

THE HISTORY OF RESEARCH MANITOBA



Research
Manitoba

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On June 19, 2014 the Manitoba government established Research Manitoba as a way to bring major provincial research funding programs together under one umbrella, making more focused and effective use of research dollars and building on the province's strengths and strategic priorities. The programs that were brought together include:

- Manitoba Health Research Council (MHRC)
- Manitoba Research and Innovation Fund (MRIF)
- Health Research Initiative (HRI)
- Manitoba Centres of Excellence Fund (MCEF)

Research Manitoba received \$17 million in funding in 2014-15.

Research Manitoba is mandated to promote and support and coordinate the funding of, research in the health, natural and social sciences, engineering and the humanities in Manitoba. According to the mandate the organization may financially assist research in Manitoba; publish and distribute scientific, technical and economic information relating to the work of Research Manitoba; and advise and make recommendations to the minister on matters related to the mandated areas of research.

Research Manitoba was built on the staff and board structure of the MHRC. Funding excellence in research was a high priority for the MHRC and the organization was able to do this because of its sound peer review process; this core program practice will be adopted by Research Manitoba and applied to all of the funding programs to ensure that the tradition of funding excellence continues.

The history of Research Manitoba has only just begun, but its roots come from the MHRC and that began in early 1980. Dr. Arnold Naimark, Dr. Henry Friesen and Dr. Lyonel Israels met with the Provincial Minister of Health, Bud Sherman and his Acting Deputy Minister, Dr. George Johnson, to express concern about the absence of provincial funding to support and recruit young investigators to Manitoba the ability to retain established scientists. Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta all had established provincial funding to support health research, which placed Manitoba in a less competitive and disadvantaged position.

Indeed a positive response was received in late November 1980 when the Minister provided \$300,000 of unexpended residual funds within the health budget to Council, with the proviso that the allocation of these monies be completed by April 1, 1981. Dr. Israels was asked to serve as chairperson with the appointment of other members to follow. On December 22, 1980, the first meeting of Council was held and the interim terms of reference, as approved by Cabinet, were set forth. The guidelines contained the seminal statement that the role of Council will be "to promote and assist basic, clinical and applied research in the health sciences in Manitoba and advise the Minister on health research related matters."

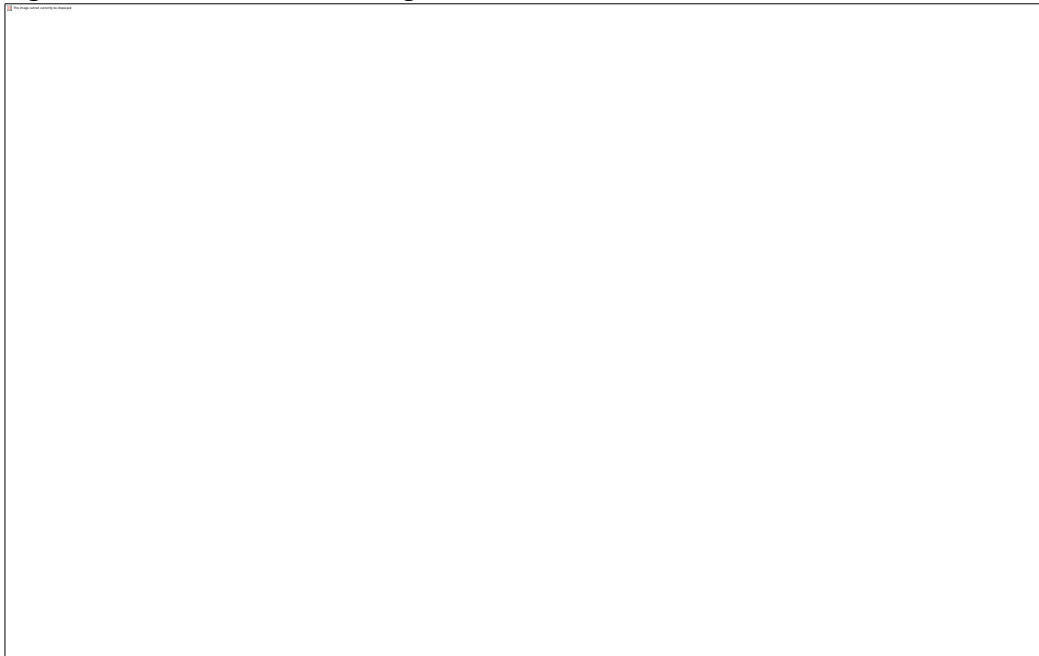
The major responsibility for assembling and chairing the first Scientific Review Committee was assumed by Dr. Henry Friesen. Council received 105 applications with a total request of \$2.2 million. Council, operating within the allocated budget, funded 4 personnel awards and 15 operating grants covering a broad spectrum in medicine, dentistry, nursing, psychology and

engineering.

Early in the life of the Council, the need for a firm commitment to funding was addressed. Representation was made to the Government with the proposal that 0.4% of the total health care budget would be provide an appropriate level of research funding for Manitoba and suggesting that this goal be achieved within a four to five year period. Although Council considered this to be a reasonable objective – it would amount to \$19.7 million today for health research alone – it has yet to be realized.

Initially, the Department of Health provided the entire funding allocated to MHRC. For a time however, a part of the grant to MHRC came from revenues provided by “break-open tickets” sold in hotel beverages rooms. Originally this source of funding was the Provincial contribution to the St. Boniface General Hospital Research Foundation’s Research Centre. When the revenue from this source surpassed the amount designated for the St. Boniface Research Centre, the surplus was divided between MHRC and either the Health Sciences Centre Foundation or the Childrens’ Hospital Research Foundation. Shortly after being designated for a portion of the revenue, the sale of tickets fell sharply so Council argued successfully that it should receive a share of general lottery revenues. In 1990, lottery revenues were merged with general Government revenues and MHRC returned to being funded exclusively by a grant from the Department of Health until 2002, when responsibility for MHRC was transferred to the Department of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines. Figure One describes the funding history of the MHRC.

Figure One: MHRC Annual Budget 1981 – 2014



In 2005, the Government requested that MHRC develop a provincial health research strategy. After community consultations, the Envisioning the Future Strategy was presented to government with the following identified as strategic actions:

1. Establish the MHRC as a coordinating body for a comprehensive and inclusive health research agenda that leads to improved health and increased economic opportunities for the Province of Manitoba

2. Identify, develop, recruit and retain the best researchers and provide sustained support to facilitate their growth
3. Facilitate networks, linkages and communication throughout the Manitoba health research enterprise and beyond
4. Move research evidence to practice

As a result of the strategy, MHRC received an increase in funding to \$6 million annually, which was the level of funding that the organization received up until June 19, 2014 when Research Manitoba was established and the funds were merged.

A new strategic plan will be created in 2015 with stakeholders to reflect the new mandate.