

CAN-ACN Advocacy update – July 2021

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CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR NEUROSCIENCE
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES NEUROSCIENCES

The following report covers the advocacy activities of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021. It is presented to the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding for Advocacy support signed by CAN and SfN in June 2019.

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

- engage directly with Members of Parliament, Senators and Parliament hill staff to promote increased investment in scientific research by the Canadian government
- promote neuroscience research in Canada to the public, to show its importance for all Canadians.

1. CAN Parliament Hill Week – November 2-6, 2020.

Key points:

- 27 meetings with key members of Parliament, Senator and Parliamentary staff
- Over 50 Canadian Neuroadvocates participated, including neuroscientists at all career levels and from across the country.
- Planned for November 2-6, 2020, with some meetings re-scheduled for later in November, beginning of December. Some follow up meetings were also requested by Members of Parliament in December.
- Hill week meeting organisation facilitated by Public Affairs firm Temple Scott Associates.

2. CAN President Shernaz Bamji speaks at House of Commons Standing Committee on Health on June 14, 2021

The President of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience, Dr. Shernaz X. Bamji was invited to speak to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health on June 14, 2021. She spoke on the importance of federal funding of basic discovery science in Canada. This invitation was extended by a Member of Parliament CAN delegates had met with during our Parliament Hill Week.

A recording of her testimony is available on the CAN youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vrg1kxayUx8&t=5s>

A transcript of her testimony is available here:

<https://openparliament.ca/committees/health/43-2/44/dr-shernaz-bamji-1/>

3. CAN and CSMB co-host "Science Policy and Government 101 with Member of Parliament Kirsty Duncan"

On Friday, June 25, 2021 at 1:00pm EST the Canadian Association for Neuroscience (Co-host Dr. Karun Singh) and the Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences (Co-Host Dr. Imogen Coe) jointly hosted a session with the Honourable Kirsty Duncan, Ph.D for a Q&A session on Science Policy and

Government. Dr. Duncan is a Member of Parliament for the riding of Etobicoke North and former Minister of Science, and former Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.

This event, exclusive to members of CSMB and CAN gave participants the opportunity to ask Dr. Duncan questions about how best to engage with elected and non-elected officials, and how to amplify our message about the importance of supporting fundamental science.

4. CAN call to action to support Motion M-38 to create a Standing Committee on Science and Research

On April 27, 2021, member of Parliament Kirsty Duncan presented a motion to create a new House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research. This will provide Canadian scientist and researchers a dedicated voice in Parliament. This motion was up for debate and vote in May 2021

<https://openparliament.ca/debates/2021/4/27/kirsty-duncan-1/>

CAN invited all our members to reach out to their elected officials (Member of Parliament) to vote in favour of this motion.

We are happy to report that this motion received unanimous support from all political parties, with no opposing voice. We will be working with Temple Scott Associates, our public affairs firm to engage with this new committee. This is an excellent opportunity for Canadian scientists to have a voice on Parliament Hill, and we are extremely excited about this new opportunity.

5. CAN President Charles Bourque participates in the Canadian Science Policy Conference as panelist

Professor Charles Bourque participated in the virtual session: *Roles & Responsibilities of Academic Science Societies in informing Policy: Lessons & Observations from Around the World* on November 17th 2020 via zoom, as part of the Canadian Science Policy Conference. Other panel participants were

- **Imogen R. Coe** *President, Canadian Society of Molecular Biosciences*
- **Susan Amara** *President, American Association for the Advancement of Science*
- **Hilary Lappin-Scott** *President, Federation of European Microbiology Societies (FEMS)*
- **Shohini Ghose** *Past President, Canadian Association of Physicists*
- **Stephen B. Heard** *President, Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution*

The Canadian Science Policy Conference is the most important science advocacy event in Canada, and participation in this event is an opportunity for networking and sharing resources.

A recording of this event is available on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFF2APt8oDc>



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6. CAN-ACN survey on impact of COVID-19 on researchers and laboratories in Canada

To quantify and qualify the impact COVID-19 has had on researchers and laboratories in Canada, CAN held a survey on its website on July 17-27, 2020. We shared this survey with other scientific associations and received responses from 700 Canadian researchers. The results of this survey were shared on our website, (<https://can-acn.org/covid-impact-survey/>) and used to inform our recommendations submitted to the government of Canada pre-budget consultations – view next section.

7. Participation in the Canadian Government’s pre-budget consultations

In preparation for budget 2021, the Canadian government held two series of consultations. CAN submitted recommendations to both instances. CAN also reached out to other scientific associations in Canada and to our members to share our recommendation and invite them to also submit recommendations in these consultations.

- CAN Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finances
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/FINA/Brief/BR10973829/br-external/CanadianAssociationForNeuroscience-e.pdf>
- February 2021: CAN submission to Department of Finance pre-budget consultations
<https://can-acn.org/docs/pre-budget-CAN-ACN.pdf>

In its report to the government, we are proud to report the Standing Committee on Finances included CAN’s first recommendation:

Recommendation 14

Provide a one-time 25% increase in investment in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for research restart and recovery from the setback of the COVID-19 pandemic to research laboratories in Canada.

(<https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/FINA/report-1/page-33#2>)

8. Promotion of basic and neuroscience research in national publications

Two members of the CAN advocacy committee, Drs. Liisa Galea and Lisa Saksida, published an Op-Ed in the Vancouver Sun on June 20, 2021:

Liisa Galea and Lisa Saksida: Fund science for a healthier and safer future

Opinion: Investment in research and innovation has huge implications for who will be most prepared for global crises, as we have learned from our decision to outsource vaccine production

View the full article here: <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/liisa-galea-and-lisa-saksida-fund-science-for-a-healthier-and-safer-future>



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CAN has published sponsored content in the following major newspapers and magazines, to promote investment in basic research.

- Toronto Star, Saturday March 27, 2021
- Chatelaine – December 2020 issue
- MacLean's – October 2020 issue
- Online: <https://www.healthinsight.ca/advocacy/funding-research-is-the-key-to-understanding-neurological-conditions/>
- a video feature was produced to be shared on social media outlets in April, May and June. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6-XAYXpWz8>

9. Highlighting Brain Star Award Winners

CAN has developed a partnership with the Institutes of Neuroscience, Mental Health and Addiction of the Canadian Institutes of Health (CIHR-INMHA) to manage applications and peer-review of applications for the CAN-CIHR-INMHA Brain Star Awards, which recognize the 15 best publications by trainees working in laboratories in Canada in the fields covered by CIHR-INMHA. CAN adjudicated the 2020 competition (for articles published between Jan 1 and Dec 31, 2020) and produced features of all 15 winners on the CAN website. These features will be shared weekly on our social media accounts (#BrainStarAward) in July and August 2021 following a promotion plan developed by CAN and approved by CIHR-INMHA.

View the 15 profiles here: <https://can-acn.org/congratulations-to-the-winners-of-the-2020-can-cihr-inmha-brain-star-awards/>

The top 3 winners have been invited to present their research in the Canadian Neuroscience Meeting

We are happy to report that CAN has recently signed a new MoU with CIHR-INMHA to manage the applications, peer-review and publicity for the Brain Star Awards for the next 3 years. This partnership is a great way to feature Canadian neuroscience trainees and the important research they do.

10. New initiative: CAN Trainee video spotlight

CAN is proud to highlight the research of trainees in Canadian laboratories in the video series "CAN Research Spotlights". The objective of this series is to feature short presentation of recently published papers which may not have been featured otherwise in a press release, in a way that presents the trainee who performed the work, and that entices viewers to read the paper.

You can view the videos here: <https://can-acn.org/can-trainee-research-features/>



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11. CAN support for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in neuroscience

The CAN advocacy committee works closely with the CAN Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee to promote to address important issues for our community. The CAN EDI committee is a very active one. CAN has published a [statement on racism, discrimination and violence](#), and an [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement](#) to promote principles of EDI. CAN has also collated a list of anti-racism resources, with a focus on resources that are most relevant to Canadian scientists, and published it here: <https://can-acn.org/anti-racism-resources/>

12. 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/>

13. Partnership development:

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

- Research Canada: Through our membership in Research Canada, CAN supports many meetings and initiatives that aim to promote investment in health research in Canada
- Partnership with other scientific associations in Canada: CAN has developed a list of Canadian science associations to share science advocacy initiatives. We have reached out to these partners to inform them of dates of pre-budget consultations, and to coordinate our requests. We have worked together with partners to develop pro-vaccine messaging.

14. CAN lead the promotion of a statement in support of widespread COVID-19 vaccination

CAN joined many other Canadian scientific associations to combat COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and promote widespread vaccination. CAN developed the website **canadiansciencesocieties.ca** and reached out to societies for the endorsement of the following message:

“Canada’s scientists welcome and support widespread COVID-19 vaccination”

<https://canadiansciencesocieties.ca/>

15. Canadian Brain Research Strategy

The CAN President and Chief Operating Officer CAN have participated in strategic meetings with the leaders of the Canadian Brain Research Strategy. The CBRS recently received financial support from the Canadian government. Learn more about the strategy here: <https://canadianbrain.ca/about/>

Following discussions with the CBRS leadership team, it has been agreed that CAN representatives will participate in the CBRS steering committee meetings.

16. 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. Many resources were developed and shared on the CAN website in preparation for CAN Hill Week and with the Parliamentarians we met. Multiple resources were translated to French. These resources are available on our website: (<https://can-acn.org/advocacy/>)

17. Supporting grass-roots advocacy initiatives in Canada.

In January 2021, CAN launched a sponsorship program competition for neuroscience outreach and advocacy activities across Canada - to engage at the local level, and to promote junior neuroadvocates in their mission to inform the public. These sponsorships aim to support the important work trainees do to promote and showcase neuroscience research and education. Applications are accepted and reviewed every three months (March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1) and awards will be given based on adherence to award criteria and be contingent on budget availability. Unfortunately there has not been strong uptake on this program, and we are reviewing application criteria and conditions.

18. Continued engagement of a Public Affairs firm and Advocacy officer to support CAN's advocacy efforts

CAN's advocacy efforts are greatly supported by the public affairs firm Temple Scott and Associates (TSA), and our advocacy officer, Julie Poupart. We are currently in negotiations with TSA for continuing support for the coming year. Financial support provided by SfN through our Memorandum of Understanding for advocacy is critical for our capability to retain the services of these advocacy professionals.

Thank you for reading our report!