



## Pandemic Preparedness Strategic Research Initiative

### Mid-term Evaluation Conclusions and Management Response

#### Introduction


In an effort to continually improve its research funding programs, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Institute of Infection and Immunity (CIHR-III) contracted Natalie Kishchuk Research and Evaluation Inc. to carry out a midterm evaluation of its Pandemic Preparedness and Strategic Research Initiative (PPSRI). The evaluator compiled and analyzed information from many sources to assess the design and current progress of the Initiative. This document summarizes the major conclusions of the evaluation and CIHR management's response.

PPSRI was developed by the CIHR-III. It is part of the Government of Canada's Avian Influenza and Pandemic Influenza (AI/PI) Preparedness Strategy, which was developed in 2006 in response to the H5N1 avian influenza outbreak. PPSRI supports targeted research intended to improve Canada's ability to prevent and respond to an influenza pandemic. It is guided by a Task Group composed of influenza experts.

#### Mid-term Evaluation Conclusion and Management Response

Overall the mid-term evaluation of PPSRI was favourable. For example the evaluator found that PPSRI priority setting was effective in identifying pandemic research priorities that were inclusive, widely endorsed, and quickly translated into funding opportunities. To date, PPSRI has supported 71 research projects and an estimated 150 trainees, thereby building research capacity in pandemic preparedness. Although the overall success rate for the funding opportunities was high, the number of applications received in some of the priority areas was low, particularly those concerning public health measures, health services and knowledge translation opportunities. In future initiatives, alternate capacity building and promotion strategies will be developed to increase research in these areas and engage the public health community. CIHR will continue to raise awareness about PPSRI funding opportunities and research results. It will also continue to maintain and build research capacity necessary for pandemic preparedness in Canada and coordinate the national pandemic preparedness research agenda.

The design of the PPSRI platform made research partnerships and collaboration possible across research disciplines and stakeholders including the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Rx&D Health Research Foundation and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Partners' contributions added



\$18.5 million to the original \$21.5 million allocated to the initiative. Although national research partnerships have been successful, international research collaborations have been more challenging to establish due to funding restrictions and time constraints. New approaches will be required to implement an effective research response needed during a rapid and widespread influenza outbreak. This will be a focus in planning future initiatives.

Development workshops and meetings organized by CIHR have increased awareness of the Initiative, uptake of research findings and collaboration across research disciplines. The 2008 meeting: *Canadian Pandemic Preparedness Meeting: From Discovery to Frontlines* increased collaborations among government departments and universities, human and animal researchers as well as between researchers and the public health community. It led to new research directions and focused strategies for response to a potential pandemic. CIHR will continue to organize networking activities and expand future meetings to improve collaboration and facilitate research.

## Conclusion

PPSRI was successful in stimulating targeted research that will improve Canada's influenza pandemic preparedness capacity. The Initiative provided researchers with relevant funding opportunities; it continues to offer networking and knowledge translation support for researchers and end-users, and it has increased pandemic research capacity in Canada. The Institute will work on novel approaches and strategies to improve international research collaborations. PPSRI programs will contribute to Canadian and international preparedness to mitigate an influenza pandemic and improve treatment of infected individuals.

