

Training and Early Career Development Program

Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship Program Guide

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Background

Over the past two decades countries have come to recognize innovation as central to economic sustainability and growth, leading to an increased focus on Highly Skilled People. These individuals — who have advanced degrees in fields such as science, engineering, medicine, finance and economics—are an essential component of knowledge creation and innovation. Alberta Innovates (AI) is providing opportunities to foster the development of future health research and innovation leaders, and prepare them to be drivers of change in diverse settings and environments.

Principles

The Training and Early Career Development Programs provide opportunities for trainees to gain broad experience within the health research environment to facilitate success in launching careers in academia, industry, government or elsewhere.

Aligned with Alberta’s requirement for Highly Skilled People across the research and innovation continuum, this investment will support the development of a high-quality workforce that is vital to the health-based knowledge industry.

To develop the required interdisciplinary and collaborative skill sets for Alberta’s next generation of scientists, clinicians, and health services professionals, the training programs will:

- **Focus on the thematic areas of priority for Alberta.** Support will be provided for the development of trainees undertaking research aligned with the thematic priority areas defined in Alberta’s Health Research and Innovation Strategy.
- **Develop the individual.** The program has the flexibility to allow trainees to customize the training experience to enable their unique career goals. The training programs support

Alberta’s Health Research and Innovation Strategy: Areas of strategic priority

Wellness at Every Age

- Child and maternal health
- Mental health and addiction
- Chronic disease
- Infectious disease
- Health promotion
- Vulnerable populations
- Injury prevention, acute care and rehabilitation
- Environmental health

Innovative Health Service Delivery

- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Innovative delivery models
- Chronic disease management support systems
- Personalized medicine

professional, career, and networking opportunities beyond what may already be available in the academic environment.

- **Provide multifaceted mentorship.** To support professional and career development in today's complex research environment, each trainee will have a minimum of three Mentorship Advisors to provide multiple perspectives on their career path. Mentor advisor roles include: a primary research supervisor; co-mentorship support, preferably from another discipline or sector; and a career advisor.
- **Recognize non-conventional backgrounds and career paths.** It is expected that trainees will use their awards to build their skills in ways that will most benefit their career goals. The training programs are designed to support careers across the full continuum of health research and innovation including academia, the health services sector, government or other policy-related areas, the private sector, research management, or health literacy and science communications.
- **Integrate knowledge translation.** Enhancing the impact of research through knowledge translation is an important objective of AI. Knowledge translation is therefore embedded in the training programs and knowledge translation support will be available to award recipients.

Support for professional development activities

All trainee awards include a research and career development allowance to support career- and skill-building activities beyond those directly related to the trainee's research.

The Graduate Studentship Program also offers an optional add-on called [the PLUS option](#). It provides one year of additional support to gain relevant experience for the trainee that will enhance their career opportunities through the development of skills such as: policy development and decision making, entrepreneurship, research management, project management, health literacy, knowledge translation, and teaching competence. The PLUS option can be initiated at any time during the tenure of the Graduate Studentship.

Description

Training and Early Career Development Opportunities include:

- [Graduate Studentship](#) for individuals undertaking health-related research areas in pursuit of a Master's or PhD at an Alberta university.
- [Postgraduate Fellowship](#) for individuals conducting postdoctoral health-related research at an Alberta university.
- **Clinician Researcher Training Stream** for individuals who have clinical accreditation and are pursuing graduate or postgraduate health-related research:
 - MD-PhD Studentship
 - Clinician Fellowship

Graduate Studentship

Objectives

The objective of the Graduate Studentship is to:

- Foster the development of high quality, broadly trained health researchers and enhance the important contribution graduate students make to the research and innovation sector;
- Provide support for both scientific training and career development and facilitate the acquisition of the professional skills crucial to achieving success in obtaining a graduate degree and in developing a successful career;
- Provide additional training and career development opportunities for trainees across a wide range of sectors ([the PLUS option](#)).

Graduate studentship recipients who take full advantage of this program will have the opportunity to attain the knowledge and experience to transition to careers in research and innovation areas and beyond, that leverages their scientific training and expertise.

Eligibility

Applicants must be currently enrolled in a graduate program (Master's or Doctoral degree) at an Alberta university undertaking health-related research training leading to a thesis-based graduate degree. Support is available only to candidates who have completed their first year of graduate training and is tenable only at an Alberta university. This program is designed for graduates who are not health professionals. The Clinician Training Stream is available for individuals who are undertaking for or currently hold a health professional degree.

We recognize the importance of strong mentorship for successful career development and have made multifaceted mentorship team a requirement of the Graduate Studentship (see [Mentorship Advisors](#)).

Term of the Award

The Graduate Studentship provides up to a maximum of four years of funding support towards a doctoral degree; and support will not be provided beyond six years of enrollment in graduate school leading to a doctoral degree.

The Graduate Studentship provides up to a maximum of two years of funding support towards a Master's degree; and support will not be provided beyond three years of enrollment in graduate school leading to a Master's degree.

Under the PLUS option, we will consider providing up to one additional year of support for the trainee to gain experience in areas outside the scope of their direct graduate research training.

Value of the Award

The Graduate Studentship will consist of a stipend of \$30,000 per annum and [a research and career development allowance](#) of \$2,000 annually.

The PLUS Option

The PLUS Option is an optional component to the Graduate Studentship award and provides up to one year of additional support so that trainees can gain valuable experience and additional skills beyond those acquired through their direct graduate research training.

Objectives

The objective of the PLUS Option is to:

- Enrich the trainee's skills, professional development, and career opportunities beyond what would be available through their previous or current graduate training;
- Help build the receptor capacity for research trained highly skilled people in the province;
- Support additional training, professional development and career opportunities for trainees across a wide range of sectors.

The PLUS Option is **not intended** to be used as an extension of a trainee's graduate training, or to further a pre-existing skill set.

What can you do with the PLUS Option?

The PLUS option is all about customizing the Graduate Studentship program for the trainee. We encourage Graduate Studentship recipients to tailor the PLUS in a way that best suits their individual career plans.

Here are some examples of how the PLUS option can be used:

- Gain experience in another academic environment. For example, you may wish combine your science background with an MBA, MBT, or an education degree.
- Gain experience in health services or in a health policy environment. For example, you could work in a clinic to refine your research questions early in your training, and then spend time in a policy environment once your degree is completed to facilitate evidence informed decision making.
- Gain experience in industry. For example, take an internship position at a pharmaceutical company.
- Gain experience in a non-profit organization. For example, to acquire relevant knowledge translation skills.

Eligibility

Applicants must currently hold a Graduate Studentship award. The PLUS Option must be used to provide the trainee with a new skill set beyond those obtained through their previous and current training and expose them to an opportunity not otherwise available to them without the PLUS Option. Trainees can utilize the opportunity to seek training or internship opportunities in education, business, industry, government and/or health policy, within clinical or other research related environments. We will provide support to trainees to help them broker PLUS Option opportunities.

Term of the Award

The PLUS Option can be accessed at any time during the tenure of the Graduate Studentship and up to six months after the completion of the award. The PLUS Option can be divided accordingly to meet the needs of the trainee's development and is not limited to one receptor organization. We will consider supporting PLUS Option activities outside of Alberta.

Value of the Award

The Graduate Studentship PLUS Option will consist of a stipend of \$30,000 per annum and [a research and career development allowance](#) of \$2,000 annually.

Application Assessment

Graduate Studentship recipients interested in the PLUS Option must complete the Graduate Studentship PLUS Option application form, which is available upon request. The application requires the Graduate Studentship recipient to provide a proposed plan outlining the linkage to their career development plan, specific objectives and the anticipated outcomes of participating in the PLUS option. Applications for the Graduate Studentship PLUS Option will be reviewed by a committee with results available approximately six to eight weeks following submission.

Postgraduate Fellowship

Objectives

The overall objective of the Postgraduate Fellowship is to attract and develop high quality, broadly trained health researchers in Alberta. The program focuses on scientific training *and* professional skill development to enhance the success of postgraduate fellows in advancing their careers across a wide range of academic and non- academic sectors.

Eligibility

Candidates must hold a PhD and/or professional health degree (eg., MD, DDS, DVM or DPharm) without clinical accreditation in Canada, and be accepted or currently hold a postdoctoral appointment at an Alberta university in a health professional or health-related program. The Clinician Researcher Training Stream is available for individuals who have clinical accreditation and wish to pursue graduate or postgraduate research.

We recognize the importance of strong mentorship for successful career development and have made multifaceted mentorship a requirement of the Postgraduate Fellowship (see [Mentorship Advisors](#)).

Term of the Award

Postgraduate Fellowships will provide up to a maximum of 3 years of support towards postgraduate training. We recognize the institutional limitations on the period of expected postgraduate training and will not provide support beyond 5 years of postgraduate training at the same institution.

Value of the Award

The Postgraduate Fellowship will consist of a stipend of \$50,000 per annum and an annual \$5,000 [research and career development allowance](#). Stipends are subject to the Income Tax Act and Regulations of the Government of Canada.

Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship

Application Assessment Criteria

All applications undergo a rigorous review process by a committee whose membership is both interdisciplinary and intersectoral. Applicants will be assessed with a focus on the trainee, their career plan and the anticipated benefits they would gain from the opportunities provided by the proposed training environment(s) as measured by the following criteria:

- Academic track record (Graduate Studentship only)
- Relevant work and/or research experience
- Career development plans
- Supervisory team, and the research and mentorship environment
- Research proposal

Academic Record (Graduate Studentship only)

Refer to section: ***Academic Background of Applicant and Submitted Transcripts***

- Does the applicant's academic record show evidence of solid and sustained academic excellence and performance throughout their training?
- Has the applicant received academic recognition (e.g. Dean's list)?
- Has the applicant received several prizes/awards, and/or highly competitive, premier prizes/awards at the national level?

Relevant Work and/or Research Experience

Refer to sections: ***University Academic Achievements***
Research and Other Relevant Work Experience of Applicant
Academic Details

- Does the applicant demonstrate a strong foundation of research skills and achievements evidenced by relevant work/research experience and formal presentations, abstracts and publications for their stage of research career? Are these of high quality?
- Is the applicant's research experience of high quality?
- Does the applicant show strong leadership qualities as demonstrated by relevant academic, leadership, work and/or leadership accomplishments? Are these of high quality?
- Does the applicant have the potential for becoming an important contributor to the health research and innovation environment?

Career Development Plan

Refer to sections: ***Applicant's Career Development Plan***
Letters of Reference

- What is the likelihood that career development plan will contribute substantially to the scientific development and productivity of the applicant?
- Does the applicant link past achievements, publications, award and related research and work experiences to the career plan?
- Is there strong linkage between applicant's proposed training program and career progression?
- Is the applicant's prior research and/or work experiences relevant to the career goals/objectives?
- Are the applicant's career plans well-articulated and illustrate a well thought out progression towards their career goals/objectives?
- Are there appropriate justifications for the selection of the mentorship advisors and their contribution to the career and scientific development of the applicant?
- What is the likelihood that the award will contribute substantially to the continued scientific development and productivity of the applicant?
- Do the letters of reference provide unanimously strong support and considerable detailed assessments of the applicant's research strengths/capabilities and intellectual capacity?
- Do the letters of reference describe the benefits that the proposed research experience provides the applicant towards their career goals?

Research Training & Mentorship Environment

Refer to sections: ***Mentorship Advisors – Biographical Sketches***
Research Training Environment
Mentoring Plan

- Are the primary (co-) supervisor's research qualifications in the area of the proposed research appropriate?
- Do the mentor(s) adequately address the applicant's potential and their strengths and areas needing improvement?
- Are there adequate plans for the mentorship advisors for monitoring and evaluating the applicant's research and career development progress?
- Is there adequate description in the mentoring plan of the quality and extent of the proposed role of each mentorship advisor in providing guidance and advice to the applicant to support their career development? Does the mentoring plan adequately

describe the elements of the research career development activities, including formal course work?

- Are the plans to provide mentoring adequate? Have past and current mentoring activities been adequately described? Is an appropriate level of effort proposed for the mentoring component?
- Is there evidence of the mentor's, co-mentor's and career advisor's previous experience in fostering the development of “highly skilled people”? Does the background information on the mentorship advisors provide evidence of success in their respective careers? Is active/pending support for the proposed research project appropriate and adequate? Are there adequate plans for monitoring and evaluating the applicant's career development progress toward independence?
- Are the proposed opportunities for professional growth of the applicant appropriate and of high quality?
- Does the research training environment provide the expertise and resources required for the proposed research?
- Are the proposed collaborations for the applicant with other active investigators adequate and are there other opportunities for professional growth appropriate and of high quality?
- Is the role of the trainee in the proposed research and how it links to the primary supervisor's research program and/or research group clearly described?
- Is the benefit of the applicant training in the proposed research environment clearly described?

Research Proposal

Refer to section: ***Proposed Research Project***

- Does the proposed research project embody leading edge concepts and is the description of the hypothesis and methodology of the caliber expected for the career stage of a researcher who is at the forefront of a field?
- Are the proposed research question, design, and methodology of significant scientific and technical merit?
- Is the research plan relevant to the applicant's research career objectives?
- Is the research plan appropriate to the stage of research development and as a vehicle for developing the research skills described in the career development plan?
- Is the research plan of high quality, and does it have potential for advancing the field of study?
- If applicable, are there adequate plans for data and safety monitoring of clinical trials?
- If applicable, is the research plan an appropriate vehicle for developing the prospective mentee's skills and capabilities in (patient-oriented) research?

Funding, Administration, Expectations and Responsibilities

Stipend Incentive

We encourage trainees to apply for and receive awards from other national or international agencies. The Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship provide an incentive to those individuals who receive additional awards.

If a Graduate Studentship recipient receives another major comparable, peer-reviewed award, they may be eligible to receive a minimum incentive of \$12,000 per year or more to a maximum combined award value of \$30,000 per year; or the maximum allowed by the other agency.

If a Postgraduate Fellowship recipient receives another major comparable, peer-reviewed award, they may be eligible to receive a minimum incentive of \$15,000 per year or more to a maximum combined award value of \$50,000 per year; or the maximum allowed by the other agency.

Recipients of the stipend incentive will continue to receive the Research and Career Development Allowance. Individuals who receive a Graduate Studentship or Postgraduate Fellowship in the form of a stipend incentive should note that the maximum years of eligibility remain the same as those for individuals receiving the full stipend value.

Award recipients may not receive simultaneous support from another Alberta Innovates trainee program.

Research and Career Development Allowance

The research and career development allowance will be administered by the trainee's university with the expectation that the primary research supervisor will approve any expenses drawn from the allowance. Approved uses of the research and career development allowance include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Career development activities including coursework that is not part of the requirements of obtaining the graduate degree (must be supported by the trainee's [mentorship advisors](#));
- Purchase of scientific materials, supplies and expendables;
- Purchase of minor equipment (Note: the policies of the host institution with respect to ownership of equipment will apply to equipment bought with these funds);
- Purchase of computer software;
- Costs for the use of libraries, or computers;
- Costs associated with the publication of research results;

- Travel expenses to attend scientific meetings;
- Purchase of books, periodicals and journals;

If the award is terminated prematurely, unused funds must be returned to AI. The research and career development allowance cannot be used for stipend support or tuition.

Multifaceted Mentorship Advisors

All Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship trainees are required to complete their training with the support of Mentorship Advisors to provide a multifaceted mentorship approach during their training. A minimum of three individuals are required to be identified as Mentorship Advisors. For the Graduate Studentship, the mentorship advisors may be distinct from the formal supervisory committee associated with thesis-based graduate programs. The mentorship advisors will be multidisciplinary and comprised of a:

- **Primary research supervisor** who will sponsor the application and ensure adherence to the terms and conditions of the award. He or she must possess both a record of productive health-oriented research and sufficient resources to ensure the satisfactory conduct of the research. He or she must provide direct supervision.
- **Co-supervisor** if the applicant has a secondary research supervisor for their degree program.
- **Co-mentor** to provide an alternate perspective, either from another discipline or research focus (e.g. basic scientist, clinician, population health investigator), sector, or institution.
- **Career advisor** to focus on the trainee's career development.

Who is a Career Advisor?

A Career Advisor is someone that supports the trainee in the exploration of and decisions for potential career options.

It is expected that the mentorship advisors agree to assist the applicant in designing their training program and career development plans, regularly monitoring and adjusting their progress to those plans, facilitating the launch of the careers and in providing progress reporting to AI.

It is incumbent on the applicant to identify a minimum of three Mentorship Advisors prior to submission of the application. For any change in the primary research supervisor, or the mentorship advisors, the trainee must obtain prior written approval from AI. We reserve the right to terminate support if its requirements for supervision and mentorship are not met.

Application Process

Applications will be accepted into an annual April competition for Graduate Studentships and an annual October competition for Postgraduate Fellowships.

Release of Competition Results

Following approval by AI, the results will be posted on the website approximately 2.5 months after the close of the competition. Results will not be released over the phone. Official letters with the competition results are sent to the applicants shortly thereafter. The formal letters will serve as Alberta Innovates' official decision should there be any discrepancy with the material on the web site.

Commencement of Funding

Graduate Studentships may be implemented within six months of the date of offer. Postgraduate Fellowships may be implemented within 12 months of the date of offer. Offers will be withdrawn for any award not implemented within this time period.

Termination of Funding

Graduate Studentships will be terminated when the trainee has successfully defended his or her thesis prior to the official award end date; the award will be terminated on the last day of the month in which the defense examination occurs.

We reserve the right to terminate any award if the terms and conditions of the award are not met, or if there is evidence of unsatisfactory progress.

Time Commitment Expectations

It is expected that Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship recipients will engage in full-time research activities. Trainees must ensure that they spend no more than a maximum of 200 hours per year on non-research-related activities. These activities must be relevant to their research and approved by their primary research supervisor. Non-research-related activities include direct participation in:

- Teaching;
- Preparation time;
- Contributions to laboratory teaching
- Professional development activities.

While undertaking the PLUS component, Graduate Studentship recipients are not expected to maintain full-time research activities toward their PhD.

Notification Responsibilities

The trainee and their primary research supervisor must obtain written approval from AI prior to any substantial alterations in supervision, mentorship, the training environment, or the research project described in the original application. Consideration may be given to proposed changes and will be assessed on a case by case basis. We reserve the right to terminate support if its requirements for supervision/mentorship are not met, or if changes to the proposed training environment or research project are not approved.

Management of Awards

For AI, the ultimate impact of funding and facilitating health research and innovation is to realize health, health system, and socio-economic benefits for Albertans. We use a performance management and evaluation framework adapted from the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences to provide accountability for its public investment and to produce evidence of the benefits of its investments in health research and innovation. The results and benefits from research are captured across five broad categories of impact that include capacity building, knowledge generation, informing decision making, health and economic benefit.

Information that is collected is used to generate statistics that inform program planning, funding allocation decisions, program monitoring and evaluation, the identification of best practices, and communications to key stakeholders.

Progress Reports

Renewal Report. Award recipients are required to submit renewal reports to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of the award. Recipients will receive a reminder outlining the required submission date along with the required report forms in advance of the deadline.

Annual Impact Report. Award recipients are required to submit annual impact reports collected through an [electronic tool called Researchfish®](#) to capture the health research impacts achieved through AI funding.

Failure to submit these reports will result in suspension of the funding and may lead to cancellation of the award.

Final Report. Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship recipients and their [Mentorship Advisors](#) are required to submit a final report within one month of the termination or completion

of an award. Final report forms will be sent to award recipients and their Mentorship Advisors.

Extended Leaves

Parental Leave

Full-time Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship recipients may receive up to one year of paid parental leave.

When each parent is taking a portion of the leave, the awardee is eligible for up to one year less any period of leave taken by the other parent. Leave must occur within the first year of the child's life and cannot be taken simultaneously with the other parent. Combined leave must total no more than 12 months.

To be eligible, Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship recipients who take a parental leave during the tenure of their awards must notify AI prior to the commencement of the leave period. There is no limit to the number of parental leaves that can be taken during the tenure of a given award.

Leaves of Absence

Unpaid leaves of absence of up to six months may be granted following a formal request to AI outlining the purpose of the leave. The support of the primary research supervisor and the host institution is required. Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis. We reserve the right to terminate the award should the required approval not be met.

Upon the trainee's return, we will consider extending the period of support by the duration of the approved leave.

Knowledge Translation

In addition to skill-building opportunities and resources to facilitate knowledge translation, we can provide some direct knowledge translation support such as profiling research results, brokering relationships between trainees and knowledge or end-users, or providing advice on knowledge translation activities.

Communications

We reserve the right to publish and/or disseminate information regarding its grants and awards.

All publications, including public messages, arising from research supported by AI grants or awards must acknowledge the support of AI. Please go to www.aihealthsolutions.ca for downloadable logos.

Studentship and Fellowship recipients are asked to inform the AI communications staff in advance if their research will be published in a major journal such that it might result in a press release from the university and/or the journal.

Support of Research Integrity

We support Alberta research institutions in their efforts to promote and ensure the highest standards of research and scholarship practice and behavior. It is incumbent upon each applicant to adhere to all research policies and procedures in place at his or her institution, including those regarding integrity in research and scholarship. We reserve the right to confirm, through independent means, representations of authorship, credentials or research support.

In the event of material deviations in the submitted information, including citation sources (in the case of authorship), issuing organization(s) (in the case of credentials), or granting agencies (in the case of research support), we reserve the right to disqualify any applicant from the competition in question.

Further actions may include disqualifying the applicant from future AI competitions for a time period to be set at our sole discretion, withdrawal of any remaining installments of support for any existing AI grant or award for which misrepresentation appears in the submission, and seeking partial or full repayment of any past financial support under any AI grant or award for which misrepresentation appears in the submission.

Contact Information

For further information on the Graduate Studentship and Postgraduate Fellowship Programs please contact us at:

Programs

780-423-5727

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