

Canadian Institutes of Health Research: Aging

In the first of a series of CIHR profiles, **Dr Yves Joanette**, Scientific Director of CIHR's Institute of Aging, provides an international perspective on the EU Joint Programme – Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND), and extols the virtues of European-Canadian collaboration

As a non-EU agency, what is CIHR's point of view on the launch of JPND?

CIHR has been following very closely the evolution of ideas and structures that has allowed the introduction of the EU's JPI schemes, and particularly this first joint programme on neurodegenerative diseases. In 2009, CIHR's Science Council voted a \$25 million budget over five years to support the International Collaborative Research Strategy for Alzheimer's Disease (ICRSAD), a budget which will be leveraged through partnerships to more than fourfold. This Canadian research strategy is aimed at fostering innovative research in Canada on neurodegenerative diseases in ageing that have an impact on cognitive abilities, and also aims to increase the participation and the leadership of Canadian researchers in large international efforts. ICRSAD is led within CIHR by the Institute of Aging and is co-championed by the Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction. CIHR is very interested in seeing its strong research community in neurodegenerative diseases interact more with their European colleagues. This is why we were extremely interested in seeing the JPND take form as a consensual effort between 27 EU Member States and EU-associated Third Countries on such an important societal challenge.

Is CIHR already participating in JPND?

Through the ICRSAD, CIHR began its participation in the JPND even prior to its official launch. Indeed, CIHR, MRC and DZNE were the three initial agencies to introduce what has since become the first country-initiated joint programme in this area, namely the Center for Excellence in Neurodegeneration (COEN). This joint programme was launched in 2010 with the subsequent addition to the programme of agencies from Ireland, Belgium and Italy. Eight multi-country teams have been supported by this initiative, which was announced in the Autumn of 2011. CIHR is very proud of the competitiveness and excellence of the Canadian researchers that are partners in seven of the eight funded projects; more than any other country in this call. The COEN programme is now considered to be within the JPND framework as one of its strategic tools to foster the required international collaborative approach to the immense challenges associated with neurodegenerative diseases.

How do you see the future of the Canadian participation in JPND?

The Institute of Aging considers the JPND as a unique opportunity to foster an international collaborative approach to study neurodegenerative diseases.

We hope that other non-EU countries will follow the path forged by CIHR and will join the effort as so-called 'Third countries'. As of May 2012, CIHR has officially joined the JPND Management Committee in order to offer perspective from a non-EU internationally connected partner.

What are the next steps in the deployment of the Canadian strategy that are relevant for JPND?

After deploying joint programmes with Europe (France-Quebec-Canada Research Program on Alzheimer's Disease, COEN), with the US (Canadian ADNI-2 centres and secondary analyses grants) as well as with China (joint CIHR-NSFC research programme on neurodegenerative diseases), ICRSAD will soon be deploying, within Canada, the Canadian Consortium on Neurodegeneration in Aging (CCNA). Via a collaborative approach, the CCNA will bring together the best of Canadian researchers in all aspects of research related to neurodegenerative diseases in ageing having an impact on cognition under the umbrella of various 'expert cores'. These cores will receive funding in order to engage in out-of-the-box innovative research and will be provided with the necessary functional platforms to do it successfully. At the same time, the CCNA will become the 'landing strip' and 'take-off runway' for international collaborative efforts in which Canadian researchers can become involved or as a catalyst for Canadian researchers to become leaders in international initiatives such as the JPND. I therefore see a brilliant and enduring future for the collaborative efforts between Canadian researchers and their EU colleagues, and one that will benefit our ageing population for which neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's represent such a formidable health and societal challenge.

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