

Reflections on Romanow

Canadians called for reform to their healthcare system and in response the Government of Canada gave Roy Romanow the challenge of finding solutions.

With *Building on Values: The Future of Health Care in Canada*, (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/care/romanow/index.html) Commissioner Romanow has delivered a final report that highlights the importance of both health research and evidence in building a cost-effective and sustainable healthcare system. CIHR welcomes the Romanow Report, which provides recommendations that will transform healthcare into a sustainable, innovative and evidence-based system for Canadians.

At CIHR, our mandate is to develop and support health research across all disciplines and to translate new knowledge into improved health for Canadians, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened healthcare system. Efforts to turn research into action are spearheaded by CIHR's 13 institutes who partner with researchers, universities, hospitals, industry, governments, communities, charities and patient groups across Canada to develop innovative programs that will lead to a cost-effective Canadian healthcare system. In addition to CIHR's corporate submission, a number of CIHR's institutes provided their own submissions to the Romanow Commission. Their efforts are reflected throughout the report.

I am pleased that the Romanow Report, echoed a similar recommendation in Senator Michael Kirby's report in recognizing the need for increased and sustained investment in health research as a means to ensuring a sustainable and evidence-based healthcare system. Research is the foundation of the healthcare system. Through new discoveries, treatments and interventions, and better understanding about how best to organize, finance and deliver health services and health policies, research holds out the best promise to strengthen the health system, improve the quality of life and health of Canadians, and reduce the economic burden of illness.

As part of its submission to the Romanow Commission, CIHR proposed the creation of Centres of Health Innovation to bridge gaps between health research and practice. These Centres would be established with a mandate to engage caregivers, governments, industry, the public, policy-makers, health charities and others to foster and disseminate a culture of innovation and evidence-based decision-making across the healthcare system. This concept resonated with the Commission, which recommended the creation of four Centres for Health Innovation dedicated to (i) rural and remote health, (ii) interprofessional collaboration and learning, (iii) health promotion and (iv) pharmaceutical policy. Other possible centres mentioned in the report include patient safety, mental health, telehealth, genomics and proteomics, and chronic disease management.

I also agree with the Commission statement that "health research ... is an increasingly important component of Canada's knowledge-based economy and a source of high-skilled, well-paid employment for thousands of Canadians." Health is the largest sector of the knowledge-based economy, employing thousands of Canadians, with expenditures in excess of \$103 billion. CIHR already has in place a suite of programs designed to fuel the pipeline of discovery, catalyze commercialization and inform healthcare practice and policy. New training programs have been designed to attract and retain outstanding researchers who will act as both agents of change in the healthcare system, and mentors and teachers for the next generation.

Finally, we must remember that many of the improvements to our quality of healthcare will come from learning how to provide and deliver it more effectively. This means adding to the mix research into management, procedures, policy and population health, and the exchange of ideas and best practices between hospitals, health practitioners and decision-makers in government, across Canada and internationally.

Underlying CIHR's submission to the Romanow Commission was the recognition that transforming our healthcare system is not just about more dollars – it is about doing things differently. At no time has the need and opportunity for such transformative change been more apparent than right now.

The tsunami wave of science being driven by advances in genomics, proteomics, stem cells, health informatics, epidemiology, imaging, nanotechnologies and telemedicine is promising to sweep away current practices and policy, and drive profound changes in how we diagnose, treat and prevent disease, and promote health.

These are indeed exciting times for Canada's healthcare system. The post-Report commitment by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health to invest more dollars in healthcare is a positive first step towards strengthening our healthcare system. Canada now has the opportunity to work collaboratively to develop an innovative, modern health system for the 21st century. CIHR will be working with others to build on the momentum created by the Romanow Report, to ensure that Canadians benefit from health research and a stronger healthcare system. Hospitals are critical partners for CIHR. By working together, breaking down silos, and aligning our collective visions and programs, we can move forward on the promise set out in the Romanow Report – and build a stronger, healthier Canada.

Dr. Alan Bernstein, OC, PhD, FRSC, is the inaugural President of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.