

Delivering for BC in a Changing Environment

Strategic Plan 2020-2025

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MSFHR researchers on cover

Top row: Dr. Kelli Stajduhar, Dr. Harlan Pruden, Dr. Karen Kobayashi

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Strategic Plan 2020-2025: **At a Glance**

MSFHR's strategic plan centres on four strategic directions, two of which represent our core areas of activity and two cross cutting directions that inform how we do our work. These strategic directions are enabled by partnerships and knowledge translation.

CORE DIRECTIONS

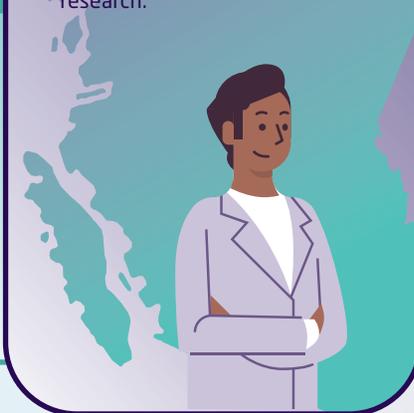
Developing the health research talent BC needs for the future

We will develop the health research talent BC needs to create healthier lives through discovery, improve our health system, and enhance our knowledge economy.



Strengthening health research capacity across BC

We will leverage the unique strengths across BC to further develop the abilities of individuals, organizations, and systems to undertake and use high quality health research.



CROSS-CUTTING DIRECTIONS

Optimizing impact through evidence-informed health research funding

We will practice evidence-informed health research funding in a way that brings national and international best practices into the BC health research system.



Fostering a more equitable, diverse and inclusive health research system

We will demonstrate leadership in EDI in health research funding to help ensure an equitable, diverse and inclusive health research system in BC.



Partnerships

Partnerships enable us to optimize provincial investment through providing additional leverage and increase coordination, and reducing duplication in BC's health research system.



Knowledge Translation

We support our funded researchers, and leverage our role as a research funder, to move evidence into policy and practice.

ENABLERS



Introduction

The **Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research** is British Columbia's health research funding agency. Our core mandate is talent development: we help develop, retain, and attract the people whose research improves the health of British Columbians, addresses health system priorities, creates jobs, and adds to the knowledge economy.

We also engage in activities to strengthen BC's health research system. We support the development and use of research evidence in policy and practice (known as knowledge translation, or KT); the research pathway from innovation to commercialization; and the creation of evidence to respond to provincial health challenges. We convene critical conversations that shape BC's health research system and ultimately increase the impact of research.

MSFHR is funded by the BC government, and we work closely with the Ministry of Health as well as the Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness; and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. We partner with post-secondary institutions, health authorities, hospital foundations, and other enabling organizations including BC Academic Health Science Network and Genome BC to coordinate activities, reduce duplication, and maximize opportunities.

MSFHR's investments in BC have created a foundation for a world-class health research system, defined as *the people, institutions, and activities whose role is to generate knowledge through research and enable its use to promote, restore, and maintain health.*¹



MSFHR's strategic evolution

MSFHR was created in 2001 to strengthen BC's health research system. We were named in honour of Nobel Laureate Dr. Michael Smith, a pre-eminent chemist and molecular biologist, who was dedicated to nurturing young scientists and creating an environment in which science and research could thrive. We are proud to continue Dr. Smith's legacy.

Establishment and capacity-building (2001-2008)

In the 1990s, BC's health research system was performing poorly relative to the rest of Canada. The province was receiving below its per capita share of federal health research funding from the Medical Research Council of Canada (predecessor to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research), a critical source of research support. BC also lacked health research infrastructure, and it was difficult to recruit and retain top talent.

MSFHR was created to address this situation. We launched a portfolio of salary award programs, from master's students through senior scientists, as well as research teams, research units, and population health networks. Institutional infrastructure and shared provincial research services were also an early priority. A technology/methodology platform program - catalyzing infrastructure projects such as Population Data BC and the Centre for Drug Research and Development - served researchers across the province.

Maintaining BC's talent base during global economic uncertainty (2009-2013)

The 2008 worldwide economic decline and subsequent constraints on funding meant that MSFHR competitions were scaled back to post-doctoral Research Trainee awards and early-career Scholar awards, which were delivered in alternating years. Team and network competitions were cancelled, but MSFHR was able to make smaller investments in health system priorities. This included a primary and community care evaluation network, and research capacity building projects in partnership with Island Health and Interior Health. Informed decision-making in government was supported through our research forums.

Optimizing the provincial health research investment (2014-2019)

Based on a growing need for evidence to inform policy and practice for BC's health system priorities, MSFHR adopted a 2014-2019 strategic plan that struck a balance between supporting the generation of evidence, and supporting its use in the health system. Extensive consultation led to a suite of eight annual competitions, as well as a partnership strategy to leverage our resources, working with BC-based organizations to co-fund research and researchers. We boosted evidence-informed decision-making through knowledge translation, including workshops for researchers and people working in the health system; training resources such as webinars and videos, and supporting government requests for evidence, for example a review and synthesis of the literature on jurisdictional responses to overdose crises. MSFHR also invested \$10M in the BC SUPPORT Unit, part of Canada's Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research.

We are committed to strategic investments that enable world-class discovery and translation, inspire and support talented people, and help build the research capacity BC needs to generate and use research for better health and health care.

MSFHR's next strategic era: 2020-2025

Regional clusters of research excellence are emerging across BC, with great potential for **impact**.

MSFHR programs have played an important role in BC's health research system. But the context in which we work is changing rapidly. Academic career trajectories are evolving - especially as researchers embrace the need to work more closely with the people, communities and systems they serve.

Regional clusters of research excellence are emerging across BC, with great potential for impact. The knowledge economy is central to BC's sustained economic growth, with increased emphasis on fostering innovation and strengthening ties among researchers, the life sciences sector and industry. There is a growing imperative for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive health research system.

MSFHR's 2020-2025 strategic plan, informed by broad consultation, an environmental scan and a review of literature, reflects this changing context. We are committed to strategic investments that enable world-class discovery and translation, inspire and support talented people, and help build the research capacity BC needs to generate and use research for better health and health care.

CORE DIRECTIONS:

- **Developing the health research talent BC needs for the future**
- **Strengthening health research capacity across BC**

CROSS-CUTTING DIRECTIONS:

- **Optimizing impact through evidence-informed health research funding**
- **Fostering a more equitable, diverse and inclusive health research system**

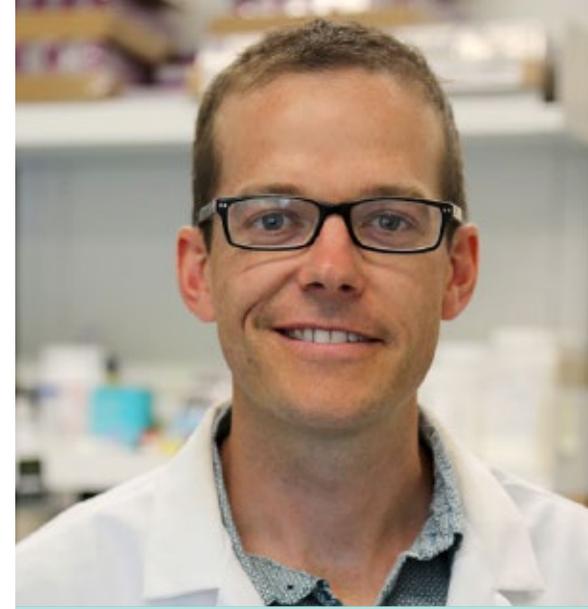
ENABLERS:

Partnerships and knowledge translation

Developing the health research talent BC needs for the future

Given our longstanding commitment to people, changing health research careers feature large in our 2020-2025 strategic plan. Health researchers in BC - particularly those in training or earlier in their careers - are pursuing work that bridges academia and other sectors, including health care, private and non-profit. They are responding to complex problems that demand research to be done in new ways, for example by multi-disciplinary teams using different methodological approaches.

Research funders have a responsibility to respond to these trends, while continuing critical support for basic scientists who advance knowledge through world-class research programs. A forward-looking approach will strengthen BC's ability to optimize our greatest asset - the talented individuals and teams who advance science, address health priorities and improve the health of people in our province.



Dr. Jonathan Little, Kelowna
Treating type II diabetes without drugs

OUR GOAL

Between now and 2025, we will develop the health research talent BC needs to create healthier lives through discovery, improve our health system, and enhance our knowledge economy.

We'll do this by:	Progress will look like:
<p>Catalyzing a provincial conversation about BC's health research talent needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial and national partners understand and commit to collectively developing BC's health research talent into the future. • There is strong collaboration and optimization of effort and resources within the BC and Canadian health research system.
<p>Enriching support for the health researchers we fund</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSFHR facilitates activities and connections that positively influence how our award holders do their research, progress their careers, and maximize impact.
<p>Advancing, sharing and applying knowledge about health research career pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actionable information about health research career pathways in BC is generated, and clarity achieved about when to invest for greatest impact. • Information is shared with key stakeholders (e.g. universities, other funders) to inform their efforts to develop and support health researchers' careers.

WHAT WE KNOW

- The majority of Canadian PhD graduates are finding jobs outside of academia,² prompting calls for universities to modernize how they train PhD students and embrace the diversity of career options available to their graduates.³
- Challenges faced by Canadian researchers include declining success rates for federal funding, limited funding for research trainees and early career researchers, and a more competitive and precarious academic job market.⁴
- Researchers are urged to increase the impact and reach of health research through knowledge translation and increased engagement of patients, the public, health providers, health system decision-makers and others.⁵

Strengthening health research capacity across BC

MSFHR's provincial mandate means we support a range of people and projects across the province. But our data and our stakeholders tell us that, while each region has health research strengths and potential, capacity across BC is uneven, and researchers and organizations face persistent challenges in securing the resources they need to sustain and grow health research capacity (defined as a range of

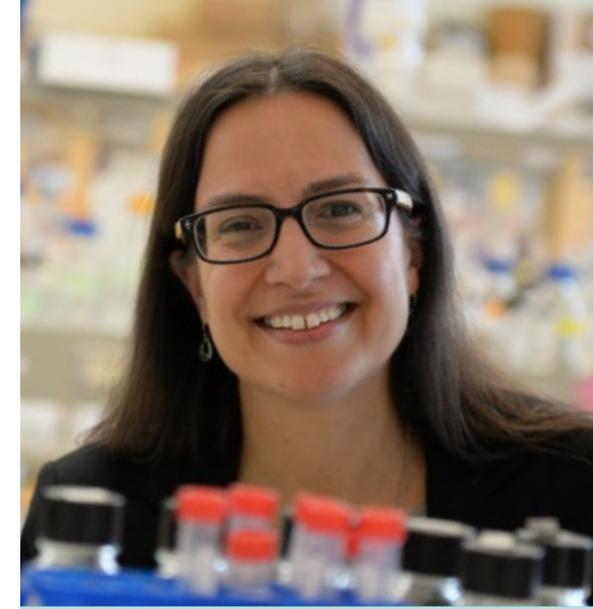
activities that enable individuals, organizations and systems to generate and use health research evidence).

Our new strategic plan takes advantage of important opportunities to strengthen health research capacity across BC in a way that's reflective of - and leverages - the unique strengths of each region and ultimately benefits the province as a whole.

OUR GOAL

Between now and 2025, we will leverage the unique strengths across BC to further develop the abilities of individuals, organizations, and systems to undertake and use high quality health research.

We'll do this by:	Progress will look like:
Enhancing access to our funding programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR awards are distributed across a broad array of health researchers and institutions in BC. Trainees and researchers based in geographically dispersed areas of the province have greater access to the resources they need to build and grow successful health research programs.
Co-creating a regional health research capacity-building initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR investments develop and leverage health research capacity in specific areas of the province that enhance the productivity, diversity, and potential impact of health research carried out in BC.
Promoting and resourcing collaborations that build on BC's strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR facilitates actionable provincial dialogue that leads to new, high-potential research collaborations that engage diverse members of BC's health research community. MSFHR supports the development of new projects or programs of research that advance BC's unique research strengths and health priority areas at the provincial or national level.
Co-developing an Indigenous health research capacity building initiative for BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR works with partners to understand the current capacity for Indigenous health research in BC, and what is needed to fill gaps.



Dr. Nadine Caron, Prince George
Addressing the genomic data divide for Indigenous peoples

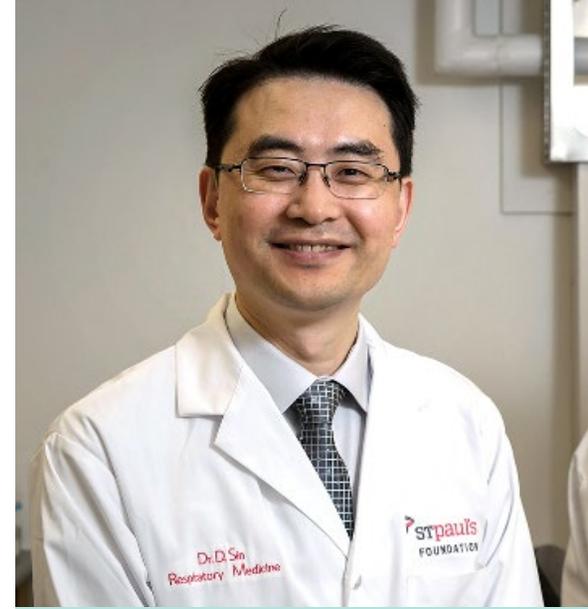
WHAT WE KNOW

- Evidence suggests the concentration of federal research funding among a small number of Canadian researchers and institutions may be detrimental to advancing scientific diversity, discoveries and training opportunities.⁶
- Health research capacity building is integral to generating evidence in service of health policy and practice decisions.⁷
- A thriving health research system is associated with a higher performing health system and improved patient outcomes.⁸

Optimizing impact through evidence-informed health research funding

MSFHR is a data-centric organization. Our commitment to evaluation and impact analysis means we continually evolve based on our analyses of a range of data at the program, organizational and system levels. Increasingly, these analyses are raising important questions - for example how best to define, assess and measure concepts like excellence or impact in peer review and research impact assessment. Fortunately, funders worldwide are committed to answering these questions, collaborating to advance evidence-informed research funding, known as "research-on-research."

Our new strategic plan will see us contributing to and taking advantage of this new body of evidence. Our skilled and committed staff and our supportive, performance-driven organizational culture will enable the generation of evidence to make strategic decisions about what to fund and through what mechanisms, and how to support the translation of evidence into practice and policy for improved health and health care for British Columbians.



Dr. Don Sin, Vancouver
Developing biomarker tests to improve care for patients with COPD

OUR GOAL

By 2025, we are practicing evidence-informed health research funding in a way that brings national and international best practices into the BC health research system.

We'll do this by:	Progress will look like:
Developing a research-on-research plan for MSFHR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR has a plan that outlines questions critical to evidence-informed health research funding.
Catalyzing conversations and partnerships on research-on-research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR establishes research-on-research partnerships with other health research funders where necessary to deliver on our plan.
Empowering our people and invigorating our culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR has a strategy that articulates our organizational values and the key skills and competencies needed to innovate as a health research funder.

WHAT WE KNOW

- There is a growing urgency for health research funders and other health research stakeholders to increase value and reduce waste in health research.⁹
- The study of research and related practices, including funding, is increasingly seen as important to understand and improve how we perform, communicate, verify, evaluate, and reward research.¹⁰
- In a context where demand often outstrips available research funding, funders have a responsibility to be more transparent and systematic in how we evaluate and prioritize which research to fund.¹¹

Fostering a more equitable, diverse and inclusive health research system

Funding agencies such as MSFHR are increasingly integrating EDI considerations into their work. This change is driven by a number of factors, including evidence of inequities in funding and higher education, but most importantly, the recognition that diversity is essential to innovation. MSFHR believes in the fair and respectful treatment of all people. We know that empowering and mobilizing a spectrum of ideas, talent, perspectives, and experiences within a health research community will help build a more innovative and impactful system.

Our new strategic plan emphasizes the collection and analysis of robust data to further understand EDI in research

funding, and to act to improve it. Our approach is consistent with federal funding agencies, including the Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada program, which focuses on groups who are underrepresented in academic research (Indigenous peoples, women, racialized people, people with disabilities and the LGBTQ2+* community).

Other considerations of equity are also important, including researchers at different career stages and in different pillars, those from less populated regions and smaller institutions, and Indigenous health research capacity. Our work in these areas is reflected under our strategic directions on talent development and health research capacity.



Dr. Stephanie Willerth, Victoria
Personalizing neural tissues to treat Parkinson's disease

OUR GOAL

Between now and 2025, MSFHR will demonstrate leadership in EDI in health research funding to help ensure an equitable, diverse and inclusive health research system in BC.

We'll do this by:	Progress will look like:
<p>Improving our data collection on EDI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR routinely collects, analyzes and learns from data. MSFHR implements an EDI questionnaire for applicants and peer reviewers.
<p>Continuing work to make our funding and processes more equitable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSFHR shares findings from our EDI data collection and program audit and takes action where appropriate. MSFHR completes an EDI audit of our funding programs and policies.

WHAT WE KNOW

- There is a lack of diversity in the Canadian research system, particularly among women, Indigenous peoples, members of racialized groups and people with disabilities.⁴
- There has historically been little data collected on equity and diversity in the Canadian research landscape.⁴
- Diversity in research is important to cultivating talent and promoting inclusive excellence, which in turn drives discovery.^{1,2,13}

* LGBTQ2+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit. The + recognizes there are additional identities and that language is evolving. This is the definition used in the Dimensions EDI program.

Partnerships



Partnerships are essential to our work, and to the success of BC's research community. They optimize provincial investment, increase coordination, and reduce duplication in BC's health research system.

MSFHR provides match funding to BC researchers to increase their competitiveness in national funding competitions. We work with external partners to co-fund researchers on MSFHR's competitions, and we partner directly on other funders' competitions to create more opportunities for health researchers in BC. Our new strategic plan will enable a refresh of our partnership strategy, with increased emphasis on high-quality, high-reward partnership opportunities provincially, nationally and internationally with both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations.

Knowledge Translation



Since 2001, MSFHR has supported researchers and research users to move evidence into policy and practice with funding opportunities, resources and training. In more recent years, we have

focused on the role of funders in knowledge translation beyond our support for the people we fund. Our role as a catalyst in provincial initiatives - for example the training tool KT Pathways - is widely endorsed by our health research and health system partners, on whose expertise and involvement these initiatives depend. Our new strategic plan will enable a refresh of our KT strategy to ensure a sharp and evidence-informed focus on building capacity for evidence use across the province.



Dr. Siamak Arzanpour, Surrey
From wheelchair to walking

Putting the strategic plan into action

Our 2020-2025 strategic plan will guide our Board of Directors and our staff, and will be revisited annually in operational planning and budgeting. It is harmonized with our accountability framework with the BC government, supported by a high-level implementation plan, and tied to an evaluation and learning plan.

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