

CAN-ACN Advocacy update – March 2023

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

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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 chaired by Dr. Karun Singh that drives all of its advocacy activities. Furthermore, the CAN executive has recently named Dr. Liisa Galea as the Co-Chair of the CAN Advocacy Committee, and future chair of the committee. Dr. Galea is a long-time member of the CAN Advocacy Committee, a strong advocate for neuroscience research in Canada and is currently the Treliving Family Chair for Women's Mental Health; Senior Scientist at the Campbell Family Mental Health Research Institute (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

The current membership of the CAN Advocacy Committee is:

Chair: **Karun Singh**, University of Toronto

Co-Chair: **Liisa Galea**, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Adriana Di Polo, Université de Montréal, CAN Vice-President

Lisa Saksida, U Western

Haung (Ho) Yu, CAMH – U of Toronto

Tabrez Siddiqui, U of Manitoba

Ciaran Murphy-Royal, Université de Montréal

Leanna Kalinowski, U of Toronto (trainee member)

CAN holds its first in-person Parliament Hill Day on November 3, 2022

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.

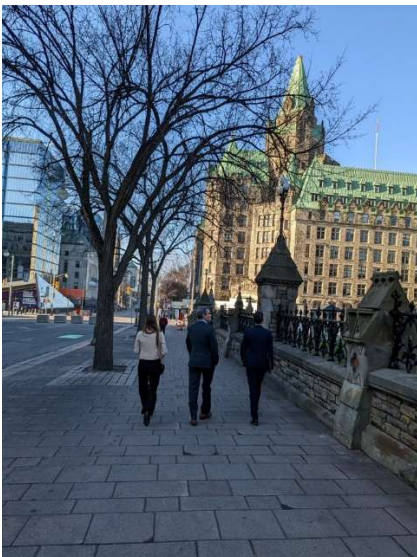


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The focus of the ask along with specific justifications are explained in CAN's pre-budget consultation submissions to Parliament (view below submissions from February 2023 and October 2022) and is summarized in the leave-behind document (<https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Nov2022-CAN-advocacy-one-pager.pdf> - appended below).

It 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.



Pictures: CAN President Keith Murai, Canadian Minister of Health Jean-Yves Duclos, Lisa Saksida, Julie Poupart, Katalin Toth. Second picture, Emerson Harkin (trainee representative), Karun Singh (Chair of the CAN advocacy committee, Jaideep Bains, Liisa Galea (Co-Chair of the CAN Advocacy committee), Senator Stan Kutcher, Keith Murai. Third picture: CAN advocates on Parliament Hill,

Fourth picture: Wai-Haung Yu, Leigh Anne Swayne, Member of Parliament Lena Metlege-Diab, Sébastien Maillé (trainee representative), Katalin Toth.

CAN submits a brief for the Minister of Finance pre-budget consultations.

CAN made the following recommendations in February 2023 to the Minister of Finance of the Government of Canada regarding Budget 2023:

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience recommends the following:

Recommendation 1: That the government of Canada increase investments in the 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. We urge the government to adopt a four-year plan to double the budgets of the three main federal funding agencies (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC) starting with a 25% increase in the next budget. 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 increase its support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows by 50% for graduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships to increase both value and number 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.

[Read the full submission here \(PDF\)](https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CAN-ACN_prebudget_submission.pdf) (https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CAN-ACN_prebudget_submission.pdf)

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

The CAN advocacy Committee shared its submission to pre-budget consultations in advance of Budget 2023 of the House of Commons permanent committee on Finances (FINA) (October 2022) [View our submission: Increased investment in scientific research for the health and prosperity of Canadians today and tomorrow](https://can-acn.org/documents/2022/CAN-ACN-FINA_pre_budget_brief.pdf) (https://can-acn.org/documents/2022/CAN-ACN-FINA_pre_budget_brief.pdf)

CAN also encouraged all members to submit a brief to this open consultation.

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

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>

Additional engagement with the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research

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: [Increased investment in scientific research: An investment in the health and prosperity of Canadians today and tomorrow](#) provides clear arguments supporting the proposal that *The government of Canada significantly and predictably increase investments in the 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.*

The brief was published on the House of Commons website on March 14, 2022.

On June 6, 2022 the new House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research tabled its first ever [report](#), as part of its study on “*Successes, Challenges and Opportunities for Science in Canada*”. The Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) was one of sixteen organizations that submitted a [written submission](#) as part of the consultations. The Committee held meetings over the course of three months, which CAN closely followed, hearing from science and research organizations, post-secondary institutions, companies and government departments.

CAN welcomed all 13 of the recommendations made to government, and was pleased that **one of our recommendations (An initial 25% boost to the budgets of the three granting councils followed by a 10% yearly increase) was specifically referenced in the report.**

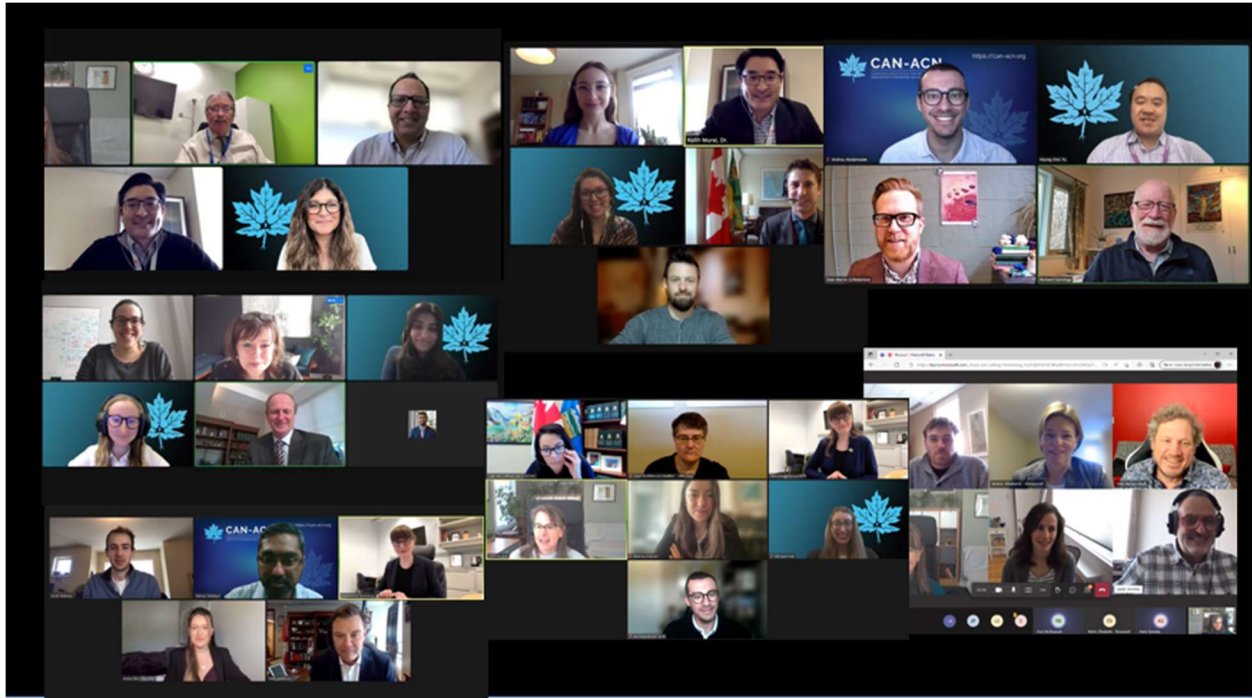
CAN Parliament Hill Week – March 21 – 25, 2022 – Virtual event

In March 2022, **48 CAN members participated as advocates** in **25 virtual meetings** with Members of Parliament, Senators and Parliamentary staff, to showcase the important work Canadian neuroscientists do for this country, and to advocate for increased funding for tri-council (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC).



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Neuroscientist participants were recruited through an open call to our membership.

Our members met with:

- Members of all major Canadian political parties
- Members of the new Science and Research Committee, of the Health Committee, of the Industry and Technology committee and of the Human resources committee (permanent committees of the House of Commons)
- The Office of the Minister of Health
- The Parliamentary Secretary of the new Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
- Senators
- Members of the Health Research Caucus
- The presidents of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

The short-term results of the March 2022 Hill week was the identification of multiple science champions on Parliament Hill, and invitations to appear in front of House of Commons standing committees, and mobilization of our members who gained advocacy experience. In the long term, this event has contributed to building relationships and increasing awareness of the importance of science and research funding in Canada.

Advocacy training at CAN2022

CAN organized an advocacy training lunch at the CAN2022 in person meeting, on Friday May 13, 12PM – 1:30 PM

The title of the session was “Science Advocacy – Why it matters, and how you can participate”, and featured presenters:

- Karun Singh, University of Toronto & University Health Network, Chair of the CAN advocacy committee
- Wai Haung (Ho) Yu, CAMH & University of Toronto, Member of the CAN Advocacy committee

Following this event, a PDF version of the advocacy training presentation and a list of resources and contacts were made available to our membership through our website and shared via our newsletter

- [CAN Advocacy training presentation \(PDF\)](#)
- [CAN Advocacy – Selected resources & contact list \(May 2022\)](#)

CAN2022 meeting event: Picture A Scientist- Viewing and Panel Discussion

At the CAN2022 meeting, the CAN EDI committee invited the Canadian neuroscience community to a panel discussion of the film “Picture a Scientist”, hoping to ask the question “When you picture a neuroscientist, who do you see? The panel discussion focused on perspective taking and discussing how to make neuroscience more diverse, equitable, inclusive and just. The documentary was viewable in the poster area throughout the duration of the conference from May 12-15, 2022.

Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) 2022 Public lecture: Focused ultrasound for the delivery of therapeutics to the brain (virtual event)

CAN hosted a public lecture on Wednesday, May 11, 2022 to showcase groundbreaking neuroscience research being done in Canada. Hosted by Dr. Carol Schuurmans, Chair of Local Organizing Committee for CAN 2022, the event featured speakers: Dr. Kullervo Hynynen, Dr. Isabelle Aubert, Dr. Nir Lipsman, with Q&A Moderators: Dr. Rikke Kofoed and Dr. Yacine Touahri

More event details and a recording are available on the CAN website:

<https://can-acn.org/meeting-2022/canadian-association-for-neuroscience-can-2022-public-lecture-focused-ultrasound-for-the-delivery-of-therapeutics-to-the-brain/>

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. (view figure in Appendix 1)

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: The Peaceful Brain
Description: <https://can-acn.org/can-outreach-advocacy-award-the-peaceful-brain/>

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

CAN supports the 2022 Black in Neuro week

Black in Neuro is an organization whose mission is to diversify the neurosciences by building a community that celebrates and empowers Black scholars and professionals in neuroscience-related fields. More information about the organization can be found on their website: <https://blackinneuro.com/>

CAN is proud to have supported the 2022 Black in Neuro week which took place July 25-31, 2022 with CAN as a Neuron level sponsor. The week featured social media posts and discussion panels on varied and engaging topics every days of #BINW22 week and was an opportunity to showcase Black in neuro community members in Canada through social media posts

Hosting of a science policy session with Senator Stan Kutcher

On Monday, April 25, 2022 the Canadian Association for Neuroscience and the Canadian Society for Molecular Biosciences welcomed the Honourable Senator Stan Kutcher for a session on science policy and advice.

Dr. Kutcher is well known Canadian Champion for science, who shared his insight on the importance of science advocacy, and the need for scientists to engage in politics and with politicians.

Key take-away messages and a recording of the event are available on the CAN website: <https://can-acn.org/recording-available-science-policy-session-with-senator-stan-kutcher-april-25-2022>

Survey of the CAN membership on advocacy targets

CAN conducted a survey of its members from August 23 to September 6, 2022 to get their opinion on CAN's advocacy objectives and targets for the coming months and years.

The survey was sent by email to CAN membership and posted on the CAN website. 147 responses were received. The full results are presented here:

<https://can-acn.org/can-2022-advocacy-survey/>

CAN members clearly indicated that CAN must continue its advocacy work to increase funding for CIHR (98% agree or strongly agree), NSERC (97% agree or strongly agree) and SSHRC (68% agree or strongly agree).

CAN members also indicated the need to advocate for increases to the number and value of student stipends funded by the Canadian government (94% agree or strongly agree), and for increased targeted funding for brain and neuroscience research in Canada (93% agree or strongly agree).

CAN publishes a response to the 2022 Canadian budget (April 2022)

Following the publication of the 2022 budget, CAN published a response to the budget on our website and social media accounts. This response was also sent via email to key stakeholders, including the Offices of the Prime Minister of Canada, of the Minister of Health, and also of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. We expressed our disappointment with the lack of increased commitment to supporting fundamental research in Canada.

"While we applaud the targeted investments announced in budget 2022, we must also **express our disappointment at the lack of re-investment in fundamental research funded through CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC**. These three entities are the core funding mechanism for basic science in Canada, and we are very disheartened that no new funding for non-targeted research supported by these agencies have been announced in budget 2022. In effect, when inflation adjusted, purchasing power continues to decline and is compounded by supply chain pressures that significantly increased costs during the pandemic."

Our full response is available here

<https://can-acn.org/can-acn-response-to-budget-2022-a-plan-to-grow-our-economy-and-make-life-more-affordable>

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.



CAN is currently working on developing 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>).

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, and others to promote research and science in Canada.

CAN 2023 Meeting – Advocacy & Public engagement planning

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience is currently planning an advocacy training session at the upcoming Canadian Neuroscience Meeting, in Montreal in May 2023. We will also host the CAN 2023 Public Lecture on Diet, Eating Disorders, & Obesity to be held at the Grande Bibliotheque on Saturday, May 27th, with leading Canadian experts Stephanie Fulton, Alain Dagher and Patricia Pelufo-Silveira.

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

Appendix 1: Short leave-behind document from the CAN Hill Day – November 3, 2022, in Ottawa

Who we are

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) is the largest association of neuroscientists in Canada 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.

What we recommend

A bold plan to invest in basic research and the next generation of scientists for the benefit of all Canadians

Recommendation 1: We urge the government to adopt a **four-year plan to double the budgets of the three main federal funding agencies (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC)** starting with a **25% increase in the next budget**. 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 increase its support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows by **50% for graduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships**, as some scholarships are currently below the low-income cut-off 22k CAD for a person living alone in a major Canadian city.

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.

Why this is needed now

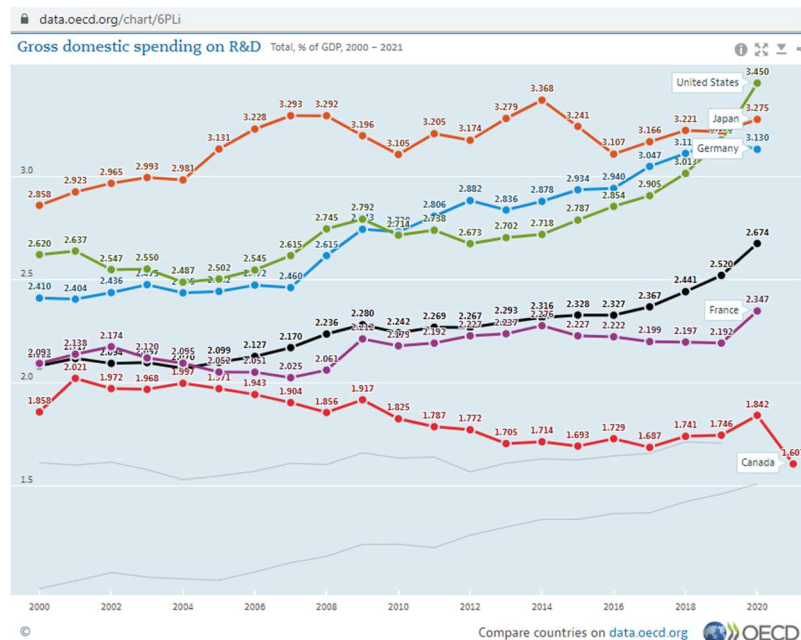
Fundamental research is key to informing Canada's response to new challenges.

- **Brain and Mental Health disorders and diseases** are the leading cause of disability and the second leading cause of death worldwide¹. Through their research, Canadian neuroscientists work tirelessly to provide hope to Canadians who live with diseases and conditions for which there are currently no cures, and few treatments. Canada's scientists are recognized leaders in research in many fields of neuroscience including stroke, autism, memory, sleep, pain, artificial intelligence, and spinal cord injury.
- **Providing Good Jobs for Canadians** – Investing in scientific research leads to the creation of jobs for highly qualified personnel (HQP) within research laboratories, industry, government, and the public sector. Our trainees constitute important assets for medical and high-tech companies in Canada, who are looking to fill high paying and competitive job opportunities.
- **Diversifying and Strengthening Canada's Economy** – *Made-in-Canada* discoveries are the foundation for innovation that supports a stronger and more diverse Canadian economy.

¹ (Feigin et al. Lancet Neurol. 2019;18(5):459-480. doi:10.1016/S1474-4422(18)30499-X)



Canada is falling behind in science funding



Canadian scientists are finding it increasingly difficult to remain competitive and for Canada to attract new talent as the disparity in research support with other G7 countries continues to widen.

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.**

CIHR Project grants are the core funding mechanism for biomedical research in Canada. Unfortunately, the **success rates for funding applications at CIHR have declined since 2005**, from a 33% success rate to close to 19% in 2021 (less than one in five successful applications), leading to financial insecurity for laboratories. One clear contributing factor to the decline in success rates is **stagnation in the CIHR budget between 2006 and 2018**. Moreover, application pressure from researchers has increased (3850 applications in 2006 vs. 4395 in 2021), and the cost of experimental materials increases at a rate higher than inflation.

Trainees that successfully compete for Canada Graduate Scholarships (Master's program; CGS-M), receive an \$17.5K CAD per year award, an amount that has not kept up with inflation and is stagnant since 2003. **This is below the low-income level cut-off** of \$22k CAD for a person living alone in a major Canadian city. Providing a living wage is the base for **equity, diversity and inclusion**, and an essential requirement if we are to attract the brightest minds from diverse backgrounds and not only those who are independently wealthy.

Canada has much to lose by not supporting its scientists. The competition is strong, and even if Canada's quality of life is enviable, high caliber researchers are attracted by the much higher financial means available to them in the United States, and other countries. If Canada does not increase its support for science, the **reality of the brain drain** will worsen.

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