Canadian Association for HIV Research

Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Since the discovery of the HIV retrovirus over three decades ago, advances across all areas of science have led to better prevention and treatment. Diverse strategies have been developed to reduce risks and improve survival and quality of life for individuals and communities. Nonetheless, HIV remains far from eradicated: UNAIDS estimates reveal that in 2018 there were 37.9 million people living with HIV, 1.7 million people were newly infected, and there were 770,000 AIDS-related deaths.

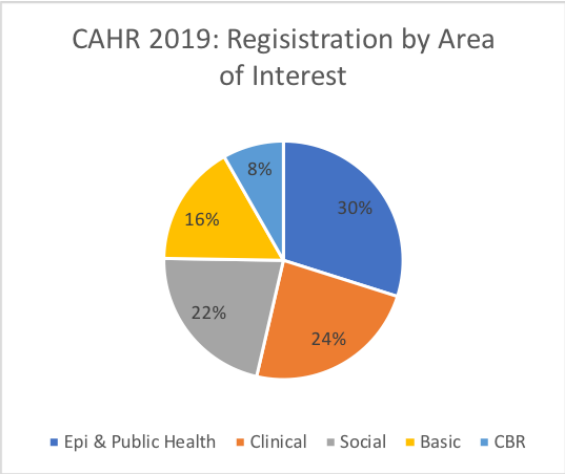
In Canada, HIV incidence has actually increased over the last five years, and we have a greater need than ever for effective, evidence-based prevention strategies. Population-specific approaches to HIV prevention and care are necessary for groups that continue to be under-served by current HIV prevention, treatment, and care approaches (including CAHR's four priority key populations: African, Caribbean and Black people; Indigenous communities (i.e. First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities); sexual and gender minorities (including men who have sex with men, and people engaged in sex work); and people who use drugs. Further, HIV continues to be a stigmatized disease, and far too many people are diagnosed late and not linked quickly to care. In addition, an aging HIV-positive population is experiencing a host of new complications. Both vaccine and cure remain desperately needed, but continue to present considerable research challenges.

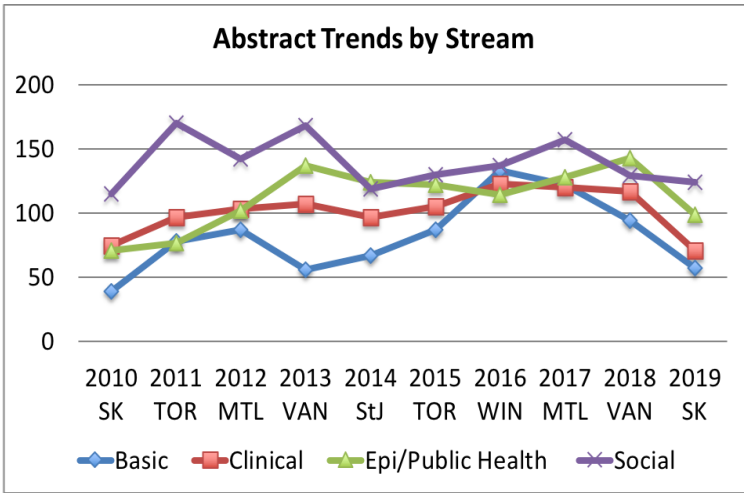
About CAHR – Where are we in 2019?

The Canadian Association for HIV Research (CAHR) started out in 1991 as a small annual gathering of biomedical scientists, sharing information and seeking to bring attention to the new HIV/AIDS epidemic. It now has over 2,000 members and participants in CAHR activities, representing researchers across the spectrum of basic, clinical and social sciences, epidemiology and public health research, as well as people living with and affected by HIV.

Over the last three decades, the Annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research has become the meeting place for 800-900 delegates, including affected community members, students, policy makers, and other interested parties. Over 500 scientific abstracts are submitted each year, across all pillars of research. Outreach continues to expand with the Conference app for participants, and active Facebook, Twitter, Instagram throughout.

CAHR has a keen interest in cultivating an HIV research community, and building and supporting the next cadre of HIV researchers in Canada.





In 2008, CAHR hosted the first of its annual New Researcher Workshops; it has since developed an extensive workshop series. Since 2012, over 1,500 people have participated in over 30 workshops, held across Canada in both official languages and ranging from virology, global health, alternative careers, data collection, to intervention training in community-based research (CBR). In partnership with the Universities Without Walls (UWW), CAHR also provides online learning opportunities, and supports knowledge translation through focused science cafes.

Through fund-raising, conference revenue and partnership agreements, CAHR also provided over $1.6M of scholarship funding from 2012 – 2019, to support 30 Canadian Master's and Doctoral students. In addition, CAHR has supported travel awards for hundreds of students and community members to attend the annual conference and currently runs other travel support programs for professional development for HIV health care practitioners and virologists.

CAHR is a professional organization for HIV research, and people living with and affected by HIV an important part of CAHR. To ensure that members of the HIV community are able to participate in CAHR activities, CAHR offers a range of community supports including:

CAHR Community supports (as of 2019)	
Conference	Community scholarships provide free registration for the Conference (registration fee for others is $750). 125 Community Scholarships were provided in 2019
	Community travel scholarships, which supported the travel costs of nine community members from across Canada in 2019
	Annual CBR/Peer Research Assistant session
	Free ancillary meeting space to community-led satellite meetings
	CAHR supports the CATIE "Implications for the Front Lines" closing session
Workshops	CBR workshops + resulting resources; three CBR workshops were funded in 2019

Awards	CAHR – CANFAR Excellence in Research Awards includes an annual award for CBR as well as CAHR's four research tracks
	Annual Red Ribbon Award for outstanding service by a community member
E-Learning	Supports UWW E-learning module program for instructors and PLH, with over 30 modules developed to date, and three new ones developed each year CIHR recommends them to CBR applicants; used by many academic instructors
Science Cafes	Science cafes tailored to and co-led by community members, with over 12 cafes supported since 2013; Supports UWW Research Lounge Series
Governance	CAHR Board of Directors has a dedicated position for a community member

CAHR MANDATE

Vision

CAHR's effective research training and knowledge sharing improves Canada's HIV/AIDS outcomes.

Goals

CAHR represents nearly 2,000 members from across Canada. It partners with researchers and people living with and affected by HIV, to:

- promote excellence in HIV research;
- foster collaboration and cooperation among HIV research communities, including basic science, clinical science, epidemiology & public health and social science and support community-based research approaches in all tracks
- promote education and the development of new researchers;
- provide a platform for Canadian HIV researchers, and engage diverse stakeholders (community, industry, government, NGOs etc.) in ongoing dialogue and knowledge exchange to ensure that HIV research remains responsive to their needs.

DELIVERING THE MANDATE: CAHR'S PLANS FOR 2020-2025

CAHR's role and structure: Achievements

Overall, CAHR is recognized as a focused organization that accomplishes a lot with limited resources. CAHR's primary function has been to showcase Canadian research: it provides a platform for researchers to share their findings with each other, with community, and with other research stakeholders. CAHR achieves its goals primarily through one central, mission-critical mechanism, its annual conference, while workshops provide a key supportive role. As a result of its dedication to research excellence at the Conference, CAHR is respected for its science focus, and considered an honest broker in a complex space with many diverse perspectives. In interviews during this and previous planning and consultation processes, stakeholders have consistently identified CAHR as a well-managed and lean organization.

CAHR is seen as a strategic and dependable partner, effective at finding and delivering on common interests. CAHR's partnerships and energetic efforts to secure diverse sources of funding and support for HIV researchers has enabled it to provide a range of additional workshops and activities that strengthen the research community year-round.

The CAHR Conference has remained viable despite the major reduction of pharmaceutical companies active in HIV. While CAHR's funding has been sorely affected, the remaining three companies continue to see significant value in Canada's HIV research conference and are still enthusiastic sponsors. CAHR has also taken major strides forward in broadening its sponsorship base in other areas of industry, charities and government. Nevertheless, pharmaceutical sponsors remain critical to the financial viability of the Conference, and CAHR as a whole. Although CAHR had to raise Conference registration fees from 2016-2019, attendance has remained steady and even increased some years, and participant evaluations continue to be excellent.

CAHR is seen as an inclusive organization, with extensive and expanding community supports, and making great strides to attract diverse leadership. It is responsive to community needs and has continually adapted its research support to make its activities more accessible to, and meaningful for, people affected by HIV. Community members are active participants and leaders of both Conference and workshops, and recognized in its awards (see more, below).

CAHR's role and structure: Next steps

Consolidate and strengthen CAHR's core functions and protect its financial viability

- Maintain reserve funds at level recommended by auditor
- Expand activities/support for membership as funding allows, without creating future-year liabilities
- Maintain CAHR's reputation for research excellence and credibility with its partners and sponsors, by reinforcing its role as a platform to showcase Canadian research

As national focus shifts towards research across STBBIs, CAHR will support a strong capacity in HIV research while building connections to the broader community of STBBI researchers and stakeholders

- As per its charitable mandate, CAHR will continue to focus on HIV, ensuring Canadian research remains strong and relevant even while national emphasis and funding shift
- Build partnerships with stakeholders in broader STBBI area to enhance research in HIV co-morbidities and related challenges
- Continue to balance research supports across all tracks, ensuring there is space to pursue the full spectrum of research from better prevention to improved treatment implementation to cure, in academia, the health system and the community
- Increase alignment and synergy with other HIV-related organizations and strategies to maximize impact

- Continue to focus on Canadian research needs, with a primary focus on populations most affected by HIV, while cognizant of the global nature of the epidemic and HIV research undertaken by Canadians
- Continue to assess the changing national and international context for HIV research, and CAHR's unique value, role and contributions in that context

Continue to expand the diversity of CAHR membership, Board of Directors and activities

- Increase transparency of CAHR processes (from selection of leaders for the Conference and workshops and the Board of Directors elections), so all members can see both where decisions come from and how they can join in. Increase documentation and communication around decisions, to broaden members' sense of ownership and fairness
- Ensure diverse participants can see themselves, and are comfortable, in CAHR activities, e.g. through Key Populations and Special Sessions, and the new Codes of Conduct for the Board (under development) and for Conference participants (being implemented)
- Continue commitment to ongoing anti-oppression training for Board members
- Identify and address barriers (structural and perceived) to participation in activities and leadership - what might enable those who feel "outside" to step in and step up?
- Expand efforts of Board of Directors' members to reach out to their diverse individual networks of research and community leaders and encourage participation in Board of Directors, Conference and workshop leadership
- Continue to use research excellence and leadership as eligibility criteria for all Board of Directors positions
- Add a Trainee Board of Directors position to gain insight into the needs of this group
- Continue to build and evolve a shared understanding of CAHR's role and purpose among its Board of Directors and membership; expand supports and documentation for new Board of Directors member orientation; maintain ongoing equity and diversity training, new Board of Directors Code of Conduct
- Provide clearer pathways for CAHR members to participate and lead CAHR activities and increase interest and experience necessary to join the Board of Directors. Explore structures such as working groups to increase opportunity to and diversity of input (e.g. trainees, community), and adjust the foci as necessary. Increased participation may reduce the learning curve for new members of the Board of Directors.

Continue to strengthen the role of Community in CAHR

- Assess viability of creating a second community-dedicated Board of Directors position and alternatives, to reduce pressure of a single member trying to represent all community
- Continue to actively support community participation in CAHR, including free Conference attendance, and providing workshops that address community needs

Identify opportunities for CAHR to provide platforms where researchers can discuss evidence around critical policy issues that affect people living with HIV

- Explore topics of interest for members and partners that could be addressed through Conference special and key population sessions, satellites, workshops, symposia, debates and other formats
- Explore interest among members and partners to develop other formats to connect researchers and evidence with major policy issues (e.g., models such as policy roundtables or best-brains exchange)

"CAHR is uniquely positioned to make space for pressing conversations about issues that impact health and the HIV community."

Identify opportunities to translate and disseminate evidence for better uptake

- Build on 2019 model, through which CAHR developed clinical summaries for HCPs (pharmacists, physicians, clinician researchers, nurses) of the latest advances and approaches presented at three major HIV Conferences (CROI, CAHR, IAS)
- Seek partners willing to expand the model for other stakeholders, including community

Explore mechanisms to increase the reach and effectiveness of member communications

- Assess value of broader and/ or more frequent newsletter and other channels
- Identify member needs and interests with respect to CAHR communications
- Increase profile of awards and previous awardees via enhanced communication efforts and utilization of partner networks

CAHR Conference – Key achievements

The CAHR Conference is seen as *the* event in Canadian HIV research, and CAHR's core raison d'être. The Conference is not only the primary mechanism to deliver on every element of CAHR's mandate, but also its greatest attraction for members, partners and funders. It builds connections and cohesion across a diverse research community. Researchers and stakeholders depend on CAHR to build their own events, knowing "everyone will be there." In turn, myriad ancilliary and satellite sessions, and related meetings add value for participants. Members unequivocally agree that CAHR is extremely successful at its core activity: each year, some 98% of participants rate the Conference as good or excellent.

CAHR members set the topics and priorities of the Conference through the open abstract submission process. A remarkable 500 abstracts are submitted each year, spread across four tracks: Basic, Clinical, and Social Sciences, and Epidemiology & Public Health. In 2019, 64% of abstracts were in the latter two tracks, as well as 58% of the participants, while 8% and 16% of registrants at the 2019 and 2018 Conferences were community-based researchers. CAHR is seen as the main venue for vibrant knowledge exchange among scientists and with community.

"Science doesn't move forward without people connecting in real ways about the research and new ideas."

CAHR has maintained a 30-year track record of success by carefully balancing the Conference's core strengths with timely innovations. The Conference is CAHR's primary source of both revenue and members, making it essential that CAHR deliver dependable value

every year. Yet CAHR's membership and scope evolve and expand, demanding both flexibility and risk-taking to test novel approaches. CAHR meets those challenges by testing novel approaches to meet the needs of its members, community, and the research environment.

Among recent innovations, the addition of Key Population oral abstract sessions are seen as a major success. In consultation, these sessions were identified as effective, valuable, and bringing much-needed attention to communities most adversely affected by HIV: Indigenous; African Caribbean Black; People who use Drugs; and Sexual and Gender Minorities. In the 2019 Conference evaluations, 95% of participants wanted the sessions to continue.

CAHR has strategically chosen Conference locations to balance financial considerations and proximity to large numbers of CAHR members, with bring national attention to regions and populations disproportionately affected by HIV. For example, the 2019 Saskatoon Conference highlighted Indigenous research, communities and approaches as its core theme, recognizing that Indigenous populations continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. Despite comprising 4.3% of the general Canadian population, people of Indigenous ancestry accounted for 16.2% of reported HIV cases in 2014. Moreover, social-structural inequities (e.g. poverty, racism, drug criminalization), colonization, and cultural disruption have heightened the vulnerability of Indigenous peoples to HIV infection, with incidence rates 2.7 times higher than people of other ethnicities in Canada. Almost 30% of main Conference activities focused on Indigenous health, including Special and Key Population Sessions, targeted workshops, awards and plenary speakers. In addition, Saskatchewan has the highest rate of HIV in Canada, with 2,091 cases reported between 1985 and 2016, and almost 30% of attendees were from within the province.

Special Sessions provide a flexible mechanism for innovation. Each Conference allows 4-6 Special Sessions, whose nature and topics are set by the locally-based organizing Scientific Committee. In 2019, for example, the organizing committee expanded the sessions to eight to amplify focus on Indigenous health and community-based research and priorities.

Community Scholarships, which provide free Conference registration to people living with HIV, have been another widely-lauded innovation. With decreasing sponsorship funding available, CAHR has had to significantly increase its conference fees each year from 2015-17. Community Scholarships were designed in 2018 by a CAHR Working group of community members and champions. They aim to place the least-possible burden on applicants, and are peer reviewed by a panel of community members. Thanks to support from CAHR and sponsors, CAHR was able to provide $100,000 to help community attend CAHR 2019, including 125 Scholarships that paid for registration, as well as nine Community Travel Awards.

CAHR Conference: Next steps for 2020-2025

Continue to partner with the key pharmaceutical sponsors who make the Conference possible

- Given the critical role of industry support to CAHR viability, continue to seek new partners in industry who share the goal of furthering HIV research

Continue to use strategic geography to draw national attention to key communities/issues

- For example, CAHR 2022 will take place in London, where HIV infection rates have been soaring despite decreases across the rest of the province. London had the 2nd highest rate of new HIV cases in a year in Ontario in 2014, just after Toronto. In 2020, the Conference in Quebec City will engage French-speaking Canadian researchers as well as bring focus to issues most central to Quebec's community and its health system leaders

Continue to seek and support diversity in Conference presenters

- Continue to provide guidance and support to Conference track chairs and reviewers to seek beyond their usual networks for keynote and oral presentation speakers, through written instructions to track chairs, and in Conference planning discussions
- Enlist all Board of Directors members in activating their networks in seeking Conference speakers

Continue to support extensive Community participation through scholarships/ travel awards

- Seek future partners to support Community Scholarships and Awards (including PHAC)
- Expand Conference Travel Awards as budget permits
- Explore mechanisms to increase community participation in Conference planning

Develop agreement with the Journal of the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada (JAMMI) to become a new new scientific publication partner to ensure broad dissemination of CAHR research

Provide training to increase access for and participation of new CAHR researchers

- Develop an online education module on how to develop a Conference research abstract and poster, appropriate for all HIV research approaches and disciplines

Increase interactivity and cross-track conversations at the Conference.

- Create more interactions around posters; for example, develop a posters tour concept
- Explore ways to attract participants to multidisciplinary sessions (e.g. problem-based)
- Explore opportunities for increased informal activities and networking
- Explore opportunities for Special Sessions or events with key teams/ training programs
- Continue to seek ways to connect trainees to researchers and possible mentors

Continue to support research excellence

- Assess balance of national and international participation to meet needs of each track
- Undertake proactive outreach to ensure key research leaders are included
- Explore ways to increase discussion time around key presentations

Continue to balance core Conference strengths with innovation

- Seek opportunities for controlled risk-taking; encourage flexibility and brainstorming especially around strategic use of the Special Sessions

Workshops: Achievements

CAHR workshops are renown for building skills and addressing learning needs that trainees can't access elsewhere. Since 2012, CAHR has provided training and development through 50+ workshops in eight provinces, for almost 1,500 researchers and community members.

People living with HIV are active participants in virtually all CAHR workshops. For example, of CAHR's 18 workshops in the last two years, six were specifically targeted to community-based research and Peer Research Associates; nine were broad interest and included CBR and community participants; and one was targeted to academics (mid-career-development).

2016 assessment of CAHR workshops confirmed the long-term value of the workshops, which have a nearly 100% positive rating from attendees. They were found to be particularly successful at connecting trainees and young researchers with potential collaborators and mentors; building key skills not available through normal channels; and fostering knowledge transfer within and across fields and disciplines. New Investigators Workshops are especially helpful to trainees and young scientists in obtaining new positions and launching careers.

> *"Anyone being trained in HIV in Canada gets exposed to a number of career development opportunities that even others in their department don't get."*

Workshops: Next steps 2020-25

Take a more proactive and strategic approach to workshop planning

- CAHR workshops are heavily dependent on the Board of Directors members to individually identify areas of interest, find funding, and put together a program and instructors. CAHR will develop approaches to identify needs and priorities, and actively seek out potential leaders

Expand the number and range of CAHR workshop leaders

- Encourage more members of CAHR as well as its Board of Directors to champion and plan workshops
- Disseminate info about the opportunity to lead CAHR workshops; how to get involved; where the resources come from and what's available; how CAHR can support workshop leaders

Expand workshop opportunities for mid-career researchers

- Seek partners and funding opportunities to address the unique needs of researchers beyond their first five years, when funding and career development supports tend to disappear
    - A model, with the Canadian Foundation for Infectious Diseases, is the 2020 Professional Development Workshop for Viral Researchers. This follow-on event provides PD requested by participants in the highly-rated 2018 Professional Development Workshop for

> *"Getting a range of workshop topics is important – and that means getting a larger range of volunteers involved in wanting to put them on."*

Canadian Virologists (see JAMMI[1]. 92% of participants rated excellent, and 100% as excellent or good.)

Awards: Achievements

CAHR's awards, presented at the annual Conference, are valued for shining a spotlight on excellence and outstanding contributions by researchers and community members **to furthering HIV research.** They are appreciated for providing profile and status, and recipients are seen as well-chosen. Members and stakeholders particularly appreciate that the awards recognize community leaders, as well as researchers and trainees across all four tracks plus community-based research.

Awards: Next steps 2020-25

Consider a new award for Best HIV Research Paper

- Pilot prizes for the best research papers published during the past two years; in 2020, one prize will be awarded in each of the four research tracks

Increase number and diversity of applicants for CAHR awards

- Undertake proactive outreach through CAHR communications and individual Board of Directors member networks, to increase applications
- Seek partners such as CIHR to raise profile
- Increase post-Conference communications about awardees (profiles in newsletters)

Increase awareness and understanding of application and adjudication processes

- Make info more prominent on CAHR website and in ongoing communications
- Work with partners and stakeholders to disseminate application information

Training: Achievements

CAHR increases the effectiveness and competitiveness of HIV trainees and new researchers. Its primary current mechanisms to support training are through its Conference and workshops.

By 2019, over $1.6M was invested in CAHR's 30 studentship awards. During its period of fiscal surplus (2010-15), CAHR supported the next generation of HIV/AIDS researchers through annual competitions for Master's and Doctoral Research Awards, in partnership with CIHR.

Training: Next steps 2020-25

Invest any budget surpluses in new/ expanded training supports, including awards

- Provide one-year Masters awards when budget allows, starting in 2020
- Explore expanding travel awards for students with top scoring abstracts

[1] JAMMI, the Official Journal of the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada (Manuscript ID JAMMI-2018-0034.R1)

- Explore awards for Field Work Support; pilot in 2020
- Explore CTN-partnered Post-doctoral fellow; pilot with one award in 2020
- Explore incremental support for highest ranking CIHR-funded New Investigator in HIV
- Expand training workshops when and where possible

"How can we support our research community to be prepared to access this type of funding?"

Support the HIV community and increase its overall competitiveness for major training funding opportunities

- For example, identify best CAHR role, e.g. as convenor/ partner/ secretariat

Address new and emerging skills/ knowledge gaps for HIV research trainees

- Develop additional on-line training modules, modeled after CBR Online Learning Practicum with Universities Without Walls and the Abstract training module; seek additional partners to expand focus of training across all priority populations

Continue to enhance trainee support at the Conference and workshops

- E.g. Increasing opportunities to connect trainees to possible collaborators and mentors

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Goal	Evaluation/ Impact Assessment - Maintain and strengthen:
Promote **excellence** in HIV research	• Demand for, and value and continuing relevance of, conference and other activities in the changing HIV research environment, as assessed by participants and CAHR membership • Application quantity, quality and diversity for CAHR awards; recognition for awardees • Respect and credibility of CAHR by key funders and partners • Publication of Conference abstracts in respected scientific journal
Foster **collaboration** and cooperation among HIV research communities, including basic science, clinical science, epidemiology & public health, and social science	• Participation and leadership in all activities, among and across all four research tracks, CBR, community members and stakeholders • Innovative cross-track activities and value placed in them by participants • Quality of interactivity and discussion at Conference • Diversity among conference leaders, participants, speakers and topics
Promote **education** and the development of new researchers	• Workshop-provided skills and opportunities highly valued and evaluated • Uptake of trainee and PD support, and value as assessed by participants • Expanded specific high-priority training supports as finances allow (including on-line training and Masters awards) • Key CAHR role in new major training funding opportunities (e.g. as convenor or partner)
Provide a **platform** and voice for Canadian HIV researchers, and engage diverse stakeholders in ongoing dialogue and knowledge exchange	• Perception of the Conference as the go-to place for evidence sharing and critical conversations • Expanded opportunities to discuss evidence around key policy issues • Community participation, and support for community, in activities and leadership • Use of Conference to draw focus to key communities and issues
Organizational excellence	• Financial viability; sustained and new sponsors, partners, and revenue sources • Efficient and effective management of resources • Strong partnerships and satisfied partners; synergy with HIV and related organizations • Board of Directors and member perception of transparency and fairness • Inclusive and diverse participation in CAHR leadership and events; reduced barriers to broad participation