2026/27

New Investigator Award (NI)

Fall 2025 Competition Guidelines

(June 27, 2025)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. SPECIFIC PROGRAM INFORMATION

Overview Table - New Investigator Award	
Competition Launch Date	June 27, 2025
Application Submission Deadline	September 04, 2025 – 3:00pm ET *(Registration closes at 1:00pm ET*
Official Notification Date	May 2026
Award Start Date	July 1, 2026
Award Value	Up to $240,000.00 CAD for up to three (3) years *($80K/year)*
Application Procedures	See Section **B** for instructions on How-To-Apply
Contact	Email: research@heartandstroke.ca

> **! Applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully read the instructions and comply with the requirements outlined in this guidelines' document.**

A.1   Purpose and Objectives

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada ("**Heart & Stroke")** New Investigator Award ("**NI**") program is a salary award to support early-career investigators who have demonstrated excellence in their doctoral and post- doctoral training and wish to establish their own independent research career ("**Applicants**"). Salary awards provide an added incentive for researchers to continue or begin their program of cardiovascular or cerebrovascular research within Canada.

The stipends, amounting to a maximum of $240,000 ($80,000 per year for up to three (3) years), will support successful NI Applicants ("**Recipients**") in conducting their research programs and engaging with mentors and trainees at their respective institutions ("**Host Institutions**").

A.2   Eligibility

In order to be eligible to apply for the NI competition, Applicants must meet the following criteria:

a. At the time of submission, the Applicant must have a full-time appointment at the Assistant Professor level or above at an eligible Canadian institution.
b. The Applicant must have an MD, PhD, or equivalent degree.
c. At the time of submission, no more than five (5) year or sixty (60) months may have passed since the date of the first faculty appointment at the Assistant or Clinical Assistant Professor level. This would include Adjunct positions in a research track for which the Applicant is eligible to write a Grant-in-Aid as a Principal or Co-Principal Investigator. **The date of first faculty appointment will be based on the date listed in the BioSketch under First Faculty Appointment**. Note that the eligibility period may be extended resulting from career interruption due to extenuating circumstances such as parental leave(s), illness etc. The period of eligibility will be extended by the equivalent duration of the eligible interruptions(s). Please refer to **B.4.3 BioSketch** for more information.
d. Applicants must have an identified one (1) mentor and provide a co-signed letter of the Mentorship & Training Plan. Please refer to **B.4.3 Mentorship** for more information.
e. The Applicant should clearly demonstrate the potential to become an independent investigator.
f. Partial awards of less than one (1) year are not available to New Investigator Award Applicants.
g. Applications for this award must be supported by the university or institution at which the Applicant will conduct the proposed research program. The Host Institution is expected to guarantee the Applicant appropriate academic rank and to provide adequate space and facilities for the investigator's research, commensurate with the status of the individual's experience and level of support from Heart & Stroke. Please refer to **B.4.3 Institutional Statement** for more information.
h. The Dean and Department Head (or institutional equivalents) must guarantee at least 75% of the Applicant's time will be allocated to the proposed research program. Please refer to **B.4.3 Institutional Statement** for more information.
i. At the time of submission, and for the duration of the award, Applicants are **ineligible** if they hold or have already held funding, directly or indirectly, from the tobacco industry.

> **! Should any significant changes occur from the time of submission to official decision letter notification, Heart & Stroke reserves the right to withdraw that application from the competition. Misrepresentation of any content by Applicants may result in cancellation of the grant or award.**

A.3   Funding Policies

A.3.1   Funding Availability

Financial contributions for this initiative are subject to availability of funds. Should the funders' funding levels not be available or decrease due to unforeseen circumstances, funders reserve the right to **reduce, defer or suspend financial contributions** to grants and awards received as a result of this funding opportunity.

Also, once funded decisions are finalized, Heart & Stroke may identify an unranked pool of fundable (but unfunded) applications for the competition. An application within this pool may receive funding should a donor(s) be identified to support the full grant or award. In order to facilitate such funding, application information such as project title, lay summary and/or research summary may be shared with the donor(s).

A.3.2   Salary and Allowances

a. The salary for the NI is $80,000 per annum, including the employer's share of benefits, for a maximum of three (3) years. There are no additional allowances.
b. These multi-year awards may be used ONLY for salary support for the Recipient. No part of this award is to be used to support other direct or indirect costs associated with any research programs or operating grants.
c. Heart & Stroke imposes no restriction on the additional income the Recipient may earn, provided it is within the guidelines of the Host Institution and that such activity does not impinge upon the time dedicated to the proposed research program.

Award Name	Eligibility	Value/Year	Duration
New Investigator	0-5 years *(refer to 'c.' in A.2)*	$80,000*	3 years

* See Special Awards (section **A.4.5**)

A.3.3   Tenure

a. The award start date is July 1, 2026, for a period of up to three (3) years. This period includes vacation as per the Host Institution's policy(ies).
b. The award cannot be renewed for a second term.
c. Recipients will be considered an employee of the sponsoring university or institution and funds awarded will be paid to the institution for payment to the Recipient. The Recipient will enjoy the benefits of a full-time member of the staff with respect to pension, insurance and other plans according to the university or institution's policies.
d. The award may be terminated at any time for good cause by the Recipients, the sponsoring institution, or Heart & Stroke.
e. For the duration of the award, Recipients are expected to devote 75% of their time to the objectives of the award and the proposed research.
f. Recipients must immediately notify Heart & Stroke should any significant changes in research activities occur during the tenure of this award.
g. Recipients must immediately notify Heart & Stroke should their academic or faculty appointment change or if they relocate to another institution (including outside of Canada).
h. The Applicant must hold an operating grant in support of the proposed research program for the duration of this award; such grant(s) may be from Heart & Stroke and/or other granting agencies. The research grant support has the following additional requirements:
    i)   For each year of the three (3) years of the award, the Awardee must be a Principal or Co-Principal Investigator on a peer-reviewed grant originating from a national or provincial funding agency, irrespective of the amount of the grant.
    ii) The Awardee must have at least $30,000 per year of research funding for which the Awardee is a Principal or Co-Principal Investigator.
    iii) Peer reviewed/non-peer reviewed funding:
        - For years one (1) and two (2) of the award, research funding may originate from peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources.
        - For year three (3) of the award, research funding must originate from peer-reviewed sources.

2026/27 New Investigator

A.3.4   Multiple Submissions and Re-Applying to the New Investigator Competition

a. Multiple submissions from a single individual for a Heart & Stroke New Investigator Award are not permitted.
b. If three (3) unsuccessful New Investigator applications have been made, a subsequent application will be considered only in unusual circumstances.
c. Recipients of a Heart & Stroke New Investigator will not be eligible for another New Investigator Award in future years.

A.3.5   Disclosure of Other Awards

A **New Investigator** may not be in receipt of another major Personnel award from another national funding agency at the same time as holding a Personnel Award from Heart & Stroke. Likewise, an awardee may not concurrently hold a Canada Research Chair and a Heart & Stroke New Investigator Award. In addition, an awardee may not hold two Heart & Stroke Personnel Awards (national and provincial) concurrently. However, an awardee may accept supplemental funding annually; no greater than 50% of the annual value of the Heart & Stroke award if it is from a local or provincial funding source.

A.4   Review Process and Evaluation

A.4.1   Administrative Review

Heart & Stoke will perform an eligibility and relevance review to identify that Applicants meet the eligibility criteria, and that applications are in alignment with Heart & Stroke objectives and strategy of this funding opportunity, respectively. Applications that do not meet these criteria will be withdrawn from the competition. There will be no appeal process once decisions are made.

A.4.2   Evaluation Criteria

The major criteria in evaluating the applications will be:

i.   Academic and research background of the Applicant;
ii. Research environment; and
iii. The quality of the research project (see **B.4.3 Research Proposal**).

A.4.3   Peer Review Committee

Heart & Stroke's peer review process engages national and international researchers and includes over 180 members of the Scientific Review Committee (SRC). The SRC comprises up to 13 separate panels that ensure in-depth knowledge and expertise in all areas of heart disease and stroke. Each panel consists of a Chair and Deputy Chair, and members approved by the SRC Executive Chair and Vice-Chair. Panel members are selected for their expertise related to the mandate of the review committee and their experience in reviewing and evaluating research funding applications. All review panels may meet in person or virtually at the discretion of the SRC and Heart & Stroke. The SRC Executives will oversee the SRC and the Lay Reviewers. All members must agree to respect the privacy, confidentiality and conflict of interest rules of the funders.

A pre-relevancy check will be conducted by the SRC Executive to ensure that applications submitted fit squarely into the Heart & Stroke mission, as presented in the GIA program mandate and SRC sub-panels (see below). If an application is deemed not directly relevant, Heart & Stroke will exclude it from further review, without appeal. Therefore, it is important that all Applicants clearly justify the direct relevance of their proposed research in the lay summary and application.

A.4.4   Scoring Rubric

Awards will be allocated in a top-down rank, according to the following grading scheme. Only applications whose overall score is ranked from **Outstanding** *(4.5 - 4.9),* **Excellent** *(4.0 – 4.4),* to **Very Good** *(3.5 - 3.9)* are within the accepted fundable range. **Overall scores of less than 3.5 are not eligible for funding**.

A.4.5   Special Awards

McDonald Scholarship

The McDonald Scholarship is awarded to the highest rated New Investigator. The McDonald Scholar will be awarded an additional research grant of $10,000 in the first year of the award.

Henry J.M. Barnett Scholarship

The Henry J.M. Barnett Scholarship is awarded to a highly rated New Investigator working in stroke or a related field. The Henry J.M. Barnett Scholar will be awarded an additional research grant of $10,000 in the first year of the award.

A.4.6   Lay Reviewers

Lay Reviewers, are also incorporated in the SRC in order to increase accountability and transparency of the Heart & Stroke review process and ensure that the proposed research is aligned with the objectives of this funding competition. Heart & Stroke places a high priority on ensuring appropriate lay summaries are submitted as part of each application. If Lay Reviewers identify that the lay summary is unsatisfactory, funds will be encumbered pending receipt of a satisfactory lay summary. For more information on the lay summary, please see the related section on the Application electronic form (e.Form) on CIRCUlink.

Please note that lay reviewers are only provided with access to the lay summary of an application, and not an application in its entirety; as such, the structured lay summary should include all pertinent information related to the application. The structured lay summary should be written for a patient, caregiver, or community member audience so that it is easily understood by a non-technical audience; it should inspire and speak to relevance and meaningfulness of the work and to the desired outcomes. To ensure that the requirement for readability is met, Applicants are strongly encouraged to use commercially available tools to determine the readability level of your lay summary.

A.4.7   Triaging of Applications

Heart & Stroke implements a triage system for applications that have been rated in the "Fair" category or below. Should an application be rated in this range by the scientific reviewers, the application may be triaged without discussion. In this case, Applicants should refer to the specific comments of the reviewers.

A.5   Post Grant and Award Conditions

A.5.1   Transfer of Award

New Investigator Awards may not be assigned or transferred to another individual under any circumstances. Should the Recipient change programs or institutions, they must notify Heart & Stroke who will determine on a case-by-case basis whether the award can continue under the new parameters. The Host Institution to which the Recipient is moving will be required to supply the same supporting documentation as was required in the original application.

A.5.2   Prolonged Absence

The Recipient or Host Institution will notify Heart & Stroke of any causes (parental leave, medical leave, personal leave, vacation time, etc.) necessitating absence from work exceeding thirty (30) successive days. Extension of the award duration may be considered, and continuation of the award will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Relevant institutional policies will also apply, and the end date of the award will be extended by the approved duration of the leave. For further details, Recipients are encouraged to review the Heart & Stroke Grant and Award Management Guidelines.

A.5.3   Grant or Award Termination

When work under a grant or award is complete, or if for any reason the work cannot be continued, the grant or award will be closed. The Recipient must notify Heart & Stroke immediately, and any remaining funds will be frozen and cannot be reallocated to other uses. The Host Institution will prepare the Financial Report and return outstanding funds to the funder. Further details are described in the Heart & Stroke Grant and Award Management Guidelines.

A.5.4   Reporting Requirements

Recipients will need to submit annual reports via CIRCUlink for the tenure of the grant or award and will be sent annual email reminders with instructions. The **Annual Financial** and **Progress Reports** are to be received no later than 30 days after the end of each funding year. A **Final Report** must also be submitted to Heart & Stroke no later than one (1) month after completion/termination of the grant or award. For further details, consult Heart & Stroke Grant and Award Management Guidelines.

...

B. HOW TO APPLY

B.1   Registration

Applicants must complete a registration for the funding opportunity using the Heart & Stroke's electronic grant and award management system CIRCUlink before accessing and submitting the application. Note that **registration for the competition closes three (3) hours prior to the submission deadline**. Heart & Stroke strongly encourage Applicants to **begin the registration process as early as possible**, and well in advance of the application submission deadline to ensure timely completion.

Applications will be completed online using Heart & Stroke's online portal, CIRCUlink. A detailed CIRCUlink User-Guide to assist in navigating the system is available, and all Applicants are **strongly encouraged to review it in advance of starting an application** to optimize user experience.

> **By submitting an application, Applicants understand that the information provided may be shared with funding partners for the purpose of eligibility, relevance, peer review and/or funding decisions.**

B.2   Application Submission Deadline

It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure that a completed application is submitted via CIRCUlink no later than **September 4, 2025 – 3:00pm ET.** CIRCUlink will **NOT** allow submissions after this deadline. Any applications attempted or submitted by email or mail after the deadline will **NOT** be accepted. There will be no appeal process for late submissions. Letters of Recommendation must be received by email to research@heartandstroke.ca by September 4, 2025 – 3:00pm ET. See **B.4.3 Candidate Appraisal** for more information.

B.3   Applicant Profile

Applicants are required to create an Applicant profile ("**Profile**") as a part of the registration process in CIRCUlink when applying for funding. If Applicants already have a Profile, they can use it for the current competition without creating a new one. However, it is essential to update the Profile before starting the application process. For detailed instructions on updating or creating profiles, please refer to section **B.1**.

Please note that all Applicants are required to complete a Self-Identification section as a part of the Profile in CIRCUlink; however, Applicants may select "I prefer not to answer" for any or all of the questions. Additionally, the following tutorials have been created to assist Applicants in the creation/updating of an Applicant profile in CIRCUlink:

- **Profile Creation Tutorial**
- **Profile Update Tutorial**

> **The Applicants' Profile will be used for statistical purposes only and will NOT be shared with Lay Reviewers or members of the SRC peer review committee in an identifiable form. Self-identification statistics will only be presented in aggregate form to ensure confidentiality.**

B.4   Application

B.4.1   Eligible Research Areas
Applicants must estimate the proportion of the proposed research that falls under the four (4) health research themes as defined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research:

Theme 1. Biomedical Research

Research with the goal of understanding normal and abnormal human function, at the molecular, cellular, organ system and whole-body levels, including the development of tools and techniques to be applied for this purpose; developing new therapies or devices which improve health or the quality of life of individuals, up to the point where they are tested on human subjects. Biomedical research may also include studies on human subjects that do not have a diagnostic or therapeutic orientation.

Theme 2. Clinical Research

Research with the goal of improving the diagnosis and treatment (including rehabilitation and palliation) of disease and injury; improving the health and quality of life of individuals as they pass through normal life stages. Clinical research usually encompasses research on, or for the treatment of, patients.

Theme 3. Health Services Research

Research with the goal of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health professionals and the health care system, through changes to practice and policy. Health services research is a multidisciplinary field of scientific investigation that studies how social factors, financing systems, organizational structures and processes, health technologies, and personal behaviours affect access to health care, the quality and cost of health care, and ultimately Canadians' health and well-being.

Theme 4. Social, Cultural, Environmental and Population Health Research

Research with the goal of improving the health of the Canadian population, or of defined sub-populations, through a better understanding of the ways in which social, cultural, environmental, occupational, and economic factors determine health status.

B.4.2 Submission Checklist

Applicants must complete and submit all application requirements listed below via CIRCUlink by the specified deadline date. Applicants may submit the application in English or French. Use the Application Checklist below to confirm that you have completed all application components required to be uploaded to CIRCUlink as part of this competition.

Due to conflict of interest, letters of support from Heart & Stroke are not permitted as part of any application to any Heart & Stroke research competitions.

Application Checklist	Submission Method
Registration and Profile Setup	*CIRCUlink – Fillable Fields*
Application e.Form (all sections)	*CIRCUlink – Fillable Fields*
Research Proposal	*CIRCUlink – Mandatory Attachment*
Principal Investigator's BioSketch	*CIRCUlink – Mandatory Attachment*
Mentorship & Training Plan	*CIRCUlink – Mandatory Attachment*
Institutional Statement	*CIRCUlink – Mandatory Attachment*
Signatures Page Form	*CIRCUlink – Mandatory Attachment*
Letter of Recommendation #1	*Email from Referee - Mandatory*
Letter of Recommendation #2	*Email from Referee - Mandatory*
Letter of Recommendation #3	*Email from Referee - Mandatory*

B.4.3 Application

This section is to help guide Applicants through the Application e.Form components on CIRCUlink. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review each section requirement to ensure accurate completion of application prior to submitting.

> **! All application components listed below are considered mandatory and required for a submission to be considered complete. Incomplete submissions will result in the application being withdrawn from the competition, without appeal.**

General Information Section

NI Information. Applicants must complete required information fields. This is where Applicants choose the amount of funding years being requested.

Financial Details Section

Budget Information. This is an overview showcasing the total Award Term and Value requested.

Applicant Information Section

Principal Investigator. Applicants must complete required information fields.

> **! BioSketch: A BioSketch form must be completed and uploaded via CIRCUlink. Applicants must use the Heart & Stroke form to enter their information directly online for the categories including, but not limited to: education, recognitions, employment, research funding history, activities (supervisory, mentoring, community and volunteer, knowledge and technology transfer, international collaboration), contributions (presentations, interview and media relations, publications, intellectual property). Please refer to the BioSketch Instructions and BioSketch Template.**

Mentorship: Heart & Stroke recognizes that successful mentorship is vital to career development and success. Mentors provide advice, counsel, feedback, and support related to career and personal development. Mentors can also serve as sponsors, collaborators, authors, or coaches. Mentoring can support skill and knowledge development across many domains including, but not limited to, research knowledge, skills, abilities, and techniques; knowledge and skills required to work with others, translate knowledge or widen the impact of research; knowledge of research standards, requirements and practices; and development of personal attributes, skills and characteristics necessary for success. Mentors also provide access to their social networks, providing mentees with research connections that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

! Applicants are required to identify a minimum of one (1) mentor and describe, in a co-signed letter, both the mentorship approach for the first year of the award and provide a three-year Mentorship Plan. The letter is required to be no more than two (2) pages; any additional pages will be removed. Heart & Stroke employees cannot act in this formal mentorship role.

History/Career Goals. Applicants should describe prior research experience and plans for their career *(limit: 10,000 characters – approx. two (2) pages)*.

Project Information Section

Research Proposal. Applicants are required to attach a detailed research proposal.

Each complete application must include a six (6) page detailed description of the proposed research program, which includes identification of the Applicant's role and how the execution of the research plan contributes to the Applicant's development as an independent researcher. Proposals should address the following areas:

a. Overall focus of research program
b. Sources of funding for all included projects within the program, existing and planned
c. Research environment
d. Information on inter-disciplinary aspects of the program, roles of collaborators/co-investigators/team members
e. Anticipated contributions toward the field
f. Roles of trainees with the program
g. To improve the clarity of the application, figures, charts, tables, etc. may be included in the research proposal. Please note that embedded figures, charts, tables, etc. count toward the page limit.

The research proposal must be in an **unprotected** PDF form according to the following formatting guidelines:

- **Text** must be single-spaced, **12-point Times New Roman** or **11-point Arial** (including labels and descriptions, as well as, items such as figures, tables, charts, photographs).
- **Margin** of 2 cm (3/4 inch) all around the entire page.
- **Header**
  o "Research Proposal" *(left corner)*
  o Applicant Name *(right corner)*
- **Footer**
  o Number pages consecutively
  o Page numbers must be centered
- **Condensed type or spacing is not acceptable.** No photo-reduction except for figures.

! Applications that do not adhere to the required fonts and formatting will be removed from the competition (without appeal).

The research proposal must be organized as per the following:

- Predominantly text and limited to **six (6) pages.**
- **The number of pages should reflect the size and scope of the proposed research.**
- Within the allotted **six (6) page limit** Applicants may submit figures, charts, tables and photographs. These portions of the submission count towards the six (6) page limit.
- References should be placed at the end of the research proposal and will not count towards the six (6) page limit.

! Applications that do not respect the six (6) page limit will be removed from the competition (without appeal).

Additional supporting documentation such as questionnaires, more detailed explanations of RCT methods, and consent forms may be attached as a separate document (there is no page restriction, and these will not count towards the six (6) page limit; the reviewers are not required to review these materials, and contents will not influence the scoring of the award).

! Applications failing to adhere to the Research Proposal guidelines will be deemed unacceptable and WILL be removed from the competition. There will be no appeal for this removal.

Representative/Relevant Publications. Applicants have the opportunity to provide up to three (3) publications/abstracts that are considered representative and relevant to the research proposal. Manuscripts **may not** be attached unless they have been submitted and accepted to a pre-print server or submitted or accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Any manuscript included with an application must be accompanied by documentation confirming its status. **Only updates to the three (3) representative publications attached as part of the proposal will be accepted.** Heart & Stroke will not accept letters indicating confirmation of acceptance for publication of a paper after December 1, 2025.

Research Institution. Applicants are asked to complete information related to the primary institution and department where the proposed research will be carried out.

An **Institutional Statement** must be provided by the identified Dean and Department Head (or institutional equivalents) confirming that the Applicant will have 75% of his/her time allocated to the proposed research program. The statement must be uploaded to CIRCUlink and clearly describe details on:

- How the 75% allocation of research time will be spent;
- Commitments for the remaining 25%;
- Critical appraisal of the Applicant; and,
- Critical appraisal of the proposed research program.

Executive Summary.
Applicants are to provide an executive summary of the proposed program of research, describing the overall theme or questions to be addressed by this research program and what contributions s/he believes will be made to the field *(limit: 5,000 characters – approx.1 page)*.

Lay Summary. Applicants must provide a lay summary of the research proposal in non-scientific, everyday language at a level no greater than Grade 8. The use of analogies, simplifications, and generalizations is recommended rather than scientific and technical terms. Applicants will need to respond to the six (6) questions that form the comprehensive lay summary *(limit: 1250 characters - approx. 1/4 pages each)*.

For more information on how to assess grade level, please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions.

SGBAR & EDI. All applicants are required to complete one of CIHR's sex and gender GBA+ training modules through the CIHR Institute of Gender and Health and submit/upload a Certificate of Completion as part of the application.

Applicants should describe how sex (biological) and/or gender (socio-cultural) will be considered in their research design or explain why sex and/or gender is not applicable to their research design *(limit 2,500 characters – approx. 0.5 pages each)*.

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research environments enhances excellence, innovation and creativity. Heart & Stroke is committed to excellence through equity and encourages Applicants from diverse and equity deserving groups to apply to our funding opportunities. Applicants should describe how EDI considerations have been integrated in the research design. Applicants are asked to explain why EDI considerations would not be relevant to the project *(limit 2,500 characters – approx. 0.5 pages each)*.

Heart & Stroke anticipates further incorporating and formalizing evaluation of EDI considerations into Personnel Award review in subsequent competitions. For more details about SGBAR and EDI, please refer to **C.8**.

Research Classification and Lay Descriptors. Applicants are asked to identify their research area focus, descriptors, risk factors, keywords and other pillars that are most relevant to their research.

Personnel Support. Applicants are asked to list any currently provincial salary award(s), and/or any previously received a New Investigator award (including Heart & Stroke), if applicable. Additionally, applicants are asked to confirm if any applications have been made or will be made for personnel award support.

Previous Reviews. Applicants may use this section to respond to reviews on a previous New Investigator award application, if applicable.

Peer Review Details Section

Candidate Appraisal. Applicants should add names of professors or instructors to whom appraisals have been requested from for this application. **Three (3) letters of recommendation cannot be provided or attached to the application by the applicant and should be emailed separately** to research@heartandstroke.ca in PDF format, directly from the referees by September 04, 2025.

The letters must evaluate the Applicant's:

- Professional and academic capabilities for this award;
- Personal attributes;
- Research potential; and,
- Alignment of the overall research program with the mission of Heart & Stroke.

The letters must be in PDF format, with the file and email subject labeled as follows: ***Letter of Recommendation_LAST NAME, First Name of Applicant_Referee Initials_Date of Submission*** Each letter of recommendation should be no more than two (2) pages. Due to conflict of interest, letters of support from Heart & Stroke employees are not permitted.

> **Letters of Recommendation must be no more than two (2) pages—additional pages will be removed. Any letters received after the deadline will be excluded (without appeal or notice to the applicant)**

Suggested Reviewers. Applicants may list up to three (3) reviewers (preferably in Canada) considered appropriate to review their application.

Exclude Reviewers. Applicants may list up to two (2) individuals to whom they would prefer that their application NOT be sent for review, if necessary.

Administration Section

Ethics and Safety. In CIRCUlink, please indicate the status of all **ethics and safety review board approval forms** *(e.g., "Included", "Form to be Sent", "Not applicable")* as they apply to the proposed research. For more information, refer to **C.7**.

Signatures. Applicants must complete the signature page form, as found in CIRCUlink, and upload a completed form to their CIRCUlink application as an attachment. The signature form requires all fields to be completed, including the mandatory two institutional signatures.

> **! Signatures are required from two (2) institutional representatives as indicated on the form and no other individual may sign on behalf of the individuals named on the Signature Form.**

Heart & Stroke accepts a scanned copy of the original signature uploaded into CIRCUlink as well as electronic signatures. Applicants need not send an original copy of the signature page to Heart & Stroke. The expectation is that an electronic signature will hold the same weight as an original (wet) signature.

B.4.4   Incomplete/Unacceptable Applications
To maintain the principle of fairness to all Applicants, regulations *must* be adhered to in the preparation of the application. *Any* infraction of the rules will lead to the truncation or immediate rejection, **without appeal,** of the application. All submissions are considered final. No alterations or changes will be accepted.

Any **incomplete** applications, **applications without required signatures or letters of reference** and/or **applications that do not respect the set-page limitations**, as noted in this guideline document, will **NOT** be admissible to the competition.

B.4.5   Competition Results
Early notification may be sent to Applicants **in early 2026**. The release of early notifications is dependent on funding availability, and on the timing of peer review. Applicants will be advised of any changes to program milestones via email.

Official decision letters will be sent to all Applicants by May 2026, or an update on the status of notifications will be provided before that date, with a public announcement posted at a later date on the Heart & Stroke Research website (see **C.14**).

…

C. GENERAL INFORMATION

C.1   Non-Employee Status

The funding of a grant or award is deemed to establish neither an employer-employee relationship nor a partnership between Heart & Stroke and the Recipient(s).

C.2   Indirect Costs

Heart & Stroke and funding partners, if applicable, support only the direct costs of research. No funding is to be used for indirect costs of research. The definition of indirect costs of research for the purposes of this policy is costs which cannot be directly associated with a particular research program or operating grant including; costs associated with the general operation and maintenance of facilities (from laboratories to libraries); the management of the research process (from grant management to commercialization); and regulation and safety compliance (including human ethics, animal care and environmental assessment); and generic institutional/departmental taxes/tithes related to services.

C.3   Financial Gain

Heart & Stroke and funding partners, if applicable, will not fund an application which results in any form of direct financial profit to Recipients or individuals related to that funded research project (e.g., related to commercial interests, or the development of commercial products as an output of the research).

C.4   Research Integrity Policy

The primary objective of Heart & Stroke's Research Integrity Policy is to protect and defend the integrity of the research process and to deal with allegations of scientific misconduct in a timely and transparent fashion. Data related to research by and with First Nations, Inuit, Métis or Urban Indigenous communities whose traditional and ancestral territories are in Canada must be managed in accordance with data management principles developed and approved by those communities, and on the basis of free, prior and informed consent. This includes, but is not limited to, considerations of Indigenous data sovereignty, as well as data collection, ownership, protection, use, and sharing.

Responsibilities of researchers, institutions and Heart & Stroke with respect to research integrity are outlined in the Heart & Stroke Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research. All Recipients agree to comply with the Principles and Responsibilities set out in this policy, and the research misconduct provisions below. Heart & Stroke defines research misconduct to include actions that are inconsistent with "integrity" as defined in the Tri-Agency Policy Framework for the Responsible Conduct of Research, and to include such actions as fabrication, falsification, destruction of research records, plagiarism, redundant publications or self-plagiarism, invalid authorship, inadequate acknowledgement, mismanagement of Conflict of Interest. Heart & Stroke will assess allegations of scientific misconduct in the following manner:

- Any allegation of scientific misconduct will be initially reviewed by Heart & Stroke to determine whether an investigation is warranted. If it is felt that an investigation is required, Heart & Stroke may request that this be conducted by the host institution of the individual considered to have performed the alleged misconduct. In allegations specifically relate to the peer review process, the investigation may be conducted jointly by the institution and Heart & Stroke.
- Heart & Stroke will not act on verbal allegations of misconduct. All allegations must be submitted in writing. Although the confidentiality of persons who submit an allegation of scientific misconduct will be protected as much as possible, it must be recognized that due process will often result in the identity of this person being released to the investigating institution.
- The institution will be required to submit a written report upon conclusion of the investigation. This report will summarize the findings of the investigation and any future actions that will be undertaken by the institute as a result of the findings.
- Applicants must certify that all statements made (or answers provided) in the application are correct and complete. Any misrepresentation of these statements (or answers provided) may result in the cancellation of the grant or award or delivery of funds to the Recipient.
- In cases where misconduct is concluded to have occurred, Heart & Stroke may apply sanctions against the individual(s) implicated. These sanctions will range from a reprimand letter to a ban from applying for or holding Heart & Stroke funds for a set period of time.

C.5   Artificial Intelligence

Heart & Stroke aims to provide clear guidance on using artificial intelligence (AI) in grant and award applications to assure a consistent, transparent, and responsible approach for Applicants and reviewers. This is to ensure that funding decisions made by Heart & Stroke are based on accurate and reliable information, thus maintaining the quality, accuracy, and reliability of research funded.

In accordance with existing Heart & Stroke: Responsible Conduct of Research policies, Applicants are responsible for ensuring that their grant and award applications are accurate, complete, and that all sources are properly acknowledged and referenced.

Heart & Stroke is now extending specific disclosure mechanisms related to the use of generative AI, where Applicants must clearly state if and where material has been generated by AI within their proposals and/or

application materials. AI-generated material includes content created using AI technologies such as large language models, machine learning models, and algorithms. This can encompass the use for the generation of text, images, audio, video, and other forms of media.

Please note that non-generative AI tools like "Grammarly" or similar platforms that review and correct content for appearance, clarity or presentation do not require disclosure as AI-generated material.

When submitting applications with AI-generated content, Applicants must disclose the use of AI by appropriately referencing the AI generated material. This disclosure must fit within the application parameters set out in the Program Guidelines for the relevant sections. Applicants should be aware that using AI may lead to presenting information without proper recognition of authorship.

C.6   Heart & Stroke Research Security Compliance Statement

Heart & Stroke acknowledges and supports the Government of Canada's directives on research security as outlined in the *National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships* and the *Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern* (STRAC Policy).

Heart & Stroke requires that all application submissions be compliant with both the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships and the STRAC Policy, together referred to as Policies. These complementary Policies provide guidance for implementing consistent, transparent, risk-targeted, and science-appropriate research security measures. Applicants must ensure that all parties involved in the submission of a Heart & Stroke application comply with the Government of Canada's guidance and policies. Where applicable, it is the Applicant's responsibility to inform Heart & Stroke of any outstanding or in process documentation required for compliance in relation to these Polices as part of the application. Further, by providing Applicant and institutional signatures to this application, Applicants are confirming to the Heart & Stroke that the proposed research will not be undertaken until it has been endorsed to meet the aforementioned Policies – initially and throughout the term of the project, as needed – by the appropriate review body(ies).

In accordance with the STRAC Policy, grant and/or award applications submitted by a university or affiliated research host institution to Heart & Stroke that aim to advance a Sensitive Technology Research Area will not be funded if any of the researchers involved are currently affiliated with, or in receipt of funding or in-kind support from a Named Research Organization.

For more information on how the Applicant and submission institution are accountable, consult the Tri-agency guidance on the STRAC Policy. Should you have any questions regarding compliance with the Government of Canada's policies, please contact: research@heartandstroke.ca.

C.7   Ethical Requirements

By signing and applying to this competition, Applicants and their Host Institutions are confirming to Heart & Stroke that the proposed research will not be undertaken until it has been endorsed as ethical and safe – initially and throughout the term of the project, as needed – by the appropriate review body(ies).

Applicants undertake the responsibility to ensure any experimentation will be acceptable to the Host Institution on ethical grounds and comply with the following guidelines and Host Institution research policies, as applicable:

- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.
- Good Clinical Practice (GCP)
- Good Laboratory Practice (GLP)
- Any research involving human pluripotent stem cells must adhere to the CIHR Guidelines for Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Research. The institution must notify Heart & Stroke as to the results of the review by the CIHR's Stem Cell Oversight Committee.
- In the case of laboratory animal experimentation, the guiding principles and standards enunciated by the Canadian Council on Animal Care.
- Guidelines and standards for biological and chemical hazards as outlined in the Public Health Agency/Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Canadian Biosafety Standards and Guidelines.
- TCPS2 (2022) – Chapter 9: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada.

C.8   Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis and Reporting (SGBAR), Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples of Canada

Sex and Gender-Based Analysis and Reporting (SGBAR)

Heart & Stroke is committed to advancing sex and gender-based analysis and reporting (SGBAR) and improving health for all.

There is significant evidence (CIHR's Methods' series and Science factsheets examples) to demonstrate that biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender and other identity factors) differences between women and men contribute to differences in health risks, health services use, health system interaction and health outcomes. Heart & Stroke is committed to funding science of the highest standards through rigorous and reproducible research, which includes systematic integration of SGBAR. For additional information on sex, gender and health research, Applicants are encouraged to review the "How to integrate sex and gender in research" section on the CIHR website.

Applicants engaging in clinical trial-based research are also strongly encouraged to complete Women's College Hospital's Sex -Specific Analyses and Reporting in Clinical Trials online training module.

Please see resource documents: Glossary of SGBAR & EDI Terminology and List of SGBAR and EDI e-Learning and Resources for Researchers for a glossary of key terminology and additional learning resources, as found on our website.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Heart & Stroke is committed to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and improving health for all. EDI considers a broad range of identity dimensions beyond that of sex and gender, although EDI may also include sex and gender considerations. This commitment applies across our organization, including to our research investment and our desire to strengthen the quality and impact of the research we fund and, ultimately, improve health outcomes for all people in Canada.

> **Equity** is defined as the removal of systemic barriers and biases, enabling all individuals to have equal opportunity to access and benefit from the research, with a focus on those bearing a disproportionate burden of disease which includes but is not limited to: women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, older adults, members of visible minorities/racialized groups, and members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

> **Diversity** is defined as differences among people, such as in in race, colour, place of origin, religion, immigrant and newcomer status, ethnic origin, ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and age.

> **Inclusion** is defined as the practice ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are equally supported to contribute.

To ensure funded research applies to all people living in Canada and that the research is specific, representative, rigorous and transparent, Heart & Stroke requires the appropriate consideration and inclusion of EDI approaches as part of the research design.

As part of a larger body of EDI resources being developed across the Tri-Agencies, the Social Sciences Research Council (SSHRC) has developed a robust guideline to support the integration of EDI principles into research. They provide distinct descriptions of what this means in terms of both research practice (EDI-RP) and research design (EDI-RD). Specifically in relation to a Grant-in-Aid application Heart & Stroke is seeking the incorporation of EDI consideration in the research design (EDI-RD).

EDI in research design (EDI-RD) involves designing research so that it takes EDI into account through approaches that may include intersectionality, sex and gender-based analysis and reporting (SGBAR), anti-racism, and disaggregated data collection and analysis, among others. These approaches necessitate consideration of diversity and identity factors such as, but not limited to: age, culture, disability, education, language, neurodiversity, parental status/responsibility, place of origin, religion, race, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to complete Women's College Hospital's Intersectionality as a Research Lens Training Module and CIHR's Unconscious Bias in Peer Review Training Video Module.

Please see the resource documents Glossary of SGBAR & EDI Terminology and List of SGBAR and EDI E-Learning and Resources for Researchers for a glossary of key terminology and additional learning resources, as found on the Heart & Stroke website.

Indigenous Research

Heart and Stroke aims to build respectful and meaningful relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples through the establishment of research environments that are culturally, socially, spiritually, emotionally and physically safe. Indigenous Research can be defined as any field or discipline related to health and/or wellness that is conducted by, grounded in, or engaged with, First Nations, Inuit or Métis communities, societies or individuals and their wisdom, cultures, experiences or knowledge systems, as expressed in their dynamic forms, past and present. This must be done with a commitment to respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities.

All research involving Indigenous peoples must be undertaken in accordance with the second edition of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, and, in particular, Chapter 9:(TCPS 2 2022) Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada. See List of SGBAR and EDI E-Learning and Resources for Researchers for relevant resources.

C.9   Patent Rights

Heart & Stroke and funding partners, if applicable, have no intellectual property (IP) claims on the outputs of the funded research. However, Host Institutions of funded Recipients, are expected to have appropriate policies in place to protect the intellectual property of the outputs that arise from the funded research.

C.10   Open Science and Open Access to Research Outputs Policy

Recipients are required to make their research outputs and findings publicly available as soon as possible but no later than twelve (12) months after project completion or final publication. To meet this requirement, Applicants should become familiar with the guiding principles that enable sharing data, information, tools and resources, and that respect Indigenous data governance and sovereignty.

- Open Science is the practice of making scientific inputs, outputs and processes freely available to all with minimal restrictions. Open Science is enabled by people, technology, and infrastructure. It is practiced in full respect of privacy, security, ethical considerations, and appropriate intellectual property protection. To learn more about Open Science, Applicants are encouraged to review the Federal Government's Roadmap for Open Science.
- FAIR: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable are guiding principles to inform data management and stewardship of digital assets.
- CARE (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility and Ethics) are guiding principles for Indigenous Data Governance.
- First Nations Principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) guide how First Nations' data should be collected, protected, used and shared.
- ClinicalTrials.gov is a database of privately and publicly-funded clinical trials around the world.
- PROSPERO is an international prospective register of protocols related to COVID-19.

Research outputs may include peer-reviewed journal publications, research data, and the results of clinical trials that will not be published in peer-reviewed journals. Research findings may be shared in ways that are culturally relevant and in formats that are functional, useful and practical to distinct needs of Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) communities.

Indigenous Peoples share common histories and concepts; however, each community has specific methods for knowledge synthesis, translation, and exchange. For Indigenous knowledge mobilization to be successful, meaningful and culturally safe, engagement with Indigenous communities is encouraged as Indigenous communities are best positioned to guide researchers towards the co-development knowledge mobilization practices that work best for their communities.

Heart & Stroke requires that all Recipients supported in whole or in part through Heart & Stroke make their research inputs, processes, and outputs publicly available as soon as possible but no later than twelve (12) months after the final publication or availability of results. In this policy, Heart & Stroke defines research outputs as peer-reviewed journal publications, positive and negative research data, and the results of clinical trials that will not be published in peer-reviewed journals. Compliance with the *Open Access to Research Outputs* policy is a condition of acceptance of all Heart & Stroke research funding. Please see Heart & Stroke's Open Access to Research Outputs.

C.11   Communicating Research to the Public and Donors

Recipients need to be aware that the title of their project and the lay summary could be placed into the public domain or included in the funder(s) publications without notification. Applicants are cautioned not to disclose information that could endanger a proprietary position in these sections.

Raising funds to support research is difficult and more than ever funders need to let donors and the public know that their donations are being used to support world class research. As Recipients are well-positioned to explain the role of research in increasing heart and brain health and reducing the burden of heart disease and stroke, they may be asked by Heart & Stroke and funding partners, if applicable, to communicate the importance of research to donors and the public, through various means, such as interviews and meetings with donors.

C.12   Acknowledging Publications

Heart & Stroke must be notified in advance of the publication date of any major publications arising from the funded research by email at: research@heartandstroke.ca. Recipients must acknowledge the support of Heart & Stroke and funding partners, if applicable, in all scientific publications and presentations related to their grant or award; further details will be provided to all Recipients.

C.13   Contact Information

For any questions or concerns, the preferred form of communication is email. Your email will go to a research email inbox which is accessed by multiple research team members and is the best way to get a timely response.

Heart & Stroke can provide general guidance but cannot confirm eligibility and/or relevance of your research topic during the application process. Final determination on eligibility and/or relevance can only be made on receipt of the full application and after the application deadline.

Research and Science Department
Email: research@heartandstroke.ca
Website: https://www.heartandstroke.ca/what-we-do/research/for-researchers

!Please note this EMAIL ACCOUNT is only monitored from 9am-5pm ET, Monday to Friday.

C.14   About the Funder

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

Life. We don't want you to miss it. That's why Heart & Stroke leads the fight against heart disease and stroke. We must generate the next medical breakthroughs so people in Canada don't miss out on precious moments. Together, we are working to promote health, save lives and enhance recovery through research, health promotion and public policy.