



## CAN-ACN Advocacy update – February 2024

The following report covers the advocacy activities of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience from **November 1, 2023** to **February 29, 2024**.

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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.

## CAN Advocacy Committee – New Leadership

CAN has an active and engaged Advocacy Committee that drives all its advocacy activities. Furthermore, the CAN advocacy committee has renewed its leadership with a new co-chair of the committee, Dr. Tabrez Siddiqui. Dr. Siddiqui is a long-time member of the committee who is very involved in advocating for increased funding for research and has, notably, participated in the CAN Hill Days.

The current membership of the CAN Advocacy Committee is:

Co-Chairs: **Liisa Galea**, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) & **Tabrez Siddiqui**, U of Manitoba

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

**Melanie Woodin**, University of Toronto, CAN Vice-President

**Huang (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

The CAN advocacy committee works with our membership, partners, and public affairs consultants to develop and define our advocacy targets. Based on these consultations, our current targets are:



# CAN-ACN

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR NEUROSCIENCE  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES NEUROSCIENCES

**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 **increase support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows** by increasing both the value and number of fellowships awarded in the next budget. We recommend that the government of Canada follow the recommendations of the House of Commons permanent committee on Science and Research:

- *Increase the value of Tri-Agency graduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships by 50%, and index them to inflation moving forward;*
- *Increase the number of Tri-Agency graduate student scholarships by 50%;*
- *Increase the number of Tri-Agency postdoctoral fellowships by 100%; and*
- *Increase the Tri-Agency research grant budget provided to faculty [...] to allow for increased graduate student and postdoctoral pay.*

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.

We have specifically modified recommendation 2 to align more directly with the Support our Science group and other scientific associations. The unprecedented mobilisation of Graduate students and post-doctoral fellows behind the "SOS- Support our Science" banner has led to multiple requests to increase 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 Parliament Hill Day November 7, 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>

The CAN 2023 Parliament Hill Day in Ottawa 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.

The **2023 Hill Day** was a very productive day of meetings and relationship building, with **15 CAN advocates** from across Canada participating in meetings with 21 Members of Parliament, Senators, Senior decision-makers, and their staff.





## Mobilization to recapitalize the Canada Brain Research Fund

(February 2024)

CAN recently sent a letter to key Ministers of the government of Canada to urgently appeal for a recapitalization of the Canada Brain Research Fund.

We wrote to express great concern over the impending loss of federal funding for the Canada Brain Research Fund after March 31, 2024.

Brain Canada plays a key role in our research ecosystem. Brain Canada is a national convenor and enabler of the Canadian brain research community, funding high-risk, high-reward brain research programs across the country. Brain Canada's unique partnership with the Government of Canada, through the Canada Brain Research Fund, has been a cornerstone in advancing brain research for over a decade. Through this fund, Brain Canada has matched the federal contributions with those of partners and donors on a 1:1 basis, doubling the federal government's \$200 million investment to establish a total envelope of \$400 million for brain research in Canada.

It is essential that the federal government renew funding for the Canada Brain Research Fund, under Health Canada, before April 1, 2024.

Read the full letter here:

<https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CAN-Brain-Canada-support-letter-2024.pdf>

## Read CAN's submission to the Minister of Finance pre-budget consultations.

(January 2024)

The Canadian Minister Finance, the honourable Chrystia Freeland launched consultations in preparation for budget 2024. The specific call was for proposals to create new jobs and build a greener, more competitive, more innovative, more inclusive, and more resilient Canada.

The brief submitted by CAN explains how investing in science will help Canada reach all these objectives. You can read our submission here:

<https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CAN-ACN-Prebudget-consultation-brief-Feb-2024.pdf>

## Advocacy session at the CAN2024 meeting

(Planned for May 2024)



The 2024 CAN advocacy lunch session will take place at the Westin Bayshore Vancouver on May 20th from noon to 1:30PM, as part of the 2024 Annual meeting of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience <https://can-acn.org/meeting-2024/>.

The 2024 CAN advocacy lunch session will focus on the power of storytelling to strengthen our advocacy message. Scientists are experts in communicating science with their colleagues, but communicating to the public and decision makers in engaging and enlightening ways is a skill they must also develop. Stories are a powerful tool to engage the public, combat misinformation and increase research funding.

We are putting together a roster of diverse panelists with a broad range of expertise to help our members understand the elements to good storytelling and why it is so important.

## Canadian Association for Neuroscience (CAN) 2024 Public lecture:

CAN is planning to host a public lecture in Vancouver, May 18, 2024, at Science World Theatre. The title of the session is "Cannabis and Psychedelics: Hype or hope for addictions, brain diseases, and mental health".

The invited speakers are Drs. Catharine Winstanley, Matthew Hill and Leah Mayo, well-known Canadian addiction, cannabis and psychedelic experts.

## 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 more than 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.

## Promoting Canadian neuroscience success stories on our websites & 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/>

As reported in our previous advocacy report, we also recently launched a new 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 is regularly updated and available here:

<https://canadabrainpower.com/>

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.

## 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.

The Society for Neuroscience remains CAN’s most important advocacy partner.

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](mailto:Julie.Poupart@can-acn.org). You can find more information about all our advocacy activities here: <https://can-acn.org/advocacy/>