in Canada

CAN met with key executives at the Tri-Agency (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC) to initiate a collaboration to promote the economic value of government investments in research. We are working with the program teams at these agencies to obtain statistics on highly qualified personnel trained and hired through Tri-Agency funding, and other economic impact of the funding.

Promoting Canadian neuroscience success stories on our website & Social media accounts.

CAN regularly publishes neuroscience research discoveries made in Canada on our website and social media platforms. CAN is present on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and uses these platforms to disseminate the success stories of Canadian neuroscientists to a wide audience. These stories and other association news can be found in the CAN news section of our website: <https://can-acn.org/>

Partnership building

CAN is continuing to build and nurture partnerships with Canadian organizations to promote investments in basic research and brain and neuroscience targeted initiatives. In the last year, CAN has partnered with the Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences, CIHR-INMHA, Research Canada, the Canadian Brain Research Strategy, Neurological Health Charities of Canada, Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation, Brain Canada and others to promote research and science in Canada.

Thank you for reading our advocacy report. If you have any questions, please contact the CAN Advocacy Officer, Julie Poupart at the following address: Julie.Poupart@can-acn.org. You can find more information about all our advocacy activities here: <https://can-acn.org/advocacy/>

Appendix 1: Joint op-ed by CAN, CBRS, CNSF, Brain Canada and NHCC Billions for better brain health

Stronger together – building capacity for a Brain Moonshot in Canada

Canada must invest in brain research. Brain conditions, which include stroke, autism, brain and spinal cord injury, depression and degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease, constitute the **biggest health challenge Canadians face today**. We must improve care for the more than **7.5 million Canadians** who live with brain conditions and their families.

Brain conditions are increasingly **impacting the Canadian economy**. Recent estimates show that the total cost of neurological and mental health disorders - in direct medical health care costs, social care costs of caregivers, income support, loss of productivity, private insurance claims, and public disability payments - is in the **tens of billions of dollars per year in Canada** and rising.

To address this crisis, we need a **greater understanding of how the brain works**. This knowledge, stemming from fundamental research to clinical research and care, is foundational to the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and cure of disorders of the brain. This knowledge is critically needed to improve the health outcomes of millions of people in Canada. Brain research must be a priority for the Canadian government.

The leadership of organizations representing people with neurological conditions, research funders and neuroscience researchers, clinicians and other stakeholders: **Neurological Health Charities of Canada, Canadian Brain Research Strategy, Brain Canada, Canadian Association for Neuroscience**, and the **Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation** have come together to look at ways to address the growing challenges posed by brain health issues. We speak in a unified voice to **urge the government to invest billions of dollars deliberately and sustainably in brain research for the benefit of all Canadians**.

Made-in-Canada discoveries are the foundation for the development of innovative treatments and technologies that fuel the **knowledge economy**. The quality of brain research in Canada is undisputed and recognized worldwide, but Canada lags behind in science funding compared to other G7 countries. The government must better support Canadian scientists so they can reach their full potential.

The consequences of lack of funding are particularly concerning for trainees and the next generation of scientists who bring the bold ideas we need to make progress. The challenge of brain drain is escalating as the funding perspectives in Canada remain less than ideal, as recently reported in the *Report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System*, published in 2023 (<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/panel-federal-research-support/en/report-advisory-panel-federal-research-support-system>).

The **return on investment in brain research** will be multi-faceted: it will contribute to the health of people in Canada; reduce the burden of brain conditions and the strain on our healthcare systems;



it will launch and support discoveries that are the foundation of an innovative economy; it will contribute to the development of a highly skilled workforce and create thousands of jobs.

The time to invest in brain research is now. Our scientists are tackling the critical challenges that Canada faces regarding neurological and mental health, which will impact billions of people worldwide in the coming decades. These conditions, which are among the most complex to understand, are also the most critical to treat as they are the leading cause of disability and the second leading cause of death worldwide (Feigin et al. Lancet Neurol. 2019;18(5):459-480. doi:10.1016/S1474-4422(18)30499-X). Mental health disorders are the leading cause of days off work. The burden of brain disorders and diseases has substantially increased over the past 25 years and will worsen due to the aging population and post-COVID19-conditions. This worsening scenario will have a detrimental impact on the economy, healthcare systems, and the livelihood of Canadians.

Canada has the talent and the personnel to be a leader in brain research in the world, and to identify cures and therapies for the more than **7.5 million Canadians who live with brain conditions and their families**. We need the resources to make this happen through dedicated, sustainable research funding. Let's commit to billions for better brain health.

Signed by

Dr. Adriana Di Polo, PhD – President, Canadian Association for Neuroscience

Deanna Groetzing – Manager, Neurological Health Charities of Canada

Dr. Viviane Poupon, PhD – President and Chief Operating Officer, Brain Canada

Dr. Jennie Young, PhD – Executive Director, Canadian Brain Research Strategy

Dr. Michael D. Hill, MD, FRCPC, President of the Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation

Canadian Association for Neuroscience

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) is the largest association of neuroscientists in Canada. Our members are dedicated to advancing brain research. Our association is composed of over one thousand researchers, who work at academic institutions across the country. We share the common goal of ensuring neuroscience remains one of the greatest research and innovation strengths of Canada.

<https://can-acn.org/>

Neurological Health Charities Canada

Neurological Health Charities Canada is a coalition of organizations that represent millions of Canadians living with neurological diseases, disorders, and injuries. In addition to supporting research, NHCC proposes the development of a National Neurological Strategy for Canada to



address the patchwork approach to neurological health that has a profoundly negative impact on quality of life for the millions of Canadians living with neurological conditions.

<https://mybrainmatters.ca/>

Brain Canada

Brain Canada envisions a future where scientists across disciplines collaborate to drive innovation. A future where early-career researchers have the resources to explore their boldest ideas. And where people across the country have access to solutions to mysteries like ALS, epilepsy, and brain injury.

<https://braincanada.ca/>

Canadian Brain Research Strategy

The Canadian Brain Research Strategy (CBRS) is a community-led initiative uniting more than 35 neuroscience and mental health institutes across the country, in alliance with Indigenous Knowledge Holders, patients and families impacted by brain disease or injury, health charities, private and public science funders, and industry. Together, we are developing a comprehensive national research strategy to tackle the enormous societal challenge and urgent need to understand the human brain.

<https://canadianbrain.ca/>

Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation

The Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation (CNSF) aims to improve the wellbeing of children and adults with diseases, disorders and injuries of the nervous system and the prevention of these conditions.

The CNSF is an umbrella organization representing six National Specialty Societies. These organizations share a common interest in the functions and disorders of the brain and nervous system. The CNSF's mission is to support the neuroscience professions in Canada through education, advocacy, membership services and research promotion.

<https://www.cnsf.org/>