

# Continuing the Journey

A proposal in support of the Rick Hansen Foundation  
and the Rick Hansen Institute



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## Executive Summary

The Rick Hansen Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute are pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance's pre-budget consultation process again this year.

**The Rick Hansen Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute are seeking renewed funding of \$21 million per year over five years toward spinal cord injury (SCI) cures, improved accessibility and inclusivity, and new social innovations that will continue to showcase Canada as a global leader in SCI research, treatment and care.**

In an era of fiscal restraint where healthcare expenditures continue to increase by six percent each year, the extensive healthcare costs associated with SCI continues to be one of the most expensive initial and ongoing healthcare costs in the country. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for those with SCI is as high as 60 percent. While significant progress has been made over the last 25 years, more can be done to improve the lives of all Canadians with SCI.

A renewed investment by the Government of Canada will achieve further substantial health and economic benefits for Canadians with SCI and other related disabilities. The work being accomplished by the Rick Hansen Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute will reduce the economic burden of SCI, saving government hundreds of millions of dollars in future health care and social assistance. Investing in a cure for SCI and improving the quality of life for those living with SCI and related disabilities will also give people with disabilities new opportunities to participate more fully in society and return to living full, productive lives.

## The Past 25 Years: Impact and Progress

Twenty-five years ago, Rick Hansen started a journey with drive, determination and a dream – to find a cure for SCI and to make the world a more accessible place. In 1985, he began his Man in Motion World Tour, a legendary journey that spanned more than 40,000 km through 34 countries and took two years to complete. The generosity of thousands who were inspired by Rick's dream resulted in over \$26 million in donations. These funds helped establish and sustain the work of the Rick Hansen Foundation. *Over the years, the Foundation has maintained its focus: find a cure for SCI and improve the quality of life for those living with SCI and related disabilities.*

In 2008, after years of dedicated work, the Rick Hansen Foundation led to the formal creation of the Spinal Cord Injury Solutions Network, a Canada-wide collaboration of people living with SCI, researchers and services providers, along with their respective organizations dedicated to generating life-enhancing solutions for Canadians with SCI. The Spinal Cord Injury Solutions Network, now known as the Rick Hansen Institute, is leading collaboration with the global SCI community by providing the resources, infrastructure and knowledge required to identify, develop, validate and accelerate the translation of evidence and best practices to reduce the incidence and severity of paralysis after SCI and improve health outcomes for those living with SCI so they can return to living full, productive lives.

With visionary funding from the federal government, the Rick Hansen Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute have achieved considerable progress. Because of these investments, the Foundation and the Institute have been able to leverage considerable support from private and corporate donors as well as contributions

from other levels of government, including overseas, producing a far greater impact and result. This year, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Man in Motion World Tour provides a pivotal opportunity to accelerate progress in SCI research and inclusivity for the next 25 years.

## Continuing the Journey – Building on Progress and Results

The Foundation has driven initiatives that have accelerated breakthroughs in SCI research and care, and has achieved great accessibility for those with disabilities. Rick and the Foundation have led in the formation of ICORD (International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries) and the Rick Hansen Institute – both of which are housed at the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre (BSCC) in Vancouver. These distinct but integrated research groups are innovating, applying and translating new therapies and medical approaches to SCI, which ultimately improve the quality of life for individuals with SCI and their families.

The Rick Hansen Institute works as a catalyst, bringing together the best and brightest minds in SCI research, clinical care and affiliated services. The Institute is designed to influence all elements of SCI treatment and care, including developing new therapies and decreasing the time required for research to be translated into real-life benefits. The model – a national network with common goals, supported by infrastructure, resources and knowledge dissemination – is already making a difference and is resulting in better outcomes for individuals with SCI. The Institute has also launched the RHI Global Research Platform (GRP) that tracks injuries and interventions at 34 sites across Canada, and international partnerships have been established to extend this system into Israel, Australia, China and the United States. The platform will enable easy and efficient capturing of data, strengthen multi-jurisdictional collaboration on clinical trials and studies, and accelerate global SCI research outcomes and healthcare benefits.

The Government of Canada has been a vital partner in achieving success in SCI research and accessibility by providing critical investments along this journey. This support has helped to distinguish Canada as a global leader in medical research and treatments for SCI, and in supporting those with disabilities. Today, thanks to past investments in capacity and infrastructure, Canada is contributing to some of the most important discoveries in the field of SCI research, treatment and services. In addition, direct investment into research and development is creating jobs, working to strengthen the economy and improving the quality of life of Canadians with SCI.

Some examples of how treatment of spinal cord injuries has improved in recent years include:

- Survival after the initial years of a traumatic SCI has improved by 40 per cent;
- Overall acute hospital stays for those with SCI have been reduced by more than half through early intervention, improved surgical techniques, and improved medical care;
- Some secondary complications from SCI have been reduced dramatically, with frequently fatal complications such as pulmonary embolism (blood clot propagation to the lungs) almost unheard of in today's hospitalized SCI patients; and
- There has been an increase in the number of people who experience significant neurological improvement due to improved imaging (magnetic resonance), which helps optimize the surgical

approach for decompressing the injured spinal cord, and improved anaesthesia and critical care techniques, which avoid blood pressure drops that are common in newly injured SCI patients.

Past investments in the Rick Hansen Institute are already showing early returns and will continue to help reduce long term healthcare costs to governments. A number of achievements (conservatively) include:

- A ten per cent reduction in hospital readmissions, saving the healthcare system \$66 million over five years; and
- A ten per cent reduction in ongoing SCI-related healthcare costs amounting to \$360 million in savings annually.

### **The Ongoing Burden of SCI and the Continuing Need for Support**

SCI is one of Canada's major unsolved healthcare challenges, affecting not only the individuals who live with it but their families too. It is a devastating form of neurotrauma that has tremendous and broad-ranging physical and socioeconomic impacts. Life is changed forever; physical functioning, independence, employment, health and community participation are all affected.

Despite notable advances, SCI still has devastating physical, emotional and social impacts and continue to place a huge – and increasing – financial burden on the healthcare system. Spinal cord injury continues to be one of the most expensive initial and ongoing healthcare costs in the entire medical system. More than 86,000 Canadians live with SCI, and with approximately 4,300 new cases occurring each year.<sup>1</sup> At an estimated cost of \$2.4 million per individual (\$1.6 million for paraplegia, \$3 million for tetraplegia), traumatic spinal cord injuries cost \$3.6 billion annually.<sup>2</sup> This figure is conservative given the fact that it does not reflect the annual costs of damage to the spinal cord and impaired function arising from *non-traumatic* causes, such as certain chronic and progressive diseases. This economic impact is compounded by the fact that unemployment amongst Canadians with SCI is as high as 60 percent.

In addition to this economic impact, accessibility for people living with SCI remains a critical societal concern. While some progress has been made, physical access remains a major barrier in communities across Canada and around the world.

### **Continuing the Journey and Accelerating Progress**

The Rick Hansen Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute are seeking to secure a federal investment of \$21 million per year over five years toward the search for SCI cures, improved accessibility and inclusivity, and new social innovations that will improve Canada's civil society and global reputation. This investment will achieve further substantial health and economic benefits for Canadians with SCI and other related disabilities, while showcasing Canada as a global leader in cutting-edge translational research, best practice standards and accessibility and inclusivity.

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<sup>1</sup> Farry A, Baxter D, Noonan V, et al. The Incidence and Prevalence of Spinal Cord Injury in Canada: Overview and Estimates based on Current Evidence. The Rick Hansen Institute and the Urban Futures Institute, December 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Krueger, Hans. The Economic Burden of SCI in Canada. Report Commissioned by the Rick Hansen Institute, December 2010.

## **Rick Hansen Institute**

The Rick Hansen Institute is seeking a continued investment of \$16 million per year over five years from the Government of Canada to solidify the Institute's position as a truly world-class research centre. Working with other partners and supporters, the Rick Hansen Institute expects to leverage this initial investment into \$206 million, in order to achieve the level of transformational change that is required. The Institute has made many advances, including rallying the scientific and medical research communities to generate improvements in post-traumatic SCI care aimed at maximizing physical functionality of the individual and reducing long-term healthcare costs.

Funds will support the Rick Hansen Institute's initiatives in the following six main areas: translational research studies and clinical trials; best practices implementation; network development; informatics; strategic partnerships and corporate infrastructure. These initiatives will contribute to improved treatment and best practices will result in continued reductions in the length of stay in hospitals and primary treatment facilities. In addition the improved recovery will lead to reduced secondary complications which will result in a reduction in readmissions and reduced home-care support requirements. These potential savings would be realized across the Canadian healthcare system and the wider society, representing the result of investments made by the Government and other funding partners.

- Acutely injured SCI patients will achieve better functional outcomes, including reduced paralysis and reduced secondary complications.
- The greater the neurological improvement, the more likely the patient will be able to return to independent living in the community.
- A 10-per-cent reduction in hospital readmissions for secondary complications will result in direct cost savings of \$66 million over a five-year period.
- If improvements in care and treatment of traumatic SCI alone lead to a 10 percent reduction in healthcare costs, the impact in Canada would be savings of \$360 million annually.

Continued funding to the Rick Hansen Institute will ensure that Canada remains the headquarters of a world-class SCI centre of excellence—setting a national and international standard to accelerate SCI research, treatment and care. Governments across Canada will benefit by reducing healthcare costs due to the accelerated integration of advanced best practices and translational research into the Canadian healthcare system. Providing the best care in the best environment in a timely fashion will be more cost effective for Canada's health care system over the long term.

## **Rick Hansen Foundation**

The Rick Hansen Foundation is seeking an investment of \$5 million per year over 5 years from the Government of Canada to build on its track record of success, stewardship and accountability to lead and develop initiatives of critical importance in building a healthier, more inclusive country, and creating more social innovations that benefit Canadians. This investment will enable the Foundation to build on its track record of success which has seeded innovations that have made a significant impact on Canada's civil society.

For 25 years under Rick’s leadership, the Foundation has pioneered innovations that have improved the lives of thousands of people. Through this funding the Government will also be supporting future initiatives like the Foundation’s Global Accessibility Initiative – a unique international call to action designed to focus on increasing physical access to the built environment in Canada and around the world. A main component of this initiative will be the launch of the Rick Hansen Global Accessibility Map (RHGAM), an easy-to-use web-based application, designed to provide consumers with the opportunity to submit and obtain reviews on the accessibility of buildings and public spaces in communities around the world. RHGAM has the potential to improve the quality of life for 4.4 million Canadians living with disabilities<sup>3</sup>, plus an aging population that is projected to double from 4.8 million in 2010 to reach 10.4 million by 2036<sup>4</sup>. Seniors are estimated to be four times more likely than people of working age to live with a disability<sup>5</sup>. By driving societal change towards improved accessibility in communities across Canada, RHGAM encourages active lifestyles, social interaction and inclusivity—all of which may help to lower health care costs and stimulate consumer spending.

As Rick has proven from past funding support, any Government of Canada investment delivers real benefits and results for Canadians. In addition, Rick has been successful in leveraging such investments with other partners. Government of Canada support for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign will provide the potential to raise over \$300 million in new resources to ensure the success of the Foundation and Institute, and sustain their growth for the future. Our ability to secure leverage is a compelling part of this proposal.

## Conclusion

The Rick Hansen Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute are thankful for a strong and enduring relationship with the Government of Canada that has enabled the Foundation and the Institute to consistently address the priorities of Canadians with SCI and other disabilities. With the renewed support of and partnership with the Government of Canada, the Foundation and the Institute can continue to provide significant and tangible benefits to the federal government and all Canadians. This investment will also ensure that Rick Hansen’s leadership can be leveraged to deliver new social innovations in support of a healthier, more inclusive and sustainable country – leaving a lasting legacy for the benefit of Canadians and people around the world.

A renewed funding commitment of \$21 million per year over five years by the Government of Canada will achieve further substantial health and economic benefits for Canadians with SCI and other related disabilities. Investing in a cure for SCI and improving the quality of life for those living with SCI and related disabilities so they can return to living full, productive lives will help governments manage healthcare and social assistance expenditures. It will also build Canada’s reputation for innovation in science and technology and drive economic growth by increasing competitiveness and productivity.

Rick Hansen’s ongoing leadership is a powerful and impactful force in improving the lives of Canadians, inspiring people to make a difference and promoting Canada’s positive social reputation globally. With renewed support and partnership, Rick will ensure that his vision continues and that his dream of a cure is realized.

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<sup>3</sup> 2006 data, Statistics Canada 89-628

<sup>4</sup> Indicators of Well-Being in Canada, HRSDC. [www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=33](http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=33)

<sup>5</sup> The Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at RBC. Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada. Ontario Annual General Meeting, November 5<sup>th</sup> 2010.