

INSIGHTS

We asked the leaders of Canada's three main granting agencies:

Why is
fundamental
research so
important?

This is what they had to say.



Alain Beaudet, President, Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR)

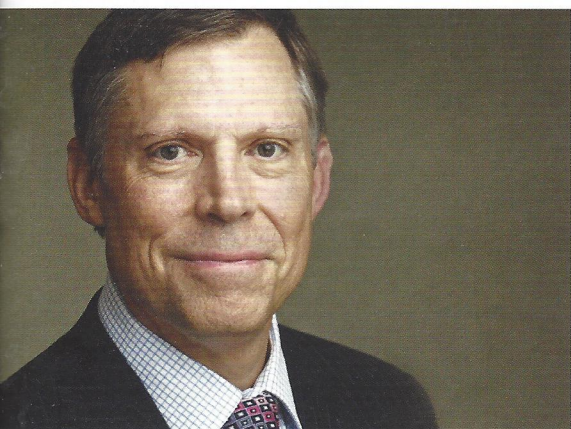
“Investments in fundamental research remain key to the success of the health research enterprise. Some of the most groundbreaking advances in health research have stemmed from basic research, sometimes in the most serendipitous way. Who could have predicted that research on the colour intensity of purple petunias would lead to the discovery of RNA interference, a mechanism that holds tremendous potential for clinical applications? Or that the observation of secretory granules in heart muscle cells would result in the discovery of the Atrial Natriuretic Factor (ANF) and thereby to new treatment options for hypertension and heart failure? On the contrary, clinical research in the absence of a good understanding of underlying pathophysiological mechanisms can yield disappointing results, as has been the case so far in trials for Alzheimer’s disease. So options are clear. Without basic research, the possibilities for future innovations wither and die.”



Janet Walden, Chief Operating Officer, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)

“People, discovery (or fundamental research) and innovation—the major thrusts of NSERC—are intimately linked and are integral to Canada’s future prosperity. Top researchers are drawn to environments where they can thrive; a strong discovery research environment attracts this creative talent and stimulates the new ideas that become our future innovations and enhance our quality of life. In short, discovery research opens new opportunities to pursue ideas that provide the foundation for our success.

For over 35 years, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) has been a leading provider of federal funding for discovery research. We are proud to provide more than \$350 million in funding to 10,000 discovery researchers across Canada every year through our flagship Discovery Grants program.”



Chad Gaffield, President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

“At the heart of what it means to be human is a desire to understand who we are, where we have been, and where we might go. While 20th century leaders often imagined a straightforward process involving the transfer of knowledge from universities to the rest of society, we are now recognizing the interconnectedness of research and past and present innovation. The new approach reflects a deepened appreciation of today’s complex and intertwined social, economic, cultural and technological challenges that characteristically transcend figurative and literal boundaries. Moreover, the topics and the questions in the headlines of the future remain uncertain and rarely predictable. For these reasons, one of the most effective ways to realize our potential as individuals and as societies is to support our top scholars in their diverse research efforts on campus and beyond.” ■

