



August, 2015

Dear CIHR,

**PRESIDENT**

Kevin Wang  
University of Toronto

The Clinician Investigator Trainee Association of Canada (CITAC) represents a national resource of over 400 young men and women training to become healthcare innovators and leaders. We are disturbed by CIHR's sudden decision to eliminate funding for MD/PhD training programs across Canada, a critical pathway of this training. The decision to drop support is unanticipated, unjustified, and without adequate alternatives. It is especially troubling as the Canadian healthcare system adapts to an aging population and threatens our status as a global leader in health research.

**VP EXTERNAL**

Branavan Manaranjan  
McMaster University

The current CIHR mandate to "excel, according to internationally accepted standards of scientific excellence, in the creation of new knowledge and its translation into improved health for Canadians" is inseparable from CIHR's principal value "to respond to the evolving needs for health research...by training the next generation of health researchers"<sup>1</sup>. By renegeing on support for trainees best positioned to fulfill its mandate, CIHR is jeopardizing Canada's ability to address future healthcare challenges.

**VP INTERNAL**

Jonathan Keow  
University of Ottawa

**MEMBERSHIP CHAIR**

Andrea Jones  
University of British Columbia

Clinician-scientists play a leading role in introducing new practices and technologies that accelerate healthcare innovation in Canada. A 2012 review of clinician-scientist salary support awards found CIHR-funded clinician-scientists generate more peer-reviewed publications, advance at a much quicker rate in their careers, and have greater success in leveraging additional grants and awards when compared to those not funded through CIHR<sup>3</sup>.

**SECRETARY/TREASURER**

Kirill Zaslavsky  
University of Toronto

While clinician-scientists have been an indelible component of Canada's health research enterprise, a 2011 Expert Review Team Report from CIHR highlighted a deficiency in their number and recommended CIHR "address aggressively" the shortfall of these unique scientists<sup>2</sup>. Now that CIHR has terminated MD/PhD funding, it is risking the loss of an established and successful national program designed for this very purpose, despite a 2013 External Advisory Committee mandated by CIHR's SPOR (Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research) concluding that "Canada needs a major increase in the number of health clinician-scientists"<sup>4</sup>.

**FACULTY ADVISOR**

Dr. Norman Rosenblum  
University of Toronto

Students cite the CIHR MD/PhD funding as a significant factor enabling them to commit to a rigorous 7-10 year program. It is the only award that provides sufficient funding to cover tuition and day-to-day expenses (see attached infographic). Such support encourages equitable access to training, dependent upon academic excellence, rather the ability to afford the price of education.

The recent actions taken by CIHR do not align with the interests of Canadians and CIHR's own mandate to develop an increased capacity for health researchers to work and innovate in Canada. To ensure future innovations make it from the minds of Canadian researchers to advances in health, CIHR needs to listen to their greatest allies, the researchers. As an ally, CITAC asks for immediate re-instatement of funding until an alternative is available. Given the increasing complexity of medicine, we welcome the opportunity to work with CIHR to ensure not only the capacity to produce exceptional clinicians and scientists but to continue to attract the brightest minds to Canada's great health institutions.

Sincerely,

Clinician-Investigator Trainees

Read More:

[CBC coverage](#)

[CMAJ article](#)

[HealthcareCAN statement](#)

References:

<sup>1</sup><http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/7263.html>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/43604.html>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/45365.html>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/47693.html>

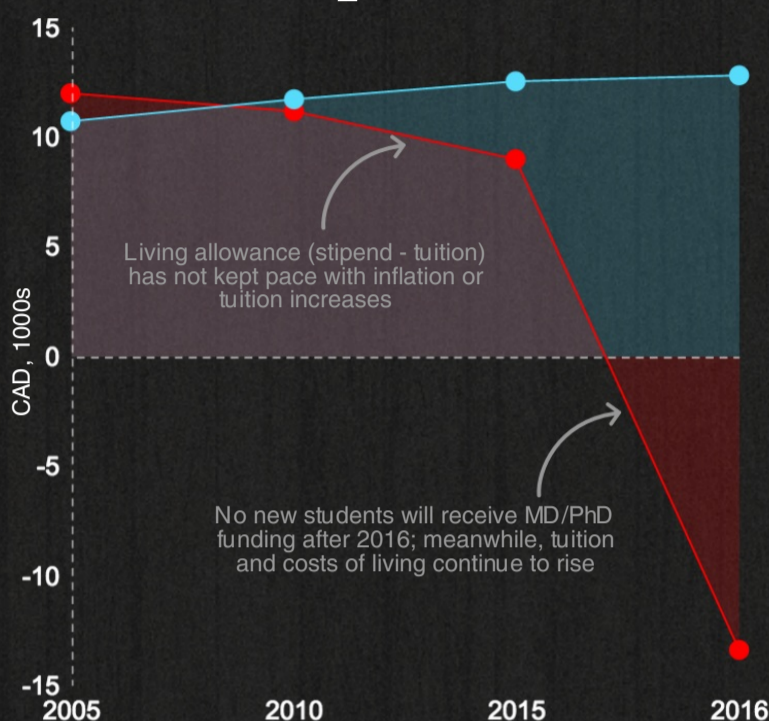


# Shocking cuts to MD/PhD funding



The Canadian Institutes of Health Research cancels a program to train doctors who care for patients and research new treatments

## MD/PhD TRAINING



### Decades-old program cancelled

Starting in the 1990s, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded MD/PhD programs due to concern that Canada lacks specialists 'bilingual' in patient care and research.

Despite patient-oriented research being a top priority for the CIHR, after 2016, no new students will be funded under the MD/PhD program.

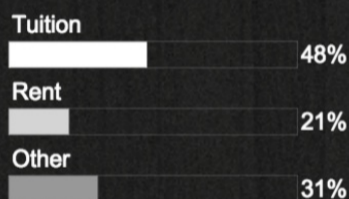
■ Living allowance ■ Consumer Price Index

Tuition information and Consumer Price Index (CPI) from Statistics Canada. Tuition data reflect national averages for undergraduate medical training. CPI data is in units of 10% with 2002 = 100%. 2016 data is projected based on 3% increase from previous year.

### 7-10 years to get degrees



### On average, 48% stipend goes to tuition



% based on a \$27,000 total stipend (CIHR + institutional supplements), average medical tuition in 2015 (\$12,959, Statistics Canada), and \$950/month rent (average rent 2 bedroom apartment in a Canadian city centre, CMHC)

### Key players in innovation

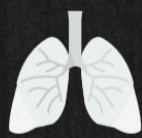


MD/PhD students are trained to care for patients, recognize gaps in care, research potential solutions, and translate results into healthcare innovations.

### The MD/PhD marathon

The MD/PhD program funding helps students focus on their intensive training pathway without working part-time jobs or going into debt. Consistent funding support is critical to help candidates choose this arduous and uncertain path.

## Examples of work done by clinician-scientists in Canada



James C Hogg revolutionized the medical understanding of lung diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma



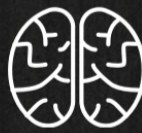
Peter A Singer and colleagues tackle global health challenges including the health of mothers and infants in poor communities



Michael R Hayden is leading efforts to develop treatments for rare genetic diseases like Huntington's and lipid diseases



Daniel Drucker's research on hormones has led to new classes of therapies for type 2 diabetes and short bowel syndrome



Anne Bassett's team is studying how genetic factors contribute to schizophrenia and other developmental disorders



Heinz Feldman helped lead the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg to develop a vaccine for the Ebola virus

### Cancellation of the MD/PhD program with no plans for viable alternatives is short-sighted



Expert reviews find that Canada needs an increase in clinician-scientists to address urgent health-care questions. Cutting funding "pulls the plug" on training the next generation of healthcare innovators.



For more information



Created by

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/cuts-to-md-phd-funding-greeted-with-horror-by-medical-scientists-1.3190215>

Clinician Investigator Trainee Association of Canada / Association des cliniciens-chercheurs en formation du Canada

[http://www.cmaj.ca/site/earlyreleases/10aug15\\_c\\_ihr\\_cutting\\_md\\_phd\\_training\\_program.109-5124.xhtml](http://www.cmaj.ca/site/earlyreleases/10aug15_c_ihr_cutting_md_phd_training_program.109-5124.xhtml)

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