

Statement For immediate release

Urgent federal support needed now for health research in times of COVID

April 10, 2020 (Ottawa) – Canada’s Academic Health Sciences Centres and Health Research Institutes are desperately seeking emergency support from the federal government to keep healthcare professionals and researchers across Canada employed in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

In early-April, the federal government announced eligibility criteria for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, a key plank of its economic response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Canada’s hospital-based research institutes later learned that their employees would not be eligible for relief for the subsidy.

This decision risks setting back health research in Canada by 20 years and will have catastrophic implications for Canada’s capacity to respond to COVID-19 and for Canada’s health research sector more generally.

Right now, all research and clinical trials in Canada that are not related to COVID-19 have recently been either suspended or cancelled. If trends hold, the pandemic will cripple Canada’s overall research capacity, generating mass layoffs of critical research staff. A rapid census of a selection of 24 Canadian health research institutes indicates that they expect to lose almost \$500 million over the next 6 months.

Healthcare organizations and research institutes across Canada are doing everything possible to mitigate job losses in these conditions in the face of extremely limited options. The categories of staff most under threat of layoffs are clinical research associates and coordinators, research nurses, laboratory technicians, biostatisticians, data managers, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows numbering in the thousands. Their knowledge and talent will be wasted in this crisis if the health sector cannot employ them, an outcome that would also pose a dire threat to morale across the health sector, which is already desperately low in Canada.

For these reasons, we urge the federal government to reconsider its decision and render Canada’s health research institutes eligible to apply for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy. This would demonstrate solid public policy and consultation in the midst of crisis. It would also be an expression of good faith to Canada’s healthcare and health research communities who are working tirelessly to move Canada past this challenging and chaotic time.

– Paul-Émile Cloutier, President and CEO

HealthCareCAN is the national voice of healthcare organizations and hospitals across Canada. We foster informed and continuous, results-oriented discovery and innovation across the continuum of healthcare.

– 30 –

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