



Health  
Canada

Santé  
Canada

2006–2007

# HEALTH CANADA'S MINISTERIAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

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## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

This annual report highlights the key advice of Health Canada's Science Advisory Board, provided to the Minister of Health regarding the science performed and used by Health Canada and other components of the Minister's health portfolio.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF HEALTH CANADA'S MINISTERIAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

In addition to formulating advice on a number of specific science-related issues, four issues received special attention by the Science Advisory Board in the period 2006–2007. First, we provided advice during the course of the development of the government's national strategy on science and technology—*Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage*. Second, we identified the key elements of a formal science and technology strategy for Health Canada to complement the national science and technology strategy, and to assist the Department in its overall management of its science-related activities. Third, the Board explored and provided advice on ways for Health Canada and other departments to better coordinate efforts on issues where they share common objectives and challenges, such as public health, the environment, food safety and agriculture. Fourth, we provided input regarding the roles of the Science Advisory Board and the Office of the Chief Scientist in light of emerging needs and opportunities,

As always, the Advisory Board relied heavily on the expertise and commitment of its members and of the Secretariat staff. I thank all of them for their dedicated service in 2006–2007, and extend special thanks and best wishes to Linda Lusby (Vice-Chair, SAB) and Keith Bailey, who retired from the Board after serving with dedication and distinction.



Dr. Arnold Naimark,  
Chair, Health Canada's Ministerial Science Advisory Board

## STRATEGIC ADVICE

Established in 1997, Health Canada's Ministerial Science Advisory Board (SAB) provides independent, strategic advice to the Minister of Health on the science performed and used by Health Canada and on other departmental activities. Board members are appointed by the Minister of Health, and each contributes expertise and knowledge relevant to the scientific activities of Health Canada.

Membership consists of a Chair, Vice-Chair and up to an additional 16 members. A Science Advisory Board Secretariat, located within Health Canada's Office of the Chief Scientist, supports the work of the Board. In addition, the Department's Chief Scientist serves as a liaison between the Board and senior departmental officials.

The Board meets up to four times annually. The following are invited to attend all Board meetings as ex-officio members:

- Health Canada's Deputy Minister, Associate Deputy Minister, all Assistant Deputy Ministers, the Executive Director of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, and the Chief Scientist;
- the Chief Public Health Officer and the Chief Science Advisor of the Public Health Agency of Canada;
- the Chair of Health Canada's Research Ethics Board; and
- the President of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

### Responsibilities of the SAB \* include providing advice on:

- scientific activities of Health Canada;
- relevance and quality of the science performed and used by the Department;
- science underpinning a range of issues addressed by the Department;
- emerging health sciences, scientific trends, challenges and opportunities in Canada and abroad;
- knowledge-translation activities at Health Canada;
- communication of science performed and used by the Department; and
- scientific partnerships and linkages.

*\* Proposed changes to the SAB's Terms of Reference reflect that the Board's responsibilities now extend to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Therefore, it is understood that each reference to Health Canada in this list of responsibilities refers also to the PHAC.*

For more information on the mandate and terms of reference of the SAB, visit its website at [healthcanada.gc.ca/sab](http://healthcanada.gc.ca/sab).

## THEMES AND ISSUES

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The Science Advisory Board met formally on three occasions during its 2006–2007 meeting-year calendar: October 31–November 1, 2006; January 10–11, 2007; and March 28–29, 2007. These meetings often involved participation by experts from other departments and agencies who were invited by the Board to discuss particular topics, key developments and emerging issues relevant to its mandate.

The Board's deliberations during the period covered by this report are summarized briefly below.

### 1. SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION

In anticipation of the 2007 launch of a new federal science and technology strategy, the Board advised the Minister about matters of particular relevance to the health sector that should inform the development of the new strategy.

External experts were invited to address the Board on the contemporary context for the development of a national science and technology strategy, namely: Dr. Arthur Carty (National Science Advisor); Dr. Peter Nicholson (President, Council of Canadian Academies); Dr. Alan Winter (Deputy-Chair, Council of Science and Technology Advisors); and Dr. Alan Bernstein (President, Canadian Institutes of Health Research). There was general support for the view that Health Canada should develop its own strategic vision and action plan related to science and innovation as a complement to the broader federal strategy. Based on this input and its own deliberations, the Board identified, and recommended for the Minister's consideration, key elements of a Health Canada S&T strategy.

The Board has been strongly supportive of the thrust in recent years towards science integration in the federal government. This topic appeared in two forms in the Board's deliberations in 2006–2007. First, the Board added to its initiative in building linkages to its counterpart advisory bodies in Environment Canada by reaching out to advisory bodies in Industry Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). Senior officials from HC and AAFC briefed the Board on science and technology initiatives underway and the interface between agriculture and health. A joint task force representing the two science advisory boards was charged with exploring topics of mutual interest, including: research on food-borne pathogens; novel products (e.g., nutraceuticals and functional foods); and strategies to close the innovation gap between Canada and its major trading partners.

Second, the Board took special note of the White Paper on Governance and Management of Science in Health Canada, developed by Health Canada's Chief Scientist (then, Dr. Pierre-Gerlier Forest), which outlined approaches to enhancing horizontal science management in Health Canada in order to realize greater synergy and complementarity among its branches and agencies.

The Board heard presentations on particular science and technology-related initiatives within the Health Portfolio and in affiliated departments and agencies. These included:

- the National Strategy on Technology Assessment, under development by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health;
- progress on meeting the goals of the Canada Health Infoway with particular emphasis on the status of the Electronic Health Records initiative; and
- implementation of the Cancer Control Strategy, including how its funding will be spent.

The SAB continued to monitor a range of issues throughout the year, including: genetic testing; the Post-Doctoral Fellowship program; Nanotechnology; Longitudinal Cohort Study; pandemic planning; research integrity; and developments in knowledge translation.

## 2. ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

The Board reviewed an assessment of progress-to-date on Health Canada's efforts to implement an integrated approach to health and environment. This included review of the general federal strategy on the environment (*ecoACTION*), as well as specific initiatives related to protecting Canadians and the environment from toxic chemicals. The Board was also updated on the review the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*.

The Board was briefed on a major report released by the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee (CBAC) entitled [\*BioPromise? Biotechnology, Sustainable Development and Canada's Future Economy\*](#) and took particular note of its implications for rural Canada. Among its key messages, the Board noted in particular that innovative technological approaches to sustainable development required greater coordination among departments, including Agriculture Canada, Environment Canada, Industry Canada, Health Canada and Natural Resources Canada.

The Board noted the Government of Canada's initiatives related to the *Clean Air Act* and urged that occupational exposure be included as part of indoor air-quality analysis. The Board welcomed the progress made on cataloguing toxic compounds. It also noted that there would be considerable advantage to having the methods for screening chemicals validated by external as well as internal experts.

## 3. PUBLIC HEALTH

Senator Wilbert Keon, Deputy Chair of the Senate's Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, provided an overview of the [\*Standing Committee's Report on Mental Health and Mental Illness\*](#), released in May 2006. The Board was

subsequently briefed on current programs and initiatives in mental health by Claude Rocan (Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Branch, PHAC) and Frank Fedyk (Director General, Intergovernmental Affairs Directorate, and A/Director General, Policy Planning and Priorities Directorate, Health Policy Branch, HC)

In its advice to the Minister, the Board emphasized that federal leadership must be well defined and noted that it will continue to monitor progress in achieving the objectives set out in the Senate report; it urged that implementation of the Standing Committee's recommendations take into account related initiatives (e.g., early childhood development and implications of mal-development for mental health in later years); it suggested that further analysis be undertaken related to gender differences and to vulnerable groups in the population; and it stressed that the proposed Commission on Mental Health include personnel with scientific expertise and links to the broader scientific community and that it would benefit from close collaboration with other agencies in Canada and abroad with complementary missions.

The Board continued to monitor developments on a range of other public health topics, including: PHAC's development of collaborating centres; the International Polar Year; pandemic influenza; oral health; marijuana; risk communication; and Aboriginal health.

#### **4. THERAPEUTICS, DIAGNOSTICS AND NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS**

The Board discussed a proposal to develop a national oversight body and research network to improve pharmacosurveillance in Canada. The Board suggested that the CIHR would be a suitable candidate to host the proposed national oversight body in partnership with Statistics Canada and PHAC. The Board noted that while conditional licensing could be a potential outcome of an effective pharmacosurveillance system, current support for such an initiative appears to be greater at the provincial level than at the federal level.



The Board alerted the Minister to the need for adequate oversight of quality and reliability of genetic testing and regulation of stem-cell therapies. It also maintained a watching brief on the government's smart regulation initiative and on the science aspects of policies related to the regulation of expensive drugs for rare diseases.

## **5. OPERATIONS**

The Board restructured its schedule of meetings to provide more time for preparation of presentations by branches and agencies within the Health Portfolio and for development of background documentation on various issues of interest to the Board.

The Board devoted considerable attention to reviewing the pattern of its activities in relation to the Board's terms of reference. The review resulted in the Board recommending the inclusion of a clause in its terms of reference indicating that the Board's purview includes scientific activities of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Two important initiatives related to the management of science within the Health Portfolio were the subject of advice provided to the Minister by the Board: the role and function of the Office of the Chief Scientist in regard to both the ongoing management of science in the Department and to support of the Board; and the proposed launch of a review of the role and function of the Board in the light of developments related to science in the various branches of Health Canada.

Given the vacancies on the Board resulting from the retirement of two members and in anticipation of other vacancies resulting from expiry of the terms of other members, the Board recommended that new appointees to the Board include individuals with expertise in one or more of environmental science, industry and biotechnology.

## FIND OUT MORE

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For more information about Health Canada's Science Advisory Board and its activities, visit the Board online at [healthcanada.gc.ca/sab](http://healthcanada.gc.ca/sab) or contact the SAB Secretariat at the following address:

Health Canada - Science Advisory Board Secretariat

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## SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERSHIP, 2006–2007

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|---|---|---|
| Arnold Naimark, Chair<br>University of Manitoba | Mark Goldberg<br>McGill University                                | Kathryn O'Hara<br>Carleton University               |
| Linda Lusby, Vice-Chair*<br>Acadia University   | Arminée Kazanjian<br>University of British Columbia               | Howard A. Palley<br>University of Maryland          |
| Lorne Babiuk<br>University of Saskatchewan      | Andreas Laupacis<br>Institute for Clinical Evaluative<br>Sciences | Rémi Quirion<br>Douglas Hospital<br>Research Centre |
| Keith Bailey*<br>Health Canada (Retired)        | Louise Lemieux-Charles<br>University of Toronto                   | Jacques R. Simard<br>University of Laval            |
| Renaldo Battista<br>University of Montreal      | Christopher Loomis<br>Memorial University                         | Stanley Vollant<br>Clinique médicale du Fjord       |
| Stephen E. Bornstein<br>Memorial University     | Renée Lyons<br>Dalhousie University                               | Mamoru Watanabe<br>University of Calgary            |

\* denotes members who left the Board at the end of its 2006–2007 meeting-year.