

Special backgrounder
Announcement of the VBI Vaccine agreement, the Vaccine Task Force and the
Therapeutics Task Force
August 5 2020

CONTEXT

On August 5, 2020, Minister Bains, will announce the creation of a COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force. The task force's mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on Canada's COVID-19 vaccine strategy, with a focus on investments to support the development and production of a safe and effective vaccine for Canadians.

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force has been providing advice on prioritizing vaccine projects seeking support for activities in Canada, identifying and connecting with international vaccine candidates of interest to Canada, and will consider options to manufacture the most promising COVID-19 vaccines. The Task Force will have up to 18 members, including two co-Chairs and four ex-officio members. It will be in place for a period of at least 12 months, subject to extension at the discretion of the Government of Canada.

In addition, the Government is announcing a COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force. Its mandate is to provide advice to the Government on COVID-19 therapeutics, including assessing and prioritizing COVID-19 therapeutic projects that are seeking support for activities in Canada.

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force is comprised of experts drawn from research and business who have proven ability to develop and bring new therapies to market in Canada. The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will be in place for a period of at least 6 months, subject to extension at the discretion of the Government of Canada, and will meet on an as-needed basis.

Minister Bains will also announce an investment with Variation Biotechnologies Inc. (VBI), a company with its research facility in Ottawa, ON, that will develop medical countermeasures in direct response to COVID-19; and build Canadian competencies and capabilities for future pandemics. This investment is made through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) to support the development of a vaccine for COVID-19 in Canada, in particular, clinical trials. The project was subjected to the governance process in place for the \$600 million being provided to SIF to support Canadian companies undertaking vaccine and therapy clinical trials, as well as bio manufacturing opportunities.



TAG LINE

The initiatives we're announcing today are further paving the way for the delivery of a safe, effective vaccine to all Canadians as quickly as possible.

KEY MESSAGES

COVID-19 VACCINE TASK FORCE

- Canada's exceptional scientific community has been working around the clock to deliver the most important tool we have in the fight against COVID-19: a vaccine.
- This is why the Government of Canada has brought together a highly capable team of vaccine and immunology experts and industry leaders who have a proven ability in developing and commercializing vaccines to serve on this task force.
- Since June, these vaccine and immunology experts and industry leaders have been providing advice to the Government on how to target our investments in projects with the greatest chance of success.
- The task force has been hard at work and have made their first recommendations to the Government on promising vaccine candidates.
- Our government has always firmly believed in the role of science in good decision-making. Now, arguably more than ever, it's incredibly important that we make evidence based decisions based on the recommendations of our world-class scientists.

COVID-19 THERAPEUTICS TASK FORCE

- While work towards a vaccine for COVID-19 continues, it is just as important to determine how best to provide needed treatments to those who contract this virus.
- Day to day treatment of those who become ill from the COVID-19 virus is vital to limiting the impacts of the virus.
- This is why the Government of Canada is bringing researchers and business leaders who have proven ability to develop and bring new therapies to market in Canada to serve on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force.
- Its mandate is to provide expert advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics. It will assess and prioritize COVID-19 therapeutic projects seeking government support.
- The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will help to guide us in supporting the development of effective treatments that we can use to make sure that while we await a vaccine, we can treat the virus effectively.

VBI VACCINES

[APG]

- The health and safety of Canadians is the Government's top priority.
- Today, I'm pleased to announce that we have followed the expert advice of our vaccine task force. We have invested nearly \$56 million to support clinical trials Variation Biotechnologies Inc.
- The company is developing a COVID-19 vaccine at its Ottawa research facility.
- Through the Strategic Innovation Fund, the Government will support VBI's work on pre-clinical studies and clinical trials.

MESSAGES CLÉS

VBI VACCINES

- La santé et la sécurité des Canadiens sont la priorité absolue du gouvernement.
- Le Plan canadien de mobilisation du secteur industriel pour lutter contre la COVID-19 a pour but de fournir aux travailleurs de la santé le matériel et l'équipement essentiels dont ils ont besoin.
- Le gouvernement du Canada appuie les chercheurs des secteurs public et privé qui accomplissent un travail essentiel afin de protéger la santé et la sécurité des Canadiens et des citoyens du monde entier pendant la pandémie de COVID-19.
- Le projet réalisé avec VBI Vaccines soutient la mise au point de contre-mesures dans la lutte contre la COVID-19 menant au développement d'un vaccin.

GROUPE DE TRAVAIL SUR LES VACCINS CONTRE LA COVID-19

- Le soutien offert par le gouvernement du Canada à la mise au point d'un vaccin contre la COVID-19 va permettre au pays d'obtenir rapidement ce traitement une fois qu'il sera disponible.
- Des investissements comme celui-ci permettent au Canada de mieux se préparer à toute éventualité et sont un moyen essentiel de protéger la vie et l'emploi des citoyens, ainsi que de relancer graduellement l'économie.
- C'est pourquoi le gouvernement du Canada a créé le Groupe de travail sur les vaccins contre la COVID-19, qui est formé d'experts en vaccination et en immunologie et des

[APG]

chefs d'entreprise chevronnés dans le domaine de la mise au point et de la commercialisation de vaccins.

- Le Groupe de travail sur les vaccins contre la COVID-19 met son expertise à profit pour cibler les investissements qui vont contribuer à la mise au point de vaccins ayant le plus de probabilités de succès. Notre objectif est d'obtenir le plus rapidement possible un vaccin sûr, efficace et abordable.

GROUPE DE TRAVAIL SUR LES THÉRAPEUTIQUES DE LA COVID-19

- Les travaux en vue de mettre au point un vaccin contre la COVID-19 se poursuivent. Il est tout aussi important de déterminer comment traiter le mieux possible les personnes qui sont atteintes par la maladie.
- Le traitement quotidien des personnes qui souffrent de la COVID-19 est essentiel à l'atténuation des répercussions de cette maladie.
- C'est pourquoi le gouvernement du Canada a créé le Groupe de travail sur les thérapeutiques de la COVID-19. Il est formé de chercheurs et de chefs d'entreprise chevronnés dans le domaine de la mise au point et de la commercialisation de nouvelles thérapies au Canada.
- Son mandat est de formuler des conseils d'experts pour le gouvernement du Canada sur le traitement des personnes qui souffrent de la COVID-19. Il va évaluer les projets de mise au point de thérapeutiques contre la COVID-19 et les mettre par ordre de priorité en ce qui concerne l'attribution de fonds par le gouvernement.
- Le Groupe de travail sur les thérapeutiques de la COVID-19 va orienter le soutien à la mise au point de traitements efficaces pour bien soigner les victimes de cette maladie jusqu'à ce qu'un vaccin soit disponible.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

VBI VACCINES

Q1. What is today's announcement? What is ISED's role in today's announcement?

The Government of Canada is announcing the creation of a COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force. The task force's mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on Canada's COVID-19 vaccine strategy, with a focus on investments to support the development and production of a vaccine for Canadians. In addition, the creation of a

[APG]

COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will be announced. The task force's mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics.

The Government also announced investments that will help support the development and access to treatments for COVID-19, including:

- Support of more than \$3 million for Nova Scotia-based [IMV Inc](#) to advance clinical development of its vaccine candidate for the prevention of COVID-19 infection. This support is being provided with contributions from the [National Research Council Industrial Research Assistance Program](#), and [the Next Generation Manufacturing Canada Supercluster](#);
- Support of more than \$19 million in funding through the [Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada](#) (NSERC) to leverage the expertise of researchers in natural science and engineering and their partners across Canada to address this unprecedented crisis. This investment will support 369 COVID-19 research projects, including work related to vaccines.

Minister Bains also announced an investment with VBI where the company will seek to develop medical countermeasures in direct response to COVID-19; and build Canadian competencies and capabilities for future pandemics.

Q1. En quoi consiste l'annonce d'aujourd'hui? Quel est le rôle d'ISDE dans cette annonce?

Le gouvernement du Canada annonce la création du Groupe de travail sur les vaccins contre la COVID-19, qui a pour mandat de lui fournir des conseils quant à la stratégie canadienne à adopter en ce qui concerne les vaccins contre la COVID-19, notamment sur les investissements à réaliser en vue d'appuyer la mise au point et la production d'un vaccin pour la population canadienne. La création du Groupe de travail sur les thérapeutiques de la COVID-19 sera également annoncée. Ce groupe de travail a pour mandat de prodiguer des conseils au gouvernement du Canada sur les thérapeutiques de la COVID-19.

Le gouvernement annonce aussi des investissements qui viendront soutenir la mise au point de traitements contre la COVID-19 et l'accès à ceux-ci :

- Un appui de plus de 3 millions de dollars à l'entreprise néo-écossaise [IMV Inc.](#) (anglais) dans le but de faire progresser le développement clinique de son vaccin expérimental visant la prévention de l'infection à la COVID-19. Ce soutien financier est une contribution du [Programme d'aide à la recherche industrielle du Conseil national de recherches Canada](#) et de la [Supergrappe de la fabrication de prochaine génération](#) (anglais);

[APG]

- Un financement de plus de 19 millions de dollars par l'entremise du [Conseil de recherches en sciences naturelles et en génie du Canada](#) pour mettre à profit l'expertise des chercheurs en sciences naturelles et en génie et de leurs partenaires de partout au Canada dans le but d'affronter cette crise sans précédent. Cet investissement permettra de soutenir 369 projets de recherche liés à la COVID-19, y compris des travaux portant sur les vaccins.

Le ministre Bains annonce par ailleurs un investissement dans l'entreprise VBI, qui cherchera à élaborer des contre-mesures médicales en réponse directe à la COVID-19 et permettra au Canada de renforcer ses compétences et ses capacités en vue d'une pandémie future.

Q2. Why did the government decide to work with VBI and select their proposal?

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, calling on all countries to scale up emergency response measures. Within a global race towards the development of a vaccine, there are over 197 vaccine candidates worldwide.

VBI's project was selected based on a recommendation from the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force. Is in direct response to the global fight against COVID-19 and contributes to Canada's ability to secure an effective vaccine.

Q3. Is this contribution repayable or non-repayable?

The SIF investment of \$55.9 million is non-repayable.

Q4. Can you tell me more about the conditions of the repayment?

The contents of the contribution agreement are commercially sensitive. But all agreements require specific benefits commitments to Canada to receive funding.

Q5. How much will the deal with VBI cost the Government?

The details of the agreement-in-principle are subject to commercial confidentiality and cannot be disclosed at this time.

Q6. What other companies are you working with to produce a vaccine?

On April 23, 2020, the Government announced \$600 million through the Strategic Innovation Fund to support COVID-19 vaccine and therapy clinical trials led by the private sector, and for Canadian bio-manufacturing opportunities. The Government is currently assessing these proposals, with the assistance of the Vaccine and Therapeutics Task Forces.

The National Research Council of Canada (NRC) is also working with a number of trusted partners in Canada and internationally as part of the collective effort to help find solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, three vaccine collaborations have been confirmed.

The NRC is working with collaborators at the following organizations to advance and test potential COVID-19 vaccine candidates in Canada:

- VBI Vaccines (based in Massachusetts, with research operations in Ottawa);
- CanSino Biologics (based in Tianjin, China, with a Canadian subsidiary based in Toronto); and
- VIDO-InterVac (based at the University of Saskatchewan)

Q7. What else is the Government of Canada doing to help find treatments and vaccines for COVID-19?

On April 23, 2020, the Prime Minister announced more than \$1 billion in support of the second phase of our Plan to Mobilize Science to fight COVID-19. This includes:

Tracking and Testing:

- The establishment of the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force.
- \$40 million for the Canadian COVID-19 Genomics Network (CanCOGeN), led by Genome Canada, to coordinate a COVID-19 viral and host genome sequencing effort across Canada.
- \$10 million for a Canadian data monitoring initiative so we can coordinate and share pandemic-related data across the country to enhance Canada's response to COVID-19.

Vaccine and Therapy Development:

[APG]

- \$114.9 million through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for research projects that will accelerate the development, testing, and implementation of medical and social countermeasures to mitigate the rapid spread of COVID-19, as well as its social and health impacts.
- \$600 million, through the Strategic Innovation Fund, over two years to support COVID-19 vaccine and therapy clinical trials led by the private sector, and Canadian biomanufacturing opportunities.

Building our Domestic Capacity for Clinical Trials and Biomanufacturing:

- \$23 million for the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization-International Vaccine Centre (VIDO-InterVac) to accelerate development of a vaccine against COVID-19, and \$12 million to expand the facility's bio-manufacturing capacity to support clinical trials
- \$44 million for the National Research Council of Canada to upgrade its Human Health Therapeutics facility in Montréal for Good Manufacturing Practices compliance, which will enable the NRC to produce vaccines for clinical trials in Canada.
- \$10.3 million over two years, and \$5 million ongoing, to support the Canadian Immunization Research Network in conducting vaccine-related research and clinical trials, and to enhance Canada's capacity to monitor vaccine safety and effectiveness.

In addition, through the Pandemic Response Challenge Program, the NRC is bringing together the best Canadian and international researchers to fast-track research and development aimed at accelerating the development of diagnostics tools and medical countermeasures for a rapid front-line response to protect and treat Canadians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pandemic Response Challenge Program is structured around four main research pillars:

- Rapid detection and diagnosis;
- Therapeutics and vaccines;
- Digital patient care and pandemic analytics; and
- Enabling adaptive responses.

Q8. Is SIF still accepting proposals for COVID-19 response projects or is it only considering projects that were in the pipeline?

The Government had an open call for proposals for vaccine and therapy development in Spring 2020. These proposals are being assessed. Strong contenders who have promising

[APG]

research and discovery for treatments, vaccines or other medical countermeasures, or manufacturing capabilities that already have projects in the SIF pipeline are being considered for funding. In addition, the Government is also seeking interest from entities incorporated in Canada that are expanding domestic bio-manufacturing capacity related to COVID-19, not in the SIF pipeline.

The Government of Canada encourages all businesses and manufacturers that can assist Canada in meeting the need for medical supplies to visit <http://ow.ly/PtF650yRbHg>.

Q9. Are you working on deals with other companies that could offer these types of therapies?

The Government is supporting Canada's researchers as they do critical work to protect the health and safety of all Canadians, and people around the world, during the COVID-19 outbreak.

On March 23, 2020, The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, announced support to quickly mobilize Canadian researchers and life sciences companies to support large-scale efforts towards countermeasures to combat COVID-19, including potential vaccines and treatments.

This \$275 million for coronavirus research and medical countermeasures was part of the Government of Canada's more than \$1 billion early COVID-19 Response Fund. The funding will be used to advance projects that are already underway by university researchers and others to respond to COVID-19, and ensure domestic supply of potential vaccines.

Q10. What else has the Government of Canada done to help in the fight against COVID-19?

To date, over 6,000 Canadian firms have offered their expertise and capacity to help combat COVID-19 by retooling, scaling up, or providing urgently needed goods and services. Today's update highlighted that:

In May, the Government of Canada announced a contribution of \$175.6M to support AbCellera's \$287.4M project to develop medical countermeasures (MCMs) in direct response to COVID-19 and strengthen Canada's ability to respond to future pandemics. This is an important project with significant benefits to Canadians both in the short- and long-term.

[APG]

This project will support Canada's fight against COVID-19 by leveraging AbCellera's world-leading drug discovery technology that searches and analyzes blood samples of recovered patients to rapidly find naturally produced antibodies that can be used to fight and prevent viral infections. Within days of receiving a sample from a recovered patient, AbCellera identified over 500 human antibodies that are candidates for development as a treatment. The company has partnered with global biopharmaceutical company Eli Lilly to rapidly commercialize a treatment. Eli Lilly has begun clinical trials in the U.S, for this treatment, ahead of any other antibody candidate in the world.

IMV

Q1. What is the support for IMV that you announced today?

The Government is providing more than \$3 million to IMV Inc. to the advance clinical development of its vaccine candidate for the prevention of COVID-19 infection. Today's investment will help IMV begin Phase 1 clinical trials in Canada, and scale-up manufacturing capacity in anticipation of commercialization.

The funding breakdown is:

- From Ngen, approved for \$2.5 million towards the phase 1 and phase 2 manufacturing for this project;
 - A \$2,500,000 contribution to by Dartmouth-led [Immunovaccine Technologies](#). This project involves the development of a Canadian domestic large-scale supply of a safe and effective vaccine to prevent COVID-19 before the end of 2020. The goal is to establish a complete end-to-end Canadian supply chain for the development and manufacturing of synthetic vaccines allowing to produce large scale quantities of the DPX-COVID-19 vaccine. The project is expected to end on 1-Feb-21 and is anticipating 25 million doses manufacturing capacity per year.
- From NRC IRAP, \$636,596 for direct salary cost of technical employees, plus support for contractor organizations for relatively early-stage activities

In addition, IMV received an emergency wage subsidy of up to \$640,332.00 from the NRC IRAP Innovation Assistance Program (IRAP IAP).

VACCINE TASK FORCE

Q1. Why are you establishing the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force?

[APG]

The health and safety of Canadians remains the Government of Canada's top priority. This is why the Government of Canada is bringing together vaccine and immunology experts and industry leaders who have proven abilities in developing and commercializing vaccines to serve on the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force. While we are announcing the task force today, members have been working since June to identify promising candidates so that we have the greatest chance of success. **The task force's advice has informed our decision to invest in VBI today.** Our goal is to be able to have a safe, effective, and affordable vaccine as quickly as possible. We will also make sure there will be sufficient quantities of vaccine available to protect Canadians.

Q2. What is the government doing to develop vaccines and therapeutics?

The Government of Canada is investing in promising projects to advance the development of vaccines and treatments and to better position our nation to have access to them. These investments contribute to Canada's preparedness and are critical to protecting lives and livelihoods, and supporting the gradual reopening of our economy.

The Government is working to secure the supply of an eventual vaccine and promising treatments. A comprehensive process is underway to ensure Canada has the manufacturing capacity and critical equipment needed to develop, produce, test, and distribute a vaccine as part of the massive global effort underway to protect us from COVID-19.

The Government of Canada's support for vaccine development includes \$600 million through the Strategic Innovation Fund to support COVID-19 vaccine and therapy clinical trials, as well as biomanufacturing investments.

The National Research Council of Canada (NRC) is also working with its partners as part of a collective effort to help find solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Canada announced a total of \$44 million in funding for critical upgrades to the NRC's biomanufacturing facility in Montréal to enable the production of vaccines for clinical trials.

The first phase of upgrades to the NRC facility will enable compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), which includes procuring and qualifying equipment,

[APG]

modifying the existing space, and implementing a quality-control system to allow for the emergency production of vaccines and therapeutics.

A second phase will leverage funding to maintain ongoing operations at the facility to produce vaccine candidate batches for clinical trials, as well as provide new equipment and infrastructure to fill and finish individual doses as soon as a proven vaccine becomes available.

By end of the summer, the NRC aims to be ready to produce approximately 70,000 to 100,000 vaccine doses per month, once one becomes available.

On May 3, the Prime Minister announced an investment of over \$175 million in AbCellera to support their promising COVID-19 research. The company has identified antibodies that could be used in drugs to treat this virus. In June, it was announced that the lead antibody (LY-CoV555) from the collaboration between AbCellera and Eli Lilly and Company (Lilly), entered into human testing for the potential treatment of COVID-19. The lead antibody was developed at record speed, taking less than three months to advance from screen to first-in-human clinical trials.

As part of Canada's plan to mobilize science to fight COVID-19, on March 23rd the Prime Minister announced \$12 million for the University of Saskatchewan's world-leading Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization – International Vaccine Centre (VIDO-InterVac). This funding, provided through Western Economic Diversification, will help VIDO-InterVac expand its bio-manufacturing capacity to support clinical trials.

On April 23rd, the Government announced an additional \$23 million for VIDO-InterVac to accelerate development of its candidate vaccine against COVID-19. This funding supports pre-clinical testing and clinical trials, which are essential steps to ensuring that vaccines are effective and safe for human use.

On June 25, the Government announced the results of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) second rapid research funding competition, representing an investment of more than \$109 million this fiscal year for COVID-19 research. Researchers will focus on pursuing domestic and international clinical trials, scaling-up promising existing projects to increase our understanding of the efficacy and effectiveness of vaccines, therapeutics, and clinical approaches to COVID-19, and evaluating public health

management strategies to inform planning and decision-making. This funding builds on CIHR's initial research investment of \$55.3 million announced in March.

Q3. What is the mandate of the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force?

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force's mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 vaccines, which can include the following:

- prioritizing vaccine projects seeking support for activities in Canada;
- attracting to Canada promising non-Canadian vaccine candidates, or partnering with developers of non-Canadian vaccine candidates;
- optimizing the tools needed for vaccine development;
- supporting effective research and development, and supply chain coordination for COVID-19 vaccine projects;
- facilitating solutions to manufacture the most promising COVID-19 vaccines in Canada; and,
- identifying opportunities to enhance business connectivity globally to secure access to vaccines with key commercial sponsors.

Q4. What role is the Vaccine Task Force playing in reviewing international vaccine candidates?

The government understands that in order to secure access to a safe, effective vaccine for Canadians, we need to consider as many options as possible.

One of the task force's roles is to identify and advise the government on the most promising vaccine candidates internationally so we can enter into agreements with sponsoring governments or companies to gain access to the vaccine technology.

The selection of which global partners to target is a key priority for the task force and the government is working with task force members to assess Canada's options on this front.

Q5. How will the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force be structured?

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force will have up to 18 members, including two co-Chairs and four ex-officio members, and includes vaccine and immunology experts and industry leaders who have proven ability in developing and commercializing vaccines. The membership will be announced in the near future.

[APG]

The Deputy Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED), the Deputy Minister of Health Canada, the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Chief Science Advisor will be ex-officio members of the Task Force.

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force will provide advice to the Ministers of Innovation, Science and Industry and Health, with a secretariat supported by and housed at the National Research Council of Canada.

Q6. How often will the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force meet?

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force will be in place for a period of at least 12 months, subject to extension at the discretion of the Government of Canada. It meets on an as-needed basis and determines its own meeting schedule in order to meet the direction and deadlines provided by the Government of Canada's designated representative.

Q7. What is the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force going to deliver to the Government? Will there be a report? Will it be made public?

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force is providing advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 vaccine development, which includes the following:

- prioritizing vaccine projects seeking support for activities in Canada;
- attracting to Canada promising non-Canadian vaccine candidates, or partnering with developers of non-Canadian vaccine candidates;
- optimizing the tools needed for vaccine development;
- supporting effective research and development, and supply chain coordination for COVID-19 vaccine projects;
- facilitating solutions to manufacture the most promising COVID-19 vaccines in Canada; and,
- identifying opportunities to enhance business connectivity globally to secure access to vaccines with key commercial sponsors.

The advice of the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, and any supporting products provided to the Government of Canada by members, will remain the property of the individual members and held in confidence by the Government of Canada.

Q8. Some members of the task force work for pharmaceutical companies or are working on potential vaccine candidates themselves. How will you address conflicts of interest?

We heard very clearly how important it is that we include the best and brightest – and that means those who are active in this space and working to develop solutions. In light of this, the risk of potential conflicts of interest will be a reality.

That said, the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force members are appointed as individuals and not as representatives of organizations. To exclude all those who could be in a conflict would limit our pool of members in a way that would not serve us well. At the same time, we recognize the importance of managing conflict of interest appropriately.

We have adopted an approach to mitigate the risk of conflicts of interest within the membership, using conflict screens to ensure that, where a disqualifying conflict exists, that member will not contribute to the advice provided. What this looks like when assessing projects for funding is that members are required to be transparent about their interests and potential for conflict, and those in a disqualifying conflict position will recuse themselves from providing advice on those projects.

Each member has signed a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement, and completed and signed a Conflict of Interest Declaration form. At the start of each meeting, the co-Chairs ask members to declare any conflicts with the agenda items of that meeting and ask members who have a disqualifying conflict to recuse themselves from that particular discussion.

Q9. Is the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force representative of Canada?

We consulted widely to identify potential members for the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force that brought the right mix of expertise and experience. We sought to have appropriate diversity and regional representation, and were mindful of that when identifying the short-list of candidates. We have potential candidates from the west, east and centre of Canada. There are also international members to contribute their objective expertise. Ultimately, membership will be based on the expertise needed, and who is willing to serve on the Task Force.

Q10. Why isn't (insert name here) on the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force?

[APG]

The Government of Canada is bringing together vaccine and immunology experts, and industry leaders who have proven ability in developing and commercializing vaccines to serve on the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force.

We consulted widely to identify potential members for the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force that brought the right mix of expertise and experience. Ultimately, membership will be based on the expertise needed, and who is willing to serve on the Task Force.

If more expert help is required, the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force can, at its discretion, consult with additional subject matter experts on an as-needed basis.

Q11. How does the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force relate to the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force?

The focus of the task force groups are quite different. The Immunity Task Force is focused on assessing and developing strategies to determine the level of immunity to COVID-19 in the population, which will be accomplished through serological blood testing. This is a wholly different focus from the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, which is concerned with providing advice on investments and strategy to develop a COVID-19 vaccine for Canada. Furthermore, the membership is very different, given the different expertise required – namely vaccine research, development and production on the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force.

Q12. How does the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force relate to the COVID-19 Expert Panel?

The Chief Science Advisor of Canada assembled a multidisciplinary science expert panel to advise her on the latest scientific developments relevant to COVID-19. This information assists the Chief Science Advisor (CSA) in providing current, cross-disciplinary and independent advice to the Prime Minister and government. Not only does the CSA participate on the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force as an ex-officio member, but we have also co-appointed members between the two groups, including the co-Chair, to ensure cross-pollination between the panel and task force, and recognizing the need to engage the most eminent experts at this critical time.

Q13. How does the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force relate to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)?

[APG]

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is a long-established and highly respected component of our health governance system, and the committee includes experts in public health, adult and pediatric infectious disease, epidemiology, immunology, pharmacoeconomics, nursing, pharmacology, and social science. NACI makes recommendations for the use of vaccines currently or newly approved for use in humans in Canada, including identifying groups at-risk for vaccine-preventable diseases for whom vaccination should be targeted. NACI is not involved in assessing funding proposals for potential vaccines or biomanufacturing, and that is where the Vaccine Task Force fills a very important role at this time. Once a COVID-19 vaccine is developed and approved for use in Canada, it is clear that NACI will provide the public health guidance on optimal use of the vaccine, as well as guidance on use of limited vaccine supply in target populations. NACI has already published "Research Priorities for COVID-19 Vaccines to Support Public Health Decisions" for COVID-19 clinical trial planning, and is actively working over the summer to establish priority immunization strategies in anticipation of vaccines arriving in Canada.

Q14. What is the role of the Minister of Health in approving funding?

The authority to approve funding related to the Strategic Innovation Fund rests with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and that is unchanged; however, recognizing the very important role of the Minister of Health and organizations in her portfolio, we established an extensive interdepartmental approach to reviewing projects and receiving advice. The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force submits their advice to Ministers Bains and Hajdu.

As well, the Deputy Minister of Health Canada and the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada sit as ex-officio members of the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, alongside the Deputy Minister of ISED and the Chief Science Advisor.

In these ways, we are ensuring there is a robust decision-making framework that brings together the different perspectives and expertise needed to inform investment decisions.

Q15. What has the Government of Canada done to secure vaccines?

The National Research Council of Canada (NRC) is working with a number of trusted partners in Canada and internationally as part of the collective effort to help find

[APG]

solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, three vaccine collaborations have been confirmed.

The NRC is working with collaborators at the following organizations to advance and test potential COVID-19 vaccine candidates in Canada:

- VBI Vaccines (based in Massachusetts, with research operations in Ottawa);
- CanSino Biologics (based in Tianjin, China, with a Canadian subsidiary based in Toronto); and
- VIDO-InterVac (based at the University of Saskatchewan).

Q16. A recent article in Foreign Policy suggested that bureaucracy at the NRC prevented an Ebola treatment from being widely developed. What are you doing to ensure red tape does not stand in the way of a COVID-19 vaccine or treatment?

Since the start of this crisis, the Government of Canada has been working across departments and agencies to ensure a swift whole-of-government response to COVID-19. The health and safety of Canadians is our first priority and the entire government is mobilized with the same goal of getting safe and effective treatments and vaccines to Canadians. The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force will help by providing timely recommendations and expert advice that will inform our investment decisions.

Q17. Are the members of the task force being compensated?

The Members have volunteered to serve Canada in this capacity. Only customary costs to participate would be covered to facilitate their work. No compensation is paid for their time.

Q18. Who selected the members of the task force?

The Members were appointed by the department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in consultation with the Ministers of Health, and Innovation, Science and Industry.

COVID-19 THERAPEUTICS TASK FORCE

Q1. Why are you establishing the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force?

[APG]

The health and safety of Canadians remains the Government of Canada's top priority. Work towards a vaccine for COVID-19 continues. Just as important will be determining how best to provide needed treatments for those who contract this virus. This is why the Government of Canada is bringing together researchers with scientific expertise and business leaders who have knowledge and experience in biopharma development to serve on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force. It will provide expert advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics. It will assess and prioritize COVID-19 therapeutic projects seeking government support. It will help to guide us in finding and supporting the development of effective treatments that we can use to make sure that while we await a vaccine, we can treat victims of the virus effectively.

Q2. What is the mandate of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force?

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics.

Q3. How will the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force be structured?

The TTF is composed of up to 18 members with

- up to seven core members, including two co-chairs, drawn from research and business leaders who have proven ability to bring new therapies to market in Canada;
- science advisor members who will review and provide advice on projects within their area of expertise; and
- four ex-officio members.

Q4. How often will the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force meet? When do they start?

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force is meeting on an as-needed basis and will be in place for a period of at least six months, subject to extension at the discretion of the Government of Canada. It will meet on an as-needed basis.

Q5. When will the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force deliver their advice to the Government?

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will be in place for a period of at least six months, subject to an extension at the discretion of the government. Its advice during this period will be ongoing.

[APG]

Q6. What is the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force going to deliver to the Government? Will there be a report? Will it be made public?

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force mandate is to provide advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics.

There will be no report. The advice of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force, and any supporting products provided to the Government of Canada by members, will remain the property of the individual members and held in confidence by the Government of Canada.

Q7. Some members of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force work, or have worked, for pharmaceutical companies, or on projects seeking funding by the Government. How will you address conflict of interest?

During our consultations, we heard very clearly how important it is that we include the best and brightest – and that means those people who are active in this space and working to develop solutions. In light of this, conflicts of interest will be a reality. To exclude all those who could be in a conflict would limit our pool of members in a way that would not serve us well. At the same time, we recognize the importance of managing conflict of interest appropriately.

We have adopted an approach to mitigate the risk of conflicts of interest within the membership, using conflict screens to ensure that, where a disqualifying conflict exists, that member will not contribute to the advice provided. What this looks like when assessing projects for funding is that members are required to be transparent about their interests and potential for conflict, and those in a disqualifying conflict position will recuse themselves from providing advice on those projects.

Each member signed a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement, and completed and signed a Conflict of Interest Declaration form. At the start of each meeting, the co-Chairs ask members to declare any conflicts with the agenda items of that meeting and ask members who have a disqualifying conflict to recuse themselves from that particular discussion.

Documents or information obtained while serving on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force should be used only in the context of the task force fulfilling its duties and mandate. Any documents or information obtained through a meeting of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will be kept strictly confidential, unless prior approval to disclose is obtained in writing from the Government of Canada representative.

Q9. How will Health Canada maintain its independence as a regulator when reviewing and approving health products?

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will not be part of Health Canada's scientific review and authorization process. The Department will maintain its autonomy as a regulator and will base its decisions on whether to authorize a therapeutic product on its scientific review of the evidence submitted to support the safety, efficacy and quality of a product.

Q9. What if the members of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force disagree about a decision? What happens then?

The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will make decisions regarding the advice to be provided on a consensus basis. Consensus will have been reached when there is agreement to the extent that all participants are willing to support the outcome or use it as a basis for further discussion. The outcome must show how dissenting points of view were accommodated and record what the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force has and has not agreed upon.

Ex-officio members may participate in discussions but will not participate in the decision-making related to the advice of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force.

Q10. What is the difference between vaccines and therapeutics?

Vaccines are created to help provide immunity to specific diseases. They introduce antigens that stimulate the body to produce antibodies against a virus. Millions of Canadians are vaccinated each year against diseases such as measles, mumps, and strains of the flu. They prevent the person from getting a disease or decreasing the severity of a disease.

Therapeutics are the drugs and treatments doctors use to treat disease after a person has already caught it, alleviating their suffering and helping them to heal. These include anti-inflammatory drugs and anti-viral drugs among others.

Q11. How were the members chosen? Is the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force representative of Canada?

We consulted widely to identify potential members for the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force that brought the right mix of expertise and experience. We sought to have appropriate gender and regional representation, and were mindful of that when identifying the short-list of candidates. We have members from across Canada, and gender balance among the co-chairs. Ultimately, membership is based on the expertise needed, and willingness to serve on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force.

Q12. How much are the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force members compensated for their participation?

COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force members volunteer their time, effort, knowledge and expertise; they will not be remunerated. Should in-person meetings be required and held in the future, eligible travel and accommodation expenses for members would be reimbursed, in accordance with the Government of Canada Travel Directive.

Q13. Why isn't (insert name here) on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force?

With the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force, the Government of Canada is bringing together business leaders who have proven ability to bring new therapies to market in Canada and researchers with scientific expertise in therapeutics, to serve on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force.

We consulted widely to identify potential members for the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force that brought the right mix of expertise and experience. We sought to have appropriate gender and regional representation, and were mindful of that when identifying the short-list of candidates. We have members from across Canada, and gender balance among the co-chairs. Ultimately, membership is based on the expertise needed, and willingness to serve on the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force.

Q14. How does the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force relate to the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force?

[APG]

The focuses of the two task forces are quite different. The Immunity Task Force is concerned with assessing the level of immunity in the population, which will be accomplished through serological blood testing.

The Therapeutics Task Force mandate is to provide expert advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics. They will assess and prioritize COVID-19 therapeutic projects seeking government support.

Q15. How does the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force relate to the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force?

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force and COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force have different mandates. The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force's mandate is to provide expert advice to the Government of Canada on COVID-19 therapeutics. They will assess and prioritize COVID-19 therapeutic projects seeking government support.

The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force is concerned with providing advice on investments and strategy to develop a COVID-19 vaccine for Canada.

Furthermore, the membership is different, given the different expertise required. The COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force includes science and industry leaders with a proven track record in developing and producing vaccines. The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force has members with expertise focused on the development and production of therapeutics. Given the wide variety of therapeutic options being considered, the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will have a larger roster of science advisors to review and provide advice on projects within their area of expertise.

Q16. You have a COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force and a COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force. Why are you establishing two expert committees?

The Government consulted widely on vaccines and therapeutics and one of the messages we heard very clearly was that the expertise related to vaccines is very different from that for therapies. Furthermore, the wide variety of potential therapies will require greater flexibility in bringing in scientific expertise for evaluating therapeutic proposals.

For the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, we identified vaccine experts from both science and industry who will be extensively engaged on the domestic and international pursuit of a vaccine against COVID-19 over the next year or more, including investments in clinical trials and biomanufacturing.

For the COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force, we will have a core group of industry and research experts, and a roster of science experts, aligning their expertise with individual projects, to advise on therapeutic project proposals. This approach will ensure that all projects receive the robust expert analysis needed to support informed decision-making.

Work towards a vaccine for COVID-19 continues. Just as important will be determining how best to treat those who contract this virus.

Q17. What is the role of the Minister of Health in approving funding?

The authority to approve Strategic Innovation Fund funding rests with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and that is unchanged. However, recognizing the very important role of the Minister of Health and organizations in her portfolio, Minister Hajdu will also review their advice. The COVID-19 Therapeutics Task Force will submit their advice to Ministers Bains and Hajdu.

Q18. Are the members of the task force being compensated?

The Members have volunteered to serve Canada in this capacity. Only customary costs to participate would be covered to facilitate their work. No compensation is paid for their time.

Q19. Who selected the members of the task force?

The Members were appointed by the department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in consultation with the Ministers of Health, and Innovation, Science and Industry.

NSERC

Q1. What is today's NSERC investment for?

[APG]

In response to a call-out for COVID-19-related research proposals NSERC issued in April, more than \$19 million in funding will support researchers across Canada working to address the challenges presented by the virus. This investment will support 369 COVID-19-related projects through two programs:

- \$15.7 million in funding through the NSERC Alliance COVID-19 grants will support 317 projects;
- \$3.8 million in funding through the Tri-agency Applied Research Rapid Response to COVID-19 grants will support 52 projects. This funding is made available through NSERC in collaboration with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

For more information, please visit https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/FundingDecisions-DecisionFinancement/COVID-19_eng.asp

Q2. Is this new funding?

No, this is funding that was previously allocated under NSERC's research funding envelope for the year.