

## CAN-ACN Annual Advocacy report – June 2020

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience has developed an active and efficient advocacy program over the last years thanks to the important support provided by the Society for Neuroscience. CAN will continue to build on the advocacy experience we have built, and, thanks to a new Memorandum of Understanding with SfN which has taken effect in July 2019, will expand its efforts in the coming years.

Our main objective in the coming months is to engage directly with elected officials, senators and parliament hill staff through the organisation of the first Canadian Parliament Hill Day, which will take place March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. We have hired a Public Affairs, Temple Scott Associates, with experience in organizing such events, to help with the logistic and strategic organisation of our event.

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## Background information about the Science Funding situation in Canada

Fundamental research funding in Canada is viewed in a positive light by Canadians, who understand its importance for their health and well-being, and by the current government (Liberal as of September 2019), who labels itself as “pro-science”. However, despite the re-investments in the Canadian funding agencies announced in 2018, research funding in Canada remains low when compared to that of other countries.

Specifically, a comparison of funding of the NIH (National Institutes of the Health) by the US government and CIHR (Canadian Institutes of Health Research) by the Canadian government is instructive.

As stated in the report from Canada’s Fundamental Science Review,

*“In 2015 the federal Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation compared CIHR’s mandate with those of sister organizations abroad, and cautioned that CIHR’s mandate was unduly broad relative to its resources. [...] CIHR has a broader mandate than the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). Moreover, the U.S. funds a significant fraction of applied research in healthcare innovation and healthcare quality through two other federal agencies with a combined operating budget of close to US\$1.50 billion per year. In 2016-17 the NIH budget was US\$30.62 billion, while the CIHR budget was C\$1.03 billion, including its share of spending contained in the relevant tri-council programs. **The thirty-fold difference contrasts with a nine-fold difference in population.** Adjustments for GDP per capita or purchasing power have only a minor influence on such large discrepancies.”*

*[http://www.sciencereview.ca/eic/site/059.nsf/vwapj/ScienceReview\\_April2017-rv.pdf/\\$file/ScienceReview\\_April2017-rv.pdf](http://www.sciencereview.ca/eic/site/059.nsf/vwapj/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf/$file/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf) (page 81)*

As the NIH budget increases, this difference increases. In 2018, the NIH budget was \$37 billion (USD), while the CIHR budget was 1.1 billion (CAD), equivalent to \$0.83 billion (USD). This is a 44-fold difference, while the population difference remains close to 9 fold.

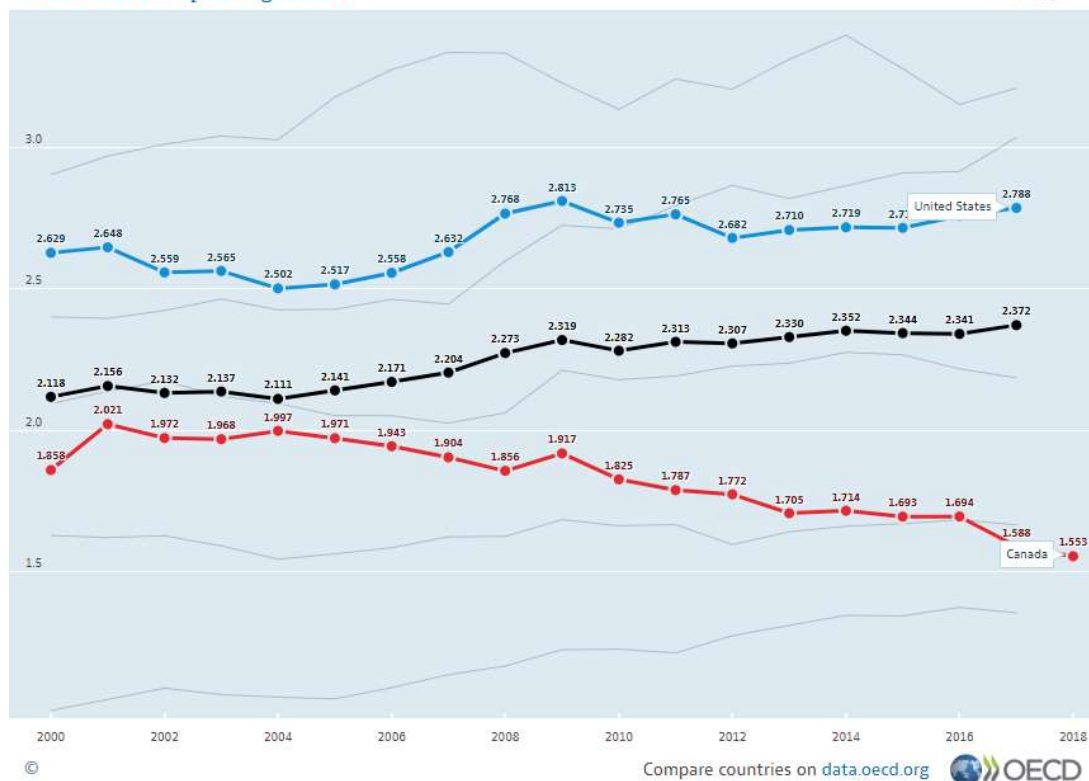
According to the latest data from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), Canada is the **only country in the G7 whose investment in Research and Development have steadily declined in the last 15 years**



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Gross domestic spending on R&D Total, % of GDP, 2000 – 2018



Canada compared to other countries of the G7. Dark black line is OECD average.

OECD (2019), Gross domestic spending on R&D (indicator). doi: 10.1787/d8b068b4-en (Accessed on 11 October 2019) <https://data.oecd.org/chart/5HLk>

While significant and historical investments were announced in 2018, the investments in this one budget cannot redress the damage done by the lack of investment in R&D in Canada over the last 15 years. Repeated investments and commitments over many budgets are required.

## CAN advocacy strategy

Our approach to address this challenge will rely on four complimentary strategies

- 1- Member engagement through calls to action
- 2- Direct engagement with elected officials (Canadian Hill Day, Engaging on social media, Invitation to elected official to participate in our events)
- 3- Partnership development and leadership in the launch of initiatives that mobilize Canadian scientists and science supporters to highlight the importance of science funding for all Canadians.



4- Promoting engagement with the public to highlight the importance of neuroscience research for all Canadians.

## Accomplishments June 2019 – June 2020

### Hiring of the Public Affairs Firm Temple Scott Associates to further develop CAN's advocacy program

CAN has officially contracted the Public Affairs Firm Temple Scott and Associates, with offices in Ottawa and in Toronto, to further develop our advocacy strategy to promote investments in scientific research in Canada. Temple Scott Associates is an independent government and public relations firm who has worked in the area for 30 years.

### Planning CAN Parliament Hill Day – March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 – now postponed to October 2020

CAN has been working with the public affairs firm Temple Scott Associates to organize a day on Parliament Hill which was planned to take place on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic made this impossible to continue. CAN leadership has discussed this situation with our support team at Temple Scott Associates, and has decided to hold a virtual Hill day in the Fall of 2020. An exact date will be decided in September, as the COVID-19 situation and restrictions are quickly evolving.

CAN will use this day to advocate for increased funding for science through increased support for the three main federal funding agencies of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Through a call for participants and direct invitations to specific individuals, CAN has already put together a diverse group of neuroscientists who were ready to participate in our March event, and have indicated they would be willing to participate in our virtual Fall event. Care has been taken to include participants of diverse geographic areas, at different career levels, and members of underrepresented groups.

Groups of 3-4 neuroscientists will meet with Members of Parliament, Senators and Parliamentary Staff virtually over a period of 24-48h for our virtual hill day, as advised by Temple Scott Associates, who have experience running these types of events. Transitioning to a virtual format will also allow us to increase the number of participating scientists, while ensuring that elected officials can meet with their constituents.



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## June 2019 – Sharing advocacy training workshop material with CAN membership and on our website

At the May 2019 Canadian Neuroscience meeting, SfN and CAN partnered to offer an afternoon advocacy training workshop to meeting attendees on May 22, 2019. Prior to this event, CAN had worked to adapt the content of the very successful advocacy training workshop that SfN has developed for US neuroadvocates. Through this adaptation process, we were able to identify many similarities in advocacy practices that can be shared in both countries, but also important differences that warrant a country-specific approach to neuroscience advocacy.

We were very grateful for the collaboration with Adam Katz (Advocacy Engagement Manager at SfN) who provided CAN with SfN's advocacy workshop material and valuable insight on how to conduct the workshop, and to Michael Heintz (Director of Advocacy & Training at SfN), who, along with the Chair of the CAN advocacy committee (Melanie Woodin) and the CAN advocacy officer (Julie Poupart), presented the workshop, and provided feedback throughout the process of developing a Canadian version of the SfN advocacy workshop.

In June 2019, we made the advocacy presentation (<https://can-acn.org/documents/2019/CAN-SfN-Advocacy-training-2019-05-22-slides.pdf>) and participant handouts (<https://can-acn.org/documents/2019/CAN-SfN-Advocacy-training-2019-05-22-handout.pdf>) available on our website.

## Plans for 2020 Advocacy training

While the participant engagement was excellent at the 2019 Advocacy training session, the advocacy committee proposed to integrate the training in the main program of the meeting to increase attendance. CAN had planned to host a 1.5h interactive lunchtime advocacy training session on June 3, 2020, during the Canadian Neuroscience meeting, but this was cancelled due to COVID-19. We are still looking for ways to offer this training in 2020.

## Promotion of basic and neuroscience research in national publications

During the Fall 2019 Canadian Election campaign, CAN President Dr. Katalin Toth Co-authored an Op-Ed with the President of the Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences (CSMB), Dr. Tarik Moroy, which was published in Le Devoir, on October 9, 2019. Le Devoir is a major French language newspaper in Montreal.

The English version of the text was sent to major newspaper prior to the election, but unfortunately did not get published at that time.

After the elections, on October 25, a modified version of this Op-Ed was published in the National Newswatch, a news aggregator that is followed by elected officials and Parliament staff.

CAN has participated in a campaign about Brain Health, which was published as an insert in the Toronto Star, a major Canadian newspaper in March 2020. CAN authored the campaign introduction



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on the front page of the insert and used this opportunity to promote the importance of neuroscience research to improve brain health for all Canadians. A copy of the article is archived here: <https://www.healthinsight.ca/health-care-industry-news/brain-health-is-a-priority-for-all-canadians/>

## Partnership development:

CAN has partnered with organizations and associations to promote government investments in Science.

### Research Canada:

Through our membership in Research Canada, CAN has visited the Canadian Parliament and showcased neuroscience and neuroscientists to elected officials on multiple occasions.

In preparation for Election 2019, Research Canada has developed a series of tools and resources to engage with Candidates, on the **Your Candidate, Your Health** website <http://yourcandidatesyourhealth.ca/> which we have shared with our members.

### #VoteScience coalition

The #votescience movement is a coordinated effort by multiple groups (CAN being one of the early supporters) to advocate for Science in the 2019 Federal election. Group actions included calls to meet with election candidates, a postcard campaign, social media interventions, in-person meetings on science topics. By working together, science support groups were able to amplify their shared message.

More at <https://www.votescience.ca/>

### Partnership with other scientific associations in Canada

CAN has built a working relationship with the Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences (CSMB) to share advocacy opportunities. Working with the help of the team at Temple Scott Associates, CAN President Katalin Toth has co-authored with CSMB President Tarik Moroy an Op-Ed which was published in the Montreal newspaper Le Devoir on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019: Science is not an election issue, but it should be (original title, in French: La science n'est pas un enjeu électoral, mais elle devrait l'être) available here:

<https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/564375/la-science-n-est-pas-un-enjeu-electoral-mais-elle-devrait-l-etre>

CAN has developed a list of Canadian science associations (July 2019) to share science advocacy initiatives in the future.

## Engaging political parties in advance of the 2019 federal elections

CAN also directly engaged with the four main federal parties in Canada (Liberal Party, Conservative Party, New Democratic Party and Green Party) on issues relating to federal support of science. CAN developed and sent five questions about science funding; the role of government in research; the

importance of basic research; equity, diversity and inclusion in science; and support for science trainees. We received responses from the Green Party and the Liberal Party. The New Democratic Party sent an initial response but failed to follow through with an official response. The failure of the Conservative Party to respond to our questions was noted. The response, or lack of response of all parties was published on our website.

### Inviting members to vote by anticipation

As the 2019 Canadian election is taking place during the SfN meeting, CAN and SfN have proactively sent reminders to meeting attendees to vote by anticipation and share information about how to do this in the weeks before the election day.

### Building relationships with elected officials

CAN has also specifically invited Canadian neuroscientists who have received funding in recent months from the federal government agencies (CIHR and NSERC) to write directly to their local Member of Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Science to thank them for their support of scientific research in Canada. CAN provided a template including information about impact of research, number of jobs created or maintained by the funding, and local companies that benefit from investment in research, to show elected officials the impact their commitments have in their riding.

### CAN 2020 Advocacy & Outreach Awards

Cristian Zaelzer and the Convergence Initiative win a 2020 CAN Neuroscience Outreach & Advocacy Award



The Canadian Association for Neuroscience is proud to present Cristian Zaelzer and the Convergence Initiative a **2020 CAN Neuroscience Outreach & Advocacy Award**. Convergence embodies the idea of linking art and science in a way that science becomes accessible and exciting to the public. They have done this through carefully planned approaches and exciting events, and they truly reach out to the public. The multi-disciplinary nature of their content and programs is inspiring. The spirit of the Convergence initiative resonates with the fundamental values

of CAN, and we are therefore glad to support their work, which we have found to be of high quality, beautiful and thought provoking.

Read more here: [Zaelzer Convergence Award](#)



## First-Person Science and Roger Hudson win a 2020 CAN Outreach and Advocacy Award



The Canadian Association for Neuroscience is proud to announce that the First-Person Science Initiative and its founder, Roger Hudson, have won a 2020 CAN Outreach and Advocacy Award. This award recognizes the important efforts of First-Person Science to present information about neuroscience discoveries in a way that is accessible to the public through interactive live stream conversations with researchers. These efforts to bridge the gaps between scientists and the public through real-time engagement and honest, open & accurate sharing of peer-reviewed data are much needed in these times when misinformation spreads rapidly.

Read more here: [Hudson First Person Science Award](#)

## CAN 2020 Public lectures – postponed because of COVID-19

CAN organizes public lectures yearly, before our annual meeting. The 2020 public lecture, planned for May 30, 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was planned to feature Antoine Hakim, O.C., MD, PhD, FRCPC, Emeritus Professor, Neurology, University of Ottawa, Founding Director, Neuroscience Research, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, Founding CEO and Scientific Director, Canadian Stroke Network, and Founding CEO and Scientific Director, Heart and Stroke Foundation Centre for Stroke Recovery.

Through his work at the University of Ottawa and his creation of the Canadian Stroke Network, Dr. Hakim has revolutionized the way strokes are being researched and treated in Canada and around the globe. He was among the first researchers to use animal models to mimic human stroke symptoms, which greatly contributed to our understanding of stroke.

## Canadian Brain Research Strategy update

CAN executives are heavily involved in the development of the Canadian Brain Research Strategy, which has the following aims:

*The mission of CBRS is to build on Canada's strengths and current investments in cutting-edge collaborative neuroscience to transform neurological and mental health for Canadians. The Strategy is a grass-roots initiative launched by leading Canadian neuroscientists, in partnership with representatives of the Neurological Health Charities of Canada (NHCC) to respond to a growing need for concerted efforts to understand the brain.*

CAN has developed a new website for the CBRS and communicated with heads of neuroscience departments and research centres across Canada to include their endorsements on the website. The leaders of the CBRS have applied for funding for further development of the CBRS. Learn more about the strategy here: <https://canadianbrain.ca/about/>

CAN continues to be strongly involved in the Canadian Brain Research Strategy, which has recently received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to further develop its program.



Continued development of guides and resources for Canadian Neuroadvocates

CAN has developed some guides and resources for Canadian neuroadvocates, which include statistics about research funding and support in Canada. These resources are available on our newly redesigned website, which more clearly emphasizes advocacy (<https://can-acn.org/advocacy/> is one of four links in the main menu of our website)

### Advocacy officer & Advocacy committee

CAN has dedicated funds from SfN to employ an advocacy officer, who assist in coordinating and following up with all CAN advocacy projects. CAN also has a very active advocacy committee (<https://can-acn.org/advocacy/>)

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

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. Press releases for presentations at our annual meeting are also disseminated through eurekaalert. These stories and other association news can be found in the CAN news section of our website: <https://can-acn.org/category/can-news>

Thank you for reading our report!