Key Research Updates

Federal Funding for Financial Aid for Medical Researchers

- PM announced significant financial support for thousands of medical researchers whose work is unrelated to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Financial support to prevent the threatened layoffs of up to 15,000 researchers at hospital-based research institutes who, due to a technicality, don't qualify for the wage subsidy.
- Research unrelated to COVID-19 was halted in mid-March, and hospital-based institutes have warned that much of the funding they rely on to pay for that research — including charitable donations, contributions from foundations and clinical trial contracts with pharmaceutical companies — has evaporated.
- Without financial support from the government, they've warned that they'll have to begin laying off thousands of researchers by the end of this week.

CFI Exceptional Opportunities Fund for COVID-19: TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

- You may have received information yesterday (May 26th) that there was a rapid call from CFI for an Exceptional Opportunities Fund for COVID-19
- On May 27th morning, the CFI has temporarily suspended the Exceptional Opportunities Fund-COVID19. If you were considering this opportunity, please hold on your submission until further details are announced from the CFI.
- [https://www.innovation.ca/awards/exceptional-opportunities-fund-covid-19](https://www.innovation.ca/awards/exceptional-opportunities-fund-covid-19)

Stage 1 of Research Resumption on UBC Point Grey Campus and Hospital Sites

The following principles will be used to guide decision making and processes by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Authority Research Institutes related to staged-in resumption of on-site activities:

- The health and well-being of faculty, health professionals, trainees, staff, patients and the public is paramount.
- The orders, notices and guidance of the Provincial Health Officer, Health Authorities and WorkSafeBC will be followed.
- Approval for on-site activities (including research, education and administration) will only be granted to those who require on-site resources and cannot conduct this work remotely.
- **All activities that can continue remote work must do so.**
- There will be a staged and coordinated approach across each building and site (includes university, health authority and clinical research spaces).
- Staged resumption of activity may need to be reversed and stricter curtailment conditions imposed in response to public health guidance or changes to the situation at any particular site.
- Equity and personal circumstances will be considered in evaluating how to plan and conduct resumption of on-site activities.

Prioritization guidelines of on-site activities

- COVID-19 research
- Current research activity exemptions as approved previously (no new research or additional related activities).
Clinical trials concurrent with clinical care

Graduate students who need to be on-site to complete lab work for graduation as determined by the student’s Supervisory Committee for completion of thesis.

Positions required to run core research facilities that are essential for approved on-site research.

Upcoming time sensitive activities that cannot be done remotely and require on-site research access.

Equity considerations for those that cannot work from home for various circumstances.

Non-time sensitive activities that cannot be done remotely for limited access.

Building Access Hours

UBC and Health Authority building’s maximum occupancy at any time for this stage will be limited and safety distancing must be adhered to. For research buildings at our Health Authority sites, they will also likely have limited operating hours that those sites will need to comply.

For UBC Point Grey campus, UBC Building Operations has indicated that Point Grey campus buildings will have limited operating hours (either option 1 of 7am-6pm OR option 2 in two shifts from 7am-12pm and 3:30pm-8pm, on Mondays to Friday). Any PI/lab wanting to work on a shift basis will need to make a request through their Building administrator. It may not be possible to accommodate all requests.

After hours process:

It is recognized that a small number of researchers have scientifically justified research protocols that require sampling/observations/data collection over an extended period of time and beyond regular working hours. For special procedures for extended work hours, please note the protocol for work between 8:00 pm – 7:00 am or on weekends and stat holidays will be as follows:

1. The PI must notify their department head / director and building administrator that there will be work continuing beyond the regular hours.
2. Building administrators will notify security ahead of time which lab(s) will have people working extended hours (time, date, location and who).
3. The researchers will post a notice on the lab door that late-night or weekend work is underway, indicating name(s), working hours.
4. The researchers in the lab must abide by their department or unit's working-alone policy (i.e., two-person working principle) with a safety plan to ensure that there are regular checks on researchers.
5. PIs are responsible for ensuring that their research staff are trained in appropriate cleaning protocols for their lab/research space, including cleaning high contact surfaces, benches, shared equipment, fume hood sash handles, doorknobs and other common areas within their labs on weekends.
6. Researchers must respect the custodial servicing of labs and spaces during regular working hours and be mindful of custodial staff working in other areas of the building while researchers are in their labs afterhours.

Please review full documents and attachments sent out by the Office of Research earlier this week for more information.

BC COVID-19 Clinical Research Coordination Initiative

- Aim to provide a structure for collective feedback to prioritize and coordinate COVID-related translational research and related activities, identify research gaps, coordinate resource sharing, and liaise with the provincial health system.
There are many COVID-19 research activities and coordination efforts underway, serving a range of individuals and organizations – and also serving as valuable contributors to and components of a provincial research response.

This includes the Public Health Officer and government, the Strategic Research Advisory Committee (supported by MSFHR), universities, health authorities, provincial funders, BC’s Academic Health Science Network, and others.

To be complementary to these efforts, the BC COVID-19 Clinical Research Coordination Initiative has been formed to help coordinate research efforts in support of the priorities articulated in the SRAC’s recently published framework as this B.C.-led initiative includes representation from B.C.’s Ministry of Health, academic institutions, health authorities and the B.C. Centre for Disease Control.

Examples from this initiative to support researchers and their activities along the translational medicine continuum, including:

- Creating a partnership with REACH BC to establish a provincial platform for patient participation in COVID research
- To address the limited supply of samples and overwhelming number of research requests to do clinical trials, the clinical trials node will consider the question of capacity and feasibility
- There is an urgent need for a provincial COVID biobank and are working toward resourcing and launching this as an immediate priority [https://www.med.ubc.ca/research/covid-19-clinical-research-coordination-initiative/](https://www.med.ubc.ca/research/covid-19-clinical-research-coordination-initiative/)

### COVID-19 Research Funding Opportunities

- We are actively maintaining a list of open and archived COVID-19 research funding opportunities here.

- Currently open opportunities include:
  - [Digital Technology Supercluster: COVID-19 Program](#); ongoing until further notice
  - [UBC Faculty of Medicine Graduate Student Initiative - Student Learning Environment Initiatives](#); rolling intake up to May 28
  - [NSERC Alliance COVID-19 Grants](#); rolling intake up to June 1
  - [UBC Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies Virtual Roundtables](#); deadline June 1
  - [UBC Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies COVID-19 Wall Solutions](#); deadline June 1
  - [Microsoft AI for Health COVID-19 Grant](#); June 15 or until further notice
  - [UBC Faculty of Medicine Clinician Investigator Program](#); deadline Jun 15
  - [Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions Opportunity Projects Program](#); deadline Aug 4

### UBC Internal Grants and Awards

- [UBC Faculty Research Awards](#) are now open for nominations. These awards acknowledge research excellence across all disciplines at UBC. Notice of Intent must be received by July 17th.

### Research Exemption requests

- **UBC – Point Grey Campus:**
  - 155 exemption forms received by the FoM Office of Research to date
  - 110 exemption forms were approved by Medicine and all approved by VPRI
  - 37 exemption forms remaining:
    - 8 in process
3 forms withdrawn
○ 4 combined
○ 22 out of jurisdiction and reverted over to the appropriate Health Authority site

- **VCHRI**: 280 Submitted, 255 Approved, 12 declined/withdrawn/not required, 13 in process
- **PCHRI**: 53 exemption forms were submitted and all approved
- **BC Cancer**: 134 exemption forms have been approved
- **BCCHRI**: 130 Submissions, 108 approved, 19 withdrawn, 2 Not Approved, 1 pending
- **WHRI**: 14 submissions, 8 approved, 4 pending
- **BC Mental Health & Substance Use Services**: 6 submissions, 2 approved, 3 not approved, 1 withdrawn
- **Island Health**: None
- **Southern Medical Program**: None
- **Other Health Authorities and Sites**: information not received yet and TBC

### Virtual Townhall hosted by VPRI – Wed, April 29th 10:30-11:30am
- VPRI has hosted a virtual townhall for the Faculty of Medicine to discuss the guiding principles that are being considered to plan for a future return to on-campus research, scholarship and creative activities
- While the escalation in the COVID-19 outbreak resulted in on-campus research being curtailed quickly and comprehensively, it will not be possible to facilitate a sudden and total return to on-campus research, scholarship and creative activities.
- During the virtual townhall, VPRI asked for input to advance the planning process of how UBC might take a phased approach towards resuming safe levels of these activities on campus that is consistent with public health advice and direction
- Other faculties have their virtual townhalls this week
- UBC continues to gather feedback at research.continuity@ubc.ca if there are more questions or comments to assist with the planning

### Extension of on-campus Research Curtailment and Remote Work Arrangements – update from April 28, 2020
- In keeping with the direction from Bonnie Henry that the requirement for physical distancing remains in place, UBC is extending on-campus research curtailment and Remote Work Arrangements.
  - **On-Campus Research Curtailment**
    - working with Faculties on both campuses to consider how we will gradually ease curtailment restrictions in ways that are consistent with public health requirements
    - While there is currently no fixed date for changing curtailment restrictions, UBC will provide updates on the planning process by May 11
    - Please visit [https://research.ubc.ca/covid-19](https://research.ubc.ca/covid-19) for more information
  - **Remote Work Arrangements**
    - UBC’s Remote Work Arrangements will continue to apply to faculty, staff, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and student employees until further notice.
    - FAQs to support Remote Work Arrangements at [http://www.hr.ubc.ca/covid-19/](http://www.hr.ubc.ca/covid-19/)
Critical research exemptions that were granted to cover the entire initial period of curtailment will be extended and remain valid.

Fixed-date exemptions must still adhere to the granted exemption date. Principal Investigators who need to extend the period of the approved exemption should email research.continuity@ubc.ca to request the extension. A new exemption form is not required if there are no other changes to the project.

Researchers can still make new exemption applications.

### REACH BC

- REACH BC is a new provincial online platform currently in final stages of development, and aims to improve how British Columbians can connect with opportunities to volunteer in health research. Researchers can post their opportunities on the platform, and its built-in algorithm can then match study participants and patient partners to their corresponding studies. Current work is being done on adding COVID-19 specific functions to the platform.
- This is a CIHR SPOR project.

### CIHR Message from Dr. Michael Strong – Additional Support for Research Trainees

- The Government of Canada announced new funding of $291.6 million to maintain income support for trainees whose programs have been affected due to the closure of academic research labs.
- Funding will include those trainees funded directly through programs such as the Canada Graduate scholarships, Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships, and Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships.
- Investment will also provide support for those whose funding is derived directly from operating grants (also termed indirect support).
- While the full details of disbursement of the funding remain to be established, this represents a major investment of the Government of Canada in further securing the stability of the health research ecosystem. From the outset of the pandemic, CIHR has been working to develop mitigation measures for Canada’s health research community, and we are grateful for this additional funding, which will provide relief for many research trainees at this difficult time.
- In concert with the announcement made today, we are continuing to support Canadian health researchers by working with the Minister of Health to assess and respond to the impact of COVID-19, with the objective of ensuring the overall stability of the Canadian health research ecosystem now and going forward.

### CIHR Project Grant competition

- Cancelling the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition - Official message from CIHR President Dr. Michael Strong - [https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/51927.html](https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/51927.html)
- CIHR has cancelled the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition
- Next competition will be in the Fall 2020 where the funding from the Spring 2020 will roll into the Fall
- CIHR will financially extend all existing Investigator-Initiated Research grants scheduled to expire between June 30, 2020 and March 30, 2021, for one year
- Additionally, CIHR will financially extend all bridge grants provided to Nominated Principal Investigators (NPIs) in the Fall 2019 Project Grant competition.
NPAs from the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition will be given the option to bring their submission forward automatically to the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition, including the ability to provide a one-page supplement for additional support data or publications.

NPAs will also have the option to withdraw their application and resubmit a new or updated application to the Fall competition.

More broadly, the following measures will be implemented immediately:

- An automatic one-year extension to the authority-to-use-funds date for all active grants. This will give researchers an additional full year to use any residual funds not yet spent to compensate for disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CIHR will place a moratorium on all existing and any new strategic/institute-driven funding opportunities during the next three months. The exception is that any funding competitions related to COVID-19 will continue to go forward.
- Relatedly, throughout this process, we have worked closely with our colleagues at the U15 and Universities Canada, who are currently considering our proposal to provide a full-year extension to all those individuals who are within the probationary period and tenure stream.

Virtual BC COVID-19 Symposium – April 9

- Hosted jointly with the BC CDC to highlight some of the COVID-19 research in BC.
- Introductions were made by Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. David Patrick & Dr. Rob McMaster.
- There were 500 attendees on Zoom (the maximum meeting capacity) and 816 viewers on the alternative stream option for a total of 1,316 symposium participants.
- 5 thematic areas to highlight:
  - Diagnostics and Genomics
  - Clinical Trials and Patient Management
  - Epidemiology and Public Health Response
  - Social Dynamics, Communications and Trust
  - Development of Therapeutics and Vaccines
- Researchers provided an overview on how their research was responding to the provincial and global health needs; they were also asked to identify what the key gaps in COVID-19 research are, and what resources they have to share with the community.
- The video of the webinar is now available: https://www.med.ubc.ca/research-2/virtual-bc-covid-19-symposium/

CanCOVID:

- CanCOVID is an expert community of Canadian COVID-19 researchers, clinical collaborators, and healthcare stakeholders from across the country.
- Canada’s Chief Science Officer mandated the creation of CanCOVID to optimize Canada’s research response to the COVID-19 public health crisis.
- More information at http://cancovid.ca
Information Links

Please access the following hyperlinks for ongoing updates related to the Research portfolio:

- Faculty of Medicine Office of Research: https://www.med.ubc.ca/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-faculty-of-medicine-community/#research
- UBC Office of the VPRI: https://research.ubc.ca/covid-19
- VCHRI: https://www.vchri.ca/covid-19-information-and-faqs
- PCHRI: http://covid19.providencehealthcare.org/information-researchers
- PHSA/CDC: http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19