

O'BRIEN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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The Institute's membership is comprised of more than 500 population health and health services researchers and research users -- approximately 40% with faculty appointments within the Cumming School of Medicine; 15% in 9 other University of Calgary Faculties; 30% Alberta Health Services employees; the remainder being stakeholders from municipal and provincial government agencies, community service organizations, and other educational institutions. Approximately 26% of O'Brien members are dual members in one of the 6 other CSM Institutes.

More than 450 trainees and non-faculty staff are considered 'affiliates', and are welcome at most Institute events, receive communications to this end, and benefit either directly or indirectly from many of the support programs listed below. The O'Brien Institute does not have an education program per se, but works closely with the Department of Community Health Sciences to optimize the research environment for the postdoctoral fellows; graduate students; medical residents; and the Department's undergraduate students in Medical Education, Bachelor of Health Sciences, and Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies.

The Institute's governance structure includes a leadership team (Scientific Director, Associate Scientific Director, and Administrative Director); 6 FTE in communications, events, and administrative support; an Executive Committee leading nine support portfolios; a Strategic Advisory Board; and an International Scientific Advisory Group. The O'Brien Institute's budget covers its operational staff and activities; specialized research infrastructure; and small awards deemed catalytic to research excellence and societal impact. "Catalyst" awards are made to members who can explain the excellence, importance, feasibility, and alignment of their proposal, and how it will yield societal and academic outputs (including leveraging external funding). Additional fund development is under way to extend the Institute's current annual budget.

The O'Brien Institute pursues three major research themes, in order to inform health and public policy decisions:

- Enhanced Health Systems Performance (similar to CIHR Pillar 3)
- Improved Population Health (similar to CIHR Pillar 4)
- Innovative Tools and Methods for Public Health (development, investigation, and application of novel data and information methodologies).

Contributing to these three themes, [various platforms and research groupings](#) have evolved within the membership and are supported by the Institute, to develop the broad range of interests relevant to public health. These groups, centres, and initiatives include:

- [W21C](#)
- [Methods Hub](#)

- Population Health and Prevention
- Vulnerable Populations (including StreetCCRED and [Refugee Health YYC](#))
- [Brenda Stafford Centre on Aging](#)
- [Geography of Health and GIS Analysis](#)
- [Global Health](#)
- Group for Research with Indigenous Peoples (GRIP)
- [Health Economics](#)
- Health Policy
- [Health Technology Assessment Unit](#)
- [makeCalgary](#)
- Office of Health and Medical Education Scholarship ([OHMES](#))
- Patient and Community Engagement Research ([PaCER](#))
- Population Mental Health (*via* the [Mathison Centre](#))
- University of Calgary Biostatistics Centre ([UCBC](#))
- [World Health Collaborating Centre](#) for Classification, Terminology and Standards

The O'Brien Institute's support programs and activities facilitate knowledge-generation, knowledge-translation, training, and professional development. Information exchange and networking among the broad membership is a central mandate, and this is achieved through a weekly seminar series; member forums; various communication tools and activities; special events; and programs for mentorship, leadership, awards and recognitions, and internal peer review. These assets are often used to inform members of strategies and tactics for success in their research endeavours, from panels on grant writing strategies to research program planning, benefiting from the participation of experienced leaders with relevant expertise.

The internal peer review program is considered particularly effective, contributing to numbers of successful funding applications that consistently match or exceed local and national benchmarks. Depending on the funding opportunity, internal peer review in the O'Brien Institute can entail the allocation of at least two relevant experts to participate in an applicant-led operating grant review process; the creation of a small committee with expertise in reviewing salary awards; the assembly of a larger, bespoke multidisciplinary committee to review all Institute submissions to a particular competition; dedicated meetings with the Institute Review Leads; and other such combinations. In addition to increasing the quality of submitted applications, the internal peer review program is credited with stimulating valuable networking among the membership. The collegial environment that enables this and other Institute support programs has been much lauded by external reviewers.

Societal impact is one of the O'Brien Institute's two goals, and it is the desired result of the Institute's other goal, academic excellence. Sophisticated knowledge translation and partnership building are required elements of achieving benefits to society, and the Institute has designed its governance structure and human resources to attain this goal. In addition to linking knowledge generators and knowledge end-users within the membership, the Institute is increasingly successful in brokering external relationships with provincial and national interest groups, policy makers, funding agencies, the media, philanthropists, and community stakeholders, thereby extending the reach and impact of its members' significant research outputs.

Shared infrastructure for population health and health services research is also made available through the O'Brien Institute. The 3rd floor of the Cumming School of Medicine's TRW Building comprises office

space for faculty members in the Department of Community Health Sciences, and workstations for research staff and Institute employees. As the physical hub for the Institute, TRW 3rd floor has several conference rooms designed for in-person and virtual meetings, computer stations hosting relevant software, drop-in desks for visiting students, and drop-in offices for visiting faculty. The W21C program manages health systems research space, including patient and provider simulations. The Institute also offers access to data resources and information systems.