

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Study on Children's Health

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Respectfully submitted by:



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[ENRICH – Empowering Next-Generation Researchers in Perinatal and Child Health \(enrichyourscience.ca\)](http://enrichyourscience.ca)

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We are a group of approximately 200 committed mentors, patient partners and learners working together to increase Canada's capacity for scientific leadership in perinatal, child and youth health.

Imperative for a national perinatal, child and youth health research training platform

The health and well-being of children, youth and families are critical to a thriving Canadian society. Yet, Canadian children and youth experience the poorest outcomes among affluent nations. Canada lags behind many developed countries in efforts to developing highly skilled scientific personnel to address these challenges. The next generation of researchers in human development, child and youth health must be equipped to lead the creation and application of knowledge across all sectors to achieve the best reproductive, infant, child, and youth health outcomes.

Canada faces a substantial gap in health researchers who focus on infants, children, youth and families.

Despite being key enablers of health research and innovation, child health clinician scientists face tremendous barriers in establishing their careers. Consequently, their numbers and amount of protected time dedicated for research are declining in Canada. PhD graduates with expertise in child health research are often disconnected from clinicians and patients and unprepared for employment outside academic institutions.

Research trainees from historically marginalized communities experience disparities in access to influential positions in health research due to a complex web of factors, including systemic racism, implicit bias and lack of mentorship, leading to loss of scientific talent over time. We recognize that the most important equity gaps are along racial lines in the academic workforce. The Canadian Association of University Teachers report that in 2018 only 1.4% of Canadian university professors self-identify as Indigenous, disproportionate to the 4.9% of people living in Canada who self-identify as Indigenous. Racialized minorities make up 21% of all Canadian university professors. However, the proportion of Black professors is 2.0%, and their representation has changed minimally over time. Lack of representation among researchers leads to diminution in health innovation and impact of service delivery, and hampers knowledge mobilization and policy changes to improve health and wellbeing of all Canadian children and families.

Our solution

To address this need, we designed a unique national training and mentoring platform - *Empowering Next generation Researchers In perinatal and Child Health (ENRICH)*. We are an interjurisdictional, interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and bilingual team of 193 experienced applicants, mentors, collaborators, partners, and patients. Building on our collective national expertise with research training, we developed strategic partnerships with 16 Canadian pediatric academic health centres and established a unified platform spanning eight Provinces and one Territory.

ENRICH represents research expertise across all research disciplines and will provide the highest quality mentorship grounded in equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles. Our platform will provide training, personalized mentorship, and experiential opportunities for Canadian research students and early career researchers within five years of faculty appointment who are focused on improving the health and well-being of mothers, fathers, infants, children, youth and families, using a life cycle approach. By embracing an intersectoral mentorship model with public, private (for profit), and non-profit partners, ENRICH will ensure research trainees are prepared for careers within and beyond academia.

Our [core competency framework](#) will guide all levels of training, via 3 three distinct, but interconnected and complementary components:

- ***Raising Interdisciplinary Scientist Excellence Learning Management System (RISE LMS)*** is an online, free-to-all training resource for scientific and professional skills development (my.riselms.ca; website under development)
- ***Enrichment Programs*** will provide training in advanced competencies for learners, with personalized mentorship, experiential learning opportunities, and more. This is a closed pathway for a selected group of learners.
- ***Illumination Program*** will include an annual symposium, networking opportunities with cross-sectoral employers, engagement with patient and community partners involved in research, and activities to promote ideation processes to create and implement knowledge to respond rapidly to emerging problems.

These components will work synergistically to foster tailored learning opportunities appropriate for an individual's stage of training, area of science, discipline, career goals, and sociocultural contexts. For further information on ENRICH please visit <https://enrichyourscience.ca> and/or check out the [Welcome to ENRICH](#) pre-recorded presentation.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the Government of Canada support research training in perinatal, child and youth health, emphasizing a lifecycle approach.

We welcome the Government of Canada to support our online learning platform (my.riselms.ca) which will have broad utility for all health research training in Canada.

Key References:

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4. Henry F, Dua E, Kobayashi A, James C, Li P, Ramos H, et al. Race, racialization and Indigeneity in Canadian universities. *Race Ethn Educ.* 2017 May 4;20(3):300–

5. Henry A. 'We especially welcome applications from members of visible minority groups': reflections on race, gender and life at three universities. *Race Ethn Educ.* 2015 Sep 3;18(5):589–610.
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7. Canadian Association of University Teachers. Underrepresented & Underpaid: Diversity & Equity Among Canada's Post-Secondary Education Teachers. 2018 Apr. Available from: https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut_equity_report_2018-04final.pdf