



The story so far: Results of an international review of the foundation's work

On behalf of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation's board of trustees, I would like to welcome the report of the international review panel.

The panel's analysis and recommendations will be a most valuable input to the ongoing development of the foundation as an exemplary, independent, flexible and responsive organization committed to working in a complementary fashion with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and other organizations involved in the sponsorship of leading-edge health services and nursing research.

The trustees note that the highly positive report covers what is still an early phase in the foundation's evolution and that a full appraisal of the long-term impact of the foundation's programs must await further experience. The panel's identification of

the criteria that should be applied in future evaluations will be extremely helpful. The foundation has already taken steps to implement changes reflecting the panel's advice and will be devoting its next planning meeting to the broader issues identified in the report.

The trustees are grateful to the members of the international review panel for contributing their expertise, time and effort to assist the foundation to achieve its goals and fulfill its mission.

For the complete international review panel final report and a description of what the foundation is doing to address its recommendations, go to the foundation's web site at:

http://www.chsrf.ca/docs/irp/index_e.shtml

Sincerely,

Arnold Naimark

www.chsrf.ca

Key findings

- The foundation has done a lot in a short time. It should continue in the same direction, with some minor changes.
- Knowledge transfer work that has already begun at the foundation should become the highest priority.
- The foundation should continue and even intensify its collaborative relationship with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, especially with the Institute of Health Services and Policy Research. However, the foundation should not merge with any other organizations with similar mandates for at least the next five years.
- The foundation compares very well to similar international organizations that operate with larger budgets and have existed for much longer.
- The foundation has been widely praised for its consultation efforts with decision makers so far and has been successful to date in predicting decision-maker needs. The foundation may want to provide more funds for research on short-term issues, increase its funding on research programs rather than single projects, and consider doing research itself.
- Now that the foundation is stabilizing after rapid growth, it needs to focus on measuring its impact and expanding its communications efforts, partnerships, and work in the nursing community.

Making research work

Since early 1997, the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation has been — as our motto states — “making research work”. Our \$126.5 million in endowments from federal sources allow us to work to connect people to each other, to fund research that will make a difference to the delivery of health services, and to get that research into the hands of those who have decisions to make as they run the health system.

After five years, it was decided to take a hard look at what the foundation has done so far, to see if what we’re doing has made a difference to the health services and nursing communities in Canada. We knew what we wanted to do, but have we taken the right path so far? And are we headed in the right direction?

Our board of trustees commissioned an international panel to scrutinize our choices and actions so far, to tell us what went right, what didn’t go so well, and where we should aim our compass over the next few years.

“CHSRF is a strong champion for effective decision maker-researcher interactions.”

— Submitted to the panel by a
decision maker from Alberta

A solid start

Overall, the panel concluded that the foundation “has achieved a fast and effective start toward achieving its mandate.” The foundation should continue to head towards its original destination, with some new pit stops along the way.

One of the biggest things that sets the foundation apart from other granting agencies is its work in getting research used, by making sure that the new knowledge generated by research is transferred to the managers and policy makers who need it — something the foundation calls “knowledge transfer”.

The panel members

Duncan Sinclair (chair)

Physiologist Duncan Sinclair was the Dean of Medicine at Queen’s University from 1989 to 1996. From 1996 to 2000, he was appointed by the government of Ontario to head the Health Services Restructuring Commission. Most recently he was the founding chair of the federal government’s \$500-million Canada Health Infoway.

Clermont Bégin

Clermont Bégin specializes in health management and is a professor of strategic management and organizational theory at the Université Laval. He is a former director general of the Quebec Association of Hospital Administrators and has done extensive work for governments and commissions, including Quebec’s Rochon Commission.

Shirley Chater

Shirley Chater, a member of the American Academy of Nursing, is a consultant and professor at the University of

California in the Institute for Health and Aging of the School of Nursing. She was president of the Texas Woman’s University before acting as the United States commissioner of the social security administration under President Clinton. She has advised several foundations on programs related to leadership and health.

Chris Ham

Chris Ham has written extensively on health policy, both in the UK and internationally, including a number of books on health policy and reform. He has acted as a senior researcher at the King’s Fund in the United Kingdom and was appointed in 1993 as director of the Health Services Management Centre and professor of Health Policy and Management at the University of Birmingham. He is currently on secondment to the UK government providing advice to health ministers as head of their Strategies Unit and is on the board of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research’s Institute of Health Services and Policy Research.

Moving research across the gap

Over the next three years, the exciting work that the foundation has begun on knowledge transfer should become its highest priority, said the panel. The foundation needs to “conduct a comprehensive synthesis of existing research relating to knowledge transfer” in the near future to fill a very wide gap in the information on what works in the research transfer process and what doesn’t.

To complement these efforts, the foundation should also consider increasing its work in training knowledge transfer

specialists, specifically by immersing these men and women in both research and decision-maker environments so that they understand both sides of the process.

“CHSRF has taught us all a great deal about how to build bridges and operationalize partnerships.”

— Submitted to the panel by a researcher from Newfoundland

Connecting with the nursing community

The foundation has done a good job of incorporating its special remit for nursing research into its programs, said the panel, both in research support and capacity-building. “The strong support for nursing research is very evident in, for example, the five CHSRF/CIHR chairs held by nurses,” said the panel.

The foundation needs to consider increasing its communications efforts with nurses in order to make sure the nursing community is aware of its efforts so far, recommended the panel. “It should be pointed out that at a guaranteed rate of allocation of \$2.5 million per year in support of nursing research, CHSRF has exceeded by far and away the minimum expenditure needed to meet the terms attached to the \$25 million with which it was endowed in 1999 to support nursing research,” said the panel.

“The opportunity to participate in one of the foundation’s projects has served as a most productive and positive opportunity to create a more formal bridge between our region and the university.”

— Submitted to the panel by a decision maker from a regional health authority in British Columbia

A natural partnership

The foundation has many partners, but the panel singled out one body in particular that the foundation should continue to strengthen its ties to as it delivers its mandate — the Canadian Institutes of Health Research’s Institute of Health Services and Policy Research. Because the foundation is unique and performs a distinct role in Canada’s healthcare system, it should not consider a merge with the institute during the next few years, said panel members. Instead, a close partnership should continue to grow with a special focus on expanding the number of health services researchers in Canada through training and development programs, particularly with respect to students in universities and health science centres.

“The research themes supported are central to the current concerns of decision makers within the health system.”

— Submitted to the panel by a decision maker from Quebec

Measuring up globally

Internationally, the foundation’s profile is comparing well to similar organizations around the world. The foundation is “rapidly emerging as an innovative organization in the field of health services research and knowledge transfer that compares very well with similar organizations in other countries, most of which are of much longer standing and are far more richly endowed/funded”, said the panel. Internationally, there are no closely comparable organizations, said the panel, because although there are many with similar programs, there are “none whose programs cover the spectrum of research support, capacity development and knowledge transfer in such a closely integrated, interrelated way.”

Despite the fact that the foundation’s funding of researchers across Canada is proportionate to the size of the population in each province, there is still some dissatisfaction in this area.

The foundation needs to commit more energy to clearing up this misconception, said the panel. The foundation needs to continue its ongoing efforts to improve the number of researchers funded outside Ontario and Quebec. The recent appointment of the foundation's regional officers is a good addition to the foundation's lines of communication across the country and should go a long way towards assisting in this work.

"[The foundation has given] a new urgency to the importance of communication between researchers and decision makers."

— Submitted to the panel by
a researcher from Ontario

Identifying decision-maker needs

The foundation "has had some short but good experience in picking research themes relevant to contemporary issues based on its wide (and widely praised) consultation with policy makers and decision makers throughout the country and with its support of programs of research focused on those themes," said the panel, encouraging the foundation to continue using funding themes.

To address short-term issues, the foundation may want to establish a special fund to address urgent decision-maker needs, said the panel. For longer-term issues, the foundation should give priority to funding programs of research — several inter-related projects done either simultaneously or in succession — rather than single projects.

The foundation should continue its focus on policy makers' and managers' needs, and avoid funding clinical, "test-tube" research while clearly stating what kind of research is excluded and why, said the panel. The foundation could use its relationship with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to make sure a broad spectrum of research is being funded — both clinical and non-clinical.

More work to be done

Generally, interviews done by the panel members were fruitful, but the panel pointed out at the end of its report that it felt three important issues — national information management, the Internet, and diversity in the patient make-up — were missed in the discussions with "witnesses" about the foundation's work in applied health services and nursing research. To address these three issues, the panel recommended that: the foundation increase and lobby for more information management across the country, use the Internet to its full potential, and recognize cultural, ethnic and gender diversity in patient care.

"We trust this report ... will be helpful to the board of trustees of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation," concluded the panel. "It has been a pleasure to conduct our review of what is clearly a very innovative and successful young organization well-started on the path to achieving its potential in a vitally important area of public policy [...] The panel recommends that CHSRF continue its fast but well-ordered progress toward the same destination it selected at the outset."

"There is much new potential for both building capacity and getting research accomplished and taken up in the province of Alberta because of the influence of CHSRF."

— Submitted to the panel by
a researcher from Alberta

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