

## CAN-ACN Advocacy update – July 2024

The following report covers the advocacy activities of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience from **July 1, 2023, to June 30, 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 Leadership

CAN has an active and engaged Advocacy Committee that drives all its advocacy activities.

The current membership of the CAN Advocacy Committee is:

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

**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)

## 2023-2024 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:

**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.





## Read CAN's submission to the House of Commons Permanent committee on Finance (FINA) pre-budget consultations

(July 2023)

Read our full submission for the FINA pre-budget submission here: <https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FINA-CAN-ACN-brief-2023-07.pdf>

## ThinkSci Outreach Program wins a CAN Advocacy Award

(August 2023)

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience is proud to announce its support of the **ThinkSci Outreach Program** with a **2023 CAN Advocacy and Outreach award**.

The "ThinkSci Outreach Program" is a workshop-based initiative organized and led by undergraduate and graduate students, with the goal of immersing high school seniors and 1st year CÉGEP students into the world of neurophysiology. Its long-term goal is to reach local, regional and national underrepresented student communities in Canada.

This initiative is lead by Phoenix Plessas-Azurduy, a B.H.Sc Honours Final Year Undergraduate Student at McGill University. She has experience delivering STEM curriculum program at Carleton University Virtual Ventures Summer Camp, in program and curriculum development at the Lowertown Community Resource Centre, a day camp setting servicing youth in underserved communities. In addition Phoenix has peer mentoring experience at McGill University as a TEAM awardee and recruitment experience as member of both the Tannenbaum Open Science Initiative and as President of McGill University's Physiology Undergraduate League of Students (PULS).

## 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>

## 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.

We invite you to read the letter calling for urgent recapitalization of the Canada Brain Research Fund CAN sent to

The Honourable **Ya'ara Saks**, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of Canada

The Honourable **Mark Holland**, Minister of Health of Canada

The Honourable **Chrystia Freeland**, Minister of Finances of Canada

The Right Honourable **Justin Trudeau**, Prime Minister of Canada

Read the full letter here:

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

## Invitation to write to the Canadian Minister of Finances in advance of Budget 2024

(March 2024)

In addition, CAN sent an invitation to all our members to write to the Minister of Finances, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, to remind her and her team of the importance of investing in scientific research as they worked on the 2024 Canadian budget.

CAN drafted a sample letter for our members, which could be downloaded here: [CAN letter to Freeland](https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CAN-letter-to-Freeland.docx) (<https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CAN-letter-to-Freeland.docx>)

## Publication of a position paper by CAN President Adriana Di Polo on the importance brain research in Canada

(March 2024)

Read an [interview with CAN president Adriana Di Polo](https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/12-LivJess-BrainHealth-TS-PR.pdf) published online and included as a special insert in the March 30 Toronto Star: [Toronto-Star-insert-BrainHealth-March2024](https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/12-LivJess-BrainHealth-TS-PR.pdf) (<https://can-acn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/12-LivJess-BrainHealth-TS-PR.pdf>)

## The Canadian Association for Neuroscience applauds new investments in science and research announced in budget 2024

(April 2024)

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience applauded new investments in science and research announced in budget 2024 by the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finances of Canada. These announcements demonstrate that scientific research has real-world benefits to people across Canada, to Canada's economy, and to Canada's future prosperity. We specifically applauded the following measures:

### **Increased funding for graduate student scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships**

We applaud the increased support for Canadian science graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Budget 2024 will provide \$825 million over five years to increase the annual value of master's and doctoral student scholarships to \$27,000 and \$40,000, respectively, and post-doctoral fellowships to \$70,000. The number of research scholarships and fellowships will also be increased, building to approximately 1,720 more graduate students or fellows benefiting each year.

### **Increased funding for 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**

Budget 2024 proposes to provide \$1.8 billion over five years, starting in 2024-25, to SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR. This is a welcome increase to the basic funding mechanism for the Canadian science ecosystem.

### **Renewed funding for the Brain Canada Foundation**

Budget 2024 announced investments of \$20M per year, starting in 2024-2025 for four years, to support Brain Canada. Understanding how the brain works is key to addressing brain and mental health issues, which are among the most complex to understand, but also the most important we face as a Nation. 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.

Budget 2024 is a great step in the right direction, particularly in its support of trainees. We hope Canada will continue to expand our research efforts aiming toward a world class level comparable to other countries in the G7.

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience congratulated the government on investments announced in Budget 2024 and looks forward to continued collaboration to further improve support for the Canadian economy through scientific research.

## Advocacy session at the CAN2024 meeting

The 2024 CAN advocacy lunch session took 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 focused 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 put together panelists with a broad range of expertise to help our members understand the elements to good storytelling and why it is so important.

- Duncan McHugh, Digital & Instructional Media Producer | The Learning Centre | [lc.landfood.ubc.ca](http://lc.landfood.ubc.ca), University of British Columbia
- Kim Hellemans, Assistant Professor and the Associate Dean of Science (Student Recruitment, Wellness and Success) at Carleton University & co-host of the podcast, [Minding the Brain](https://science.carleton.ca/profile/dr-kim-hellemans/). <https://science.carleton.ca/profile/dr-kim-hellemans/>
- Alireza Kamyabi, Policy analyst in the Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer in Vancouver Coastal Health. <https://www.alirezakamyabi.com/>

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

CAN hosted the 2024 CAN public lectures in Vancouver, May 18, 2024, at Science World Theatre. The title of the session was “Cannabis and Psychedelics: Hype or hope for addictions, brain diseases, and mental health”.

The event was hosted by Dr. Mark S. Cembrowski, Assistant Professor, Department of Cellular and Physiological Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia, and member of the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre for Brain Health.

### Speakers and Topics



**Dr. Catharine Winstanley:** The puzzle of problem gambling: addiction without the drugs?

Dr. Catharine Winstanley, PhD is a Professor in the Department of Psychology and a member of the Centre for Brain Health at the University of British Columbia.

**Dr. Matthew Hill:** Cannabis: Separating fact from myth

Dr. Matthew Hill, PhD, is a Professor at the Cumming School of Medicine, Department of Cell Biology and Anatomy, University of Calgary, and Full Member of the Hotchkiss Brain Institute & of the Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research and Education. He is also a Child Health & Wellness Researcher at Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute

**Dr. Leah Mayo:** Psychedelics as new mental health treatments: hype or hope?

Dr. Leah Mayo, PhD is Assistant Professor at the Cumming School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, University of Calgary, Full Member of the Hotchkiss Brain Institute, Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research and Education. She is also Parker Research Chair in Psychedelics at the University of Calgary

## 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/>