




Highlights of the Pandemic Preparedness Strategic Research Initiative

THE RECENT EMERGENCE of avian influenza (bird flu) has heightened concerns that an influenza pandemic is close at hand. It is estimated that up to 7 million people could die in the next pandemic, including 58,000 Canadians.



In May 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$21.5 million, five-year investment in pandemic preparedness research. These funds helped the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Institute of Infection and Immunity (CIHR-III) create the Pandemic Preparedness Strategic Research Initiative (PPSRI). CIHR-III moved quickly to develop partnerships with other agencies, who invested an additional \$18.5 million and worked with CIHR-III to coordinate strategies, stimulate new research and build capacity in priority areas identified by a PPSRI Task Group. Highlights of PPSRI's progress include:

Funding essential pre-pandemic research

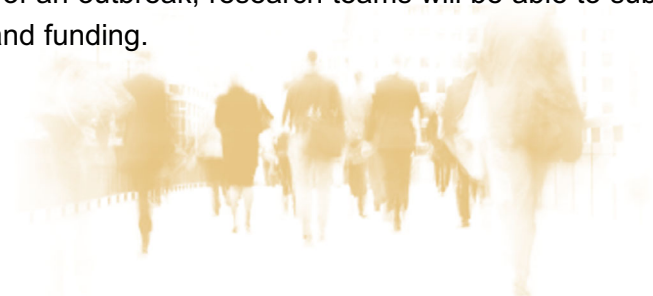
In consultation with researchers and stakeholders, PPSRI identified and began supporting research in four priority areas: vaccines and immunization, the virus, prevention and treatment, and ethical, legal and social issues. Examples of funded research include developing diagnostics, anti-viral drugs and vaccines; understanding and preventing disease transmission; and identifying ethical ways to use limited resources during a pandemic.

Building research capacity

PPSRI's directed funding encourages researchers to undertake influenza and pandemic research, thereby building the national expertise we'll need during a pandemic outbreak. Also, PPSRI grant recipients are required to include trainees in their research programs, increasing the number of highly qualified personnel in this area.

Preparing for outbreak research

To ensure that the research community is poised to act immediately in the event of a pandemic, PPSRI is helping researchers prepare for outbreak research. For example, PPSRI offers application development funds, so that, in the event of an outbreak, research teams will be able to submit abbreviated applications for expedited peer review and funding.



Fostering collaborations and networks

Through the International Opportunities Program, PPSRI supports research collaborations between Canadian researchers and researchers in China, Thailand, Peru, India, Europe, and the United States. As well, CIHR-III is working with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to establish an Influenza Research Network comprised of Canadian researchers who will develop methodologies to evaluate influenza vaccines and implement immunization programs.

Enhancing communication and knowledge translation

Fostering communication is a central part of PPSRI's goal. For example, PPSRI research teams must collaborate with research users, such as public health practitioners and policy makers, throughout the research project. In addition, CIHR-III, PHAC and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will host a meeting in November 2008 featuring presentations by Canadian and international authorities on pandemic and influenza research.

Impact

PPSRI has already increased research capacity and strengthened linkages and partnerships for enhanced pandemic influenza planning and control. Knowledge from PPSRI-funded research will also lead to improved methods to prevent and treat seasonal influenza and will enhance our ability to respond to other infectious disease outbreaks. Canada must remain committed to the intense, organized and sustained effort required to be ready to rapidly respond to the next pandemic, whenever it occurs.

For the full report, visit www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/32573.html or contact Michelle Hume at 613-948-2692 or michelle.hume@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

