



Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship in Patient-Oriented Research

Program Guide

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Background

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has developed provincial partnerships across the country to support Patient-Oriented Research (POR) with expertise, resources, and knowledge. The [Alberta SPOR Support for People and Patient-Oriented Research and Trials \(SUPPORT\) Unit](#) is dedicated to increasing the quantity and quality of patient-oriented research in Alberta. Together, CIHR, AIHS, and the Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU) are fostering the integration of research into care by “putting patients first.”

The Career Development in Methods and Health Services Research Platform (CD Platform) of AbSPORU offered the inaugural SPOR Graduate Studentship competition in 2015. The CD Platform plays a critical role in training and career development in POR for researchers, graduate students, trainees, patients, health practitioners, and other stakeholders from across Alberta. The CD Platform, in partnership with AIHS, hosts and funds the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship Program, including award recipient training, monitoring, and management of activities throughout the funding year.

Principles

AbSPORU is using [CIHR’s 2014 definition](#) of patient-oriented research:

“Patient-oriented research refers to a continuum of research that engages patients as partners, focuses on patient-identified priorities, and aims to improve patient outcomes. This research, conducted by multidisciplinary teams in partnership with relevant stakeholders, aims to apply the knowledge generated to improve healthcare systems and practices”

AbSPORU has operationalized the definition of POR, further information can be found on the [AIHS website](#).

Knowledge Translation is defined by CIHR as “a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange, and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve the health of Canadians, provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system.” The [Knowledge Translation \(KT\) Platform](#) encompasses work in knowledge synthesis, knowledge translation and implementation science. Projects or programs of research can be related to either the practice or science of KT.

Patient is an overarching term inclusive of individuals with personal experience of a health issue and informal caregivers, including family and friends.

Patient Engagement refers to meaningful and active collaboration in governance, priority setting, conducting research and knowledge translation. Depending on the context, POR may also engage people who bring the collective voice of specific, affected communities.

Description

The general competition for students with proposed projects from across the POR continuum, as defined above, will be funded through the collaboration between the [CD Platform](#) and [Patient Engagement \(PE\) Platform](#). In addition, a special stream aimed at students focusing on POR Knowledge Translation (KT) activities is concurrently available. Trainees working in KT are encouraged to select the KT stream option within their application form and briefly describe how the proposed research is relevant to KT. Applicants who do not select the KT stream in the application, but whose projects are commensurate with the topic area, may be designated to the KT stream during the Relevance Review Process.

Applications that are not successful in the KT stream but obtain scores in the fundable range, according to the peer review committee, will be automatically placed in the general competition.

Objectives

The objectives of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship include:

- Supporting and training first year Master's or PhD graduate students in the principles and practice of POR;
- Providing POR activities to develop capacity through a multi-disciplinary approach for all stakeholders including applicants, thesis supervisors, patients, and community team members;
- Creating opportunities for stakeholder groups to work closely together from conceptualization of research question to dissemination and implementation of results at the practice and community levels; and
- Demonstrating the impact of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship for the student and the development of their project by providing a Research Impact Narrative at the end of the funding year.

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients 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. To develop the required interdisciplinary and collaborative skill sets for Alberta's next generation of scientists, clinicians, and health services professionals, the CD Platform is coordinating additional training and mentorship activities with other AbSPORU Platforms for successful applicants.

Eligibility

Applicants must reside in Alberta and be enrolled in, or accepted to, a graduate program at an Alberta university undertaking health-related research training leading to a thesis-based graduate degree. Applicants may be entering their first year of graduate studies in either September of the competition year or January of the award year. Please note, as the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is jointly funded by AIHS and CIHR, successful candidates cannot also hold an AIHS or CIHR award.

Term of the Award

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship provides one year of funding support towards a thesis-based Master's or Doctoral degree.

Value of the Award

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship will consist of a stipend of \$30,000.

Application Assessment

All applications will undergo a rigorous review process by an external committee whose membership is both interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral. Applicants for the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship will be assessed based on the focus on POR in relation to the graduate 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, which will undergo both a relevancy review and a peer review process:

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

Application Assessment Criteria

Academic Record

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. Honors, Dean's list)?
- Has the applicant received several prizes/awards, and/or highly competitive, premier prizes/awards at the local, provincial, or national level?

Relevant Work and/or Research Experience

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

- 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 in patient-oriented research?

Career Development Plan

Refer to sections: ***Applicant's Career Development Plan***
Letter(s) of Reference

- What is the likelihood that the career development plan will contribute substantially to the scientific development and productivity of the applicant in patient-oriented research?
- 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 (as well as patient and/or community partners, if applicable) and their contribution to the career and scientific development of the applicant and the proposed patient-oriented research project?
- 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 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

- Are the primary (co-) supervisor's research qualifications in the area of the proposed research appropriate?
- 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 patient-oriented research project?
- 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 benefit of the applicant training in the proposed research environment clearly described?

Research Proposal

Refer to section: ***Proposed Research Project and Patient-Oriented Research***

- Does the proposed research project embody the principles of patient-oriented research 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 to advance the field of study and exemplify patient-oriented research?
- 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

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is intended to be an initial source of start-up funding and an incentive by which future sources of funding may be secured for the subsequent year(s) of the trainees' program.

Stipend Incentive

AbSPORU/AIHS encourage trainees to apply for and receive awards from other provincial, national or international agencies. The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship provides an incentive to those individuals who receive additional awards during the funding year.

If an Alberta SPOR 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. Individuals who receive their Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship in the form of a stipend incentive should note that the maximum eligibility of one year remains the same as those for individuals receiving the full stipend value.

Application Process

Applications will be accepted until October 1 (or next business day) for the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship competition. The AIHS administrative procedures are utilized for all application, review, and award funding processes.

Release of Competition Results

Following approval by AbSPORU/AIHS, the results will be posted on the website approximately 2 1/2 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 the official decision should there be any discrepancy with the material on the website.

Commencement of Funding

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship funding year will begin January 1 and continue until December 31.

Termination of Funding

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentships will be terminated after 12 months. AbSPORU/AIHS reserves the right to terminate any award if the terms and conditions of the award are not met (as outlined below), if there is evidence of unsatisfactory progress, or if there are major changes in the proposed research project, supervisor, or training environment.

Award Recipient Requirements

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients are required to complete a self-directed learning plan and submit it to the Career Development Platform upon notification of award. Failure to participate in these mandated activities will result in termination of award. The self-directed learning plan will include the following awardee requirements:

- Attend the Training Program sessions as part of the AbSPORU Patient-Oriented Research (POR) Training Program
- Participate and present their proposed project as a poster presentation, as well as participate in the workshops and training opportunities offered during the multi-day Alberta SPOR Summer Institute conference.
- Complete fifteen (15) hours of Alberta SPOR mentorship activities during the funding year. A list of options will be provided to awardees to aid them in completing this learning plan; options may include a range of activities across the AbSPORU platforms (outlined below). The awardee in the Knowledge Translation (KT) stream may be required to commit ten (10) of the 15 hours to the KT platform.
- Play an active role in the promotion of their POR projects; this may include participation in videos, presentations, posters, and other activities as requested.

The SPOR Summer Institute is a multi-day event offering workshops, training, speakers, and presentations to all members of the Alberta health research community.

The Alberta SPOR mentorship activities will allow students to become familiar with many of the SPOR platforms, interact with SPOR Platform Leads and personnel, engage in mentorship events, shadow meetings, committees, or presentations, and ensure that students are provided with a range of opportunities across the Alberta SPOR network. These activities will create capacity for new researchers to conduct their POR project, become ambassadors of POR and offer peer mentorship to future students in POR across the province.

Time Commitment Expectations

It is expected that Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients will engage in full-time research activities. Recipients 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.

Successful applicants are required to participate in the SPOR activities as indicated in Award Recipient Requirements.

Notification Responsibilities

The award recipient and their primary research supervisor must obtain written approval from AbSPORU/AIHS 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. AbSPORU/AIHS reserve the right to terminate support if its requirements for supervision are not met, or if changes to the proposed training environment or research project are not approved.

Management of Awards

For AbSPORU, the ultimate impact of funding and facilitating patient-oriented research and innovation is to realize health, social and economic benefits for patients and the health system. AbSPORU uses a comprehensive evaluation strategy developed from [AIHS's Research to Impact Framework](#) to systematically evaluate the benefits of AbSPORU investments for the purposes of *accountability*, and *analysis and learning*. The results and benefits from research are captured across broad categories of impact that include capacity building, knowledge generation, informing decision making, health, social and economic benefit.

The information collected from recipients by AbSPORU will be used to inform decisions in terms of program planning, management and quality improvement. The information will also be used to communicate the impact of AbSPORU to key stakeholders, partners, patients and the public.

Final Report

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients and their primary research supervisor are required to submit a final report within one month of termination of the award, or within one month of the award end date. A final report form will be sent to recipients and their primary research supervisor to complete.

The final report requirement also includes a research impact narrative to demonstrate the impact of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship on the recipient's research project and overall capacity development in patient-oriented research. An impact narrative is a brief (i.e., 3-4 page) description that outlines the key contributions of a research project/ program/ initiative to health, social and economic impacts. It also highlights the pathways used to achieve the impacts. These impacts constitute the returns on the investments made in research and innovation.

Extended Leaves

Unpaid leaves of absence of up to six months may be granted following a formal request to AbSPORU/AIHS 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. AbSPORU/AIHS reserve the right to terminate the award should the required approval not be met.

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

Knowledge Translation

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients, whether in the KT stream or general open competition, will have the opportunity to request KT support from the [KT Platform](#), which offers consultation, support, and training across the knowledge-to-action cycle, including knowledge synthesis, knowledge translation, and implementation science. The platform staff can provide guidance on how to incorporate KT into research, advice on designing knowledge synthesis projects, or assistance in the development and/or evaluation of KT or implementation strategies.

Communications

AbSPORU/AIHS reserve the right to publish and/or disseminate information regarding its grants and awards. All publications, including public messages, arising from research supported by AbSPORU/AIHS awards must acknowledge this funding utilizing a designated funding statement. The following funding statement should appear on award recipient presentations, posters, and publications:

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is jointly funded by Alberta Innovates - Health Solutions and the Canadian Institute of Health Research.

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients are asked to inform AbSPORU/AIHS 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

AbSPORU/AIHS 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.

AbSPORU/AIHS reserves 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), AbSPORU/AIHS reserve the right to disqualify any applicant from the competition in question.

Further actions may include withdrawal of any remaining installments of support for any AbSPORU/AIHS award for which misrepresentation appears in the submission, and seeking partial or full repayment of any past financial support under any AbSPORU/AIHS award for which misrepresentation appears in the submission.

Contact Information

For further information on the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship, please contact:

Training & Early Career Development

Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions

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