

CAN-ACN Advocacy update – September 2026

The following report covers the advocacy activities of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience from **September 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026.**

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CAN Advocacy Objectives

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience’s main objectives in the past months have continued to be to

- Promote increased investment in scientific research by the Canadian government by direct engagement with Canadian Members of Parliament, Senators and Parliament hill staff
- 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 membership of the committee and leadership has been renewed in recent months. The current membership of the CAN Advocacy Committee is:

Co-chairs:

- **Tabrez Siddiqui**, University of Manitoba
- **Susanne Schmid**, Western University

Committee members:

- **Shalina Ousman**, University of Calgary
- **Alyson Fournier**, McGill University, as CAN Vice-President
- **Tamara Franklin**, Dalhousie University

Trainee members:

- **Zahraa Chorghay**, University of Toronto
- **Vina Li**, Queen's University

Additionally, CAN has been working on extending our advocacy network by identifying advocacy leaders from across Canada to better represent all provinces or geographic areas.

Public affairs consultant firm services provided by Santis Health starting in the fall of 2025

The CAN advocacy committee has worked with the public affairs consultant firm Temple Scott Associates since 2021, and the committee suggested we review the services provided and reach out to other firms to increase our level of engagement with the government.

We specifically requested

1. Strategic advice on how to get our message heard by key stakeholders
2. Advice on specific actions to be taken to be most effective
3. Ways to engage and mobilize our members (including members at all career levels – from trainees to senior professors)

Our objective was to specifically increase the reach and quality of our engagement year-round, but also to review and improve our advocacy strategy in the changing political climate.

Through this process we have identified and hired **Santis Health**, a firm with deep familiarity with the Canadian research landscape, and a team with extensive experience and knowledge in Canadian health policy and government, having worked federally and provincially for senior government officials from Health Ministers to Prime Ministers.

Project kick-off meeting with Santis Health (December 2025)

CAN invited members of the CAN advocacy committee and key stakeholders from institutions across Canada, including advocacy leaders that have been engaged with us in the past, to participate in an advocacy workshop hosted by Santis Health to brainstorm and review CAN's advocacy objectives to optimize our impact and reach.

Given the changing political climate and the general austerity mindset of the government, we have identified new ways to frame our message that resonate better with the government's priorities.

Following this meeting, we have worked with Santis to

- Develop of a detailed workplan
- Develop Stakeholder map of key decision makers, including bureaucrats, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.
- Plan the next Canadian Parliament Hill Day

Meetings with key decision makers

The CAN advocacy leadership has begun engagement with individuals identified by Santis in the stakeholder map of key decision makers.

These meetings aim to broaden CAN's engagement to Ministries outside the Ministry of Health.

Since Santis Health and CAN began working together we have secured meetings with **27 bureaucrats and political officials so far** (including our hill Day, please view below). These efforts have significantly broadened CAN's influence, moving the organization towards becoming a trusted partner in solving complex health system challenges CAN has held meetings with MPs, Senators, and senior bureaucrats across key portfolios including Health, Industry, Science, and Veterans Affairs.

Key Successes

- **Bipartisan Engagement:** CAN has successfully engaged with many important policymakers in government, socialized its key issues and gained helpful feedback across multiple political parties and sectors. CAN secured 9 meetings with Liberal MPs and 5 meetings with Conservatives, identifying potential champions for CAN's future initiatives. These preliminary interactions helped CAN pinpoint knowledge gaps, allowing CAN to define the necessary groundwork for advancing future funding requests. By identifying cross-party allies, CAN is positioned to mobilize these parliamentarians as strategic policy opportunities arise in the near future.
- **Committee Leadership:** Gaining direct access to the Chairs of the Science and Research (SRSR) and Industry (INDU) committees means CAN's messaging is directly in front of parliamentary gatekeepers. This positions CAN to potentially influence upcoming committee studies, witness lists, and parliamentary reports.
- **Bureaucratic Support:** Beyond political offices, the inclusion of high-ranking bureaucrats from Health Canada, ISED, and CIHR ensures that CAN's message is reaching the technical experts and

policy-makers who manage the development of policies which can have direct impact in health research and neuroscience funding.

CAN President Douglas Zochodne writes a letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney

CAN President Douglas Zochodne sent a letter on behalf of CAN to the Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on the topic of Neuroscience research and Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR – the equivalent of NIH) Project Grant Operations shortfalls. This timely letter was sent shortly after the announcement of the CIHR project grants results. <https://can-acn.org/read-our-letter-to-prime-minister-mark-carney/>

In this letter, Dr. Zochodne discussed the results from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant competitions, highlighting a significant opportunity for growth. Current data indicates:

- Funding rates are steadily decreasing and are now at 13.6%, down from 30% in the early 2000s, meaning the vast majority of highly-ranked, "excellent" research projects remain unsupported.
- Significant across-the-board budget reductions (often exceeding 23%) are applied to even the most successful grants to stretch limited resources.
- While our international peers continue to increase per-capita investment, Canadian researchers are finding it increasingly difficult to remain competitive on the global stage. Even longstanding laboratories with exceptional track records are at risk of closure and unable to maintain training and employment of Highly Qualified Personnel given recent inaccessibility of CIHR support.

Parliament Hill Day – April 14, 2026

The Canadian budget had historically been tabled in March every year, however the current government has modified this schedule. The 2025 budget was tabled on November 4th, 2025, leading us to review our engagement schedule, and specifically the date of our Parliament Hill Day to be better aligned with the period when budget discussions take place in Ottawa. Engagement in the Spring (instead of in the Fall) allowed us to share our priorities with elected officials and staff in advance of budget discussions.

The Canadian Association for Neuroscience held its 2026 Parliament Hill Day on April 14, 2026. It was an opportunity for Canadian neuroscientists to highlight the important work they do for Canada and the importance of government support for Canadian Research.

The meetings



CAN-ACN

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR NEUROSCIENCE
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES NEUROSCIENCES

In total, CAN had 19 meetings, including

14 parliamentarians (2 Senators and 12 MPs including 2 parliamentary secretaries),

8+ bureaucrats across four departments

CAN participants

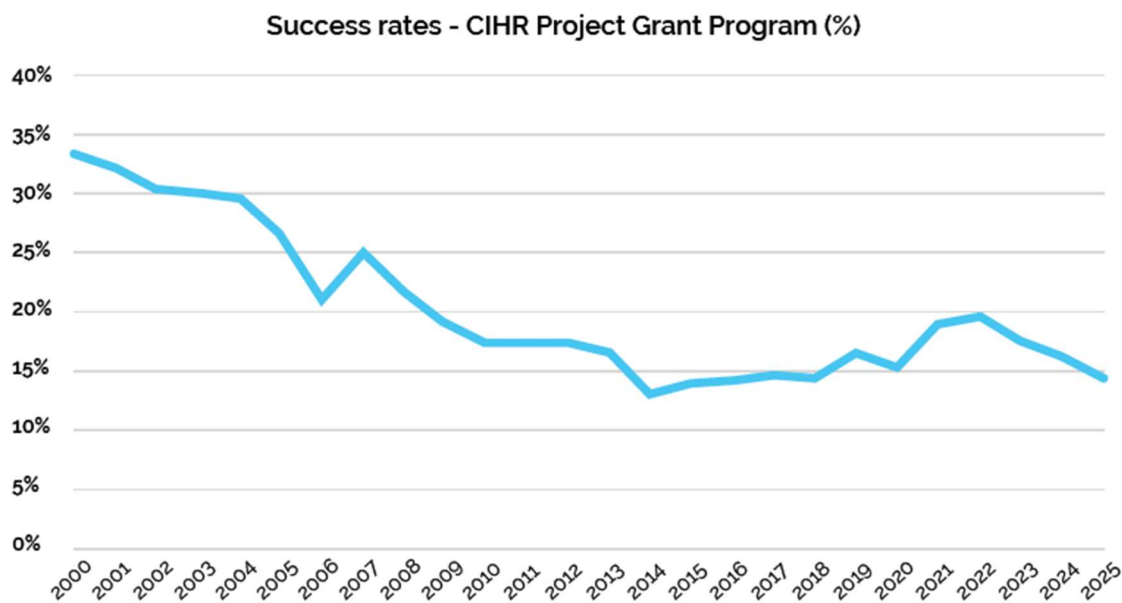
We are grateful to the very engaged neuroadvocates who participated in this year's Hill Day. We had 16 scientist participants from across Canada and at different career levels, representing the diversity of our community.

Our message

You can [download our one-pager here](#)

We highlighted the importance of strengthening Canada's research foundation

- Canada's research ecosystem is at risk due to a two-decade erosion of support.
- Rebuilding Canada's core research capacity will ensure Canada can attract and retain top talent, maximize public investments, and deliver long-term economic growth.
- CIHR success rates have declined by more than 50% since the early 2000s — falling from roughly 25–30% to approximately 13.6% today.



Calls to Action

The Government of Canada should **implement a multi-year plan to rebuild base research funding** by:

- Immediate Boost: A targeted 25% increase to CIHR project grants in Budget 2026, and to work with CIHR to restore project grant success rates to a 25% benchmark while maintaining two competitions per year.
- Predictable Growth: Establish 10% annual growth in base funding for the following four years across CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC.
- Objective: Provide CIHR with the means to restore a 25% success rate for investigator-led project grant applications.

Neuroscience must be a central focus as the government develops the new **federal capstone research funding organization**. By making brain research a central priority, Canada can better utilize its existing leadership to tackle the increasing impact of neurological and mental health conditions

Neuroscience is foundational to federal priorities beyond core research funding. **Embedding neuroscience expertise across government strategies** will ensure evidence-based policy development and improve outcomes for Canadians. These include **Economic Growth, Artificial Intelligence, National Resilience, Defence, Public Safety and Health System Sustainability**

CAN Advocacy workshop at the 2026 Canadian Neuroscience Meeting

We are currently working on an advocacy workshop titled: “Advocating together: the importance of partnership and collaboration to support research advocacy”.

This event was organized in partnership with the *Society for Neuroscience*

Panelists

- Adam Katz – Director of Advocacy and Training, Society for Neuroscience
- Diane Lipscombe – Past President of SfN and current Chair of the SfN Government and Public Affairs Committee
- Katalin Toth – Past president of CAN and founder of the CAN advocacy committee
- Viviane Poupon, President and CEO, Brain Canada
- Laura Dickson, Director, Neurological Health Charities of Canada

The event took place on Tuesday, May 19, 2026 at noon in Montreal, during the Canadian Neuroscience Meeting.

CAN participates in Research Canada’s Stakeholder action roundtable 2026

Through strategic advocacy and collaboration, Research Canada engages policymakers, media, and stakeholders to ensure health research and innovation remain central to Canada’s progress and global competitiveness. CAN has been members of Research Canada for over 10 years, and as members, we participated in Research Canada’s Stakeholder action roundtable on June 11, 2026 in

Ottawa, which brought together 200 leaders across Canada's health research and innovation ecosystem—scientists, clinical researchers, healthcare administrators, biotech entrepreneurs, pharmaceutical and medtech executives, investors, policymakers and patient partners.

This was an opportunity for CAN to participate in discussions to define advocacy objectives of this coalition.

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 both the World bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/>) and 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.

We have updated the published statistics in April 2026. These are often cited by our members and partners as a useful advocacy tool.

Participation in government of Canada pre-budget consultations

CAN has had two opportunities to submit briefs during pre-budget consultations of the House of Commons Finance Committee consultations, and the consultations of the Ministry of Finance.

- Our brief to the FINA committee was submitted in May 2026: <https://can-acn.org/read-cans-submission-to-pre-budget-consultations/>
- Our brief to the Department of Finance was submitted in August 2026: <https://can-acn.org/read-cans-submission-to-the-2026-pre-budget-consultations/>

These consultations are an opportunity for CAN to highlight the importance of funding research in the current context.

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/>

Of note, our continued collaboration with the Institute of Neuroscience, Mental Health and Addiction of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR-INMHA) to manage and promote the Brain Star awards, which are designed to recognize the excellence of research done in Canada by students and trainees in all fields and disciplines covered by CIHR-INMHA. CAN has been managing the application process and publishing profiles of the winners since the 2019 competition. Every year, we feature the winners on our website and social media accounts. View the latest cohort of winners here <https://can-acn.org/congratulations-to-the-winners-of-the-2025-can-cihr-inmha-brain-star-awards/>

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.

We are currently working on building a list of scientific, research and patient organisation with the objective of sharing our advocacy initiatives to strengthen our voice by building a larger coalition of stakeholders.

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. You can find more information about all our advocacy activities here: <https://can-acn.org/advocacy/>