

Frequently asked questions: Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy

What is the purpose of the strategy?

- *Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy* provides a high-level, flexible framework to guide health research investments and decision-making in the province over the next 10 years. It will directly shape the business planning processes of key health research organizations in Alberta's health research and innovation system including the Alberta Innovates corporations, Alberta Health Services, and health research programs at post-secondary institutions.
- The strategy is intended to:
 - provide a strategic approach to health research investment;
 - capitalize on strengths Alberta has established through past investments; and
 - encourage effective translation of knowledge in all areas of policy and practice, to capture the benefits of Alberta's investments in health research.

Why is this strategy needed?

- Over the past few years and through consultation on this strategy, stakeholders have identified a number of challenges facing health research in Alberta:
 - health research, health outcomes and the health system need to be better aligned;
 - health research needs to focus on health system priorities with the most impact;
 - health research needs to be considered broadly beyond traditional research domains;
 - translation of new knowledge into innovative products and services for an improved health system must be enhanced; and
 - health systems need to be responsive to technological change.
- *Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy* was developed to specifically address these issues through its integral role in the overarching research and innovation framework.

What are the strategy's actions?

- The strategy focuses on Albertans becoming and staying healthy and supporting a responsive, quality health system. It outlines 19 actions, grouped under four outcomes:

Strategic focus — address emerging health and health system challenges in two broad priority areas: wellness at every age and innovative health service delivery.

Knowledge translation — develop a culture of inquiry and knowledge translation at all levels of the health and health research systems. A strong knowledge translation system will help to generate new discoveries that will result in improved health for Albertans through new practices and policies, accelerated commercialization of new products and services, and increased public understanding of health research and technology.

Highly skilled people — develop the province's critical mass of talented researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs throughout the health research system. Programs are needed to retain and attract talent; increase cross-disciplinary expertise; keep pace with the latest advancements; and facilitate cross-linkages among all professionals involved in health.

Innovation platforms — develop a supportive environment for people working in health research, to provide them with the programs and tools they need to do their best work. Programs are needed to improve clinical trials processes, incorporate personalized medicine capabilities within the health system, improve computing capability to process and interpret data, and accelerate technological and policy innovations.

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What are the long-term benefits?

- Over the long term, Albertans will be healthier and will have better access to well-coordinated programs and services in the health system. Alberta will also benefit from new economic opportunities related to the commercialization of new health products and services.

Does the strategy require additional government funding?

- The strategy provides a strategic framework to focus current and future investment by the major health research funding entities in Alberta to help achieve “better value for money” from public spending on research.
- Specific investment decisions are the responsibility of key health research organizations in Alberta's health research and innovation system including the Alberta Innovates corporations, Alberta Health Services, and health research programs at post-secondary institutions.

How does the strategy support new discoveries in basic science?

- To achieve the outcomes of *Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy*, research and innovation at all stages of development from basic science to clinical practice is required across all four research pillars of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research: biomedical, clinical, health services and population and public health.

How will the strategy build on Alberta's strengths? The current strengths of Alberta researchers such as neurology, cardiovascular and cancer don't stand out.

- The broad stakeholder community told us to go beyond traditional approaches to the priorities, to focus on the “system” level – thus the focus on wellness at every age and innovative health service delivery.
- What we wanted to do is to identify broad directional areas in which research critical to the province should be focused.
- In doing so, we are building on Alberta's strengths and also addressing critical needs. For example, neurosciences research is a critical part of research for mental health and addictions, chronic disease and the elderly (vulnerable populations). Cancer research can be seen in child and maternal health, chronic disease, health promotion and environmental health.

Who is accountable for ensuring implementation occurs?

- The Ministers of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and Alberta Health and Wellness are accountable for implementation of the strategy.
- As part of the implementation and oversight process, direct responsibility for implementation of the strategy's actions has been assigned to the relevant organizations: Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Innovates corporations, Advanced Education and Technology, or Alberta Health and Wellness.
- Over the next six months, oversight, monitoring and reporting mechanisms will be developed. In addition, lead organizations for each action will develop their action plans for implementation.
- Over the next 10 years, these plans will roll out to achieve outcomes of the strategy and help to build the health research system we need to achieve the Premier's vision of creating the best performing, publicly-funded health system in Canada.

What other organizations or programs will be guided by the strategy?

- Other organizations, such as the post-secondary institutions, the Institute of Health Economics, and the Health Quality Council of Alberta play a strong role as partners in implementation – for example, through supporting knowledge translation, identifying best practices, or providing health informatics.
- The strategy will also have an indirect impact on health research supported through non-profit and private sector investments. There has been considerable interest by philanthropic organizations and industry throughout the development of the strategy.
- All of these organizations contribute to the evidence-informed decision-making landscape in Alberta and create an environment in which health care is based on the best scientific and research evidence available.

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How was the strategy developed?

- The strategy was co-developed over the last year by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and Alberta Health and Wellness in consultation with more than 150 stakeholders through numerous workshops, forums and one-on-one interviews.

How does the strategy connect with actions from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health (MACH)?

- Most of the work on development of the strategy was completed prior to the release of the MACH’s report. That being said, it strongly supports MACH’s direction for the health system by ensuring use of research evidence in making decisions on health technologies, programs and services. The process used for the development of the AHRIS also supports MACH – members of the health research community were consulted throughout the process.

Where is more information available?

- For more information, visit www.aet.alberta.ca or contact:

Cross-Ministry Initiatives Research and Innovation Division Alberta Advanced Education and Technology 780-422-8870	Clinical Advisory and Research Branch Health Policy and Service Standards Division Alberta Health and Wellness 780- 415-2775
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