



CanCOVID

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW CANADA-WIDE NETWORK

TO FACILITATE COVID-19 RESEARCH COLLABORATION

Health, science, and policy researchers mobilize to support Canadians during COVID-19 crisis

[April 10, 2020] -- Experts from Canada's scientific, policy, and health communities have mobilized to launch CanCOVID, a rapid-response network for facilitating the nation's COVID-19 research effort. CanCOVID was mandated by Canada's Chief Science Advisor, Dr. Mona Nemer, to expedite communication and collaboration between the scientific, healthcare and policy communities during the COVID-19 crisis. "From virus detection to disease management, science has helped us fight COVID-19 every step of the way, and science will help us prevail," said Dr. Nemer.

While CanCOVID was initiated by the Office of the Chief Science Advisor of Canada and is closely tied to federally-funded COVID-19 efforts, it has room to self-organize so that it can respond to rapidly evolving regional and local research needs. "The scale of the COVID-19 challenge demands agile, transdisciplinary leadership," said Health Canada Science Advisor Dr. Cara Tannenbaum, who was appointed by Nemer to help lead the CanCOVID implementation

effort. “We need information flowing from the top down, from the bottom up, and laterally from coast to coast. If ever the science community was going to step up for the government and achieve something of significance for Canadians, this is the moment.”

Leveraging technology for real world learning in real time

CanCOVID is linking up Canada’s research network using Slack, an online messaging platform that organizes real-time group discussion into team-specific and topic-specific channels. Using the Slack platform, CanCOVID members can collaborate across critical research and development areas, from clinical trials and testing, to diagnostics and treatment. They can also easily connect with others in their regional or local networks, and with clinicians on the frontlines. Ultimately CanCOVID’s mission is to enable the agile, evidence-based decision-making needed to help steer Canada safely through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“CanCOVID has the potential to avoid research waste by preventing duplication of effort and ensuring that decision makers can get the best available information when they need it,” said Dr. Sharon Straus, Director of the Knowledge Translation Program at St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, and also a member of the CanCOVID network. “These are critical issues in this evolving pandemic.”

The urgency and grave reality of the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged researchers across the globe to rapidly accelerate the pace of science, while at the same time practicing physical distancing. Given how quickly the COVID-19 research knowledge-base is evolving, researchers may not realize that someone else in another city -- maybe with a different set of skills -- already has half the solution to their problem. Or that they have already tried a similar approach and had unanticipated consequences. CanCOVID will make it easier for researchers who are working on

different angles of the same problem to find each other, share what they know, vet research results, and anticipate challenges. “I’m looking forward to connecting with government agencies and also with colleagues from across Canada,” said University Health Network Scientist Beate Sander, who joined the network during its preliminary launch on April 1, 2020. “I am especially excited about CanCOVID bringing together scientists from basic science to the social sciences, with the potential to address key policy questions in interdisciplinary teams.”

One example of how CanCOVID is facilitating interdisciplinary approaches is in the indigenous-themed channel, moderated by Carrie Bourassa, Scientific Director of the Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Already, researchers linked to Indigenous communities in the North, specifically Yellowknife, Behchoko and Fort Smith, are discussing their drive-through COVID-19 testing initiatives, and Morning Star lodge has been sharing resources relevant to Indigenous communities including culturally safe Fact Sheets, Videos, and a resource packet entitled '19 ways to a healthy home fire'. As of this morning, over 1000 researchers have joined the CanCOVID network, from Nova Scotia and Ontario, to BC and the Northwest Territories.

“As Canada’s research community mobilizes in response to COVID-19, CanCOVID will play an important role in bringing our nation’s best minds to bear on this challenge” said Dr. Gilles Patry, Executive Director of the U15 Group of Canadian Universities. U15 is one of the many organizations working behind the scenes to facilitate the CanCOVID response, alongside Canada’s Departmental Science Advisor Network, stakeholders from the federal and provincial governments, funding agencies, industry, academia from across Canada, non-profit, indigenous communities, hospitals, and clinics.

Rapid redeployment

While those who are working on the COVID-19 front lines have found themselves working around the clock to steer financial resources, equipment and supplies, information, and expertise to the people who need it most, the unexpected COVID-19 shutdown has left many scientists from other sectors locked out of their labs.

Given the imperative to get the CanCOVID platform functional as quickly as possible, researchers from other sectors are lending their leadership and skills to the CanCOVID response. Among them are Canadian Space Agency (CSA) Science Advisor Dr. Sarah Gallagher, Compute Ontario Board Chair Dr. Mark Daley, and University of Toronto Vice-President of International Partnerships and Scientific Director of the AGE-WELL NCE Dr. Alex Mihailidis, all of whom are leading the CanCOVID implementation effort.

“We need to have people outside healthcare working on this effort. Healthcare professionals and health researchers are at the centre of COVID-19 activity and can’t answer all the calls,” said Dr. Gallagher. “This has been a team effort, with a core group of people working very hard to make things happen quickly. We went from a recognized need to launching the platform in under two weeks. We came together because something needed to be done, and we got the support from our universities and federal agencies to focus on this effort.”

How to Join the CanCOVID Network

The CanCOVID network is by invitation, and is restricted to verified members of the COVID-19 expert research and response community. This includes, for example, researchers with recognized expertise in:

- Diagnostics
- Vaccines & Therapeutics
- Modelling
- Fundamental Science
- Clinical trials
- Cohort studies
- Social & behavioural sciences
- Healthcare
- Policy decision-making
- Indigenous knowledge
- Medical devices
- Patient perspectives
- Community health

To be considered a recognized expert, you must have professional affiliation with a university, hospital, clinic, government office, non-profit association or business. All prospective members will be vetted to ensure that they are legitimate members of the research and response effort. This will include verifying email addresses and professional affiliations.

Post Doctoral and PhD Trainees will qualify for membership ONLY if serving as representatives for faculty supervisors who are actively researching COVID-19, or if they can demonstrate substantial prior research experience on COVID-relevant topics.

Members of industry who are working directly on the COVID-19 crisis are welcome to join, but may be restricted to certain channels. Marketing or business promotion efforts, including efforts to raise capital, are inconsistent with the spirit of CanCOVID and are forbidden.

Researchers who meet the above criteria can register at cancovid.ca. Please do not register if you do not meet the above criteria. Limiting membership in this way will enable COVID-19 researchers to focus on critical research without distraction. It will also enable the platform administrators to focus their efforts on supporting core platform activities.

Timeline	
Saturday March 21, 2020	Chief Science Advisor Dr. Mona Nemer officially mandates the creation of the CanCOVID network. Departmental Science Advisors Dr. Cara Tannenbaum (Health Canada) and Dr. Sarah Gallagher (Canadian Space Agency) are assigned to lead the implementation team.
Monday March 23, 2020	Drs. Tannenbaum and Gallagher convene a meeting with the U15 Group of Canadian Universities to develop an action plan. Drs. Mark Daley (Chair of the Board of Directors, Compute Ontario) and Alex Mihailidis (Associate Vice-President International Partnerships, University of Toronto) join the CanCOVID implementation team.
Wednesday April 1, 2020	The CanCOVID platform and cancovid.ca website soft launch.
Friday April 3, 2020	556 active members
Monday	First Governing Council Meeting

April 6, 2020	718 active members
Tuesday April 7, 2020	811 active members
Thursday April 9, 2020	Over 1000 active members

ABOUT CanCOVID

CanCOVID is an expert network of Canadian COVID-19 researchers, clinical collaborators, and healthcare stakeholders from across the country. Canada’s Chief Science Officer mandated the creation of CanCOVID to optimize Canada’s research response to the COVID-19 public health crisis. CanCOVID was created to link up the many critical research efforts that are taking place across the country, and internationally. CanCOVID is designed to support collaboration, coordination and communication between scientists, clinical collaborators, funding agencies, government policy makers, and healthcare practitioners. For more information, visit the CanCOVID website <https://cancovid.ca/> or follow us on Twitter @CanCOVID <http://twitter.com/CanCovid>.