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• (1550)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 103 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research.

Today's meeting is taking place in the hybrid format. All witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

I'd like to remind all members of the following points.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have a choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French.

Thank you all for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(i) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 17, the committee commences its study of the mission, mandate, role, structure and financing of the new capstone research funding organization announced in budget 2024.

It is now my pleasure to welcome, from Colleges and Institutes of Canada, Pari Johnston, president and chief executive officer; from the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities, Chad Gaffield, chief executive officer; and, from Universities Canada, Gabriel Miller, president and chief executive officer.

We're looking forward to your testimony today. Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Ms. Johnston, I invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Ms. Pari Johnston (President and Chief Executive Officer, Colleges and Institutes Canada): Thank you so much.

Good afternoon, everyone.

As noted, I'm the president and CEO of Colleges and Institutes Canada, the national voice of our 135 publicly funded colleges, institutes, CEGEPs and polytechnics.

Research impact for Canadians is the theme I want to underscore today.

Federal research must improve the daily lives of Canadians. It must also drive community and business innovation to support prosperity and well-being for all.

Canada's public colleges and institutes specialize in industry-partnered, problem-driven research that works at the speed of business to de-risk technology development and mobilize greater technology adoption, adaptation and integration. Sixty-two per cent of our partners are Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises that keep the IP generated from our collaborations, supporting wealth creation and retention in Canada and across communities. Colleges' research approach is, by definition, mission driven.

[Translation]

I'm pleased to be here to share the perspective of Colleges and Institutes Canada, or CICan, on the establishment of the new capstone research funding organization.

We support the creation of the capstone organization and the transition to a mission-driven research program. To achieve this, the mandate, structure and priorities of the capstone organization must help our research system address Canada's major challenges.

[English]

Given this impact imperative, we have five recommendations.

Enshrine college and small and medium-sized enterprise representation on the new council of science and innovation to inform the federal strategy and priorities for the capstone.

Have a dedicated college seat on the capstone's board to ensure all research players have a voice in the governance.

Ensure full eligibility for colleges in the capstone's mission programs.

Hire capstone leadership and staff with a core understanding and experience of industry-academic partnerships, pathways to research implementation and college-led research.

Also, mandate intentional connections and hand-offs with existing federal granting agency programs, where barriers to full college participation must be removed and where the overall role of colleges must be reimagined, recentered and reinvested in to optimize the impact of federal research dollars.

We believe that adopting these recommendations and ensuring the capstone has a stand-alone and robust budget means that the capstone will be well positioned to leverage the unique strengths of colleges to deliver on a mission-driven research agenda, with tangible benefits for Canadians.

Let me share a few other data points that illustrate why we can't afford to leave college capacity on the table if we want to reap the benefits of mission-driven research.

In 2021-22, our colleges and institutes leveraged \$150 million in federal government investment for a total of \$433 million in research activity to support over 8,000 research projects, prototypes, projects, services and processes in challenge areas such as housing construction, advanced manufacturing and climate-smart agriculture and food production.

- (1555)

[*Translation*]

However, most impressively, the colleges are achieving these results despite receiving only 2.9% of the funding provided by the three granting councils in 2021.

If we really want the research ecosystem to make a tangible and noticeable impact on Canadians, mission-driven research that leverages college expertise must become one of Canada's most powerful drivers of innovation.

[*English*]

However, our system is severely challenged right now, putting all this at risk.

The latest reforms at IRCC to the international student program will create a \$2-billion shortfall in our system, and our main funding vehicle, the college and community innovation program, is set to expire in 2026. This is creating a perfect storm that threatens the capacity of our system to work with our industry and community partners to produce the research and innovation results that matter to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Let's not overlook this tool. This means intentionally supporting and leveraging colleges as full partners in the research and innovation ecosystem.

Thank you for your time.

I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Johnston.

We will now turn to Dr. Gaffield.

The floor is yours for an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Chad Gaffield (Chief Executive Officer, U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to extend my greetings to all the committee members.

I'm pleased to be here and to have the chance to contribute to your discussions.

[*English*]

I want to especially thank you for inviting me back to talk about the capstone research funding organization announced in budget 2024, but first let me emphasize the impact of the new research funding announced in budget 2024 for scholarships, fellowships and the core budgets of the federal research granting agencies, as well as AI compute capacity. While more remains to be done, this support better positions Canada and all Canadians for a competitive 21st century.

As you know, U15 Canada is composed of the leading 15 research-intensive universities that came together in 2012 to help advance research and innovation policies and programs for the benefit of all Canadians. These universities act as domestic research hubs for Canada's entire diversified research ecosystem. That includes not only universities but also research hospitals, research organizations and colleges.

In this context, U15 Canada welcomed budget 2024's announcement that it would act on the advice of the advisory panel by creating a new capstone research funding organization. This development reflects increasing efforts to combine the strengths of disciplinary research to study deeply complex phenomena.

When they were first created during the 1960s and 1970s, the federal research funding agencies reflected the established assumption that the best way to advance knowledge was through specialized research. This approach proved stunningly effective during the 20th century and led to major advances that have improved quality of life in remarkable ways.

In recent decades, however, we have also become increasingly aware that disciplinary expertise by itself cannot always tackle complex research questions. For this reason, the federal funding bodies began working years ago to make their collective achievements greater than the sum of their parts.

To manage this approach, the federal research agencies collectively created what is now called the “Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat”, which administers about one-third of the three federal research agency budgets, as well as the vast array of common research policies.

The Bouchard panel concluded that the time had come to take further steps in leveraging the specialized disciplinary strengths of the research funding agencies by evolving the tri-council's secretariat with a new governance structure.

U15 Canada supports these efforts to build on the long-standing success of Canada's research system with updates that seek to strengthen coordination across the granting agency programs through a new governance mechanism. As recommended in the Bouchard report, such updates must preserve and build on the existing strengths of the research support system, including the excellence in fundamental research at the granting councils.

Similarly, updates must be implemented cautiously to minimize any disruption to the existing system and ongoing research.

The new capstone organization must continue to maintain the political independence of funding decisions. This core commitment to academic freedom and the free pursuit of knowledge are foundational principles of Canada's research system and are central components of its success. Funding decisions must always be guided by a commitment to scientific and scholarly excellence, based on competitive applications and merit-based review to support the best proposals and the best researchers.

The new organization must commit to diverse representation, including indigenous researchers, to achieve truly inclusive excellence.

An ongoing connection to health research must ensure that health-based research is guided by health care delivery, patient outcomes and the activities of other federal departments and agencies. Similarly, it is essential that the social sciences and humanities research on human thought and behaviour be fully supported in keeping up with the complex challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Finally, we welcome the recent publication of a “what we heard” report following tri-agency-led consultations. We appreciated their recommendation for sustained engagement and ongoing dialogue as the capstone changes are developed and implemented.

Overall, the opportunity to pursue greater interdisciplinary research, to strengthen international research collaboration and to drive mission-driven research, building on the essential specialized research supported by the granting agencies, promises to be an important step forward for the research ecosystem for the benefit of Canada.

We look forward to learning more about this initiative in the coming weeks.

[Translation]

Thank you.

• (1600)

[English]

I look forward to the discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Gaffield.

We'll now turn to Mr. Miller.

You have the floor for an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Miller (President and Chief Executive Officer, Universities Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm pleased to be here today.

[English]

Thank you for inviting me today to discuss the development of the new capstone agency and its mission, mandate, role, structure and financing.

[Translation]

Universities Canada represents 96 institutions of all sizes. All these institutions are part of Canada's rich research ecosystem.

[English]

Advanced research training in all disciplines is the foundation of a post-secondary system that delivers the highly skilled talent Canada needs for a knowledge-driven and innovative economy. The new capstone agency will play a crucial role in this process and in modernizing and strengthening federal support.

Universities Canada participated in the tri-agencies' consultations held this past summer. We also held our own consultations with our members, and we produced a report on these discussions, which has been shared with the tri-councils, the department and the minister's office.

I would like to emphasize three key priorities as we discuss what this new agency might look like and be responsible for.

First, let's protect what's good about the system we've built in Canada.

Our members feel strongly that the structure and integrity of the tri-councils should be maintained under this new organization, a recommendation also made by the advisory panel on the federal research support system. The tri-councils are integral to Canada's research ecosystem, supporting the specific needs of the STEM, the social sciences and the health sciences communities.

Their governance structure includes strong academic representation, which enhances understanding of the research process and needs. We recommend that the capstone agency include academic representation in its structure and that any new internal grant review committees also comprise academic subject matter experts. We must ensure that the cost of administrating this new agency does not take away from existing research funding capacity in Canada.

Second, let's improve our system where there's room to improve it.

The stated goals of the new agency are to modernize and to bring more coordination, cohesion and agility to Canada's research funding system. To meet these important goals and to maximize the positive impact of this reform, we must minimize any administrative burden and ensure ongoing research remains unhindered. Adding layers of bureaucracy would negatively impact accessibility for researchers and would limit the participation of smaller institutions, which already face significant burdens and often lack capacity to support researchers in this regard.

Our members recommend that the new agency make funding applications and reporting processes more efficient by implementing either a universal grant management portal or a data management system. The agency should also look for opportunities to decrease the existing administrative burden and to provide additional supports to institutions to address them.

Finally, one of the objectives of the capstone agency is to strengthen Canada's ability to support mission-driven research. Our members support the value of mission-driven research, but it's important to emphasize the importance of making sure that investigator-led discovery research is not pushed to the wayside. Investigator-led research can lead to discoveries that address future problems. Canada also needs this kind of research to preserve academic independence and the integrity of the research process.

As the government moves forward with the creation of its new agency and the modernization of the system, it should continue to be guided by regular, sustained consultations with researchers, institutions and stakeholders, as well as by findings from the independent "Report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System".

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I'm ready to answer your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses for your opening statements.

We will now turn to our first round of questions.

We'll ask MP Viersen to please begin for six minutes.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

My first set of questions is for Ms. Johnston from College and Institutes Canada.

We've been talking a lot in Parliament about building homes, and I have in front of me a report from Colleges and Institutes Canada. Right off the top, it was about equipping Canada's skilled workforce to build the homes. I want to thank you for this report, and it looks like your organization and the people you represent can definitely help with building the homes.

What's interesting is that the Government of Canada has supported a study on how to tax homes, how to get home equity tax out, and they spent \$250,000 on this study. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has uncovered this, and we're concerned about the fact that perhaps, on the one hand, it's funding good research and initiatives on the work that you do, and on the other hand, it's exactly the opposite.

Do you think that taxpayer-funded research on how to tax the value out of people's homes is a good use of Canadian taxpayers' money?

Ms. Pari Johnston: Thanks for the question.

I'll focus on the issue you raised with respect to the ideas we put forward about how to build more homes in Canada.

The investments by the government to date in terms of the Canadian housing strategy have been very important. In our report, we talked about the fact that the ability to build those homes requires attention to workforce development. This is where we're seeing incredible challenges with respect to impending retirements.

The average age of a construction worker is 55 years right now. One of the issues we raised was how we can work with the Canadian public college system to develop more pre-apprentice programs to support more students choosing to go into the trades to build the homes we need.

A related issue, and an issue related to this study, is the issue of how you leverage the opportunity to build better homes faster through innovation. One of our ideas has been to set up a housing challenge fund through the applied research program at NSERC, which would set a challenge for Canadian colleges to come together to develop innovative approaches to modular housing and different ways to look at building efficiencies.

This is where I guess I would respond to the question. I think we are very interested in finding ways to leverage the capacity of the applied college system and its partnerships with industry. Housing is one of the key sectors in which our members are very active, so how can we do that to leverage the housing challenge that we have right now?

• (1610)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that whatever we're doing must improve the daily lives of Canadians. I appreciate that. I'm just concerned about research that is going into how to tax the equity in people's homes. How does that provide value for Canadian homeowners when we have a housing shortage in this country?

Do you have any comments around that?

Ms. Pari Johnston: I think that one of the things.... We haven't done too much of an assessment of the particular measure you're talking about, but what I do think that we would be really well placed to focus on is how we leverage the opportunity we have through the public post-secondary system to look at where the challenges are to building more homes in this country. How can we leverage the policy capacity, the research capacity and the partnerships we have with industry and with communities to really build and to develop the multistakeholder approach to building more homes?

This is where our particular interest around a challenge fund would come in. It's really marshalling new resources to give a challenge to our post-secondaries and ask what they could come up with in terms of new ideas to support and develop new technologies, new processes, etc., to build the kind of housing supply that we need. Where are some of the policy barriers, etc.?

This is why we're so interested in the notion of more investment in mission-driven research. The housing crisis in Canada needs a mission-driven approach that we feel we could be marshalling more of our research capacity to address.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: In your opening statement, you mentioned the budget for capstone. What would you see that budget going towards? To some degree, this could be a volunteer organization with a very limited budget. You said it would be well funded. I'm not sure what you foresee with that.

Ms. Pari Johnston: Like my colleagues, I think what's important is that we look at how to stand up and fund a capstone organization that builds on but doesn't take away from the investments in the system to date.

How do we look at creating some stand-alone envelopes—for example, mission-driven research—that could really leverage the capacity that's been built into the system to date? Our—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: My time is coming to an end.

Ms. Pari Johnston: Sure.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I noticed that on Twitter you have a very prominent photo of you and Minister Boissonnault. I was just wondering if you discovered who the other Randy is. Did you meet the other Randy?

Thank you.

Ms. Pari Johnston: No, I didn't.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You're lucky we don't have rules as to relevance, but anyway....

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I think my time is up, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, it is.

We will now turn to MP Longfield for six minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for launching us into this study and for the work you've all done over the summertime in the consultation process.

I'm going to start with Ms. Johnston.

It's great to see you in this role. I'm both a college grad and a university grad. There is room for both.

In fact, there now are, more and more frequently, partnerships between universities and colleges, between the theoretical and the applied. Could you comment on the changing nature of the relationships between colleges and universities and how capstone should be able to accommodate the changes?

Ms. Pari Johnston: Thanks for the question.

I think you've put your finger on exactly the kind of approach we're trying to encourage when we think about an opportunity to reimagine the research agenda here in Canada. How do we think about all of the different strengths that different players in the ecosystem can bring? How do we intentionally connect them by identifying the impact and outcomes we want through the research? How do we then design the program to get there?

This is why we feel mission-driven research and a mission-driven agenda are ways to do that. If you identify the challenge, things become more clear in terms of how you develop a set of tools and a mission portfolio that can incentivize colleges and universities to come to the table to play to their different strengths and bring the impact down to the end-users at the forefront.

• (1615)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

Your example of housing is excellent. In Guelph, we have auto parts manufacturing processes being applied to housing in modular construction. In fact, some of the same companies are involved on both sides. Conestoga College is involved on both sides, as well as the University of Guelph. It's very cool to see it happening on the ground. We just need to support it as well.

Mr. Gaffield, it's great to have you back. You have such rich experience in this area, having been part of the tri-council agencies as well.

I'm trying to ask a question fairly, because you might have some criticism or things that could be improved that you've already presented and could present again. That's one part of the question.

The second part is this: Thank you for bringing the U15 German delegation to Canada a few years ago, and for including me in some of those meetings. We had a German delegation on the Hill yesterday. They were talking about the Fraunhofer Institute, the Max Planck Institute, how research in Germany has evolved into several external institutes, and whether there's a lesson in what's been happening in Germany over the years.

How could that apply to capstone, and do you have any criticism of the existing system we should try to capture?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: The member is raising something that is very active at the moment. In fact, we are organizing, with our counterparts in the German U15, a major event in Germany in the third week of January. In fact, our transatlantic action has increased. This is for a few different reasons.

One is that, as we all learned vividly during the pandemic, research is global now, and we need to leverage each other. We need to share the world's challenges, like the pandemic, obviously, but also everything else—the environmental and digital challenges. It's all global.

Canada is very fortunate to have very good links internationally. We found this out during the pandemic when, for example, we were able to turn to our research community, which had contacts with the key scientists at Moderna, Pfizer and so on. We were able to get access to vaccines. The international dimension of research is very important. Europe, obviously—thanks to Horizon Europe—is going to become increasingly important. We are seeking the kinds of partnerships that will help all of Canada. It's going exceedingly well.

Obviously, there's a lot more to do. I think capstone fits into this, because one thing we haven't had as successfully as we might have is one door to knock on. In other words, I can remember when I was heading the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We developed partnerships with our counterparts in other countries, often bringing in other Canadian agencies on certain initiatives. However, there wasn't a single door. With capstone, the idea is to have a single point of entry, so if any country would like to engage with us, they can come to that door.

To go back to the member's comment earlier, this is a way to make this more efficient and effective. We can respond more nimbly, at times, to the importance of international research collaboration for Canada's benefit.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

I'll quickly go to Dr. Miller on the internal connections.

The University of Guelph hosted the Minister of Agriculture last week. I was in an ag-tech discussion on how to connect all of the data going on around agriculture across Canada. Could capstone play a role in the internal connections within Canada?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: Yes, I think so, absolutely. A big part of the potential we see for capstone is, as Chad was alluding to, a single coordinating contact point. We see it benefiting researchers who now interact with the government through the three tri-councils.

I think, as you say, that there are also advantages to government in bringing together the knowledge that it is helping to produce

through its research investments, and then making sure the country is benefiting to the greatest possible extent.

• (1620)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you all.

Thank you, Chair, for the extra couple of seconds.

The Chair: Thank you. That's great.

MP Blanchette-Joncas, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're delighted to be joined today by the witnesses for this important study.

My first questions are for Mr. Miller from Universities Canada.

How many universities in total does your organization represent in Canada?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: We represent 96 universities.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Roughly how many students attend the smallest university?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: I think that there are 200 or 300 students.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

You must know that the capstone research funding organization is nothing new. We've been talking about this proposal for a number of months, if not years.

In October 2022, the government gave itself this mandate. It launched the advisory panel on the federal research support system. Seven people with a great deal of expertise worked at large universities. We can name these universities. They're the Université de Montréal, the University of Toronto, McGill University, the University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan. There was also the former executive director of U15, the group comprising the 15 largest universities in Canada.

Mr. Miller, I want to understand one thing.

Since you represent universities comprising 200 or 300 people, have you taken steps with the government to ensure that the number of members that you represent provides for a balanced and inclusive panel?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: I'll try to respond in French. However, I may have to say a few words in English.

I share your concern about the need to implement a process to reflect diversity in our institutions.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Miller, my question is the following.

Has Universities Canada approached the government to say that it represents 97 universities and that it would make sense for people from universities of all sizes to sit on the advisory panel on the federal research support system?

Have you taken any steps in this area?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: Are you talking about the panel headed by Mr. Bouchard?

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Yes. Exactly.

Mr. Gabriel Miller: We told the government that our community wants to reflect the diversity that you just described.

We haven't debated staff decisions much. However, we brought to the table the concerns of small, medium-sized and large institutions. We said that we needed a recommendation to support this whole community.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Miller, you represent 97 universities in Canada. Is that right?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: We represent 96 universities.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

You're the organization that brings together the most universities in Canada. Is that right?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: Yes.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

I gather that you haven't spoken to the government or that the government hasn't spoken to you. Nothing has changed in the composition of the panel. Six out of seven people represent large universities. I understand that you may have spoken to the government. However, the government didn't listen to you. If it had, it would have done things differently.

I would like to understand your perspective.

Do you truly represent the values of equity, diversity and inclusion? Are these values embraced by your organization?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: Yes. Absolutely. Thank you for your question.

We embody these values—

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. That answers my question.

In your opinion, do equity, diversity and inclusion apply only at the individual level, or also at the organizational level? I'm talking about small and medium-sized universities, not just large universities.

Mr. Gabriel Miller: I want to say that we're committed to representing the diversity of our community.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Miller, some people have missed out. The 96 universities may have representation, but not everyone does. Again, I don't understand how Universities Canada.... I haven't seen you make a public announcement about this.

Mr. Gabriel Miller: The panel is currently studying an important issue. This issue is how to move forward. We must take steps to ensure a diverse membership and to support small institutions.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Miller—

Mr. Gabriel Miller: Please, let me just say—

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Miller, I'm asking the questions here, okay? I know that you're giving the answers, but we know the answers.

You haven't said anything publicly to ask the government to change things. You now have the chance to do so.

What does Universities Canada, which claims to represent 96 universities, have to say publicly?

People are listening to you. Small and medium-sized organizations are listening to you.

Will you ask the government for real and inclusive representation to ensure that people from small and medium-sized universities, which you also represent, also have a seat on this panel, meaning in the new capstone research funding organization?

• (1625)

Mr. Gabriel Miller: Madam Chair, I want to say to the government, to our members, to the committee and to the public that we're fully committed to representing all our members from small, medium-sized and large universities. There are currently a number of ways to support them. For example, we can ensure that they receive the investments needed to boost their capacity to participate in federal programs.

We're currently focusing on the issues that will shape the future. As part of this work, we're committed to representing all our communities.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: How many small or medium-sized universities do you want in this group, Mr. Miller?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: The group's members are appointed by the government. We said that we would do our job, which is to represent—

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: How many small or medium-sized universities would you like to see in the new group proposed in the budget, to ensure inclusive and fair representation?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: We want to see diverse representation of our community.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you give us a rough percentage?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: We want a diversity that enables us to represent the views of our community and contribute to a system that makes decisions and creates programs to serve the country and the public to the greatest extent possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to MP McPherson.

Welcome to our committee. It does take a village, as we saw earlier, to replace Mr. Cannings.

The floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It certainly does take a village to replace Mr. Cannings, and I'm sorry that I am a pale shadow of Mr. Cannings at this committee.

It's nice to see everyone here.

This is a particularly interesting study for me, because I have so many post-secondary institutions in my riding, including, of course, the University of Alberta. I'm grateful for all of you being here today. I think that might be where I'll start. I'll ask you a few questions about the current situation that we have in Alberta.

As we're looking at funding research and trying to find ways to better fund research across this country, in Alberta right now there is a piece of legislation that is limiting the ability of the university to do that because it actually says that the Alberta government has to determine which dollars can go through to the University of Alberta.

Can you talk about any worries that you have about how we keep political interference out of these decisions, how we ensure that the decisions are made in the best interests and have autonomy? Can you talk about that?

I'll start from left to right.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Thank you for the question.

You're touching on, I think, a really key question that all Canadians and in fact citizens around the world want to ask: Is their taxpayer money being invested as well as possible? In other words, it's used to fund the best research. That's what we want: the best impact, the best results for Canadians.

What we have found over decades and decades is that the minute you base that on something other than serious peer review or merit review, it leads to trouble, and you don't get the best results. The tried and true method is to not try to interfere in the process, to not try to put a thumb on the scale, but rather to allow a robust peer review or merit review system whereby experts come together.

Often, as we found in Canada, we invite experts from other countries and so on, such that we do the best we can in terms of the taxpayer funding that supports our work. It's, I think, worked really well, and I think it's a mistake to ever move away from that. If we do, it will not provide expected results and it will really confuse why we invest in research and innovation. We invest in research and innovation to enhance quality of life, to build a better future and to build a better society, and we can't do that based on periodic momentary preferences.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Johnston.

Ms. Pari Johnston: Thanks so much for the question, and it's great that you're part of the committee.

What I want to offer is a complementary perspective about how we could think about impacting relevance and excellence.

I think it is important to look at the opportunity, and this is why I think mission-driven research is an interesting concept that we're certainly advocating needs to be part of our ecosystem of investments. This is because, yes, we want to ensure that there is strong scientific merit for what we're investing in, but at the same time, this is where a mission-driven approach can come in.

If you're also involving an impact review in which policy-makers, regulators and those who represent end-user communities also are part of determining the final shape of a research initiative, it can actually be embedded in more results on the ground. From a conceptual point of view, I think that it is interesting for us to look at that in the context of mission-driven research.

With regard to the particular challenge that you're noting in the context of Alberta, I know that there is certainly an interest among our college members who also do a lot of research in making sure that at the end of the day, all of the dollars going into research, both federally and provincially, are optimized to respond to the needs of Albertans. That's where I would come in.

However, I do encourage us to think about an impact lens if we're looking at mission-driven research. There are examples going on here in Canada. I used to work at Genome Canada, so I'm aware of the challenge-driven approach to mission-driven research. There is something to be examined as we look at relevance and impact and who you're involving in finally shaping a research program.

• (1630)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Adding that level of bureaucracy and, as you said, putting your thumb on the scale are not good ways of selecting research.

Ms. Pari Johnston: Yes. I think it's more about the experts, but outside of the bench scientists, there are also the regulators, the policy-makers, those who represent end-user communities that are going to be the receptors of this research.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have some questions for you on that, but I want to get to Mr. Miller if I could.

Mr. Gabriel Miller: I'd just simply say on this question that there is no plan for Canada's future, for a better future—a future with better jobs, better salaries, stronger communities and solutions to our biggest challenges—that doesn't require us to have a world-class university system, and there is no world-class university system without institutional autonomy. It is a value that we absolutely have to protect if we want the essential benefits that flow from higher education.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You're right on time. That's perfect. See what a good replacement you are?

Now we'll start our five-minute round, and we'll begin that with MP Tochor for five minutes.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

I'm encouraged by some of the testimony we heard today. I do believe that solutions for the major problems our country is facing can be found through research and through our institutes across Canada working on those problems that face Canadians.

I heard from the testimony that it's important to invest in the best possible research that has impacts on our society, that we have to put an impact lens on this as to how it affects Canadians, and that the results on the ground need to be measured.

I don't want to put words in your mouth, Mr. Miller, but I think you said that there is no bright future for Canada without the research that gets done in Canada. I would say that there is research that falls into those categories. I believe a capstone project would help drive research in getting towards those goals that impact Canada and that it's important.

It's just a little bit troubling when we see what we have spent money on. There are two million Canadians right now who are relying on food banks to eat. One in four Canadians is forgoing meals because they can't afford to feed themselves. Meanwhile, at the University of British Columbia, for \$20,000—I wonder how many meals we could feed on that—they studied gender politics and Peruvian rock music—not Canadian, but Peruvian.

Does anyone want to defend that or explain that? If not, that's all right.

The next one we would have is large-scale archaeological video game analysis. This one cost \$280,000 that taxpayers paid to research large-scale archaeological video game analysis. Does anyone want to take a stab at that one?

• (1635)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: I'll happily jump in here.

The question you're raising is about the topics of research projects that do, in fact, get selected for funding.

How do we arrive at that? I can remember—

Mr. Corey Tochor: I'm going to run out of time here, but would you agree to funding those two examples?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Well, again, I don't want to judge them because I don't know the proposals.

I do know, for example, that the world recently awarded a Nobel Prize to Geoff Hinton, who—

Mr. Corey Tochor: Okay, I'll go back to Canada, the problems Canadians face and the solutions that could be found at institutions.

Giving out \$280,000 for research on large-scale archaeological video game analysis is a tough pill to swallow, sir.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Well, off the top of my head, I would say that the video gaming industry is now a billion-dollar industry worldwide. Which games succeed and which don't, and how they relate to cultures and so on, have become big preoccupations in the industry and in many governments and societies.

Mr. Corey Tochor: I understand the gaming industry would support that, but why would the government want to know more about video gaming?

It's not just that one. If I continue on, there's the University of British Columbia. This is in a province where 15,000 people lined up earlier this week for ugly potatoes. You might have seen that news coverage. People are starving and will accept any vegetables. Good on those producers offering food to hungry Canadians.

Here's one: "reframing gender and race in music therapy and its pedagogy". That's \$20,000. The next one is "sexual satisfaction among gender non-confirming Canadians: creation and validation of a gender-neutral sexual satisfaction scale using a mixed method approach". That was \$35,000 to Queen's University.

I am understanding and accepting of everyone's sexual orientation, but to spend \$35,000 during a cost of living crisis to study the sexual satisfaction of Canadians...

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Again, I don't know that project, but I can tell you that music therapy, for example, has proven to be one of the most interesting new areas in which we—

Mr. Corey Tochor: It might be very interesting.

One last one is "suitably dressed"—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have a point of order.

Chair, the witness is trying to answer and isn't being allowed to.

Mr. Corey Tochor: It's the same amount of time, Lloyd. I'm running out of time. Unless you're going to offer me time....

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I think you're pointing out the need for a peer review process, but go on.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Maybe we need a review process for "suitability dressed: finding social justice through distinctions in modest fashion for men, women and transgender people". This was \$35,000 to the Toronto Metropolitan University.

We're talking about millions of unaccounted dollars here, guys, for questionable studies.

The Chair: That's your time.

Now we will turn to MP Diab for five minutes.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Thanks very much.

Welcome to our witnesses. You have, among all of you, such valuable experience in the fields you have studied and seen, based on your experiences, just like us members of Parliament around the table. We all come from different and diverse backgrounds.

I want to go back to that question. I'm going to let you, Mr. Gaffield, start off with that.

I want to take it a step further. MP Tochor was trying to ask all of these research questions. Dear Lord, I have several degrees and I do not pretend to know....

There's so much research out there. My children, nieces and nephews, who come from a different generation than mine, obviously, all have such varied backgrounds, capabilities and research. A number of them have gone on to graduate with Ph.D.s of different varieties. I'm sure you see so much out there, so I want to take you back to his question and have you elaborate.

I also want to then have you talk about the independence of research. Regarding the capstone the government announced a few months ago, they want independence for it, including from political interference. I will ask you again to elaborate, based on all of that. It's where Ms. McPherson was coming from, but I'd like an even longer explanation. It's incumbent on us to start with that here, this afternoon.

Mr. Gaffield, it's over to you.

• (1640)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Thank you very much.

I think the way to think about this is that Canadians need research focused on what's happening in the headlines right this minute and what is going to be in the headlines five years from now, 10 years from now and 20 years from now. We don't know much of that.

I can remember that on September 11, all of a sudden, people whose research would have been considered irrelevant and a "who cares?" subject.... The fact is that in Canada, we have funding for top researchers studying the 14th century Middle East. It's a time period that people don't care about. Why are we doing this? We are doing this because those people were chosen as being leading scholars advancing research about something they passionately feel is important. They were considered by others to be really justified in studying that.

That day, they were being sought after to be on the news to explain to us what we were hearing, what they were saying, what these documents being referred to are and so on.

Going back to my AI example, when Geoff Hinton was being funded in the 1980s for this new approach, this research on neural networks, people were wondering, "What is he doing? He's a computer scientist. How is this all connected? Why does Canada care?" Today, we see a huge industry in the world, which Canada is leading, thanks to that.

We can't just prepare for the impact right now. Yes, we have a housing crisis, and yes, our researchers are devoted to contributing to that, and we are enhancing that and so on, but we also have to be thinking about 10 years, 20 years and 100 years out there. We have to start preparing for that and developing the kind of talent and expertise.

How do we do that? We have open competitions and we make people compete for very limited funds. They have to be selected as the most promising for those immediate, mid-term and long-term perspectives. Canada has a great tradition of doing this in a very balanced way.

I had a proposal to the editor of The Globe and Mail. I remember I said, "I will guarantee that for any headline you put in the paper, I will be able to provide you with the names of six experts to con-

tribute to that headline." He said, "How are you going to do that? You don't know what the headlines are going to be." I said, "Exactly, but I'll guarantee you that I can do that for the next five, 10 and 20 years."

It's because of the merit review system that gives Canada the pool of expertise that we need so that we're prepared for or are able to address today, tomorrow and our children's future.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Let me quickly ask you this. When we fund something for \$35,000, as an example, what does the money go to?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: It usually goes to research assistants. Usually much of it goes to the kinds of talented people we want developing our country. I think we underestimate sometimes that a lot of these research activities really enhance the human capital component of our country.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to turn to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll turn to Ms. Johnston.

Ms. Johnston, let's be honest. Colleges, institutes and CEGEPs were completely overlooked when the federal government created the advisory panel on the federal research support system.

I want you to talk about this. Have you approached the government?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): There's no interpretation.

The Chair: There's no interpretation. We'll stop the time.

Can you hear it now? Okay, we're good now.

Continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm delighted to start again, Madam Chair. It's nice to know that my colleagues are listening to me.

Ms. Johnston, let's be honest. In October 2022, the federal government completely overlooked colleges, CEGEPs and polytechnics when it created the advisory panel on the federal research support system. No member of your institutions sat on this panel.

Today, I want to hear your thoughts on this and your hopes for future representation in the new capstone research funding organization announced in the 2024 budget.

• (1645)

Ms. Pari Johnston: Thank you for the question.

I think that there was indeed a flaw. That's why we made these recommendations. Our vision of research in Canada must be guided by mechanisms that reflect the players involved in research. These include colleges, CEGEPs and polytechnics.

As I said today, our brief on the capstone research funding organization includes a requirement for college representatives to sit on the new national advisory council on research and innovation.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Ms. Johnston.

In March 2023, the government tabled the report of the advisory panel on the federal research support system, commonly known as the Bouchard report. One year and three months later, in June 2024, we finally saw a public consultation. After one year and three months, the federal government finally decided to hold a public consultation.

First, I would like you to explain the delay between the release of the report and the public consultation and to share your thoughts on the matter.

Second, the public consultation lasted only 30 days, in the middle of the summer. Were all your members really able to make their voices heard?

Ms. Pari Johnston: Thank you for your question.

It's a good question about the nature of a genuine consultation that really seeks the input of institutions. You know what happens during the summer months in institutions, especially CEGEPs, in Quebec, but also in other institutions.

It was quite difficult to obtain a representative picture of their perspectives. That said, the colleges considered the consultation vital. They were so eager to have their voices heard that we managed to obtain their feedback in the middle of July.

[English]

The Chair: That's your time. Thank you so much.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: For the final two and a half minutes, we'll go to MP McPherson, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm interested in what you were talking about with regard to "mission-driven" and some of the challenges around mission-driven research.

I know that during the consultations, that term raised some particular concerns with research in the social sciences and humanities and with indigenous communities that saw that perhaps the historical, religious, military and colonial connotations were exclusionary or could be exclusionary. I am concerned, when we do a consultation process like this, what the costs are if we get it wrong—what the costs are if this is not done correctly and if we are not able to hear those alternative voices.

Mr. Miller, maybe I'll start with you, just because I know your colleagues have had an opportunity to answer in this round.

How do we deal with that? How do we make sure that those voices are heard? How do we ensure that we are getting it right?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: I think probably the most important point on this point that the group of us has made is that the dialogue has to be ongoing. It can't just be a kind of one and done, and then we'll see how it turns out, especially given the speed with which this has had to happen. I think the conversation needs to continue closely with the community at every stage of the decision-making process and then right into implementation.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Does that also involve ensuring that continuity as projects are chosen or selected? We know that there are experts and researchers who are involved in that selection process. What role did the academic community play in peer reviewing and selecting the projects to be funded?

Mr. Gabriel Miller: The best of what our system has established is the tri-council's definitive role in evaluating the research proposals. I think it's very important that it continues to be the case, that proposals be evaluated for their scientific merit.

This goes back to the point that Mr. Blanchette-Joncas talked about. It's very important that a diversity of institutional and academic backgrounds be represented and that we're helping researchers from all institutions build the capacity to access these funds and contribute to our research ecosystem.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. Two and a half minutes goes fast.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thank you to the witnesses. We really appreciate all your expert testimony today. It was very interesting. We appreciate your coming before the committee.

Dr. Gaffield, we're always glad when you return. Thank you so much.

Actually, if you have anything else that you didn't get to cover and that you would like to submit, you can submit those through the clerk.

We're now going to suspend while we get ready for panel number two.

● (1650) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1655)

The Chair: Welcome back.

I believe that we have a witness who is participating via video conference. I'll read this for you.

Click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French.

It's now my pleasure to welcome our witnesses.

From Research Canada and Alliance for Health Discovery, we have Alison Evans, president and chief executive officer; from Evidence for Democracy, we have Sarah Laframboise, executive director; and from the Canadian Science Policy Centre, we have Mehrdad Hariri, president and chief executive officer, who is appearing virtually today.

Welcome, everyone. We look forward to your testimony. Up to five minutes will be given for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Ms. Evans, I invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Ms. Alison Evans (President and Chief Executive Officer, Research Canada: An Alliance for Health Discovery): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. I want to thank all members of this committee for inviting me to appear as you study aspects of the new proposed capstone research funding organization. We heard of this first in budget 2024.

My name is Alison Evans. I'm the president and CEO of Research Canada, which is an alliance of organizations from across the health research and innovation ecosystem. Our members range from hospital research institutes to pharmaceutical companies, from med tech start-ups to post-secondary institutions, from provincial health organizations to health charities. Despite differences across these organizations, we share a vision that a world-leading health research and innovation system is essential to the health and prosperity of Canadians and the country.

One of the most important things I observed through several town halls, focus groups, board conversations, stakeholder and member engagements in the lead-up to budget 2024, in the months that have followed and in service of the capstone organization consultations earlier this summer is this: There is growing consensus from health and broader research and innovation stakeholders that the severity of our declining prosperity, competitiveness and innovation must be addressed in new ways and without delay, so much so that previously siloed sectors and organizations are lining up to work together in ways I've not seen before.

Incredible things are happening in businesses, labs, clinical trials and regional innovation hubs, but for those pockets of success and ingenuity to lead to transformative outcomes across the country, national leadership in the form of compelling vision, decreased regulatory and other hurdles and the provision and coordination of much-needed resources are essential. Now is the time to be bold. We need renewed ambition for research and innovation as a driver of not just health outcomes but economic outcomes that matter, and in so doing, alleviate the alarming and growing frustration of Canadians as they grapple with the many repercussions of declining productivity, quality of life and health.

Canada has not adequately translated its investments in research and in building a highly educated workforce into domestic innovation. Why is it that we don't have a homegrown global biopharmaceutical success story much like RIM? The top three biotechs on the NASDAQ—Amgen, Vertex and Gilead—have a market capital-

ization of over \$400 billion U.S., which eclipses the market cap of all 129 oil and gas companies.

Look at Novo Nordisk, whose market cap at times has exceeded the entire GDP of Denmark. The irony is that this company was founded on insulin, a Canadian innovation, which they licensed for one dollar.

Thus Research Canada welcomed budget 2024's investments and measures that respond to key findings in the report of the advisory panel on the federal research support system that suggest a readiness to modernize and strengthen Canada's research and innovation system.

The promise of the capstone organization is for greater coordination and impact of the research supported by NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR as well as the advancement of Canada's leadership in internationally collaborative, major multidisciplinary and mission-driven research. The capstone organization, if effectively implemented and refined with ongoing input from stakeholders, could do even more. It could be used to strengthen the linkages between basic research, clinical research and the commercialization of research for better health and economic outcomes in ways we've not been able to achieve.

In our submission to the tri-agency presidents earlier this summer, we suggested a number of principles to be upheld in the pursuit of this capstone organization, and I'm happy to elaborate on them in the Q and A period, particularly those that pertain to CIHR and the health portfolio.

We also identified risks, including funding, the connection of health research to the health of Canadians and the system of health care delivery. We saw those reflected in the "what we heard" report, and we're glad to see them there.

We also note the critical importance of marrying structure with strategy, which is to say that structural changes in the absence of strategy and prioritization could jeopardize the intent of transformative change. Tinkering at the margins of our research and innovation ecosystem, adjusting structures, programs and policies is no longer sufficient.

● (1700)

What we need is leadership and overarching vision, which is why we've also been actively feeding into the work being done to stand up a council on science and innovation.

We understand that this is a challenging moment and that competition for mindshare and resources is at an all-time high. Other countries see research and innovation as the way forward. We believe that Canada has an opportunity to lift itself out of this record slump in productivity by maximizing previous investments in infrastructure, grants, programs and organizations for all types of research and innovation.

The Chair: That's quite a bit over our time.

Ms. Alison Evans: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Chair: We'll probably have a chance to elaborate on some of the comments in our questions.

Ms. Alison Evans: Thank you for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, Ms. Laframboise, you have the floor for an opening statement of five minutes.

• (1705)

Ms. Sarah Laframboise (Executive Director, Evidence for Democracy): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the standing committee, for the opportunity to be here today.

My name is Sarah Laframboise, and I'm joining as the executive director of Evidence for Democracy, known as E4D for short.

E4D is a national, non-partisan not-for-profit that works to close the gap between decision-makers like you and the best available science and evidence. We believe that we all benefit when government makes decisions that are informed by the best available science and evidence.

Canada is facing significant challenges—low productivity, climate change and a strained health care system—all requiring evidence-informed policies.

While Canada ranks sixth in higher education research and development expenditure among OECD countries, our overall research and innovation ecosystem lacks coordination, and we risk falling behind without a strategic direction.

As proposed in the 2024 federal budget, the research capstone organization promises to provide better coordination across the federally funded research ecosystem. We echo the recommendations previously made in the 2024 “Report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System” and the 2017 fundamental science review. I believe that if executed with transparency, accountability and community engagement, this new capstone organization could strengthen the very foundation of our science and research ecosystem. Importantly, this organization has the opportunity to lay the foundation for the development of a national strategic vision for the science and research community.

I'd like to share with the committee a set of values that E4D believes to be crucial when taking on the creation of this organization.

First, we believe that prioritizing transparency, accountability and openness will ensure the utmost trust in this organization and its seamless execution. For example, the capstone organization should be sustainably funded, ensuring that we strengthen the foundations of our research ecosystem. Securing the transparent allocation of predictable funding to support the organization's operations, staff and resources will enable long-term success.

There should be an established mechanism to prevent the duplication of efforts and to enable open communication among research entities, promoting efficiency and collaboration.

There should also be a reporting, feedback and collaboration process with ISED and health ministers that is formalized and struc-

ured for ongoing communication and coordination with relevant government departments.

A publicly available strategic plan and evaluations should be published in annual reports to outline the outcomes and impacts for this new capstone organization.

Next is ensuring that the community continues to be involved in the vision and execution of the work of the capstone.

At its core, the new capstone organization should ensure that its work is informed by a representative set of science and technology stakeholders by intentionally establishing government bodies. While a board of directors will likely be composed of representatives from the tri-agencies, the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the chief science adviser's office, we see an opportunity for intentional representation on the science and innovation council.

Ensuring that this council has a clearly defined mandate means that the council can play a large role in providing strategic input to guide the priorities and work of the capstone.

Further, this council should have diverse representation from academia, with dedicated representation of trainees, early-career researchers and established investigators, in addition to industry, non-profit organizations, third party organizations and the public sector. Individuals should reflect Canada's diversity and regions, with consideration towards gender, career stage and marginalized communities.

Beyond this, evaluation of research proposals under the capstone should uphold the values of peer review, ensuring that all research proposals are evaluated based on scientific excellence and potential impact.

It should also exist independently, and government structures should be established to protect the organization from political interference, ensuring that decision-making processes are based on scientific merit and integrity.

I look forward to hearing more on the capstone in the upcoming fall economic statement, and we are encouraged by the release of the “what we heard” report based on the public consultations just last week.

I hope that we can continue these conversations through the coming year as more becomes clear about the structures of the capstone organization, and it's my hope that we can continue to move forward in a way that encourages the active participation of researchers and community members.

In summary, I will reiterate that if executed with transparency, accountability and community engagement, the new capstone organization could strengthen the very foundations of our research and science ecosystem and could help Canada unlock the full potential of its ever-growing knowledge asset and talent capacity for the benefit of society at large.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Laframboise. We appreciate that.

We will turn it over to Mr. Hariri for a five-minute opening statement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mehrdad Hariri (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Science Policy Centre): Thank you, Madam Chair, honourable vice-chairs and committee members—

[*English*]

Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mehrdad Hariri: Thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

[*English*]

My name is Mehrdad Hariri. I'm the founder and CEO of the Canadian Science Policy Centre, or CSPC, an independent, non-profit, non-partisan and non-advocate organization dedicated to connecting science, innovation and policy communities across Canada.

CSPC serves as a national hub for convening, connecting and capacity building within the science, technology and innovation policy ecosystem.

We raise our own funds through programs, including our annual conference, which is Canada's largest science and innovation policy forum. Other key programs include science policy magazines and editorials, more than 20 events annually, workshops and Science Meets Parliament, which is a unique program bringing young scientists from across the country to meet with parliamentarians on a non-advocacy basis in order to learn about policy-making in the Canadian Parliament. Many of these programs rely on contributions from volunteers.

Please note that my observations today are my personal views and do not reflect CSPC's position, as CSPC does not hold any views or make recommendations. It remains a neutral platform for national conversations on these matters. My perspectives as an individual come from outside government, granting agencies and academia, but they are grounded in my experience working in science policy.

The proposed capstone organization is based on the premise that it is important for Canada to generate more coordinated efforts, in particular in three areas: international collaborations, multidisciplinary

research and mission-driven research. I believe the context for the proposed capstone organization stems from the recognition of the rapidly changing landscape of research and of the world, including geopolitical shifts, the evolving nature of scientific research as it becomes increasingly multidisciplinary, and the need for strong mission-driven research to address our socio-economic challenges.

The mandate also references the gap between research outcomes and their application in public policy and industry, which, in my view, is an important element to include.

The first area is international collaboration.

In today's interconnected world, the complexity of global challenges like public health, technological disruption, global supply management, climate change and many others requires a collaborative approach that transcends national borders. However, Canada's ability to effectively engage in international research partnerships is hindered by insufficient coordination among various entities. Our research community often faces barriers, such as limited funding mechanisms and limited policy coordination for international project engagement in science, technology and innovation, or STI. This is well reflected in a Council of Canadian Academies report published this year entitled "Navigating Collaborative Futures".

The CCA says:

The need for a strategic and deliberate approach to international [science, technology, innovation and knowledge] partnerships is acute. Opportunities for such partnerships are rapidly expanding, and Canada risks falling behind in an increasingly competitive global knowledge economy. Meanwhile, new scientific discoveries and emerging innovations are increasing in complexity.

The second area is the need to provide more incentives for multidisciplinary research.

This has been mentioned in report after report over the years. While the tri-agency has moved to adjust its programs in this direction, more needs to be done. The research community itself is advocating more opportunities to pursue research that crosses traditional disciplinary lines, much of it collaborative.

The third area is mission-driven research.

The concept of mission-driven research has two dimensions: one, the challenges of enhancing critical connections between research and the end-users of knowledge, and two, the alignment of our research enterprise with national and global needs and priorities. My organization, CSPC, is active in this sphere, connecting and convening researchers and end-users.

However, more needs to be done. Canada needs a road map of interrelated and interdependent economic, social, environmental, security and technological risks that are impacting our societies, one that frames mission-driven research initiatives. Could capstone marshal the strengths of our research community to anticipate and help shape the future? This mission remains critical. Again, in a rapidly changing world where research and technology are the drivers of economic, social and environmental progress, we have an enormous opportunity to up our game.

In conclusion, capstone represents a bold step towards transforming Canada's research ecosystem by enhancing international collaboration, breaking down disciplinary silos and driving mission-focused research.

• (1715)

These changes are vital if we are to remain globally competitive and address the complex—

The Chair: Thank you. That's quite a bit over.

We'll now open the floor for questions. Please be sure to indicate to whom your questions are addressed.

We'll start our six-minute round with MP Lobb, please.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you, everybody, for being here today.

I'll direct my first question to Sarah.

In your estimation, with all the granting agencies already, why do you think we don't do everything? Like, why aren't we doing that right now?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: May I ask, doing what?

Mr. Ben Lobb: In this meeting, we've heard all the great possibilities of capstone and mission-driven research, etc. With all the wise people at all the granting agencies and universities, why aren't we doing it already?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I think maybe it's just about the history of the creation of the tri-councils and the division of the science that then falls under the mandates of those tri-councils. That's how we've created these silos of social sciences and humanities, natural sciences, and then the health research, CIHR. The siloing of those into those funding structures has benefited the community in the way that we can consolidate different funding through those processes, but it has created gaps where you can't provide funding. As well, interdisciplinary research might combine multiple domains.

That's where I see the strengths of the capstone coming. You can have the interdisciplinary aspect ingrained right into the mandate, including the mission-driven research.

It's not to say that we don't do applied research in a lot of these tri-agencies, but I think that the distinction is important: Applied research definitely does happen in the tri-agencies, but mission-driven research is where you have this intention, where you have a vision for what the mission should be for Canada.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Who do you think should decide what the missions are?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: That's a really important question—

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is it the government of the day that is handing out the money? Is it the wise people at all the universities? Who do you think gets to decide the missions?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: Thank you so much. I think that's a really important question.

It's important that research broadly is occurring outside of any sort of political interference. That is how it will be sustainable. If we have something like the science and innovation council that is representative of the community, I think that is where I see a large portion of vision and guidance coming from, because you have that community representation. I think the operating board of directors and leadership will always be more on the bureaucratic side. The combination of the two will allow for things like that to be happening.

I'll say one last thing. I think having publicly available strategic plans and mandates will also help that to be really accountable to the public and to policy-makers to be able to hold that accountable.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Alison, what are your thoughts on who gets to decide?

Ms. Alison Evans: I share the sentiments of my colleague in that what's really essential, as we look to prioritize and develop strategy and plans, is that diversity of voices.

You mentioned the universities several times, but we also have research taking place in clinical settings; at patients' bedsides; in colleges, as we heard earlier; and in a variety of other settings.

In terms of decisions about how Canada is going to respond to such increasingly massive global challenges as climate change, AI and things like that, it will need to be increasingly multidisciplinary.

This perhaps goes to your point of why the three existing mechanisms might need an overarching umbrella framework for mission-driven, major international and multidisciplinary research in ways that we haven't seen so far.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Right.

From all the presentations I've heard today and from all that I've read, it's a very impressive idea, but maybe the question is this: Have there been enough details? Are we lacking details? Do we have any guidance on how many years and how much money?

There are some impressive claims with this mission-driven research with capstone. Are there details that you've had or that you think there should be? What does it look like?

Alison, you can go first, and then Sarah. We'll switch it up this time.

• (1720)

Ms. Alison Evans: Thank you for the question.

I think what we're working on is the level of detail that was provided in budget 2024 and then the further timeline that will be coming out in the fall economic statement.

Then, of course, what we did was respond to the opportunity to provide input from our community earlier this summer, which was our chance to outline the principles, the risks and the ideas that we would hope would be incorporated or considered as those additional details are developed.

One of our main recommendations is that all the communities continue to be consulted, because clearly this is not, as I think one of the colleagues earlier said, a one and done. To get this right and to evolve it over time, we all have to continue to work together and to consult throughout the process.

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I'll echo mainly what Alison said. We are waiting for the fall economic statement for the details that you are looking for and that I think that the community is looking for as well.

While generally the community is really positive about this, there are questions. I think that's why it's important to have conversations like this now to put forward some of the values that we're hoping to see, and also we can then have conversations later about accountability and how to enforce things once we do get some announcements.

The Chair: That's the time. Thank you.

We'll now turn to MP Jaczek for six minutes, please.

Hon. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses on this panel.

The need for a capstone organization seems to have been clearly established, starting with the Naylor report in 2017 and the Bouchard report and the intention of coordination and mission-driven research. I think we all understand that concept. I'm more interested in how the structure is actually going to work.

Is it necessary to maintain boards of directors and CEOs for the tri-councils? Why would you not, from a structural point of view—possibly to promote efficiency and maybe even to save some money—have the capstone organization and just simply not disband the tri-councils but have all that assessment of individual research projects occur via the tri-councils? Could you somehow have a way of coordinating that activity without requiring approvals through individual boards and CEOs that then go to the overarching capstone?

I'm just trying to understand, through the consultation that you were engaged in through the summer, some of these more detailed aspects of how it will work.

Ms. Evans, you used the term “without delay”. There seems to be a certain urgency when you talk about mission-driven, etc. How are we going to ensure that in fact there is no delay and that the coordination occurs rapidly? Could you elaborate, in a very practical way, as to how you see this working?

Perhaps, Ms. Evans, I'll start with you.

Ms. Alison Evans: Thanks for the question.

Again, we share curiosity about some of the operational details and we value the opportunity we had to outline things that we think should be considered to operationalize well. We think that all the intentions that have been shared and the aspirations are great, but a lot of it is that the devil's in the details, and implementation is very important.

We agree that huge operational streamlining and efficiencies can be gained by having all three granting agencies under one umbrella. To your point about how this could help with speed, when the pandemic hit, we didn't have a go-to spot to set up rapid response research that was as transdisciplinary and robust as we will need going forward for such things.

I think it was Chad Gaffield who earlier talked about that one door that will allow the government, when a major crisis or opportunity or challenge reaches a boiling point, to have a mechanism through which each of the three autonomous, investigator-led, discipline-rich organizations can more systematically use their power to work together on transdisciplinary challenges.

• (1725)

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Go ahead, Ms. Laframboise.

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: Thank you.

I think it's important that the existing roles and responsibilities of the tri-agencies be relatively unimpeded during this process, just because of the importance of research and the everyday research that does happen, but this is an opportunity to review and harmonize a lot of that inter-agency communication.

Even in the fundamental science review, they recommended that the government undertake a comprehensive review to modernize it where possible, to harmonize a lot of the legislation between the four agencies and to support extramural research as well.

These calls have been coming since 2017. Opening up the idea of capstone allows us to re-evaluate some of those things, even including the review of current allocations of funding between the tri-councils as well. I think it ensures that we can have these types of conversations in a time when we are starting to have the conversation about preventing duplications and trying to streamline and enhance productivity and efficiency.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Dr. Hariri, are you aware of other countries' organizations of this sort from your institute's knowledge of the structure in other countries? Could you give us some examples of where this kind of organization is working well?

Mr. Mehrdad Hariri: Sure.

Certainly one of the countries we can look to is the U.K. A couple of years ago the United Kingdom merged a couple of granting agencies into UK Research and Innovation—what is known as UKRI—under one CEO and with one mission, but with different units in it. That perhaps could provide some lessons learned, which we can look into.

I hope the government and the granting agencies are looking into these models to take lessons from them, but UKRI perhaps could be one of the best examples to look at.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you so much.

In the consultations, would you say there was good engagement? Were you given lots of opportunity to provide feedback through the summer? We know that was the intention. Did you feel that you were well consulted?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I'll go first.

It was a bit of a short turnaround of consultation. I think most people were able to engage with their communities pretty rapidly, mostly because I think the research community is really interested in this. I think a lot of our organizations are getting constant questions about this, and people want to engage.

I believe they got about 118 submissions—in about 30 days, I believe—which is pretty substantial and I think represents the interest from the community on this.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to extend my greetings to the witnesses here with us for the second hour of this study.

My first question is for Ms. Laframboise from Evidence for Democracy.

It seems that we're going in circles. Today, we're looking at a capstone research funding organization. This organization was previously proposed in 2017, in the Naylor Report, by the committee that the government created. A few years later, we're working on this again. In 2022, another consultation was requested. It came out in 2023. A year and a half later, the government woke up and said that it might be time to consult people publicly. Evidence for Democracy has already released a report on the recommendations made in the Naylor report. Today, people want to talk about a new capstone organization. However, this topic has been on the drawing board for a long time. The two reports were released eight years apart. Eight years of work requires a great deal of consideration. We want action.

I would like you to tell us, as a representative, what you want the government to do. We're familiar with the recommendations, strategies and consultations. How can the federal government ensure that the scientific ecosystem is better represented in this capstone organization, but also more effective, particularly in the interdisciplinary field?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: Thank you for the question.

I think it has been a long time since we first heard the calls for a unified funding body. As I said, there were some challenges with the current funding structures. I don't think it's appropriate to think that we could change everything overnight, but once we start to

open up the doors to change like this, I think it's important that we have proactive levels of transparency and accountability from the very beginning so that they are created in ways that are sustainable and that support this in the long term.

I would have loved to see this announced in 2017—absolutely. I wouldn't say no to that, but the reality is that it's being proposed right now, and all we can do in the moment is to say the values and wishes that we would like to see now, because we are having these conversations before it is announced.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I would sum it up as eight years of work or waiting and patience for a number of people.

In a nutshell, both reports call for a review of the granting councils to ensure better coordination and increased funding.

The Bouchard report focuses more on innovation, partnerships with the private sector and the effectiveness of the assessment process. The Naylor report emphasizes the need to strengthen funding for basic research and to create an independent advisory body to guide the national science strategy.

I want to know your opinion on this. Do you agree with all these requests? Have we forgotten anything? Now is the time to speak up. We hope that the government will then take action.

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I won't speculate on Mr. Miller's statement, because I'm not familiar with the wording. I think it is important to uphold these values of transparency, accountability and community engagement, and I see that as our way forward.

As I said, we are having these conversations before the announcement, and this is a unique opportunity to engage with the community beforehand. We've had lots of time to think about it, and I think the public consultations showed that people want to have their voices heard.

Going forward, I've provided a few recommendations of reactive transparency and reactive measures that can happen later for accountability. I think those will be important going forward when we hear more details.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Ms. Laframboise, you talked about a key issue in politics, but especially in science. That issue is transparency.

The Bouchard report called for a review of the assessment processes for grant applications. Specifically, it called for a review of the assessment mechanisms to make the granting processes more transparent and effective. It also emphasized the need to review assessment criteria to better include interdisciplinary projects.

I want to hear your thoughts on this.

[English]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: As I said, there are two forms of transparency that we like to talk about at E4D: reactive and proactive.

Proactive is the moment we're in right now, when we can create structures that will allow this to function in a transparent way. This can include publicly releasing a mandate and a strategic plan. When we create councils, we can also create mandates for the councils so that they are then accountable to those procedures and outcomes. We also have things like instituting sustainable mechanisms, funding and training for people who are on councils like this. These will all impact transparency in a proactive manner.

Reactively, I look at things like annual reports, strategic plans, who's involved in those meetings and who creates the strategic plan for the capstone and the public release of all of these things. My organization has done a variety of research on transparency practices in the federal and provincial governments. Overall, what we're seeing is that the evidence often isn't shown in the creation of policies.

Going forward, the more we can be transparent about what those missions are and the evidence that was used to create them, the more trust we'll generate with both the research community and the public.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

We noticed that the people involved in these public consultations came from the large universities. No one came from CEGEPs, colleges or polytechnics. No one came from the type of organization that you represent, the not-for-profit organizations that also advocate for the advancement of science.

We have a government that claims to uphold the values of equity, inclusion and diversity. Yet, when it comes to appointing the people who represent this diversity, funnily enough, these values seem to completely vanish.

I want to hear your thoughts on this.

[English]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I think it's important, because there is a wall for information that goes to the not-for-profit and third party organizations in comparison to academia or universities. They're already tied into that conversation, so it's quicker for them to be able to participate in a lot of these.

The more that publicly accessible consultation happens and the more open it is, the more the not-for-profit and public side will be able to contribute.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Do you think that the government—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's our time. Maybe you can follow up on that in the next round.

We will now turn to Ms. McPherson for six minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for coming today and sharing your expertise with us.

I've been struck by a few things I've heard today. My colleague from the Conservatives asked about how the mission is determined. That's the first thing that comes to my mind, especially when the mission-driven approach is described as top-down. I come from the international development sector, and top-down has certainly never been seen as a particularly strong method.

On the other hand, Madame Laframboise spoke about how we need to make sure that the representation is there and that we have a diversity of voices and a diversity of participation. I am concerned that this process will privilege certain groups and exclude others by the very nature of a top-down approach.

Ms. Evans, when we talk about the idea of the potential in the income and the amount of money that can be generated, we will often run into situations. I know you're from the international development sector. Vaccinating kids, for example, in easy circumstances is always the first choice, but it's the kids we need to vaccinate in the hard circumstances who are the most important.

How will you deal with these particular challenges of making sure that the research that is being selected...? How would you propose that this be done?

Ms. Evans, I'll start with you, and then maybe I'll go to you, Ms. Laframboise.

• (1735)

Ms. Alison Evans: Thank you so much for the question.

I'm sure we all think of mission-driven research in slightly different ways, but to me, it's about starting with what we are trying to solve and kind of working backwards, whereas some types of basic research are more exploratory and we don't know where it's going to lead.

Mission-driven, of course—

Ms. Heather McPherson: That comes down to who identifies the problem and who identifies what we're trying to solve, right?

Ms. Alison Evans: Yes. That's understood.

I think both Sarah and I have talked about the importance of having an independent mechanism, a representative body outside of the capstone. Whether that's the council on science and innovation or whether that's the governing council of capstone itself, it necessarily needs to have that diversity of voices.

Part of what we heard from the health community is how important it is—especially if CIHR moves over from under the Minister of Health to the Minister of Industry—to maintain that inextricable link, the spirit of the act of CIHR about the health of Canadians.

We also need to think of people with lived experience. We need to think of people in the provinces at the provincial level. All of these voices are extremely important.

I think your example about international development and what we know about the importance of local voices in designing solutions really does apply here as well. It comes down to how we set up representative bodies to be a part of the designation of priorities and strategies for the country.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Before I move on, I will say that science has been historically very white, very colonial and very institutionally racist in a number of different mechanisms. I think it is very important to be able to step outside of that.

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I'll echo most of what Alison has said as well, because I think creating that diversity and that landscape has to be really intentional.

You mentioned who's choosing the priority areas. I think the more that we have accountability in the people who are involved in those decision-making processes, the more we and the public will be able to have trust in the whole science research ecosystem. Ultimately, these are taxpayer dollars. It should be accountable to the public and it should have a public interest as well. This is a huge, important part of this.

I think there's a balance in that. I've said it a few times in my remarks, but I think it's worth emphasizing that this shouldn't come at the expense of fundamental research as well, because there is a balance to be struck there. So much of our future in Canada depends on fundamental research. While mission-driven research might be more apparent in the immediate future, that is how I see long-term sustainable impact to our community and to the public.

I also think that investing in data structures and things like this to help with that successful collaboration is an important aspect. The more that you can have successful conversations with the tri-agencies and the capstone together, and the more cohesive that is, the better this will be in the long term in terms of efficiency.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have one last question on that.

As I mentioned to the first panel, in Alberta the provincial government is interfering with funding mechanisms that are supposed to be going to the university. What future-proofing could be done to ensure that future governments that want to choose to meddle, to interfere, are not able to do so?

We've seen that before. We've seen the muzzling of scientists. We've seen the muzzling of research. We've seen focus on research that has clearly had political interference. How do we protect this in the event of a different government or another government?

• (1740)

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: My organization was founded at a time when scientists were impeded from speaking out publicly when they worked for the federal government. This has been problematic in the past.

In terms of political interference, it's about creating sustainable and independent bodies that help guide a lot of this work. The science and innovation council has a great potential here. I empha-

sized this a few times today, because I think there's a lot of opportunity here to use that.

In terms of the example in Alberta, I think it's also education about the peer review process and what that actually means. I think this has been a core tenet of Canadian research, and it's the backbone of what we have done. I really think that talking about what that process is and what it does for Canadians is important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll turn to our second round of questions, and we'll start with MP Kitchen for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here. I really appreciate your comments. In some ways, they're enlightening us on what's been going on.

I have so many questions for all of you and so little time, but I'll start with you, Mr. Hariri.

I'm looking at your website. It's great to look at. It talks about how it's a "non-profit, non-partisan, and non-advocate organization." That's great to see.

One of the things you mentioned in your presentation was that you raise your own funds. That's another fantastic thing, because the reality is that as a government, we have to be very judicious with taxpayers' dollars.

What percentage of research do you think should be private investment, government investment or non-profit organization investment?

Mr. Mehrdad Hariri: Thank you for your question.

Are you referring to the funding for research in research institutes? Is that the question?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Mehrdad Hariri: Thank you.

That differs from country to country, but I think the main chunk of funding for research institutes comes from the public and from the government. However, the private sector needs to step up and provide a significant amount of research funding for research institutes, as well as for research within the private sector. As you know, there are—

Mr. Robert Kitchen: I appreciate that. I'm sorry for interrupting.

Based on your experience—and I'm not holding you to this—what do you think would be a good percentage, roughly?

Mr. Mehrdad Hariri: Currently, the federal government invests around \$10 to \$14 billion in public research in Canada. That includes the departments as well as granting agencies. The tri-agency funding is around \$3 billion. The business sector invests around \$15 billion in research. A very small part of it comes to public research institutes. Most of the research is being conducted within private sector firms.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ultimately, when we look at that, one of the things we've heard around the table today is how bureaucracy consumes a lot of that funding. It eats it up. By creating a capstone, the concern will be how much of the federal funding is actually going into that bureaucracy and not to the boots on the ground, as I like to say, and the researchers. That's a big concern in getting that out there.

Ms. Laframboise, your comments were excellent when you talked about reporting, feedback and public availability of plans, and you included community involvement in academia. In my previous life, when I did my undergraduate degree, I had to do research, and I did it. When I did my graduate degree, I had to do a research project. When I did my fellowship, I had to do a research project. I've gone through that route. The one thing it taught me is that I wasn't cut out to be a researcher and that I was going to go into clinical practice versus research practice.

As you move through those steps and you're making those presentations to these organizations and to the tri-agency committee to make those decisions, especially from a health care point of view, to your point, Ms. Laframboise, the reality is that it's based on scientific merit. That's the big challenge we have. It's the accountability for the scientific merit that determines what the research will be.

For example, \$111,000 was given to a study at the University of British Columbia. The title is "Narco-Animalia: Human-Animal relations in Mexico's Narco-Culture". If we're talking about scientific merit—somebody gave that money to this study—where is the scientific merit?

Do you have any thoughts on that?

• (1745)

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I believe in our peer review process in Canada, and I believe our tri-councils uphold it in a way that funds the best research in Canada.

I'm not familiar with that study, so I can't elucidate on it, but I trust that our peer review process was created in a way that is supposed to fund the best available research.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Ultimately, that presentation.... For whatever that person could get, they had to come up with a methodology beforehand. They had to have a purpose and a scientific basis for doing the research. That was what the funding was based on, not the peer review. The peer review would be based on what the report is and whether the report was a valid study, after the fact. The money was given beforehand, which is a waste of taxpayers' dollars, if that's the case. It's given out before there's any understanding of it.

Ms. Evans, do you have any comments?

Ms. Alison Evans: Well, what I'd like to key in on here is the opportunity before all of us when it comes to the three previously siloed granting agencies. Bringing them together under a single umbrella will allow some operational day-to-day streamlining and new efficiencies. It will lead to greater coherence for researchers wanting to apply to these granting agencies and allow us, through the umbrella mechanism of the capstone itself, to make sure we are attending to the most important priorities and the strategy we set for the country.

The ways Canada can show up to major interdisciplinary, international and mission-driven—

Mr. Robert Kitchen: That umbrella you're talking about still has the three agencies with their own determination factors underneath. Now you have two groups doing that. That umbrella isn't going to cut NSERC, CIHR, etc., because they've already given that money. The set-up for the capstone is putting another agency on top of that.

The Chair: That's our time. I'm sorry.

Thank you.

The next five minutes will go to MP Chen.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

The world experienced a major global health crisis in the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to bring the notion of mission-driven research into this example.

What could an organization like capstone, which implements mission-oriented research, have done differently in the midst of a global pandemic?

Ms. Evans, could you talk about that further?

Ms. Alison Evans: Well, I guess we're talking a bit theoretically here.

In the absence of existing structures, a whole bunch of new ways of working had to be developed when the pandemic hit. All kinds of synergies across governmental departments had to be forged. In the urgency of the situation, people rose to the occasion. We were able to set up funding for rapid response research. We were able to be at the forefront of some very important outcomes that helped in Canada and elsewhere. We've also seen a variety of structures and changes come into place postpandemic, based on those learnings.

How exactly would the capstone purport to operationalize in those moments? We're all awaiting those details in the fall economic statement.

I think there's a sense that the time and energy invested in creating ad hoc, cross-governmental bodies to address.... It was a health emergency that time. It could be a climate change emergency next time. Maybe the forest fires are another example. We want a one-door, one-stop shop, going forward, where that interstitial tissue is already there and being strengthened through each successive major challenge.

• (1750)

Mr. Shaun Chen: Thank you.

Other countries have taken bold strategic action to enhance their research ecosystems. What can we learn from what peer countries have done and their experiences, so that we can move forward in a way that is thoughtful?

Ms. Alison Evans: I echo my colleague Mehrdad's earlier example of UKRI.

We also have our homegrown example in the province of Quebec. I find that our colleagues in that province have a lot of interesting perspectives and lessons learned as they put their own granting agencies under a single umbrella.

I think Canada is the type of country that ought to look very closely at what is working in other jurisdictions. We have our own unique challenges here with our federated model, for example, but we don't have to reinvent everything. I like the fact that we are making good on some of the recommendations from the previous studies to try to get ourselves into an operational state of readiness.

Mr. Shaun Chen: Thank you.

Dr. Laframboise, in terms of political interference, how can we make sure that in the structure or strategy around the capstone organization, the funding decisions are independent and we can prevent interference, whether it be political, peer to peer or in the work-place?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I think this really comes down to the accountability mechanisms that will be in place for this capstone project. I see this as being a really great opportunity to proactively have these conversations now. I think when we're talking about political interference, we can look to examples showing that when the public sees evidence and sees these types of accountability procedures, they're more willing to trust.

I really believe in accountability to the public in spending research dollars. By putting in mechanisms like publicly available reports, impact statements, mission statements, mandate letters and things like this, you'll have the opportunity to have that conversation surrounding accountability, but without those mechanisms it's almost impossible to hold the organization accountable for its actions.

That would be my recommendation. I have more listed in my brief.

Mr. Shaun Chen: I know that we don't have the details yet of the changes for this organization. We've spoken about opportunities, but what would be one big concern you might have in terms of the creation of this organization?

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: I think the involvement of the community is the most important part for me.

I've spent the last few years advocating for graduate student scholarships and post-doc salaries. It was 20 years before we saw increases to those salaries and scholarships. I hope that involving the community at the get-go, at the beginning of these types of processes, will make sure that the community is heard from at the very beginning. I think that will allow for 20 years not to pass before we realize that we need to improve living standards for a group of people.

The Chair: That's our time.

Now we'll turn to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Laframboise, are you concerned that the government will appoint people to advisory panels based on the connections that it would like to have or the directions that it would like to take? There have been two advisory panels in eight years. These panels always include people from the same group, which is the large universities. No one represents colleges, CEGEPs and not-for-profit organizations like yours, which must remain vigilant and monitor the advancement of science and the strategies implemented.

I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

● (1755)

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: In this perspective, I think having the ability to train and having a mandate for a council like the council for science and innovation will help deflect any of that sort of interference. By promoting people from the not-for-profit sector and the community, you will also diversify that in a way that should negate any sort of political alliances.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Do you agree with the Bouchard report's recommendation to set up a committee to liaise between the granting councils and other players in the research ecosystem, including universities, companies, the Quebec government and other provincial governments?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: Yes, I would. I think the council for science and innovation is a great place for that to lie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

The Bouchard report also suggested the creation of a single multi-council portal for all grant applications to reduce administrative redundancies and speed up the process. I think that my Conservative colleague will be pleased to hear about a measure to increase efficiency and reduce red tape and related costs.

Do you agree with this simplified process for researchers?

[*English*]

Ms. Sarah Laframboise: It is, yes. This is undeniable. I think unifying and being able to review these processes in the creation of the capstone project will help to take out some of these duplications.

I do think the tri-agencies should still exist and have independent structures for funding, mostly because I think it allows the peer review process to work properly, because you have people who are experienced and have experience in that type of research who are able to evaluate those reports. It just becomes a question of where you should be applying. It's the education side of where you should be directing that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Welcome, MP Idlout, to our committee. In keeping with the theme that it takes a village to replace Mr. Cannings, you're the third person to do that today, and we also had one briefly on the screen.

The floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.*

Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I did listen to a bit of the testimony. One question that came to mind is based on some of your responses so far.

We know that Canada just didn't emerge. First nations, Métis and Inuit were here before Canada became a country. Through colonial and genocidal policies, first nations, Métis and Inuit were actively suppressed. Their knowledge, their expertise and their science were ignored. I think we still see the impacts of that.

We still don't see enough indigenous researchers or scholars in academia. We do have some. I'm very lucky to have a good friend of mine, who is also an MP, who says she's recovering from academia.

I'm curious about the process for the creation of the capstone, which the NDP supports.

What will this agency do to ensure that indigenous research is also supported, that indigenous expertise is part of the design and that indigenous researchers are also funded through the capstone?

Qujannamiik.

Ms. Alison Evans: I really appreciate the question. It's very important.

Again, without speculating on how exactly that might be addressed in the future organization, we were all pleased to see that in the "what we heard" report and across so many of the more than 100, submissions that went into this process. Those very considerations and concerns were there and acknowledged.

Whether it's indigenous, Métis or Inuit knowledge and ways of doing research and representation, whether it is patients with lived experience, whether it is citizens and whether it's the not-for-profits, colleges, or any groups who have been under-represented, we've seen, over the years, many activities and initiatives designed to further our progress in these areas

Of course, this is an inflection point where we can make a commitment to doing even better. With change comes the opportunity to do better.

● (1800)

The Chair: Thank you so much. That's our time.

Thank you to our witnesses, both on the screen and in person today. We really appreciate your testimony. If you have anything further to add, you may submit it to the clerk.

I want to remind our members that our next meeting on Thursday will be reviewing the second draft of the U15 report, and we will have committee business. We need to focus on what we're going to do after the capstone study, and hopefully we'll be able to have a discussion on that.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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