Strategic Implementation Process
Alberta Innovates - Health Solutions (AIHS)

SUMMARY REPORT

JUNE, 2012

Transforming health and wellbeing through research and innovation

Executive Summary

Throughout 2011 and early 2012, Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions engaged with members of Alberta's health research and innovation stakeholder communities through a planned Strategic Implementation Process focused on gathering input into the design of new funding programs and initiatives for the organization.

The process was necessitated by the creation of AIHS and the redesign of the research and innovation landscape in Alberta. A new mandate focused AIHS on the "support of research and innovation activities to improve the health and well-being of Albertans and create, through innovation, health related social and economic benefits for Albertans." This new mandate is explicit in emphasizing the impact of publicly funded research on quality of life, both socially and economically.

The Board of Directors directed the new organization to a new approach: undertake a coordinated and integrated Strategic Implementation Process to seek input from across our broadened research and innovation stakeholder community into the design of new strategies, funding opportunities and programs for the organization. To ensure integration with our shareholder, the Government of Alberta, and improve potential for impact, the Board of Directors designed the Process to focus on the priority areas and enabling directions outlined in Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy (AHRIS).

During the process, 48 individuals volunteered their time on the Process's Working Groups and Oversight Committee. These individuals were carefully selected to provide a balance of stakeholder perspectives on each Working Group: researchers themselves as well as the users of research knowledge - the public, patient groups, private industry, the government, the healthcare sector, post-secondary institutions, and others – were represented.

The collective contribution of time invested by these individuals was just over 1,000 person-hours. In addition, 3,856 invitations to provide feedback to the recommendations developed by these Working Groups were extended to the broader research and innovation community via surveys, focus group meetings or individual interviews. In total, 1,039 responses were received to the recommendations and strategies proposed by the three foundational Working Groups. Responses received through this broader consultation were used to inform final program recommendations forwarded to the AIHS Board of Directors for approval.

To ensure focus and clarity of purpose, each Working Group was provided with information on AIHS' mandate, and on Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy which the Process was built around. Throughout the Working Groups' discussions and deliberations, a number of common principles emerged which not only guided their development of recommendations, but will now underscore AIHS' planning and strategies for the foreseeable future.

At the end of the Strategic Implementation Process AIHS had:

- announced five new broad envelopes of programs reflective of the consultative design process under the Highly Skilled People direction;

- articulated key strategies for the Knowledge Translation area to underscore the development of a KT strategy for AIHS;
- identified key strategic observations to support further definition of priorities in the Innovation Platforms area.

Additional key results from the Process include:

- Articulation from our stakeholder communities of the important and unique role AIHS plays as a research management organization including as influencer, broker, facilitator, convener, manager, and innovative leader in Alberta's health research and innovation system.
- Collectively developed, stakeholder-endorsed guiding principles for AIHS investment strategies and decisions.
- New programs and initiatives developed and designed by multiple stakeholders to be responsive to Alberta's needs and build and expand on our strengths.
- Increased awareness of AIHS' new strategic direction from across the research and innovation system.
- Expanded relationships with a broadening range of stakeholder sectors that will contribute to innovative approaches and partnering opportunities.
- Recognition by our Government Ministry and other research funding organizations of AIHS' successful involvement of stakeholders in the design of new approaches to help AIHS deliver on its mandate.

The Strategic Implementation Process delivered on the goals initially envisioned to "deliver on the strategic framework outlined in AHRIS through the engagement of various stakeholder groups and communities to help define and develop the key initiatives that will support AIHS in the delivery of its mandate." The Process did not finalize convening of working groups in the thematic priority areas outlined in AHRIS. Exploration of needs and opportunities in these thematic priority areas will proceed and involve Alberta Health Service's Strategic Clinical Networks, and others, where appropriate.

Introduction

In January 2010 Alberta Innovates - Health Solutions (AIHS) became one of four Alberta Innovates corporations of the Government of Alberta. AIHS is an integral part of Alberta Innovates – a strategically aligned and integrated provincial system designed to maximize innovation. The legislative Mandate of AIHS is to "**support research and innovation activities to improve the health and well-being of Albertans and create, through innovation, health related social and economic benefits for Albertans".**

To deliver on this mandate, the Board of Directors directed that AIHS would focus its contributions to support the achievement of Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy (AHRIS), which targets the outcomes of improving health through *Wellness at Every Age* and *an Innovative Health Service Delivery System*. AIHS strategies would therefore map directly to the strategic or thematic priority areas identified in AHRIS and incorporate the enabling directions and actions highlighted there.

Background

The Strategic Implementation Process was put in place by AIHS' Board of Directors in late 2010 to solicit meaningful and structured input into the organization's offerings from Alberta's broad health research community. This meant strategically and purposely involving individuals from the research community as well as representatives from other stakeholders including industry, not for profits, government of Alberta, the health delivery system, and other Alberta Innovates corporations. This design would ensure that input received through the process integrated diverse views and perspectives on health research and innovation investments into recommendations.

The key features of the process were designed to focus on the priority areas outlined in AHRIS and to ensure that AIHS' strategic initiatives were priority-driven and stakeholder-defined as opposed to open-ended, broadly-based research programs that had been the conventional approach for the organization in the past.

The Engagement Process

The Strategic Implementation Process began in January 2011 and reached the conclusion of the first phase of the process by April 2012. The implementation process undertaken over these 16 months resulted in a number of program initiatives and recommendations brought forward to the Board of Directors for approval and further development.

See Appendix A: Timeline.

Oversight Committee and the Working Group Process

The Process began with an Oversight Committee approved and appointed by the Board of Directors. On their recommendation, three foundational working groups identified as enabling actions in Alberta's Health Research and Innovation Strategy were developed: Highly Skilled People; Knowledge Translation; Innovation Platforms.

AIHS played a Secretariat role for the Process, overseeing all aspects of supporting the working groups in administrative, writing, event management, and other support requirements.

The stakeholders:

Each of the three foundational Working Groups included representation from our key stakeholder groups to ensure participation from across the research and innovation spectrum. Working Group members were solicited to include representation from the following stakeholder categories:

- Government of Alberta ministries – Alberta Advanced Education and Technology (AET), Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW), and others
- Health delivery system - Alberta Health Services (AHS), health professional associations
- Post-secondary institutions, including academic researchers
- Alberta's research and innovation system; Alberta Innovates corporations
- Private sector
- Not for profit organizations, as well as community groups and the public as appropriate
- Research organizations and funders

The Process also incorporated input and support from across AIHS to ensure an ingrained understanding of the working groups' concepts and principles by those within AIHS translating these into programs.

The task:

Each Working Group was provided with background information on the organization and on the process; this included articulation of the purpose and the scope of the activity to be undertaken by their WG and information on AIHS' mandate and roles. Terms of Reference were developed for the Working Groups with input from both the Oversight Committee and the working group members.

Developing the recommendations:

The Working Groups were each tasked with the following:

- Assess the needs, strengths and opportunities for investments in research and innovation in their foundational area.
- Identify the assets in place in Alberta (and considering national and international contexts) in their foundational area.
- Identify stakeholders and mechanisms for eliciting broader stakeholder input on key strategies and recommendations.
- Develop proposed initiatives to be presented to the Board for funding consideration based on relevance, quality, opportunity and available resources.

Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles for AIHS emerged from the discussions that occurred with each Working Group. These Guiding Principles were endorsed by a meeting of key thought leaders from across Alberta's health research and innovation system in November, 2011.

- o Strive for provincial level integration
- o Ensure innovation is linked to outcomes
- o Encourage collaboration for success
- o Explore appropriate partnering and leverage opportunities
- o Consider both Alberta's strengths and needs in investing
- o Maintain focus, balance and flexibility in funding approaches

Working Group deliverables

Highly Skilled People

The HSP Working Group focused their program recommendations under three key strategies:

- Preserve existing research strengths and opportunities;
- Encourage new skills necessary to succeed in our changing research environment;
- Attract new people in key areas determined by Alberta needs.

Based on these strategies the HSP Working Group developed recommendations for the following programs: Collaborative Research Opportunities, Catalyst Opportunities, Bridge Grant Fund, and Training Initiatives. These recommendations were consulted on via survey, focus group meetings and through individual interviews before being taken to the AIHS Board of Directors for approval for development.

In general, the stakeholder community's reaction was positive and supportive of AIHS's proposed programs. Stakeholder approval for the proposed programs was rated as follows:

- Collaborative Research Opportunities – 80%
- Catalyst Opportunities – 73%
- Bridge Grant Fund – 80%
- Training Initiatives – 76%

In June, 2011 the Board approved the programs for further development.

In September, 2011 the HSP Working Group proposed a Translational Health Chairs Program to help recruit faculty health researchers focused on identified priority research areas for Alberta. This recommendation was consulted on via survey in October, and Stakeholder approval for the proposed Chairs programs demonstrated that 90% agreed the program would be a beneficial mechanism to recruit high-quality leaders; 81% agreed the program would be a beneficial mechanism to build capacity.

Deliverables

In January 2012, AIHS announced the following new programs that had been developed and designed with the input of the Highly Skilled People Working Group and influenced by the broad stakeholder consultations.

AIHS Sustainability Funding Opportunity – offers bridge funding to Alberta researchers submitting renewal applications to federal Tri-council agencies. Sustainability funding ensures excellent research programs are sustained without loss of momentum, staff, or trainees.

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

AIHS Collaborative Research and Innovation Opportunities (CRIO) – aims to bring together experts and end-users to tackle health research problems in areas of strategic priority that would benefit from an interdisciplinary and outcomes-driven approach.

AIHS Catalyst Opportunities – will provide funding support for great new ideas that require a defined, but limited amount of work to move them into a more competitive position; or into a more developed stage that could attract further investment; or into discoveries that could be further evolved to an applied stage of development.

AIHS Translational Health Chairs – will be used to recruit outstanding researchers working in priority areas in translational health research and innovation to Alberta.

The first three funding opportunities described above have now been implemented. The Translational Health Chairs are to be launched imminently and the Catalyst Opportunities will be launched in Fall 2012, although an Industry-partnered funding related opportunity is already underway based on the same general principles elaborated for this funding envelope.

Knowledge Translation (KT)

The KT working group focused their program recommendations under three key strategies:

- Embed KT principles into AIHS programs and initiatives;
- Advance the science of KT;
- Support knowledge to action approaches.

The KT working group also articulated a number of strategic observations as important considerations for the development and implementation of KT strategies for AIHS.

- To build capacity in the understanding of KT theory and practice within the health research and innovation community, AIHS must expand its current KT programs and initiatives.
- AIHS funding must help create a critical mass of highly skilled people in the area of KT/implementation science, i.e. research on what is effective in moving knowledge into action and application.
- To meet its mandate, AIHS must support initiatives that advance the knowledge and practice of KT evaluation expertise.
- AIHS must support effective collaborative linkages within the provincial research and innovation system and its other stakeholder groups in order to fulfill its mandate and to capitalize on opportunities.

A broad community consultation sought feedback on the key strategies articulated by the KT working group and received the following response:

- Embed KT Principles into AIHS programming
  - 72.4% agreed would help maximize the impact of health research
- Support Knowledge to Action approaches
  - 65.2% agreed would help maximize benefits of health research/build capacity and understanding of KT
- Advance the Science of KT
  - 68.4% agreed would contribute to enhancing provincial capacity in KT
- Input into the role that AIHS should play related to KT was also sought:
  - 82.3% agreed improved access to KT knowledge would be useful
  - 78.7% agreed access to KT broker would be useful
  - 43.7% agreed KT resource center would be useful

Deliverables

Referenced by the work of the KT working group and the input received to their recommendations, AIHS is in the process of developing a KT strategy for the organization. This strategy will be reviewed by the stakeholder communities for additional input when finalized.

Innovation Platforms (IP)

The IP working group focused their program recommendations under four key strategies:

- Support infrastructure to help provide advantages for Alberta to succeed nationally and internationally;
- Recognize the intrinsic value of networking as a key platform of innovation;
- Support training units critical to building Alberta's research and innovation capacity;
- Support provincial systems level platforms.

The IP working group articulated the following recommendations to support these key strategies, and received endorsement via broad consultation as indicated:

- Support an innovative infrastructure funding opportunity as a component of the Collaborative Research and Innovation Opportunities program.
  - o 84.9% agreed would address infrastructure needs
  - o 88.9% agreed would support research and innovation activity
- Support innovative training units (training programs) as a component of the Collaborative Research and Innovation Opportunities program.
  - o 79.3% agreed would address competency gaps
  - o Support innovative networks as a component of the Collaborative Research and Innovation Opportunities program.
    - o 71.1% (Networks) and 71.9% (Systems Platforms) agreed would encourage more research and innovation activity
    - o 71.9 % (equal for both) agreed would increase AB's attractiveness and competitive advantage
- Support innovative provincial systems level platforms as a component of the activities delivered directly by AIHS.

Deliverables

Define and develop the guidelines for utilizing the CRIO program to support: infrastructure funding; training units (training programs); innovative networks.

Convene stakeholder engagement process to identify and prioritize system level platforms, training initiatives and infrastructure investment to best build on Alberta's strengths and address needs.

Conclusion

The Strategic Implementation Process delivered on the goals initially envisioned to "deliver on the strategic framework outlined in AHRIS through the engagement of various stakeholder groups and communities to help define and develop the key initiatives that will support AIHS in the delivery of its mandate" with the development and launch of a series of priority-driven, stakeholder-defined projects and strategic initiatives to support AIHS in delivery of its mandate. The Process did not finalize convening of working groups in the thematic priority areas outlined in AHRIS. Exploration of needs and opportunities in these thematic priority areas will proceed and involve Alberta Health Service's Strategic Clinical Networks, and other stakeholders, where appropriate.