

Developing collaborative research on
the **Canadian** scene and **internationally**

2008–2011 Action Plan

EXTERNAL RELATIONS POLICY

FONDS DE LA RECHERCHE EN SANTÉ DU QUÉBEC (FRSQ)

EXTERNAL RELATIONS POLICY 2008-2011 ACTION PLAN

Developing collaborative research on the Canadian scene and internationally

Adopted by the Board of Directors of FRSQ
on October 24, 2008

List of acronyms

CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
FP7	Seventh Framework Programme
GHRI	Global Health Research Initiative under the aegis of the International Development Research Centre of Canada
INSERM	Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale (France's national institute of health and medical research)
MDEIE	Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation du Québec (Québec's department of economic development, innovation and export trade)
MELS	Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec (Québec's department of education, recreation and sports)
MRC	Medical Research Council (United Kingdom)
MRI	Ministère des Relations internationales du Québec (Québec's department of international relations)
NIH	National Institutes of Health (United States)
NSFC	National Natural Science Foundation of China (China)
PSR/SIIRI	Research Assistance Program, Component 3 – Support for international research and innovation initiatives (MDEIE)
QRIS	Québec Research and Innovation Strategy

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Foreword

At its October 24, 2008 meeting, the Board of Directors of the Fonds de la recherche en santé du Québec (FRSQ) adopted an external relations policy - a framework enabling FRSQ to coordinate its action to develop collaboration in health research on the Canadian scene and internationally. To implement the policy, this action plan was produced. It consists of 22 measures subsumed under four broad areas of intervention:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| FIRST AREA | Support the bilateral mobility of students in the health field (outward-bound Québec students and inbound students from other Canadian provinces and from abroad); |
| SECOND AREA | Promote the participation of Québec health researchers in major research teams and projects, in Canada and abroad; |
| THIRD AREA | Foster the reach of Québec health research in Canada and internationally; |
| FOURTH AREA | Encourage Québec researchers to participate in global health research. |

The summary table at the end of this document presents the full slate of measures and the means for implementing these measures.

FIRST AREA OF INTERVENTION

SUPPORT THE BILATERAL MOBILITY OF STUDENTS

FRSQ already has a number of initiatives to encourage Québec awardees to study outside Québec. Every training award offered can be used in institutions located outside Québec. Furthermore, in the wake of the Québec Research and Innovation Strategy (QRIS), a new international internship program (Master's and doctorate) was introduced to provide funding for two- to six-month internships abroad for all qualified Master's and doctoral students. FRSQ research group programs, and, more particularly, theme network programs, will be used to channel students towards the new internship program.

Postdoctoral awardees who carry out an internship abroad have their round-trip travel costs reimbursed by FRSQ and are entitled to a premium based on the cost of living at the place of internship. More and more postdoctoral fellows are tapping into these measures, with the number of awardees who conduct an internship outside Québec (elsewhere in Canada or abroad) rising from 52% to 66% in the past three years. FRSQ has also entered into a framework agreement with Inserm that provides incentives for studying at the graduate level in France.

In addition to its measures aimed at the mobility of young Quebecers, FRSQ also has a series of initiatives to encourage qualified graduate students to come to Québec, notably, a postdoctoral training program designed specifically for foreign students. The above-mentioned Inserm agreement has also meant that students from France can do a postdoctoral internship in a Québec research centre. Furthermore, MELS also offers some merit awards for foreign students and therefore provides annual support for a few health-sector applicants. In recent years, FRSQ has kept a close eye on the results of this program and will continue to do so in the future.

This action plan recommends seven measures to foster the outbound mobility of Québec students and the reception of students from other Canadian provinces and abroad into Québec.

Measures to foster the outbound mobility of Québec students
1. Maintain the framework agreement with Inserm. 2. Establish the new international internship program (Master's and doctorate). 3. Continue to make it possible for training program awardees to study outside Québec (Master's, doctorate and postdoctorate). 4. Identify the agencies in other Canadian provinces and priority countries with which Inserm-type agreements could be signed.

Measures to foster the mobility of students from other Canadian provinces and from abroad (towards Québec)
5. Maintain the framework agreement with Inserm. 6. Maintain the access of foreign students to FRSQ's postdoctoral programs. 7. Monitor trends in MELS training programs for foreign students (short-term, doctoral and postdoctoral).

SECOND AREA OF INTERVENTION

PROMOTE THE PARTICIPATION OF QUÉBEC HEALTH RESEARCHERS IN MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECTS AND TEAMS, IN CANADA AND ABROAD

Given its population, Québec is underrepresented on the world stage. Integration of our researchers into pan-Canadian or international research teams or projects is crucial if we are to be at the forefront of scientific advancement. FRSQ intends to fully play its role in supporting researchers, notably by entering into agreements with foreign partners, with a view to a framework for developing long-term collaboration.

In addition to agreements directly negotiated with foreign agencies, FRSQ encourages Québec researchers to take advantage of the many opportunities for collaboration afforded by the health component of FP7, which includes a number of priority themes in which Québec has solid expertise (e.g. cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory health, aging, infectious diseases and AIDS, population health and environmental health). Furthermore, the ties created through long-standing collaboration with European colleagues (for example, in France through Inserm) give Québec researchers natural access to projects under the aegis of FP7 which, like its predecessors, provides for the inclusion of non-European researchers as long as their governments cover related costs. One of the components of PSR/SIIRI¹ provides for financial support of up to \$500,000 a year (50% of eligible expenses for a three-year period) for international-calibre projects. These resources should be put to use by the health sector.

Multilateral or bilateral projects other than those under FP7 should also be developed in the area of targeted research themes, for example. The United Kingdom's MRC and the Flemish Government in Belgium have expressed interest in making such arrangements with Québec. Discussions in France recently led to a collaborative research agreement on Alzheimer's between FRSQ, Inserm and CIHR. This initiative by the researchers themselves is an apt illustration of the leadership they are called to exercise in developing international collaboration in research.

In the same vein, Québec's databanks and biobanks could be used to foster the integration of Québec researchers and even to attract a sizable share of international research projects.

This action plan recommends four measures for increasing the participation of Québec researchers in international projects.

¹ *Research Assistance Program, Component 3 – Support for international research and innovation initiatives (MDEIE)*

Measures to foster the participation of Québec health researchers in major research projects and teams, in Canada and abroad

- 8.** Identify, within priority countries, the foreign agencies with which FRSQ could sign framework collaboration agreements modeled on the current agreements with Inserm and NSFC.
- 9.** Encourage researchers to participate in bilateral or international research projects (particularly within the framework of the FP7) in order to make the most of the MDEIE budget earmarked for supporting Québec's participation in international projects or consortiums under the QRIS.
- 10.** Develop core bilateral or international projects with foreign partners around themes in which Québec has strong expertise (e.g. Alzheimer's in collaboration with France).
- 11.** Consider the possibility of using Québec's databanks and biobanks to attract pan-Canadian or international research projects to Québec.

THIRD AREA OF INTERVENTION

FOSTER THE REACH OF QUÉBEC HEALTH RESEARCH IN CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY

Quebecers are recognized internationally for their creativity and competence. Our aircraft, live entertainment products, and video games, for example, are sold around the world. Québec, Greater Montréal in particular, is a leader in medical research. In the private research sector, five of the six Canadian laboratories of leading international companies are located in Québec. In the public research sector, every year a great number of important articles are co-authored by our researchers and colleagues from around the world.

However, Québec's reach in certain spheres is limited. This is the case of Canada's and Québec's diplomatic apparatus, which needs more information about the research conducted in Québec, more specifically, our areas of expertise, the main players, and FRSQ centres, groups, networks and programs. Québec entries for certain prestigious prizes and awards in the medical field could also be more widely promoted.

Similarly, Québec could figure more prominently as a venue for major international scientific events (conventions, symposiums, workshops, etc.). With their well-structured theme networks, Québec researchers are favourably positioned to attract important events of this kind, with positive spinoffs for science (by giving students the opportunity to attend at low cost) and the economy (by the impact on tourism and on international visibility). Cancellation of the program to support the organization of international scientific conferences is taking a heavy toll and it is pressing that the situation be rectified.

Participation by FRSQ representatives and researchers in international missions under the aegis of MDEIE should also continue to be encouraged. However, this is contingent upon adequate funding. Researchers do not receive sufficient financial backing to cover the cost of travel and accommodation abroad, and the budgets of FRSQ representatives are limited, making these costs unaffordable. The financial assistance provided by MDEIE and MRI as part of the missions conducted in recent years has proved critical and was greatly appreciated. Support from government departments in the next three years remains crucial if Québec is to shine even brighter in the field of health research on the world stage.

Clearly, much remains to be done to enhance the visibility of our researchers and to promote Québec as a place where innovation in the field of health can thrive. This action plan recommends six measures for extending Québec's reach.

Measures to foster the reach of Québec health research in Canada and internationally

- 12.** Continue the practice of translating key FRSQ documents into English and broaden their distribution in paper and electronic format.
- 13.** Establish a procedure for systematic distribution of synthesis documents to the Canadian and Québec diplomatic apparatus (e.g. fact sheets on groups, centres and networks; fact sheets on research themes; promotional documents).
- 14.** Encourage FRSQ representatives and researchers from centres, groups and networks to participate in the missions organized by MDEIE or MRI, when involvement is deemed relevant.
- 15.** Encourage FRSQ representatives and researchers from centres, groups and networks to participate in hosting the foreign delegations invited by MDEIE or MRI, when involvement is deemed relevant.
- 16.** Lobby MDEIE for reinstatement of its program to support the organization of international scientific conferences, symposiums and other international events in Québec, or transfer funds to FRSQ for creating a program of this kind for the health sector.
- 17.** Form an entry committee every year to submit Québec nominations for prestigious national or international awards (Friesen Prize, Gairdner Award, Nobel Prize, l'Oréal Award for Women in Science Research Excellence Fellowship, etc.).

FOURTH AREA OF INTERVENTION

ENCOURAGE QUÉBEC RESEARCHERS TO PARTICIPATE IN GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCH

Global warming and economic globalization have caused a shift in the geographical distribution of diseases on the world map. There is no longer such a thing as a typical southern hemisphere disease because viruses, heat waves and respiratory problems have found their way north in pace with the effects of global warming. Likewise, there are no exclusively northern diseases because cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, stress and depression are now prevalent in major cities in emerging countries.

Global health research deals precisely with public health problems and issues that concern the entire planet. While its first concern is the populations in developing countries (which account for a disproportionate share of avoidable mortality and morbidity), it is also aimed at improving our ability to protect and restore health. Furthermore, it is part of a vision of research befitting a multicultural and an open society such as Québec.

Research granting agencies now recognize that there is great added value to investments in global health research. The Global Health Research Initiative (GHRI), a partnership of four major federal institutions (Health Canada; Canadian Institutes of Health Research; International Development Research Centre; and Canadian International Development Agency), is a significant provider of funding opportunities for health research in Québec.

Québec researchers are particularly well positioned to act in the area of global health research. They are sought by international organizations and US-based foundations for their North American-style training and approaches. Their bilingualism is another important asset for research projects carried out in English-speaking countries or French-speaking African countries, for example.

In Québec, some 250 researchers and graduate students are involved in the field of global health as part of the global health component of FRSQ's Population Health Research Network. In recent years, they have scored highly in CIHR competitions or for GHRI awards. Québec is particularly known for its expertise in environmental health; women's health, migration health, and Aboriginal health; HIV-AIDS epidemiology and management; nutrition; and health system funding and assessment.

Global health appears to be a field in which the excellence of our researchers is likely to be recognized internationally. This is why this action plan is recommending the five following measures to support the development of global health research in Québec.

Special measures concerning the issue of global health

- 18.** Foster the participation of Québec researchers in Global Health Research Initiative (GHRI) programs and promote these researchers' ability to compete.
- 19.** Examine whether it is opportune for FRSQ to become a GHRI partner.
- 20.** Gauge the interest of FRSQ research centres and networks in creating an award for a trainee from an emerging country, cost-shared by FRSQ and the centre/network.
- 21.** Expand the Albert-Aguayo training award programs to include all fields of health science research and not just neuroscience.
- 22.** Approach national or international organizations active in the field of global health (e.g. NIH, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) with a view to collaboration (creation of targeted cost-shared awards or grants).

APPENDIX

SUMMARY TABLE OF MEASURES AND MEANS

Measures to foster the outbound mobility of Québec students	Means for implementing measures
1. Maintain the framework agreement with Inserm.	▪ Inserm framework agreement ▪ Inserm international exchange program ▪ Inserm postdoctoral
2. Establish the new international internship program (Master's and doctorate).	▪ New international internship program (Master's and doctorate)
3. Continue to make it possible for training program awardees to study outside Québec (Master's, doctorate and postdoctorate).	▪ Training awards programs (Master's, doctorate and postdoctorate)
4. Identify the agencies in other Canadian provinces and priority countries with which Inserm-type agreements could be signed.	▪ Participation in missions abroad ▪ Hosting of delegations visiting Québec

Measures to foster the mobility of students from other Canadian provinces and from abroad (towards Québec)	Means for implementing measures
5. Maintain the framework agreement with Inserm.	▪ Inserm framework agreement
6. Maintain the access of foreign students to FRSQ's postdoctoral programs.	▪ Postdoctoral exchange program
7. Monitor trends in MELS training programs for foreign students (short-term, doctoral and postdoctoral).	▪ MELS programs (short-term exchange, doctorate and postdoctorate)

Measures to foster the participation of Québec health researchers in major research projects and teams, in Canada and abroad	Means for implementing measures
8. Identify, within priority countries, the foreign agencies with which FRSQ could sign framework collaboration agreements modeled on the current agreements with Inserm and NSFC.	▪ Participation in missions abroad ▪ Hosting of delegations visiting Québec
9. Encourage researchers to participate in bilateral or international research projects (particularly within the framework of the FP7) in order to make the most of the MDEIE budget earmarked for supporting Québec's participation in international projects or consortiums under the QRIS.	▪ Research Assistance Program, Component 3 – Support for international research and innovation initiatives (MDEIE)
10. Develop core bilateral or international projects with foreign partners around themes in which Québec has strong expertise (e.g. Alzheimer's in collaboration with France).	▪ New initiatives to be developed with financing packages (partnerships)
11. Consider the possibility of using Québec's databanks and biobanks to attract pan-Canadian or international research projects to Québec.	▪ New initiatives to be developed with financing packages (partnerships)

Measures to foster the reach of Québec health research in Canada and internationally	Means for implementing measures
12. Continue the practice of translating key FRSQ documents into English and broaden their distribution in paper and electronic format.	▪ Ongoing development of the Web site
13. Establish a procedure for systematic distribution of synthesis documents to the Canadian and Québec diplomatic apparatus (e.g. fact sheets on groups, centres and networks; fact sheets on research themes; promotional documents).	▪ New initiative (cost to be estimated, covered by communications budgets)
14. Encourage FRSQ representatives and researchers from centres, groups and networks to participate in the missions organized by MDEIE or MRI, when involvement is deemed relevant.	▪ Participation in missions abroad
15. Encourage FRSQ representatives and researchers from centres, groups and networks to participate in hosting the foreign delegations invited by MDEIE or MRI, when involvement is deemed relevant.	▪ Hosting of delegations visiting Québec

16. Lobby MDEIE for reinstatement of its program to support the organization of international scientific conferences, symposiums and other international events in Québec, or transfer funds to FRSQ for creating a program of this kind for the health sector.	▪ Lobbying of MDEIE (notably when the new QRIS is being drafted)
17. Form an entry committee every year to submit Québec nominations for prestigious national or international awards (Friesen Prize, Gairdner Award, Nobel Prize, l'Oréal Award for Women in Science Research Excellence Fellowship, etc.).	▪ New initiative (cost to be estimated)

Special measures concerning the issue of global health	Means for implementing measures
18. Foster the participation of Québec researchers in Global Health Research Initiative (GHRI) programs and promote these researchers' ability to compete.	▪ New initiative (cost to be estimated)
19. Examine whether it is opportune for FRSQ to become a GHRI partner.	▪ New initiative (cost to be estimated)
20. Gauge the interest of FRSQ research centres and networks in creating an award for a trainee from an emerging country, cost-shared by FRSQ and the centre/network.	▪ New initiatives to be developed with financing packages (partnerships)
21. Expand the Albert-Aguayo training award programs to include all fields of health science research and not just neuroscience.	▪ New initiatives to be developed with financing packages (partnerships)
22. Approach national or international organizations active in the field of global health (e.g. NIH, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) with a view to collaboration (creation of targeted cost-shared awards or grants).	▪ New initiatives to be developed with financing packages (partnerships)

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Québec 

Fonds de la recherche en santé du Québec

500, rue Sherbrooke Ouest, bureau 800
Montréal (Québec) H3A 3C6

Téléphone : 514 873-2114
communications@frsq.gouv.qc.ca



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