



Strategic Research Investment Framework (summary)

2012 – 2017



Alberta Cancer
FOUNDATION

Introduction

Over the last 10 years, Alberta Cancer Foundation donors have funded more than 25 per cent of the \$400 million spent on cancer research in this province. The Foundation invests more than \$15 million annually towards research in pursuit of its vision of a cancer-free future for all Albertans. Its role is to ensure that these research investments result in progress in reducing the incidence and impact of cancer in Alberta.

The Alberta Cancer Foundation is building on its past investments and the excellent foundation of science and infrastructure in the province through a new approach towards investing in research. The Foundation will seek to invest in research that is transformative, that forms the basis for innovation and improved outcomes.

OUTCOMES CAN INCLUDE:

- Improved understanding in risk factors
- Earlier diagnosis
- Improved interventions and treatments
- Improved quality of life during treatment and after care
- Reductions in the recurrence of cancer

THE ALBERTA CANCER FOUNDATION WILL:

1. Target strategic investment, to achieve results and meet donor expectations
2. Invest actively, leveraging many resources (rather than passively, through grants)
3. Invest in outcomes that benefit at-risk individuals, cancer patients and cancer survivors
4. Build capacity, collaboration and alignment in the cancer research community
5. Use scarce resources strategically to achieve significant outcomes
6. Champion patient networks and leverage patient expertise to inform research, treatment and care
7. Encourage innovative, outcome-focused programs to advance cancer control
8. Strengthen Alberta's capacity for rapid translation of research into practice
9. Partner (in Alberta, nationally and globally) to build capacity to tackle cancer

ALBERTA REALITIES

1. Alberta has a relatively small research community dedicated to cancer research
2. There is a need to strategically focus investments to achieve the vision of a cancer free future.
3. The key to any strategy for cancer research is global collaboration.
4. A need exists to leverage all of Alberta's assets, including public policy design and the assets of sectors not typically seen as part of the cancer research community.
5. The Alberta Cancer Foundation needs to focus on return on investment in order to accelerate breakthroughs in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer and achieve the expectations of its donors

CONTEXT

Cancer, a collection of more than 200 complex diseases, is one of Alberta’s most daunting public health challenges. In 2013, more than 16,000 Albertans will be diagnosed with cancer and over 6,000 will lose their lives to the disease.

The Alberta Cancer Foundation will fund world-class research to improve prevention and screening, diagnose cancer earlier and develop better treatments. The Alberta Cancer Foundation will also work closely with such partners as Alberta Health Services, the universities, and other stakeholders working to achieve a cancer-free future.

STRUCTURING RESEARCH INVESTMENTS

The Process: Open, Rigorous, Strategic and Efficient

The Foundation will develop a process that includes:

- working with its Research Advisory Committee
- building on the system’s existing investments, strengths and capacities
- encouraging applicants to offer plans that align with Alberta Cancer Foundation’s strategic intent
- developing a pipeline of opportunities for current and future investment
- using a transparent review process that involves scientific peers, patients and donors
- using clear and transparent decision-making criteria
- involving the Alberta Cancer Foundation Board, expert patients and the scientific/clinical community

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

The Alberta Cancer Foundation’s investments in research will build on the excellent discovery, clinical and applied research taking place in Alberta. Investments in transformative research will accelerate the translation for knowledge and scientific evidence gained from these scientific discoveries into improvement of outcomes. The Foundation has adopted a portfolio approach to new investments, that is guided by three key strategic priorities and two areas that enable these investments to be fully leveraged and globally connected. They are:

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	ENABLING SUPPORTS
Invest in transformative programs	Foster collaboration on a global scale
Invest in foundational infrastructure	Enable innovations in patient care
Realize new opportunities	

Strategic Priority : Invest in Transformative Programs

Investing in research that is based on research that contributes to breakthroughs in the direction of cancer research or programming, facilitating the translation of these breakthroughs and scientific discoveries into practice towards defined outcomes:

- the research approach should be: **transformative** (accelerates or revolutionizes existing research efforts and strengths); **innovative** (using novel ideas or approaches); **catalytic** (initiating or accelerating from research into practice)
- the project is expected to lead to new understandings, directions or breakthroughs in the **incidence of cancer**, increasing the efficiency and efficacy of **treatment** and improving the **quality of life** of those living with cancer or cancer survivors

Open to all areas of research interest, applications are specifically encouraged in the following:

- Prevention research
- Early detection and screening for cancer
- Supportive oncology and research that improves the quality of life for cancer patients
- Championing patient networks and/or leverage patient expertise to inform research, clinical practice, screening and diagnostics
- An area of high unmet clinical need

Strategic Priority: Invest in Foundational Infrastructure

Research infrastructure that will provide Alberta with a leading-edge advantage by supporting core infrastructure for all areas of research e.g. biobanking, clinical trials support, biomarker discovery and validation facilities, imaging technology. This core infrastructure will enable Alberta researchers to fully participate in collaborative networks while making a major contribution to cancer related issues in the province. Open to all areas of research interest, however applications will be encouraged in infrastructure that demonstrably strengthens the translation of research into practice such as:

- leading the way in funding the further development of bio banking and related disease modeling
- continuing to invest in diagnostic imaging and imaging technology programs
- strengthening the translation of research into clinical practice
- enhancing the ability to collect, access, analyze and use clinical/research data
- supporting the development of highly qualified people

Strategic Priority: Realize New Opportunities

Every five years, the Alberta Cancer Foundation will:

- identify a major challenge or opportunity in which it would like to make a measurable and substantial difference, and have a direct impact on individuals
- challenge the Alberta cancer research and clinical communities to outline what it would take to eliminate, reduce or significantly impact that cancer

Enabling Support: Foster Collaboration on a Global Scale

- **Support global networking:** The Alberta Cancer Foundation will target future investments in global collaborative partnerships and alliances (e.g., the Tomorrow Project) aimed at accelerating cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment and research outcomes.
- **Develop communities of practice:** The Alberta Cancer Foundation will link Albertans (those with cancer, those who care for those with cancer and those with a commitment to making a difference globally) with global communities of research, practice and care, to achieve patient-centered outcomes.

Enabling Support: Enable Innovations in Patient Care

Potential opportunities include:

- facilitating enrollment of all of Alberta's cancer patients and caregivers in online cancer communities
- connecting cancer researchers and clinicians to expert patients' communities
- enabling health professionals working with cancer patients to rapidly translate research into practice

STRATEGIC RULES FOR INVESTMENTS

The Alberta Cancer Foundation is committed to making effective investments in cancer research and activity in Alberta. The Foundation's investments must lead it to play a differentiated role (that is, a role that differs from the roles of other organizations in the field, such as Alberta Health Services or Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions). This role will reflect the Foundation's vision, mission, funding sources and ability to act. Differentiation will occur through strategic investments focused on specific outcomes aligned with the Foundation's vision of a cancer-free Alberta. Research is one vehicle by which this vision can be achieved. Other vehicles will include supporting new prevention, screening, diagnostic, and treatment programs.

The Alberta Cancer Foundation's Rules for Making Strategic Investments

How-to Rules – The Alberta Cancer Foundation:

- invests in outcome-based work
- focuses on reducing the incidence of cancer, increasing the efficiency and efficacy of treatment and improving quality of life for those living with cancer or for cancer survivors
- seeks partnerships for investment
- does not normally invest directly in the establishment of new endowed chairs or provide "base-like" funding for positions or teams
- practices results-based management (RBM) in its support of research, development and innovation

Boundary Rules – The Alberta Cancer Foundation:

- invests in outcome-based work
- may invest in a range of different contributory research disciplines
- will not seek to own intellectual property, commercialize intellectual property or seek to own an interest in commercial activities resulting from its investments (although has no objection to others seeking to do so); the Alberta Cancer Foundation may hope to receive donations and contributions.

Priority Rules – The Alberta Cancer Foundation:

- invests in programs that support a range of cancer researchers
- invests in research that targets an improvement in quality of life for those who are living with cancer or who are cancer survivors
- invests in programs that improve the efficiency and efficacy of treatment

Timing Rules – The Alberta Cancer Foundation:

- invests in programs that are based on evidence of potential impacts on the incidence of cancer, on the efficacy and effectiveness of treatment or on improvements in quality of life for those living with cancer
- invests in programs on an agreed-upon cycle of investment, with clear protocols for submission, review and decision-making
- will generally not make "emergency" investments (e.g., to keep a particular highly qualified person in Alberta or to buy equipment)

Exit Rules — The Alberta Cancer Foundation:

- makes investment decisions based on outcome-focused proposals that have defined milestones, and will exit from its support if milestones are not being achieved and outcomes are not being demonstrated
- makes investments linked to both proposals and people—if a key proponent of a proposal is no longer part of that work, or leaves Alberta, the Foundation reserves the right to review and end its support
- terminates its investments at the end of each project, as planned

CONCLUSION

The Alberta Cancer Foundation is a mission-driven organization that, while committed to partnering with others, must deliver its own outcomes that align with donor expectations. The Foundation chooses to invest in transformative research that has the potential for substantial, real-time and focused impact. The Alberta Cancer Foundation will support foundational infrastructure that benefits research across the continuum of cancer control.

The Alberta Cancer Foundation's framework for investing in research is aligned with its core objective and is based on the understanding that "less is more"—that is, fewer but more focused investments will produce outcomes better aligned with the Foundation's vision of a cancer-free future.