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CHRIMCY: A proposed institute for research on reproduction, development, and mother, child and youth health

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The establishment of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is one of the most significant and far-sighted plans to address the health of Canadians. The success of the CIHR will be determined by the degree to which Canada is able to provide focus and the resources to tackle the critical health issues affecting Canadians.

The health of mothers, children and youth is of central importance for all Canadians. Women of childbearing age (5.6 million people), and children and youth (eight million) comprised 45% of the population in 1998 and used a significant portion of Canadian health care resources. The ability to reproduce, to support a safe and healthy pregnancy with normal fetal development and birth, and to allow children and youth to grow and develop normally, free from neglect, disease and pain, are the fundamental goals of Canadian society.

Critical health issues affecting the periods of preconception, pregnancy, fetal and newborn development, and growth and development throughout childhood and adolescence are naturally linked to each other through their interdependence and through existing organizations within the Canadian research community. The creation of a Canadian research institute concerned with the health of mothers, children and youth would provide an oppor-

tunity to focus and to build on existing national and international strengths. For this proposed institute, the working name, The Canadian Health Research Institute for Mother, Child and Youth (CHRIMCY) has been adopted. The proposed primary goals of CHRIMCY are to initiate, support and disseminate excellence in peer-reviewed research encompassing the critical stages of life, including preconception, pregnancy, fetal and newborn development, and growth and development throughout childhood and adolescence. These primary goals define the nature of research that would be supported by the proposed institute, and clearly distinguish this institute from others that may form within the CIHR. Research would be conducted in the fields of basic biomedical science, clinical and applied health, health services and health care systems, and population health, with a particular focus on the determinants of health.

WHY A RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR MOTHERS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

The proposed main objective of CHRIMCY is to reinforce individual investigator initiatives by aiding in the formation of networks of research teams that would cross disciplines, institutions, regions and the country. This in-

TABLE 1: Canadian Health Research Institute for Mother, Child and Youth (CHRIMCY) partners and potential partners

- Assembly of Canadian University Paediatric Department Heads
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
- Canadian Paediatric Society
- Hospital-based maternal, child and youth research institutes across the country
- Health Protection Branch, Health Canada
 - Bureau of Reproductive & Child Health
 - Child Maltreatment Division
 - Therapeutic Products Program
- Childhood and Youth Division, Health Promotion and Programs Branch, Health Canada
- Canadian Institute of Child Health
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Child & Youth Injury Prevention Centre, “Plan-it Safe”
- Association of Professors of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Canada
- Canadian Association of Pediatric Hospitals
- Canadian Perinatal Programs Partnership
- Canadian Academy of Child Psychiatry
- Sutton Group (children’s hospital foundations)
- College of Family Physicians of Canada
- Rx & D – Canada’s Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies (formerly Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of Canada)
- Canadian Association of University Schools of Nursing
- Fonds de la recherche en santé du Québec
- Conseil québécois de la recherche sociale
- Réseau québécois de recherche sur le développement de l’enfant
- Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l’aide à la recherche

cludes providing mechanisms for researchers to work across the institutes of the CIHR. CHRIMCY would have the unique mandate and framework to identify research themes and to harness research expertise across the country, and to focus on priority issues affecting the health of mothers, children and youth.

By fostering networks across Canada and by promoting the creation of pools of biological samples and data, CHRIMCY will be key in addressing the lack of critical mass, in terms of size and diversity of patient cohorts, that often plague epidemiological and clinical trials in these population groups. This, in turn, will make individual investigators and their networks more attractive to funding from private foundations, and provincial, national and international funding agencies, and for partnerships with industry. By providing a national framework for setting priorities and for identifying and focusing resources and energies that can be applied to

those issues, CHRIMCY will also help eliminate unnecessary duplication of research infrastructure, freeing additional funds to support a greater depth and breadth of studies.

BUILDING ON STRENGTH

The maternal-child health research mission in Canada currently involved over 30 research themes within six major axes. In 1998, these efforts represented over 700 investigators and over \$125 million in internal and external research support. This extensive infrastructure constitutes a core of existing strength for the development of an institute for “mothers, children and youth” within the CIHR.

The presence of national professional bodies linked to university departments that have a clear mandate to support the development of their fields through the acquisition and application of new knowledge has been a critical component of the developmental phase of CHRIMCY. The active involvement of the many researchers, partners and potential partners who have come together during this development phase of CHRIMCY demonstrates the importance that is being placed on the CIHR initiative. While not yet representing all the disciplines potentially involved in the area of maternal, child and youth research, the identified organizations (Table 1) comprise thousands of dedicated professionals in the field of maternal, child and youth health.

These organizations are currently working to integrate and disseminate information to consumers, to provide quality information based on evidence and to stimulate the identification of new issues of concern to Canadians. In January 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) launched the Center for Child Health Research, which has much in common with the stated mission goals of CHRIMCY, and which may be an important international partner.

The commitment of the federal government to address the health of children and youth, as mentioned in the recent Throne Speech, is important to the success of this proposed institute. The proposed institute would work in partnership with the government to support this commitment with new knowledge and new methods for ensuring the dissemination and application of the new knowledge.

CHRIMCY WEBSITE

The Internet is an outstanding tool for communication and will be used extensively in the process of establishing CHRIMCY. The CHRIMCY website www.chrimcy.org is under active construction, so please visit it frequently.

For further information, please contact Drs Harvey Guyda (harvey.guyda@muhc.mcgill.ca) and Robert Armstrong (barmstrong@cw.bc.ca), co-chairs of the CHRIMCY Coordinating Committee, or Ms Elaine Orrbine, CHRIMCY facilitator (eorrbine@cyctn.on.ca).