

Brain Canada SGBA+ and EDI* Action Plan 2022-25

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* Sex and gender-based analysis plus and equity, diversity, and inclusion

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Executive Summary

The Brain Canada SGBA+ and EDI Action Plan identifies short-term activities to improve the quality and relevance of brain research in Canada by addressing sex and gender brain science and integrating sex and gender-based analysis plus (SGBA+) and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts into all of Brain Canada’s activities. These considerations and perspectives will be integrated into Brain Canada’s operations, research funding opportunities, and knowledge mobilization (KM) programs.

Sex refers to a set of biological attributes (i.e., physical and physiological features) in humans and animals, while gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities of individuals. The distinctions and interactions between these factors are increasingly important in science and research, influencing risks for developing certain diseases and disorders as well as responses to treatment and interactions with the healthcare system.

Like most health research, neuroscience research has historically focused on male subjects, materials, and participants (i.e., animals, cell lines and humans), biasing results towards the male body and men’s experiences, distinct from those of females, women, and gender diverse people. This has led to ongoing deficits in evidence regarding sex and gender-related dynamics in brain health and disease and, more specifically, the brain health of females, women, and gender diverse people. While these deficits are slowly being rectified in health research more broadly, a comprehensive approach to developing sex and gender brain science is needed.

To date, Brain Canada has contributed to remedying this gap by encouraging researchers to include sex- and gender-related factors in their research, allocating specific funding to add these considerations to existing projects, and developing funding opportunities focused on these considerations. When we consulted key members of Canada’s brain research community on this topic in 2023, we heard clearly

that Brain Canada has an opportunity to take a more defined and proactive leadership role in this area. As Canada's only research funder focused specifically on the brain, we are seizing the opportunity to advance the field of sex and gender brain science.

As a research funder and as an organization, Brain Canada recognizes that challenges remain in achieving the full integration of SGBA+ and the participation of underrepresented groups (also referred to as equity-deserving groups, as outlined in the federal [Dimensions Charter](#) – including women, visible minorities/racialized groups, Indigenous persons, individuals from the 2SLGBTQ2+ community, and persons with disabilities) in scientific research and careers. Evidence clearly shows that EDI in research environments enhances innovation and creativity, leads to new research questions, and engages and benefits new audiences. Brain Canada seeks to facilitate an equitable, diverse, and inclusive brain research environment where all groups have access, resources, and support.

We are committed to integrating SGBA+ and EDI approaches together to enable researchers to identify relevant interactions of sex, gender, and intersecting factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) in brain science and eliminate barriers experienced by underrepresented groups to participation in scientific research and careers. These measures will improve the quality of health research. This commitment will enhance our funding opportunities and peer-review procedures, as well as our own hiring processes and organizational policies.

As the Action Plan logic model in **Figure 1** illustrates, we are actively embedding SGBA+ and EDI into leadership and governance, human resources practices, organizational capacity, research and KM practices, and data management and communications. **Our goal is to align all of Brain Canada's strategic efforts towards full integration of these approaches to achieve improved brain health for all. In doing so, we will lead and facilitate the development of sex and gender brain science in Canada.**

Definitions

Sex and gender brain science refers to brain research that considers sex and gender related factors in its design, methods, and analyses. It contributes to understanding and filling evidence gaps on the biological and social factors affecting both sexes and all genders on the mechanisms and experiences linked to brain health and disease.

Sex and gender-based analysis plus (SGBA+) refers to the processes of using a lens to examine the impact of sex, gender, and a range of intersectional factors on funding programs, research projects, and organizational policies. Integrating this process into Brain Canada covers a wide range of areas of both internal and external activities.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) refers to policies and initiatives related to increasing diversity and inclusion of a wide range of people and groups and to improve outcomes for federally designated underrepresented groups (women, visible minorities, Indigenous peoples, individuals from the 2SLGBTQ2+ community, and persons with disabilities) in recruitment, engagement, and impact.

Background

Brain Canada is generating plans to integrate SGBA+ and EDI approaches into all its activities. Using these approaches will empower us to address issues related to equity and representation in brain research, contribute to funding current and new research areas with an SGBA+ and EDI lens, and inform our efforts to reach diverse audiences. To achieve this integration, Brain Canada is working with Galvanizing Equity,

a company that helps research organizations make progressive change by bringing evidence to practical strategies to advance equity.

Since 2018, Brain Canada has been developing both internal and external capacity on SGBA+ and EDI, and in 2021 we began to shape this Action Plan. Galvanizing Equity supported this effort by carrying out priority-setting processes and training with staff, Board engagement, data collection, external consultations, document review, policy revision, communications and website review and revision, and outcome identification. Internal capacity-building focused on internal organizational policies and capacity, communications, and training, and enhancing research programs and practices. To date, several of the actions included in this plan have been completed. We have included those actions here and used the timeframe of 2022-25 to provide a full picture of the goals we’re working towards.

At the core of all this work and the Action Plan is a widespread commitment championed by the leadership of Brain Canada to effectively embed SGBA+ and EDI in all that we do, and to enhance sex and gender brain science in Canada.

Approach

Figure 1 below illustrates the components of Brain Canada’s Action Plan and our broad-based commitment to embed SGBA+ and EDI in all that we do, and to advance sex and gender brain science. These components build upon Brain Canada’s core cultural values of fairness, positivity, collaboration, friendliness, flexibility, openness, cooperation, curiosity, dignity, respect, and innovation. They also intersect with Brain Canada’s existing strategic plan, KM plan, and evaluation plan. The action areas include **Research and KM Practices** (Who we fund, What we fund, and How we fund), **Organizational Capacity**, **HR Practices**, **Governance and Leadership**, and **Data, Reporting, and Communications**.

Brain Canada’s President & CEO is responsible for championing and leading all equity-related initiatives including the outputs of the plan, with strategic and operational support from across departments. Brain Canada’s plan aligns with efforts of the Canadian government to increase diversity among federally recognized underrepresented groups and to integrate SGBA+ across its activities.

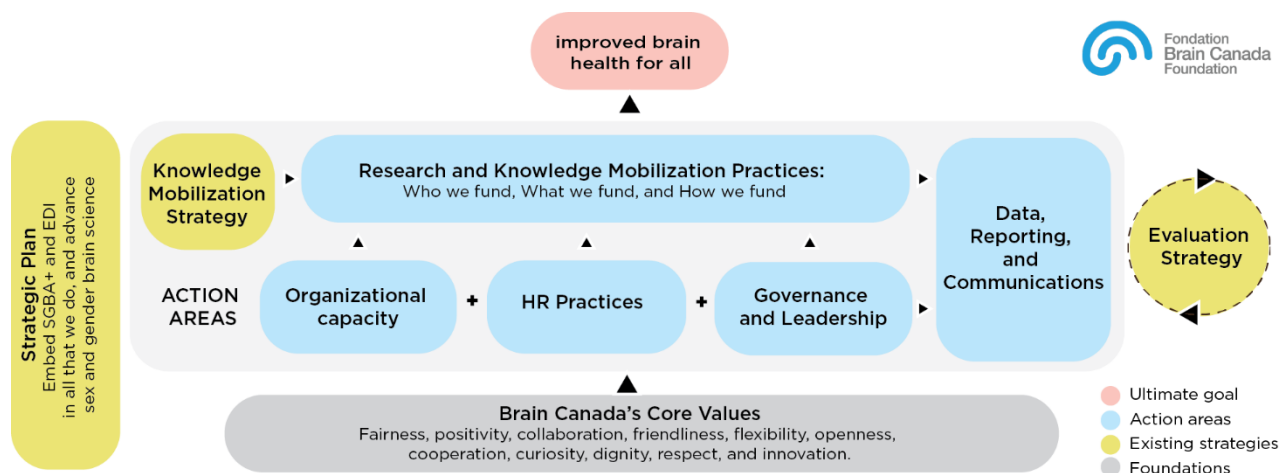


Figure 1: Action areas of Brain Canada’s SGBA+ and EDI Action Plan and interrelationships between existing organizational strategies and foundations, building improved brain health for all.

Goals and actions

Action areas and the responsible departments and goals for 2022-25 are presented in the tables below. Supplemental implementation and evaluation plans (under development) include additional details regarding activities, budgeting, and key performance indicators.

Action area 1a: Research Practices – Who we fund.

Department lead: Research and Programs, with support from Evaluation and Special Projects

Goals	Actions
1a.1: Attract a wide diversity of applicants to Brain Canada's programs, to support federal efforts to ensure that the number of individuals from underrepresented groups participating in the research ecosystem is more representative of the Canadian population	Identify barriers and opportunities to achieving a broader, more diverse representation of researchers and team members applying for and receiving funds, and develop strategies for pursuing those opportunities
	Conduct outreach activities to expand our funded research across all provinces and territories in Canada
	Explore opportunities to co-develop mentorship programs for underrepresented groups (e.g., diverse students, early-career researchers, high school girls, etc.)
1a.2: Apply SGBA+ and EDI principles in determining funding programs to be offered to targeted groups of diverse researchers	Form partnerships with funding organizations that share our SGBA+ and EDI goals to co-invest in targeted programs
	Offer partnered programs to support projects led by targeted groups of diverse researchers
	Increase engagement of young scientists (including trainees) and early-career researchers from targeted groups in Brain Canada-led programs and funded research

Action area 1b: Research Practices – What we fund

Department lead: Research and Programs, with support from Evaluation and Special Projects

Goals	Actions
1b.1: Enhance capacity among researchers for sex and gender brain science, SGBA+, and EDI	Identify gaps in resources and training for researchers on integrating sex and gender in research, SGBA+, knowledge mobilization (KM), and EDI-related considerations, and opportunities to fill those gaps
1b.2: Maintain and enhance requirements for SGBA+ and EDI considerations in funded research projects	Require funding applications to include an SGBA+ component and an EDI section, with evidence-informed rationales
	Refine equity-oriented requirements for KM in the funding application process across Brain Canada-led programs
	Identify opportunities to promote diverse team composition in funding applications across different programs
1b.3: Inspire and support researchers to advance sex and gender brain science	Encourage applicants to integrate sex and gender related variables, hypotheses, designs, analyses, and reporting into, or as an addendum to, their research, with evidence-informed rationales

	Identify gaps, barriers, strategies, and opportunities for Brain Canada to lead and facilitate advancement in sex and gender brain science, including the implementation of further changes to research infrastructure and KM processes, the development of new potential partnerships, and the design of new and refinement of existing research funding programs
1b.4: Develop SGBA+ and EDI related research programs	Establish research and KM programs informed by needs of stakeholders and/or members of underrepresented groups through engagement processes aligned with EDI principles

Action area 1c: Research Practices – How we fund

Department lead: Research and Programs

Goals	Actions
1c.1: Conduct stakeholder engagement activities to guide program development	Increase involvement of people with lived experiences in the design of research programs
	Partner with organizations that work closely with underrepresented groups to build relationships, and work together to co-design programs that address identified needs
	Continue to encourage reviewers to familiarize themselves with best practices in mitigating bias in the peer-review process
	Include SGBA+ and EDI components in the criteria for assessment used by reviewers to evaluate applications, where applicable
	Identify gaps in training for peer-reviewers on sex and gender brain science, SGBA+, and EDI, and opportunities to fill those gaps
	Increase and support involvement of stakeholders in the review process when relevant to the funding program
1c.3: Ensure that peer-reviewed journal articles and associated data arising from funded projects are freely accessible	Require Principal Investigators, as a condition of funding, to follow the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications

Action area 2: Organizational Capacity

Department lead: Human Resources, with all departments

Goals	Actions
2.1: Create an equitable, inclusive, and diverse organizational culture	Offer SGBA+ and EDI (including KM) related information and trainings to all employees and continuously evaluate the quality and usefulness of these resources across departments
	Ensure all employees complete SGBA+ and EDI-related courses on an annual basis

2.2: Enhance internal capacity for SGBA+ and EDI work	Engage internal champions and external experts (including people with lived experience) to create and offer presentations for staff, and develop a curated list of training resources
	Develop internal capacity to ensure communications and fundraising language and visuals, HR documents, and other organizational policies and practices are aligned with SGBA+ and EDI principles (in relevant languages)

Action area 3: Leadership and Governance

Department lead: Legal Affairs and Governance, with support from Evaluation and Special Projects

Goals	Actions
3.1: Make visible commitments to SGBA+ and EDI and related matters	Commit to adopting Dimensions charter principles throughout organizational practices and culture to achieve greater EDI
	Explore opportunities to make ongoing commitments to SGBA+ and EDI (e.g., SAGER guidelines , DORA , OCAP)
	Establish a policy regarding Indigenous land acknowledgments, including consultation with Indigenous organizations
3.2: Apply SGBA+ and EDI principles to governance processes, Board recruitment and membership	Update the skills matrix of the Board to include SGBA+ and EDI considerations and targets, and continue to engage Board members on SGBA+ and EDI topics
	Continue to pro-actively identify potential Board members from underrepresented groups, individuals that may benefit from the research (e.g., patients), members from all regions of Canada, and those with capacity in relevant areas of science, policy, and KM
	Revise the mandate of the Governance Committee (a committee that assists the Board on all matters relating to governance and leadership, as well as ensuring the highest ethical standards) to include Brain Canada’s SGBA+ and EDI and sex and gender brain science commitments
3.3: Identify SGBA+ and EDI staff champions within each department	Establish an SGBA+ and EDI committee with employees across departments to guide the implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the Action Plan

Action area 4: Human Resources Practices

Department lead: Human Resources

Goals	Actions
4.1: Enhance EDI within the organization through hiring practices	Promote candidate diversity by improving our recruitment processes (e.g., review and refine job descriptions, expand reach of job postings, etc.)
	Develop formal processes for mitigating bias throughout hiring activities, including the application review and interview stages
	Ensure equity among staff through fair and transparent HR practices

4.2: Strengthen EDI within the organization through retention and development practices	Promote an equitable and inclusive workplace through policies that ensure staff feel protected against discrimination, welcomed, and supported
4.3: Hire new staff to help advance SGBA+ and EDI goals	Acquire staff expertise in stakeholder engagement and in working with a range of underrepresented groups

Action area 5: Data, Reporting, and Communications

Department lead: Communications and Marketing, Evaluation and Special Projects

Goals	Actions
5.1: Communicate efforts to promote SGBA+ and EDI, and advance sex and gender brain science	Review and refine communication channels and mechanisms, as needed, to enhance reach and engagement with funded researchers and potential applicants across disciplines, as well as diverse members of the brain research community
	Promote funded research advancing SGBA+, EDI, and sex and gender brain science widely via external communication channels to inspire further research, demonstrate impact, and mobilize knowledge
	Share perspectives of people with lived experience in external communications and engage in public events
	Communicate Action Plan commitment and progress regularly through internal and external communication channels
5.2: Create an evaluation strategy for the Action Plan, including SGBA+ and EDI data collection and continuous improvement within Brain Canada	Integrate SGBA+ and EDI Action Plan indicators into the organizational evaluation strategy and establish processes for critical review, assessment, and data analysis
	Enhance and standardize approach to gathering EDI data from funding applicants and reviewers across Brain Canada-led programs, and staff and Board members
	Review and enhance measurement approaches and practices to improve inclusivity and ultimately health equity

Evaluation and continuous improvement

Brain Canada’s Action Plan is an evolving document that will be updated and re-visioned regularly by staff and Board members with the goal of continuous quality improvement. One of the goals outlined in the Action Plan is to integrate SGBA+ and EDI into our organizational evaluation strategy and establish formal processes for data analysis, critical review and assessment by Management and Governance Committees. The mandates of these committees will be updated to include the task of overseeing progress on this Action Plan on a regular basis.