



**Canadian Psychological Association Submission:  
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance  
(August 2014)**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) is the national association for the science, practice and education of psychology in Canada. With almost 7,000 members and affiliates, the CPA is Canada's largest association for psychology. There are approximately 18,000 psychologists registered to practice in Canada. This makes psychologists the largest, regulated, specialized mental health care providers in the country – out numbering psychiatrists approximately 4:1.

The CPA applauds the federal government's decision – as an employer – to double the coverage for public servant psychological services from \$1,000 to \$2000/year. We also recognize the government's support of research, through its continued investments in Canada's federal granting councils, including the most recently announced Canada First Research Excellence Fund, as well as in research infrastructure and internships.

Enhancing coverage and removing barriers to accessing psychological services for Canadians remains necessary. Continued increases in core funding for research, students and research infrastructure are also of paramount importance to the success of our societies. Investing in psychological care will improve the health and well-being of Canadians, and help mitigate the billions of dollars in lost wages and insurance payouts that currently result when needed services are not accessible through private and public health insurance plans. Investments in research funding, infrastructure and students will contribute to more and better-paying jobs, innovation and productivity, increased government revenues, a higher standard of living for Canadians, and help secure Canada's place as an international center of research.

The CPA is pleased to provide the following recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance as part of its pre-budget consultation, which address five of the six identified key themes.

- **Recommendation #1:** Remove existing barriers to accessing psychological care for federal employees, particularly the requirement that employees obtain a medical referral in order for psychological services to be reimbursed under the extended health insurance sponsored by the federal government.
- **Recommendation #2:** Increase the base budgets for the granting councils and the Indirect Cost of Research program at levels that compensate for the effects of inflation. *Cost: \$50 million/year for next 5 years.*
- **Recommendation #3:** Increase support for students through graduate scholarships, internships/fellowships, and targeted recruitment/retention efforts. *Cost: \$35 million/year for next 3 years.*
- **Recommendation #4:** Invest in various building blocks of Canada's national infrastructures that support research and data collection. *Cost: \$10 million/year.*

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** Remove existing barriers to accessing psychological care for federal employees, particularly the requirement that employees obtain a medical referral in order for psychological services to be reimbursed under the extended health insurance sponsored by the federal government.

**Themes Supported:** 2, 5

Psychological treatments are among the most effective treatments for the most common mental disorders – they are considered the treatment choice for anxiety disorders and significantly reduce the risk of relapse for depression. Disorders that are addressed promptly and effectively will yield a cost offset for their treatments – fewer medical visits and interventions, and decreased need for short/long term disability. Untreated or undertreated psychological disorders cost the workplace billions of dollars annually. The CPA applauds the federal government’s decision – as an employer – to double the coverage for public servant psychological services from \$1,000 to \$2000/year. With this decision, the government has led by example in responding to the Mental Health Strategy developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada – specifically responding to Direction three calling for access to needed services and supports. While this represents a tremendous step, barriers to accessing care still remain.

The CPA recommends:

- Remove the need for medical referral to access the psychological service benefit. This requirement places a burden on the public health system and requires a general practitioner to make a mental health determination he or she may not have the time or skills to assess. The need for a medical referral is not a requirement of licensed psychological practice – psychologists are autonomously regulated health practitioners, can accept self-referrals, and function fully independently of medical oversight.
- Make session and plan caps meaningful. Research into the efficacy and effectiveness of psychological treatment suggests that courses of treatment are 15 to 20 sessions. A cap that would afford a meaningful amount of service would be approximately \$3000, based on \$150 per session.
- Consider employee-directed plans. Assign a dollar amount to a basket of services (e.g. psychological services, physiotherapy, optometry) and let the employee decide how he or she wants to direct coverage annually.
- Deem psychological assessments and interventions, when delivered even in a medical/legal context, or when privately insured, a necessary basic health service that are exempt from HST/GST. Because psychological assessments and treatment are not covered by provincial health insurance plans, patients often cannot afford to access these services without funding support. This means that when psychological services are provided outside of publicly funded facilities, an insurance policy is often involved. When limits on coverage are too low, or there is no coverage at all, patients either live without needed service or pay out of pocket for it.

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** Increase the base budgets for the granting councils and the Indirect Cost of Research program at levels that compensate for the effects of inflation.  
**Themes Supported:** 2,3,6

Canada's granting councils are widely admired internationally and form the bedrock of support for Canadian research. However, success rates for NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR have fallen in recent years as a result of decreased funding levels when adjusted for inflation. While investments have been made in programs of excellence, many researchers rated highly by international standards of excellence have been unable to secure funding. For example, approximately:

- 20% of researchers in the social sciences received a SSHRC grant while another 40% of researchers deemed eligible by peer-review committees did not
- 15% of CIHR-focused researchers are typically funded despite two-thirds being deemed worthy of funding

The CPA recognizes that the current federal government has continued to make investments in Canada's federal granting councils, including the most recently announced Canada First Research Excellence Fund that promises over \$ 1billion in funding over the next decade. We hope this fund will be accessible to all post-secondary institutions based on a peer-review process by the research community.

We appreciate that in a time of fiscal constraint, increases in research funding may have been seen as challenging; however, as we enter a surplus budget, increased investments are required to ensure program growth and to position Canada competitively in the international research landscape. For each of the next 5 years, the CPA recommends an investment of an additional \$50 million in research funding through SSHRC, CIHR and NSERC.

Investments in research will create more and better-paying jobs, boost productivity, increase the standard of living for Canadians, and secure Canada's identity as an international centre of research for innovation and skills development. Investing in research also serves the public interest by advancing knowledge and answering questions of concern. With its ability to provide information on key social, cultural, psychological, economic, and health-related issues, psychological research has broad relevance to the success of individuals, families, economies and societies with an application to public policies and programs, economic recovery, and Canada's long-term prosperity, and Canadians' health and well-being.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** Increase support for students through graduate scholarships, internships/fellowships, and targeted recruitment/retention efforts.

**Themes Supported:** 3, 6

Supporting graduate-level teaching, research, and experience is imperative to build the foundation for development in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. The CPA recognizes the investments that were allocated to postdoctoral research partnerships through MITACS and the allowances that were made to include some not-for-profit organizations in MITACS' Accelerate program. Continued investments in graduate scholarships and internships/fellowships remain necessary. For each of the next 3 years, the CPA recommends expanding the Canada Graduate Scholarships by \$25 million to fund an additional 1,250 students (\$20,000 value) and continued investments of \$10 million to fund an additional 250 internships/fellowships (\$40,000 value) across disciplines and settings.

Investments in post-secondary education will help institutions attract staff and students; allow more Canadians to pursue scholarly activity; foster the next generation of researchers; gain practical experience in research, business, entrepreneurship and scientific management in real-world contexts; ensure that employers have access to high quality expertise, thereby reducing training costs; help close the gap in graduation rates vis-à-vis those in peer countries; and position Canada as a solid training ground.

The CPA also recommends augmenting recruitment and retention efforts in high-demand areas. Numerous government departments have need for psychological services to address their specific populations (e.g. military, corrections). To augment these psychological resources, it is important that government departments create job and work conditions that support recruitment and retention. In the case of psychology, recruitment and retention can be enhanced by:

- Creating federal residency placements for doctoral-level psychology graduate students. Such programs help train a needed resource, and help with recruitment since psychology residents often stay to work in the jobs where they train.
- Create opportunities for clinical psychologists to more fully engage in the development of policy, programming and decision-making when it comes to mental health – this kind of engagement speaks to the conditions of work which enhance recruitment and retention for any employer.
- Ensure that the benefits and remuneration of psychologists are competitive with those in other public sectors like corrections, health and education.

Psychology doctoral students graduate with highly transferrable skills. Current curricula provides excellent training in scientific methodology, research design, data collection, analyses, critical thinking, theoretical grounding, professional writing, evaluation, multi-disciplinary study, management, and computer skills. These are all skills which can be applied and adapted to match and address the needs of stakeholders, decision-makers, communities, and people in the contexts in which they live and work.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** Invest in various building blocks of Canada's national infrastructures that support research and data collection.

**Themes Supported:** 3, 4

An important determinant of effective knowledge transfer is the quality and breadth of research that is pursued in academic settings; however, key research is also conducted in non-academic settings and thus requires continued investments. Investing in Canada's national data collection agencies such as Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information lays the foundation for research in a variety of fields and for many sectors, leading to broad economic, social, and environmental benefits, as well as researchers' ability to generate reliable knowledge and inform policy.

Data collected via national and standardized surveys is crucial to the research community and to government, industry, business, not-for-profits, municipalities and communities which depend on these data to develop reliable, informed decisions and policies that can improve productivity, economy and health. In the case of psychology, information needs for supply-based human resource planning include: demographics, education/training, geographical distribution, migration, non-migration-related attrition, employment/practice characteristics and productivity. For example, we are unable to assess how many psychologists are needed to provide adequate care for the millions of Canadians with mental health disorders because there is no standardized method by which to collect this data. There is a particular paucity of data about licensed health care providers, like psychologists, working specifically in the area of mental health.

The CPA supports the recommendation of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) that calls for the creation of a time-limited Mental Health Innovation Fund. The proposed fund could be used to help identify evidence-based mental health services and supports and support their implementation in communities.

Harmonized efforts are needed to align initiatives aimed at enhancing mental health information, facilitate integration and quality improvement of existing data resources, and develop new resources able to fill the practice and health human resources gaps in mental health information and services. The CPA recommends:

- Re-instating previously discontinued surveys such as the University and College Academic Staff System (UCASS) and the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)
- Investing in collaborative efforts involving national organizations to collect data specific to Canada's mental health human resource.

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*We thank the Government for welcoming input as part of its pre-budget consultation.*

*We would welcome the opportunity to provide further input*

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