

# MICHAEL SMITH FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH RESEARCH

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 - 2019



Discover. Connect. Engage.

# INTRODUCTION

The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) was established by the provincial government in 2001 to build capacity for health research in British Columbia (BC). Over the past 14 years, MSFHR has been a key component of BC's health research enterprise, helping the province and our research community to establish an international reputation for excellence.

Over the last decade, the context for health research has changed significantly. Resources are more limited, the demand for accountability is greater, and the complex problems that society faces require research to be done in new ways, involving a wide range of stakeholders.

With this context in mind, MSFHR presents a strategic plan that charts the course for both our immediate and longer term futures. The plan presents our goals, with the strategies and tactics we will use to achieve them. The plan also describes how we will measure our success. Actions to achieve our goals will be developed annually to ensure regular reflection on our impact and enable the evolution and adaptation of our approach.

# VALUES

## LEADERSHIP

*We serve to advance shared priorities among BC's health research stakeholders*

## INTEGRITY

*We act in ways that build trust for working collaboratively with stakeholders*

## EXCELLENCE

*We strive to exceed our own and others' expectations of our work*

# VISION

A thriving, world-class health research community in British Columbia, working together to improve the health and well-being of our citizens

## MISSION

### DISCOVER

Solutions to our greatest health challenges

### CONNECT

Knowledge and action on provincial priorities

### ENGAGE

Partners to improve the research enterprise

## MANDATE

Develop, attract and retain outstanding health researchers

Address health-care system priorities

Identify and advance health research priorities by fostering partnerships, research opportunities, and activities

## GOALS

### PEOPLE

Maintain a base of excellent health researchers who advance knowledge and help inform decision-making in BC

### RESPONSIVENESS

Increase responsiveness of the health research enterprise to BC priorities

### COHERENCE

Increase coherence through coordination and collaboration across BC's health research enterprise

# ENABLING GOAL

Continuous improvement of organizational effectiveness and efficiency

## PEOPLE

- Support establishment and retention of outstanding early career researchers and trainees
- Support BC health professionals to advance careers in the conduct and application of research relevant to care
- Target resources to grow excellence in gap areas
- Build capacity for the development and use of research evidence in practice, policy, and further research

## RESPONSIVENESS

- Provide financial and/or operational support for research responsive to health-care system priorities
- Support teams of researchers, practitioners, patients, and decision-makers to conduct research addressing BC's health-care system priorities
- Build capacity for using research evidence in practice and policy

## COHERENCE

- Advance health research system priorities
- Build strategic partnerships that address common goals and increase funds available for health research in BC
- Remove barriers to doing, using and reporting on research in BC
- Support collaborative, multi-sector efforts to advance solutions to complex health problems

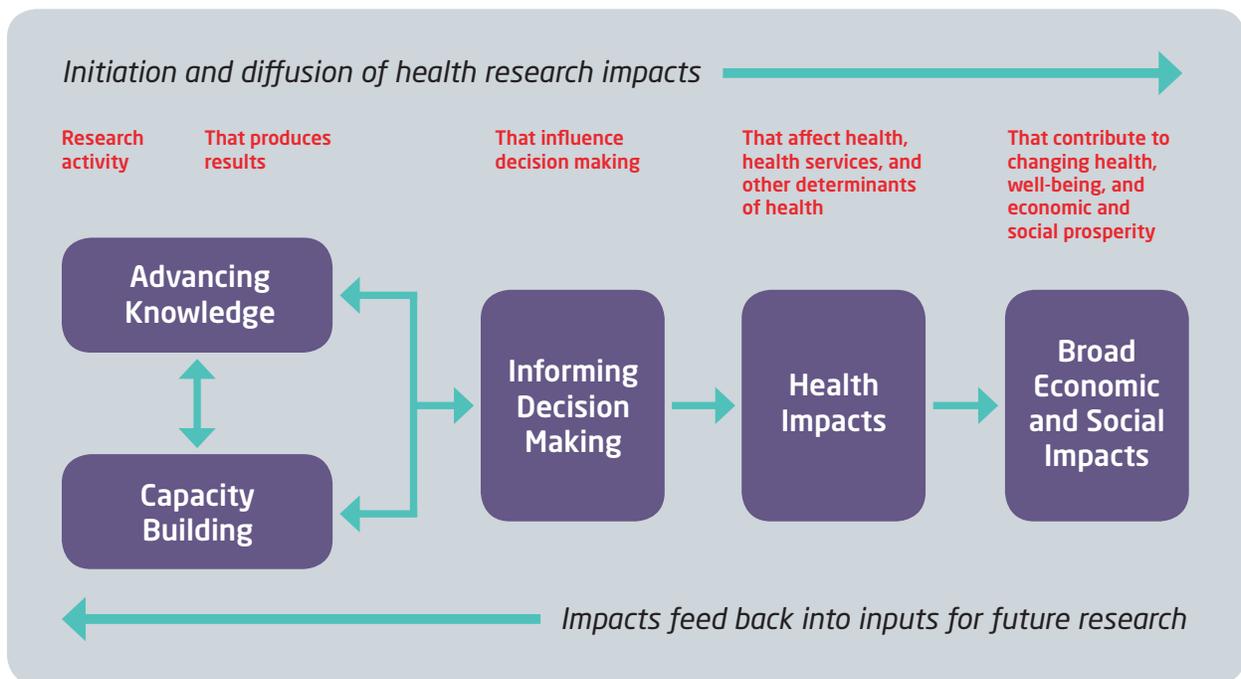


# THE POTENTIAL OF HEALTH RESEARCH

Health research increases our understanding on a wide range of issues – from the causes of disease to treatment and prevention – and contributes to better health for individuals and populations. Specifically, health research helps build a pool of knowledge that can influence decision-making by patients, health-care providers, policy makers, and leaders in both the public and private sectors. In turn, improved decision-making leads to better health and a more effective and efficient health-care system. Health research also paves the

way for broader social and economic benefits including greater health equity and a thriving economy.

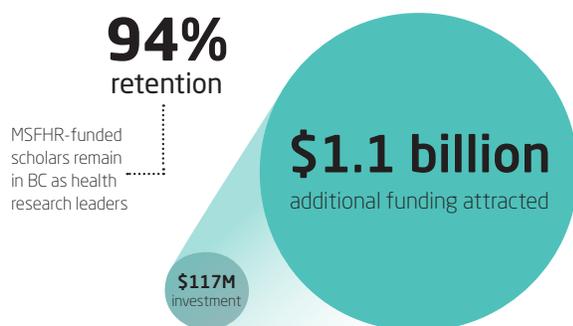
The relationship between research activity and downstream impacts is described in a framework developed by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (see figure below).<sup>1</sup> This framework informs the approach to performance measurement and impact analysis underpinning our strategic plan.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from logic model developed by and published in the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (2009). *Making an Impact: A Preferred Framework and Indicators to Measure Returns on Investment in Health Research*.

# EARLY SUCCESSES: CAPACITY BUILDING IN BC

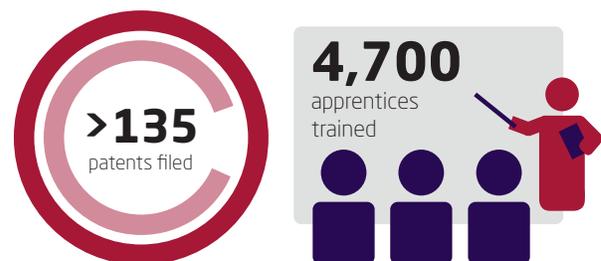
In the 1990s, BC was falling behind other provinces in our ability to attract and retain the best and the brightest researchers; our share of federal research dollars was falling.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the Government of BC created the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research to help address the decline in our health research enterprise. Government has since invested more than \$392 million in MSFHR<sup>3</sup> and more than \$575 million in other organizations that support health research.<sup>4</sup>



MSFHR's initial focus was on building capacity to conduct excellent health research that will benefit British Columbians and others globally. Our approach has been to support research institutions to attract and retain outstanding researchers; we have directly invested in more than 1,500 such positions through our scholar and trainee competitions since 2001. This support has enabled researchers to multiply BC government investments 10 fold by securing additional

funding from other sources and by creating training opportunities for the next generation of knowledge economy workers (see two figures illustrating the health research impacts of MSFHR Scholars).<sup>5</sup>

A 2013 CD Howe Institute study underscores the importance of investing in excellence while building capacity, especially for the purposes of enhancing technology transfer and wealth creation. Maintaining an outstanding environment by continuing to fund excellence, as MSFHR has done, is a critical success factor driving economic growth based on innovations developed in Canadian universities.<sup>6</sup> But health research is about more than innovation that leads to wealth creation – it is also about improving health and wellness across our populations, and finding the best ways to transform our health-care system. Real improvement in health outcomes requires strategies that support a broad range of individuals to work across disciplinary, sector and geographic boundaries.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (2007). *Evaluating British Columbia's Performance in Health Research: Technical Report 1999 - 2006*.  
<sup>3</sup> As of March 31, 2014.  
<sup>4</sup> BC Ministry of Technology, Innovation and Citizens' Services (May 2014).

<sup>5</sup> MSFHR Research Impact Report (2001 - 2013).  
<sup>6</sup> Howitt, P. (2013). *From Curiosity to Wealth Creation: How University Research Can Boost Economic Growth*. CD Howe Institute Commentary No. 383.  
<sup>7</sup> Wooding, S. et al. *Mental Health Retrosight, 2013*, RAND Corporation. ([www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR325.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR325.html))

# TRENDS SHAPING OUR ENVIRONMENT

In BC, funding for health research comes from many different sources including both federal and provincial governments, as well as foreign governments, private sector and many non-governmental, non-profit organizations. The economic climate of the early 2000s enabled increased funding for health research across Canada, including BC, but in the late 2000s, the flow of funding slowed due to the global economic downturn. Since 2006, for example, the federal government has reduced health research funding by 14 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Provincial investment plays a critical role in sustaining the quality and competitiveness of BC's health research enterprise. In BC, the economic climate has altered the pattern of investment by the provincial government, but it remains supportive and continues to invest new dollars in MSFHR and other research organizations. Between 2010 and 2014, MSFHR received \$98 million in new provincial funding to support MSFHR's overall mandate and specific targeted activities.<sup>9</sup>

Coincidental to limited health research funding worldwide is a trend toward increased demand for accountability by governments and the public. Stakeholders want to understand both the financial return on health research investments, and the health and social impact of those investments. Increasingly, national and provincial funders are responding to

requests from government that health research should focus on finding answers to our most pressing problems. More and more stakeholder groups are involved in posing and addressing these problems, as demonstrated by increased participation of practitioners, policy-makers and the public in health research.

Another trend, linked to accountability, involves increasing the efficiency of health research. In many jurisdictions, limited resources mean that governments are urging research funders to leverage their investments by securing support from partners, including those in other sectors and jurisdictions. There is also pressure for organizations to work together to streamline research activity, so as to avoid duplication of effort and resources.

Finally, over the last decade the way research is conducted has changed. Advances in knowledge have traditionally been made by individual researchers often working in isolation on problems they chose to pursue. As questions become more complex and the tools and methods to answer them become more specialized, researchers and research users with different skills, expertise and even worldviews must be supported to work together to create new knowledge and use it to make decisions.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation, *The Current State of the Canadian Health Research Landscape: Review and Data Analysis*, page 13 ([www.nshrf.ca/sites/default/files/canpaperjune\\_4\\_2013\\_final.pdf](http://www.nshrf.ca/sites/default/files/canpaperjune_4_2013_final.pdf)).

<sup>9</sup> As of March 31, 2014.

# MOVING INTO THE FUTURE OF HEALTH RESEARCH

Responding to changes in the health research landscape, MSFHR has evolved into an organization valued for our support of capacity building for research excellence and our advancement of knowledge on key priorities, as well as for our leadership efforts in support of the health research enterprise.

The current strategic opportunity for MSFHR lies in maintaining a thoughtful balance between building capacity for health research across the province, and supporting its application to address priority issues in both the health-care system and in prevention and population health. This balance must be struck in an era of finite resources, increased accountability, expectations of leverage, and new ways of doing and using health research.

Our strategic plan seeks to address this balance and position MSFHR to continue to support discovery, connect knowledge with its use to address key priorities, and engage all stakeholders in ensuring the health research system thrives in BC. In light of the changing health research landscape, we have identified three goals to guide our work:

- 1. Maintain a base of excellent health researchers who advance knowledge and help inform decision-making in BC.**
- 2. Increase responsiveness of the health research enterprise to BC priorities.**
- 3. Increase coherence through coordination and collaboration across BC's health research enterprise.**

On the following pages, we indicate the strategies and tactics we will use to achieve each goal. Actions to implement these strategies will be developed annually and described in a yearly action plan. MSFHR is committed to monitoring progress towards our strategic goals, and to evaluating the impact of our activities within the BC health research enterprise. We have developed a comprehensive organizational evaluation strategy with high level evaluation questions, performance indicators, and measures for each goal. Goals, strategies, tactics and actions will be reviewed every year, and progress towards the goals will be measured and publicly reported.

# GOAL 1

# PEOPLE

Maintain a base of excellent health researchers who advance knowledge and help inform decision-making in BC

## THE CONTEXT

Providing support for health researchers and researchers-in-training who do the work of advancing knowledge and informing decision-making is at the core of what MSFHR has done best since its inception in 2001. MSFHR-funded researchers are the engines that drive the creation of knowledge and great training opportunities. They develop new ways to address our complex health and health-care system problems, and they generate a 10-fold return on provincial investments for BC.

BC researchers are among the best in Canada and around the world. MSFHR investments in excellent individuals together with investments and resources from many other sources and sectors enable BC to excel in areas like genetics and genomics, HIV/AIDS and health services research. MSFHR-funded scholars form the base of today's leadership in BC's health research enterprise.

But the way we define "health researcher" is changing and the settings where researchers work vary considerably. To support our health-care system, which is working to keep people healthy, help them get better or live well with chronic illness or disability and then cope with the end of life, research needs to be done not just in universities but also in the community, the clinic, and both the public and private sectors. We need the expertise derived from working and living in these settings or with these conditions to help drive the research agenda. That in turn means we need to grow excellence in health professional and community researchers, maintain a base of excellent researchers in our academic institutions, and build capacity for generating and using knowledge to inform the decisions we make every day as we tackle some of our most wicked health problems.

## THE STRATEGY

- Support establishment and retention of outstanding early career researchers and trainees
- Support BC health professionals to advance careers in the conduct and application of research relevant to care
- Target resources to grow excellence in gap areas
- Build capacity for the development and use of research evidence in practice, policy, and further research

## THE TACTICS

- Competitive awards
- Training programs

## THE IMPACTS

- High-quality knowledge economy jobs
- A broad base of excellent health researchers in BC
- Evidence-informed decision-making by patients, practitioners and policy-makers
- A reputation for world-class excellence in health research and care

# GOAL 2

# RESPONSIVENESS

Increase responsiveness of the health research enterprise to BC priorities

## THE CONTEXT

While individual organizations and structures within the health-care system have their own specific priorities and plans, in BC we have a strong overarching strategic plan, *Setting Priorities for the BC Health System*, published by the BC Ministry of Health in February 2014. This strategy seeks to achieve the goals of supporting the health and well-being of BC citizens, delivering a system of responsive and effective health-care services for patients and ensuring value for money by focusing on eight priorities for service delivery and seven enabling strategies.

Beginning in 2015, investments in BC's SUPPORT Unit – a regional research service centre providing specialized multi-discipline expertise – will establish supportive structures and foster connections between researchers and research users. Part of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research

(SPOR),<sup>10</sup> this collaborative investment in infrastructure will accelerate the integration of research and care. It will integrate with the development of an academic health sciences centre and network approach in BC where research, care and education are intimately linked.

MSFHR has been responsive to BC health-care system priorities since its inception through targeted funding for projects such as the Health Services & Policy Research Support Network (HSPRSN) and the BC Nursing Research Initiative (BCNRI). More recently, MSFHR has been asked to respond to priority research needs in seniors' home and community care, influenza vaccination policy, and the integration of primary and community care. In the future, we will continue to support priority health research through targeted projects and competitive grants.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on SPOR, visit [www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/41204.html](http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/41204.html).

## THE STRATEGY

- Provide financial and/or operational support for research responsive to health-care system priorities
- Build capacity for using research evidence in practice and policy
- Support teams of researchers, practitioners, patients and decision-makers to conduct research addressing BC's health-care system priorities

## THE TACTICS

- Targeted projects
- Competitive grants

## THE IMPACTS

- Health research that is responsive to BC priorities
- Evidence-informed decision-making by patients, practitioners and policy-makers

# GOAL 3

## COHERENCE

Increase coherence through coordination and collaboration across BC's health research enterprise

### THE CONTEXT

BC's health research enterprise is complex, with many organizational stakeholders (including the provincial government, health authorities, research institutes, universities, health charities and foundations) and individual actors (including researchers, practitioners, other research users, patients and the public). To effect change and increase efficiency to ensure BC is globally competitive, attention must be paid to mechanisms that support connectivity and push our collective effort in a coherent direction. By "coherence," we mean bringing people, knowledge and resources together to identify and advance health research priorities, through partnerships, research opportunities and other engagement activities.

MSFHR has invested in coherence in numerous ways. In the mid-2000s, MSFHR invested in research units and networks, and more recently in technology-methodology platforms such as PopData BC. MSFHR supports coherence through investments in projects such as the establishment of the nursing health

research network InspireNet (supported through BCNRI), an ethics harmonization initiative, and the development of a provincial health research strategy. This strategy, *Directions for Health Research in BC*, provides details on priority areas for action within the health research enterprise in BC. It identifies a number of actions to increase coherence. MSFHR is already supporting some of these (e.g. ethics harmonization) and will provide leadership on planned activities (e.g. development of a provincial framework for measuring health research impacts).

MSFHR also builds coherence through its partnership activities by working collectively on fewer, larger health research programs and projects. We engage in strategic partnerships with partners from a diverse range of sectors. Together we achieve common goals; co-create new health research opportunities; and foster a more coherent, innovative and effective health research enterprise in BC.

### THE STRATEGY

- Advance health research system priorities
- Build strategic partnerships that address common goals and increase funds available for health research in BC
- Remove barriers to doing, using and reporting on research in BC
- Support collaborative, multi-sector efforts to advance solutions to complex health problems

### THE TACTICS

- Projects and platforms
- Competitive grants
- Co-creation and/or co-funding

### THE IMPACTS

- An efficient and competitive BC health research enterprise
- Accelerated problem-solving for complex health challenges
- Fewer barriers to research and knowledge translation

## Continuous improvement of organizational effectiveness and efficiency

MSFHR staff take pride in their ongoing efforts to increase our organizational effectiveness and efficiency across all business units. Using a process of review and reflection we aim to continuously improve:

- Organizational structure and function
- Organizational culture
- Board governance
- Decision-making and transparency
- Financial stewardship
- Stakeholder support for MSFHR

To measure our performance in delivering on our enabling goal, we will evaluate whether MSFHR has increased its organizational efficiency and effectiveness. We will use indicators designed to enable us to look inward (e.g. board/staff satisfaction with organizational decision-making) and outward (e.g. brand reputation) so as to gauge our success in multiple domains.

## Harnessing the power of health research excellence

Our strategic plan is the result of the insights and contributions of our dedicated board and staff team. We are grateful for the privilege of working collaboratively to realize MSFHR's vision of a thriving, world-class health research community in BC, working together to improve the health and well-being of our citizens.

The goals and strategies articulated in our strategic plan connect directly to our mission:

- To **discover** solutions to our greatest health challenges, we will support **people** by maintaining a base of excellent health researchers who advance knowledge and help inform decision-making in BC.
- To **connect** knowledge and action on provincial priorities, we will increase the **responsiveness** of the health research enterprise to those priorities.
- To **engage** partners to improve the research enterprise, we will increase **coherence** through coordination and collaboration across that research enterprise.

We will be supported in achieving these goals by a foundation of organizational effectiveness and efficiency. We will continuously monitor our progress and measure our success to ensure that we are achieving our desired impacts, and we will connect goals to actions as we plan and budget for our activities and initiatives.

All of our efforts will be driven by a commitment to harnessing the power of health research excellence in service of the health of all British Columbians.

## Who was Michael Smith

The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research was established in 2001 to honour the memory of Dr. Michael Smith (1932 - 2000), a pre-eminent chemist and molecular biologist whose distinguished career helped establish BC as a hub of world-class health research. Dr. Smith was the province's first Nobel Laureate, receiving the honour in 1993 for his role in creating one of the foundational tools of genetic engineering.

Dr. Smith was an inspired scientist, a humanitarian, a humble and generous mentor loved for his humour, and a committed believer in BC's potential to be a leading centre of health research. MSFHR is proud to uphold his legacy of support for up-and-coming researchers and sustain his vision of a strong, vibrant research community.

© **MICHAEL SMITH FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH RESEARCH**

604.730.8322 | [info@msfhr.org](mailto:info@msfhr.org) | [www.msfhr.org](http://www.msfhr.org) | Twitter: @msfhr | YouTube: themsfhr