

CPA Position Paper on Restructuring of Granting Councils and the Implications for Psychology

Psychological science creates an understanding of people, human problems and the many environments in which we live. How people think, feel and act are the cornerstones of a society's human infrastructure and all of its systems (health, social, educational, community, economic). Psychology is diverse in its scope and the research methods that it uses. It is both a basic science and a social science whose relevance to science, technology, societal well-being, human functioning and health is everywhere.

Psychology and the Mandates of the Granting Councils

Psychology is a discipline whose research cross-cuts and meets the mandate of each of the Councils and whose field of study, by its very nature, is inter-disciplinary. Psychology and its focus of study brings together researchers, health professionals and policy-makers from voluntary health organizations, universities, government and non-government agencies, international research organizations, and industry and patient/consumer groups from across the country and abroad.

- The *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)* promotes and supports university-based research and training in the humanities and social sciences. Research in the social sciences and humanities advances knowledge and builds understanding about individuals, groups and societies—what we think, how we live and how we interact with each other and the world around us.
- The *Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)* invests in people, discovery and innovation through programs that support post-secondary research in the natural sciences and engineering. NSERC is the national instrument for making strategic investments in Canada's capability in science and technology.
- The *Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)* integrates research through a unique interdisciplinary structure made up of 13 "virtual" institutes. Each Institute is dedicated to a specific area of focus, linking and supporting researchers pursuing common goals. Each Institute is dedicated to a specific area of study and embraces a range of research from fundamental bio-medical and clinical research, to research on health systems, health services, the health of populations, societal and cultural dimensions of health and environmental influences on health.

Implications of Granting Council Restructuring on Psychology

In the Federal Government's 2009 Budget, the Government announced 2 billion dollars allocated to infrastructure for post-secondary institutions and 35 million to support graduate student research for each of CIHR and NSERC with 17.5 million for SSHRC. With this announcement, came a strategic review by the Councils in which they reviewed their mandates, re-structured their funding criteria and identified areas where operations could be streamlined to be made more efficient. This restructuring has many implications for psychology as a discipline, as well as all students, researchers and universities. A look at the implications, by Granting Council, is provided below.

SSHRC

One of the outcomes of the strategic review and cuts by SSHRC is that SSHRC will no longer fund any health-related research. The latter is of particular concern to psychology whose health-related research more often focuses on the social and psychological aspects and interventions (the historical and effective mandate of SSHRC) of human function and dysfunction rather than their biomedical aspects (the historical and effective mandate of CIHR).

NSERC

Another outcome of the strategic review that is of particular concern to psychology is NSERC's decision to explicitly state that it will not fund students in clinical programs even when their research falls within the NSERC mandate.

- Unlike SSHRC and CIHR, which base their eligibility criteria on the nature of the research, NSERC is basing its criteria on the career path or home of the researcher. This change means that doctoral students in applied psychology programs (e.g. those training to become clinical or clinical neuropsychologists) who, not infrequently, conduct research that is basic and not applied (e.g. functions and processes of memory or perception, endocrine system regulation of mood) will not have a funding option. NSERC will not fund them because they are in the wrong program and CIHR will not fund them because they are doing the wrong research. For example:
 - At Concordia, 6% of clinical program students are conducting research that does not have a health focus.
 - At the University of Ottawa, 15-20% of clinical program students are conducting research that falls within the NSERC basic science mandate.
 - At the University of Western Ontario, 40% of clinical program students are conducting research that does not have a health outcome.
 - At UBC, 55% of clinical program students are conducting NSERC-related research.
- NSERC is presuming that all clinical psychology students will pursue a health-research or practitioner-based career – this is inaccurate. Many students who graduate with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology or clinical neuropsychology find employment in universities or institutes where they continue to work on basic science, NSERC-related projects rather than on health-related research. These students represent from 10-30% of clinical graduates.
- Many students who graduate with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology discover an aptitude for basic science research during their studies. The decision by NSERC may discourage students from pursuing their interests in basic science, thereby affecting the productivity of future scientists and limiting the range of science that engages students – in doing so, innovative basic science research findings may be lost.
- Many researchers can maintain both NSERC and CIHR relevant lines of research and might, at times, focus on one area more than the other. NSERC's new rule will mean that students, and subsequent faculty, who have both interests will no longer be able to nurture both of their research areas as one area will not be funded. Practice informs science and science informs practice. The clinical

background of a basic science researcher can enhance rather than detract from his or her research contributions.

- NSERC's decision will undoubtedly affect students' acceptance into various graduate programs across the country as faculty members who are doing basic NSERC research will not take on students enrolled in clinical programs.

When NSERC defers funding for clinical psychology students and SSHRC defers funding of all health-related research, NSERC and SSHRC are assuming that all clinical psychology student thesis research has direct or near-direct relevance to health or CIHR-fundable topics. Much of this research does not. Students carrying out such research should not be disenfranchised from fellowship funding or judged by committees less knowledgeable about these applications than others. These funding decisions fragment, rather than support the inter-disciplinarity of psychological research. Preeminent examples of researchers at risk are:

- the clinical psychology student whose combination of field of study and research will not meet the eligibility criteria of any of the granting Councils;
- the health psychology researcher whose focus on psychological etiology and interventions of human functioning and problems will render his work ineligible for SSHRC funding and at risk of not being funded by CIHR because of its lack of biomedical focus; and
- the social psychology researcher whose interest in the development of personality may be perceived as health research by SSHRC and social science research by CIHR and effectively funded by neither.

CIHR

As previewed above, yet another concern is the fact that all health-related research has moved to CIHR. CIHR is encouraging health researchers, previously supported by SSHRC, to submit applications to CIHR indicating that the CIHR Act provides CIHR with a wide-ranging mandate that includes research on social determinants of health. Despite this encouragement, there are many concerns:

- Many among us continue to be concerned that CIHR has not sufficiently moved beyond its biomedical focus. This is evidenced by the lower funding rate of behavioural science research compared to biomedical research at CIHR, as well as the lower success rate for behavioural sciences research at CIHR than at SSHRC.
- Many faculty are also concerned about the likelihood of their students being awarded CIHR funding if they themselves have not been CIHR-funded.
- It is very important to ensure that research proposals are being judged by officers and committees who have the sufficient knowledge in the research area as well as familiarity with the discipline in which it is conducted to competently and fairly evaluate its merits.

CPA Position

Core funding of the Councils is not only essential to the advancement of knowledge but also provides the platform within which graduate student research takes place. While disciplines and the growing inter-disciplinarity of research are comfortable with permeable boundaries, the granting agencies clearly are not – the most recent restructuring creates silos whereas knowledge is being best created through transit ways. A particular risk of siloed research funding for psychology is that some of its researchers, because of their area of specialty or area of research, will have no access to funding. CPA calls upon

1. **NSERC to revise its eligibility criteria and base its funding decision on the content, focus and intention of the research and not on one's program area or career path.** As noted on NSERC's website, research in the health sciences and natural sciences and engineering are intertwined – advances among researchers in the health sciences constantly stimulate progress and innovation in the natural sciences and engineering. NSERC's decision to not fund students in clinical psychology programs, while not only excluding a proportion of students from federal funding, will undoubtedly interfere with future innovation and progress in both basic research and health-related research. There should be consistency across all of the granting councils in terms of how eligibility criteria are set. They should be set upon the nature of the research not the home or career path of the researcher.
2. **CIHR to ensure that it reflects the need for psychological health research and inter-disciplinarity, across all its Institutes that includes, but is not limited to, a biomedical focus.** CIHR's institutes are not buildings, but networks of researchers brought together to focus on important health problems. The virtual structure of the Institutes encourages partnership and collaboration across sectors, disciplines and regions – a philosophy that is core to psychology and, key to the understanding of health and human problems. Human function and dysfunction is the result of complex interactions of biological, social and psychological determinants and factors.
3. **SSHRC to ensure that psychological research that does not have an immediate health focus continues to have a home at SSHRC.** Where to draw the line on what research is and is not related to health is difficult but an important consideration in psychological science. Research that focuses on personality development or group behavior has a home in the social sciences not health. Further, it is important to ensure that research proposals are being judged by officers and committees who are sufficiently knowledgeable about the applications of research.

As a member of the Steering Committee of the Canadian Consortium for Research, CPA continues to lobby the granting councils and government to ensure that the voice of our scientific community is heard and understood. We encourage CPA members and student affiliates to use this position statement to write the granting agencies as well as local, provincial or federal politicians and remind them about the importance of funding for psychological science.

About the Canadian Psychological Association

The Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) was organized in 1939 to improve the health and welfare of all Canadians; to promote excellence and innovation in psychological research, education, and practice; to promote the advancement, development, dissemination, and application of psychological knowledge; and to provide high-quality services to members. For more information about CPA, please visit: www.cpa.ca. For additional information on this position paper or CPA's liaisons with the granting councils, please contact Dr. Lisa Votta-Bleeker, Associate Executive Director, CPA, at executiveoffice@cpa.ca.