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Bell
Let's Talk

Bell Let's Talk – Brain Canada Mental Health Research Program

2021 Request for Applications (RFA)

About Bell Let's Talk

Bell Let's Talk promotes awareness and action with a strategy built on 4 key pillars: Fighting the stigma, improving access to care, supporting world-class research and leading by example in workplace mental health. Since its launch in September 2010, Bell Let's Talk has partnered with more than 1,100 organizations providing mental health services throughout Canada, including hospitals, universities and other care and research organizations. To learn more, please visit Bell.ca/LetsTalk.

Research holds the greatest promise to better understand treatments and solutions. Bell is investing in best-in-class research programs with the potential to have a transformative impact on the mental health and well-being of Canadians.

About Brain Canada

Brain Canada is a national registered charity that enables and supports excellent, innovative, paradigm-changing brain research in Canada. For two decades, Brain Canada has made the case for the brain as a single, complex system with commonalities across the range of neurological disorders, mental illnesses and addictions, and brain and spinal cord injuries. Looking at the brain as one system has underscored the need for increased collaboration across disciplines and institutions, and to ensure that Canada has a robust pipeline of talent to remain at the forefront in the field of brain research. This will lead to a smarter way to invest in brain research that is focused on outcomes that will benefit patients and families. Brain Canada's vision is to understand the brain, in health and illness, to improve lives, and achieve societal impact.

The Canada Brain Research Fund is an innovative partnership between the Government of Canada, (through Health Canada) and Brain Canada, designed to encourage Canadians to increase their support of brain research, and maximize the impact and efficiency of those investments. The Fund supports the very best Canadian neuroscience, fostering collaborative research and accelerating the pace of discovery, in order to improve the health and quality of life of Canadians who suffer from brain disorders. Over the past 20 years, Brain Canada and its donors and partners have invested \$250 million in more than 300 research projects across the country.

www.braincanada.ca

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Rationale

In any given year, one in five Canadians will experience a mental health issue or illness, with an estimated 1.6 million reporting that their needs for mental health care are not fully met. While some individuals benefit greatly, the reality is that for many living with a mental health issue or illness, the options that are currently available yield modest benefits that are suboptimal. Providing care that is both accessible and meets the diverse needs of individuals is key.

The current COVID-19 pandemic comes at a point in time that coincides with an important juncture in efforts to advance the mental health field - a juncture that is characterized by the shift from raising awareness to action and new solutions. The **Bell Let's Talk-Brain Canada Mental Health Research Program** speaks directly to this juncture by creating an opportunity for diverse research teams to mobilize, with the goal of developing new and emerging directions and solutions for mental health challenges.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for enhanced mental health research and care initiatives: more than 60% of Canadians who struggle with a mental illness, and 40% of all Canadians, say their health has declined since the onset of COVID-19. The time to act is now to meet the rising demand. In parallel with increasing access to existing mental health care, we must enhance the current system of available resources, services, and treatment options. To make advances in this space, we must utilize new and emerging knowledge and find ways to implement it to achieve meaningful and optimal outcomes now. Current advances in evidence-based knowledge hold the key to creating new directions for improving mental health care and contribute towards advancing efforts to recognize and respond to the diverse mental health needs of Canadians.

Scope

The Bell Let's Talk-Brain Canada Mental Health Research Program aims to support novel and transformative research that will accelerate the integration of emerging scientific knowledge into developing and/or improving mental health care, including substance use and addiction. The ultimate goal is the development of innovative solutions to ensure effective, sustainable, and accessible mental health care for all Canadians. Research projects must include a well-defined Knowledge Translation plan integrated throughout the entire granting period. Knowledge users and stakeholders should be engaged at each stage of the research process to ensure meaningful outcomes are achieved, and the impact of the research reaches beyond the grant itself.

Grant Details

The Bell Let's Talk-Brain Canada Mental Health Research Program has an overall funding envelope of \$3.8M to support four team grants of \$950,000 each, over three years. Grants are non-renewable.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Evidence clearly shows that increasing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research environments enhances excellence, innovation and creativity. Brain Canada and Bell Let's Talk are committed to excellence through equity and encourage applicants of diverse backgrounds to apply to our funding opportunities.

Eligibility

The funding opportunity is open to teams of two or more independent investigators from different institutions, or distinct research groups within the same institution. Teams must include at least one

member with expertise in integrated Knowledge Translation. Depending on the nature of the research project, teams should include one or more of the following as collaborators: People with Lived Experience (PWLE), carers, allied-health workers, and/or health administrators.

- Investigators must be conducting research at, and affiliated with, a Canadian institution for the entire duration of the grant. Academic appointments must have started by the deadline for Full Application submission.
- Investigators must be considered an independent researcher at their institution. Such an individual normally holds the rank of assistant, associate, or full professor; can initiate and direct their own independent lines of research as principal investigator; has full responsibility for running their laboratories; has full control of their research funds; and is permitted to supervise trainees (if applicable, as per their institution's policy). Postdoctoral fellows or adjunct faculty are not eligible to apply.
- Research applications may be related but cannot be identical to any other currently funded projects. It is the responsibility of the applicant to notify Brain Canada immediately should substantial overlap arise from new funding awarded during the application and review process of this competition.

Use of Funds

The funds must contribute towards the direct costs of the research project for which they were awarded and should be directly attributable to the project or activity being performed. Funds cannot flow outside of Canada.

Eligible Costs

These funds may be used to support any aspect of the operating costs of the research project, including:

- Salaries for technical personnel;
- Stipends of trainees;
- Maintenance of essential equipment; purchase of equipment that is currently unavailable but essential for the project;
- Supplies and materials;
- Provision of special services and user fees, payments to study participants;
- Travel of principal investigator, team members, and trainees for collaboration and presentation of results;
- Publication fees. Brain Canada does not support secret or classified research. Results must be publishable in open and public literature at the earliest opportunity. Applicants are encouraged to include article processing charges in order for their article to be published open access.

If funds are required for the procurement of goods and services from a telecommunications service provider, please note that no more than ten percent of the project funds can be allocated to these expenses. Indirect or overhead costs are not considered eligible expenses.

Ineligible Costs

- Salaries and consulting fees of any investigator or researcher holding an academic appointment;
- As this grant is to be used for the specific project that is proposed, the purchase of general office and lab equipment are considered as ineligible expenses;
- Indirect costs or overhead costs associated with managing the research project.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and Brain Canada must be consulted on expenses that are not listed here, so that any partners involved can determine the eligibility of other categories of expenditure.

Criteria for Assessment

There will be equal weighting of the following criteria:

Innovation and Originality

Quality of the project which, while solidly based in scientific principles and technically feasible, offers new concepts, with the potential to change the paradigms of the field, open the field to new experimental directions, or address a critical barrier to improving treatments, and progress in our approach to mental health care.

Feasibility

The degree to which the project can be successfully executed using the proposed methodology within the timeframe, budget, and resources available. Appropriate background and justification for the proposed research should be provided through literature citations and data from other sources. The team's potential to successfully complete the project based on their expertise and track record will also be considered.

Potential for Impact

The degree to which the proposed research has the potential to reduce the social and/or economic burden of mental health problems through improved prevention, intervention, diagnosis, and treatment. While accounting for sex as a biological variable is important for transparency and reproducibility, incorporating considerations for sex, gender, and diversity into study design additionally broadens the potential impact of the work to expand knowledge and turn discovery into health.

Knowledge Translation

The degree to which the Knowledge Translation plan and strategies are clearly defined and integrated throughout the three-year grant to ensure engagement with key stakeholders. The research proposal describes how the knowledge generated will be acted on, identifies potential barriers and facilitators to uptake, and will have a meaningful, tangible impact on mental health care within the project timeframe and in the long term.

Timeline

Launch of Request for Applications	February 2, 2021
Deadline for Letter of Intent	March 16, 2021, 16:00 EDT
Invitation to Full Application	May 10-14, 2021
Deadline for Receipt of Full Applications	July 6, 2021, 16:00 EDT
Notification of Decision	October 2021
Funding Begins (earliest date)	December 1, 2021

How to Apply

The Letter of Intent (LOI) and Full Application (FA) must be submitted using Brain Canada's electronic grant management system – SmartSimple (https://braincanada.smartsimple.ca/s_Login.jsp) by the

deadlines outlined above. **Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent.** It is the sole responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure the submission adheres to the requirements and is received before the deadline. Applications received in any other format, exceeding the word/page limits, incomplete, or late, will be rejected. **There will be no appeal to late submissions.**

Letter of Intent Components

Applicant Information

Brain Canada strongly believes that excellence, innovation, and creativity in Canadian brain research can only be achieved by striving for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in its research environments. We encourage researchers of diverse backgrounds to apply and to be involved in all aspects of our funding opportunities. We are thus implementing a demographic survey to evaluate the progress of our programs in fostering EDI.

The information collected will not be shared in an identifiable form with the public, external stakeholders (e.g. Health Canada, funding partners), or reviewers, and will have no impact on the evaluation of submitted grant applications. Survey responses are completely anonymized and aggregated to ensure protection of the identity of any individual. Please see Brain Canada's [Privacy Policy](#).

Project Summary

- Project title.
- Keywords (including freeform): up to 10 words.
- A summary of the research project and its goals, emphasizing the innovative and original features. Applicants must also explain the feasibility of the project within the timeframe and funding available (maximum 500 words).
- A description of the anticipated outcomes, outlining the tangible and measurable results to be achieved within the allowed timeframe. An overview of the integrated Knowledge Translation plan must be included (maximum 500 words).
- A description of the impact of the proposed research on the current system of available resources, services, and treatment options in mental health care (maximum 300 words).
- Figures and references (maximum 1 page).

Project Team Details

- Describe the role that each team member will play in the proposed project, providing concrete examples that illustrate their relevant experience, expertise, and ability to contribute to the proposed research project (maximum 500 words).

Budget

- Using the budget template provided, a budget for the full period of funding is required, listing the major categories as described under *Eligible Costs*, above.
- Written budget justification describing the proposed costs in each of the major categories (maximum 300 words). Provide sufficient information to allow reviewers to assess the appropriateness of the cost allocation.

Certification and Signature

The principal investigator must certify that all members of the team have agreed to their inclusion in the application and allow them to represent the team throughout the application process. Please note that institutional signatures are not required at the LOI stage.

Full Application Components

The Full Application will need to be formatted using 12-point Arial or Georgia font, single-spaced, on a letter-size page with 1" minimum margins. The font size for figures and legends must be a minimum of 10 points. Use of a condensed font and spacing is not permitted.

Project Summary

- Project title.
- Project start and end dates (within a 36-month window).
- Keywords (including freeform): up to 10 keywords.
- A summary of the research project.
- Changes from the Letter of Intent, if applicable. Briefly describe any changes to the application and indicate if these changes are as a result of feedback from the LOI reviewers' comments (maximum 300 words). Please note that significant changes to the scope and goals of the project as outlined in the LOI are not permitted at the Full Application stage.

Lay Summary

- Suitable for publication and understandable by non-scientists (maximum 300 words).

Proposal (maximum 15 pages, including figures and legends)

Proposals should include the following information, structured to best address the criteria for assessment outlined above:

1. The overall objectives to be achieved by the end of the funding period.
2. The rationale for undertaking the study, including:
 - A clear statement of the original and innovative features of the project;
 - An overview of previous results obtained by team members and others that support the rationale for the project;
 - Any preliminary data that demonstrates that a full-scale project is feasible and ready to be implemented within the three-year grant.
3. The work plan, including:
 - The approaches, methods, and techniques that will be used;
 - Timeline and Anticipated Milestones (template will be provided): key intermediate stages in achieving the final objectives, and the projected timeframe for their achievement;
 - Potential pitfalls or obstacles, and how they will be overcome;
 - Methods of data analysis, including statistical methods and calculations to show that the study will be adequately powered, if applicable.
4. The expected outputs from the study, and how the findings will be disseminated:
 - Plans for making the data and knowledge generated throughout the project available to other stakeholders;
 - Expected impact of the knowledge generated;
 - How will the outcomes from the study have the potential to improve health and quality of life, and have practical impacts, including changes to professional practice, services, products, and public policy?

Sex, Gender, and Diversity Considerations (maximum 2 pages)

Understanding sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnic and socioeconomic status, and/or other relevant factors as determinants of health, and how they interact with other determinants can help to ensure that research projects lead to better outcomes and are beneficial for all people living in Canada.

Applicants are encouraged to consult the CIHR [Online Training Modules for Integrating Sex & Gender in Health Research](#). Please provide a description to each enquiry below:

- Are sex (biological) considerations taken into account in this study? Please describe how sex will be addressed in your research project. If you answered no, please describe why sex is not applicable to your research project.
- Are gender (sociocultural) considerations taken into account in this study? Please describe how gender will be addressed in your research project. If you answered no, please describe why gender is not applicable to your research project.
- Please describe any targeted research including diverse populations, such as that based on gender, age, Indigenous identity, visible minority identity, or disability.

Team Member Details

CVs of the Principal Investigator and Team Members

- The CV should be four pages or less in length and should be submitted in standard NIH biosketch format (template will be provided). The Personal Statement should describe why the individual is well suited for their role in this project.
- Any publications listed should include the DOI, URL or PMID, where applicable, so reviewers can access them.

Letters of Support - Collaborators

- Letters should describe the collaborator's role in the proposed project (one page per letter, maximum five letters).

Budget

A yearly budget must be provided, using the template provided, along with a written budget justification describing the proposed costs in each of the major categories (maximum 1 page). Provide sufficient information to allow reviewers to assess the appropriateness of the cost allocation.

Certification and Signatures

- Signature of the principal investigator is mandatory for the application to be considered complete.
- Institutional Signature: Signature of the responsible official of the institution where the principal investigator will conduct the research is required.
- All signatures must be submitted along with the application by the deadline for Full Application.

Confidentiality and Ownership

Brain Canada Foundation will keep all materials submitted for this funding opportunity confidential and only share them with reviewers, Review Panel members, and observers who have signed confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements. Funded applications will be retained for comparison of intended and actual outcomes, as part of the evaluation of the Canada Brain Research Fund. Brain Canada does not claim ownership of intellectual property (IP) arising from the research they fund, and expects that any IP arising from this funding is developed and commercialized according to the policies of the research institutions in which the research is performed.

Review Process

Brain Canada will manage the review process. The Peer Review Panel will be composed of Canadian and international members, selected by Brain Canada, with expertise in the field of mental health and/or substance use and addiction. Brain Canada will take into account conflicts of interest and other relevant

considerations to ensure a balanced panel. Brain Canada will not entertain appeals against the assessment of the Peer Review Panels at either stage of the competition.

Letter of Intent

Letters of Intent submitted by the deadline to apply will be verified by Brain Canada to ensure eligibility criteria are met. Eligible LOIs will be reviewed by at least two reviewers, and the top-ranked applications will be invited to submit a Full Application. All LOI applicants will receive anonymized reviewers' comments.

Full Application

Only those invited by Brain Canada following the LOI review are eligible to submit a Full Application. Applications submitted by the deadline will be reviewed by at least two reviewers. Applications may be reviewed by an external reviewer, if needed, depending on the nature of the research.

Based on the reviewer scores, the Peer Review Panel will discuss the top applications via virtual meetings. The Panel will recommend to Brain Canada and Bell Let's Talk the applications that have received a high merit score. Applicants will receive anonymized written comments from the Reviewers. Applicants whose applications were discussed at the Peer Review Panel meeting will additionally receive Scientific Officer notes from the proceedings.

Communications

Recipients of the Bell Let's Talk-Brain Canada Mental Health Research Program grants must make every effort to attend events organized by Bell Let's Talk and Brain Canada, and present their projects, if applicable, to demonstrate the implications and importance of their research for moving the field of mental health forward.

Contact Information

For more information, or if you have any questions regarding the application process, please contact mentalhealthgrants@braincanada.ca.