

Michael Smith Health Research BC **Strategy 2022–2025**

We are British Columbia's health research agency. Our ambition is to inspire and connect curious, creative and passionate minds to drive discovery and innovation for better health and health care. We support the people who do and use health research and we strengthen the system in which they work.

In 2022, the BC Government confirmed three years of funding for Health Research BC to advance research across the province. Our 2022–2025 strategy is based on our strong track record and experience serving the province, government priorities, stakeholder conversations, and pandemic-related learnings.

BC: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

By 2032, BC is recognized worldwide for its vibrant, coherent, inclusive, and globally competitive health research system, which improves the health of British Columbians, the health system and the economy.

- ▼ The gap between evidence creation and use is significantly reduced.
- ▼ BC's diverse health research talent spans the province and the cell-to-society continuum.
- ▼ Indigenous-led research is thriving.
- ▼ Patients and the public are actively and widely engaged in research.
- ▼ People, organizations and communities partner to resolve health and health system issues.
- ▼ National and international investments drive significant economic benefits for BC.

OUR CONTEXT

Health research saves lives, improves health and health care, and strengthens local economies. Its value was proven during the pandemic through rapid vaccine development, new therapies, and evidence-informed policies. But we also saw research disrupted and duplicated, and health inequities increase.

The pandemic has increased the importance of strengthening health research systems, whose purpose, according to the World Health Organization, is advancing scientific knowledge and using such knowledge to improve health and health equity.

British Columbia's health research system is already benefitting from what we learned during COVID-19. We are partnering more deeply to integrate research and care, compete for federal funding to strengthen our system, and address the pandemic's impact on our research talent.

The context continues to shift for the health research system. We are dealing with rapid demographic, social and technological changes; lack of equity, diversity and inclusion; changing academic careers; and challenges to the traditional notion of "research excellence."

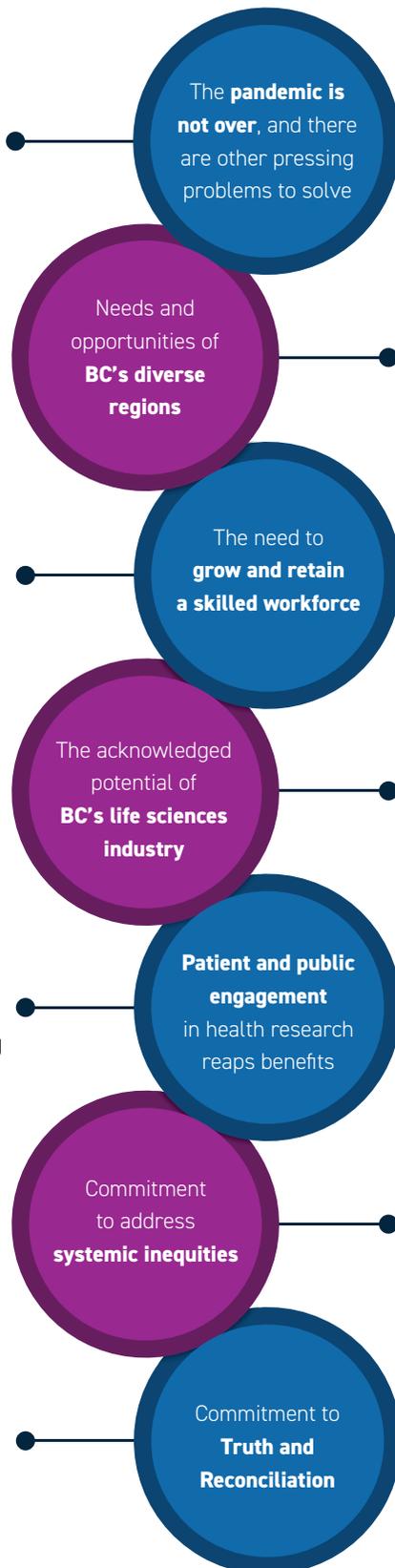
OTHER DRIVERS INFORMING OUR STRATEGY

As we build back, health research will need to address not only health but social and economic improvements. We will need to attend to other crises – including the toxic drug supply and climate change – and new ones that emerge. Key to success is providing the right evidence in the right ways for decision-makers, including patients, the public, clinicians, and policymakers.

Attracting, retaining, training, and growing a diverse workforce is critical for a strong knowledge economy, a well-functioning health care system and resilient communities.

Across the country, patient and public engagement in research is increasing, but there are more opportunities to expand the diversity of voices, encouraging participation from all communities.

Canadians are coming to terms with our colonial history and its devastating impact on Indigenous peoples and communities. In 2019, the BC government passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act to advance reconciliation in tangible and meaningful ways.



Government has committed to supporting businesses, entrepreneurs, and non-profits across BC to bring new products and ideas to market, adopt leading-edge technologies, and secure talent. This support, and the strengths and uniqueness of our regions, offer huge potential for health research.

BC is home to the fastest-growing life sciences sector in Canada. Government's StrongerBC plan will position the province as a worldwide life sciences hub: nurturing new talent, developing new lab space, leveraging research capacities and supporting employment.

Given the long-standing lack of equity, diversity and inclusion in research – particularly for Black, Indigenous, people of colour, LGBTQ2S+ and disabled researchers – much research does not reflect the needs and realities of communities. This situation is widely recognized as unacceptable.

3-YEAR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

We commit to leadership, courage and creativity as we co-create BC's future in an evolving context. We commit to deep collaboration in improving the health of British Columbians, the health system and the economy. Our contribution is to:

- Build research talent for BC's future
- Catalyze change for a stronger health research system
- Mobilize communities for research impact

These interconnected strategic directions reflect our niche in BC's health research system, our 20+ year track record and our existing strengths. And they challenge us to develop new skills, new relationships, and new ways of delivering for British Columbians. They are shown below with the strategic enablers and then expanded on through the identification of three-year priorities and outcomes.



Considerations of equity, diversity and inclusion are top-of-mind as we implement our strategy, and our commitment to Indigenous reconciliation and self-determination will guide us. Finally, rigorous, ongoing evaluation will enable us to understand and increase impact, and to demonstrate accountability to the provincial government and British Columbians.

BUILD RESEARCH TALENT FOR BC'S FUTURE

Why?

Academic career paths are changing, and the pandemic has stalled research careers and programs, revealed talent gaps, and exacerbated inequities in research jobs. Attracting, retaining, training and growing a diverse health research workforce is critical for better health and health care and a stronger economy.

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- Refresh and enhance our research competitions, guided by principles of equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Support research talent recovery from the pandemic through a talent continuity fund, regional talent awards, and academic-life sciences industry partnerships.

- Increase support for Indigenous health research career development.
- Partner to recruit, support and retain diverse academic, life sciences, health system and community-based research talent.

Our work will result in:

A significant, diverse and skilled research talent pool, improved care, more jobs, expanded research impact and financial leverage.

CATALYZE CHANGE FOR A STRONGER HEALTH RESEARCH SYSTEM

Why?

The value of health research systems is demonstrated by an international body of evidence. Attending to system issues (e.g. misaligned incentives or policies, fragmented processes) increases research impact and reduces waste. Recent improvements in BC such as the expanded role of research in health authorities and increased patient and public engagement provide momentum for positive disruption.

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- Horizon scan health research system trends, issues and opportunities: analyze and interpret for action by provincial stakeholders.
- Initiate or support provincial systems and infrastructure for research production and use.

- Advance patient-oriented research across BC.
- Strengthen efforts to build a robust provincial clinical trials ecosystem.

Our work will result in:

Health research system efficiencies, more timely application of research, and economic growth through increased efficiency and effectiveness of research activity, including clinical trials.

MOBILIZE COMMUNITIES FOR RESEARCH IMPACT

Why?

Generating and using evidence to resolve pressing problems requires multi-disciplinary research, multi-stakeholder involvement, patient and public engagement, and an understanding of change in complex systems.

Over the next 3 years, we will:

- Develop a priority-based funding program in partnership with research intensive universities, health authorities, government, communities, and patient and public groups.
- In true partnership with BC's Indigenous communities, co-create and fund an Indigenous-led health research program.

- Initiate a program of topic-specific research forums for policymakers.
- Expand our knowledge translation program to build more capacity for using evidence in practice and policy.

Our work will result in:

Progress on priorities that are collaboratively identified as important to British Columbia, including Indigenous health research, and enhanced understanding of evidence use.

STRATEGIC ENABLERS

▼ FUNDING



Health Research BC rejects a “fund and forget” approach to supporting research. As a leading health research agency, we bring evidence, expertise and our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion to bear in designing and measuring the impact of our funding programs. We remain committed to attracting, retaining, training and growing research talent through our competitions. Further, we will dedicate funding to collaboratively-identified BC priorities, ensuring accountability while enabling the flexibility and creativity necessary for the discovery and application of solutions.

▼ CONVENING



COVID-19 has emphasized the need to bring diverse groups together to understand problems, and to brainstorm solutions and partner on their implementation. For more than 20 years, Health Research BC has worked across regions, sectors and stakeholder groups, facilitating sometimes difficult conversations on a range of issues and opportunities. Our 2022–2025 strategy sees us expanding this role to serve government and research system stakeholders.

▼ PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY



Strong partnerships with non-profit agencies, other funders and industry have leveraged our government funding to generate millions of additional dollars for research in the province. They have also reduced duplication of research and increased its impact. Our new partnership strategy increases our business development efforts provincially, nationally and internationally for additional leverage. And importantly, our partnership strategy extends beyond funding: expertise, skills, knowledge, infrastructure and other resources of new partners and existing ones, including health authorities, will complement our strengths on specific initiatives.

▼ SCIENCE PROGRAM



Evidence underpins everything we do at Health Research BC — and our 2022–2025 strategy demands an expansion of our science program. We will increase our evidence generation activities in support of our own work. We will enhance our efforts to promote understanding of science across different audiences, catalyze science-based approaches in the health system and communities, and contribute to the emerging evidence on both health research systems and learning health systems.

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healthresearchbc.ca | info@healthresearchbc.ca | 604.730.8322