



PROGRAM GUIDE: AbSPORU Graduate Studentships in Patient-Oriented Research Program Overview

IMPORTANT DATES	
Competition Opens for Applications:	September 15, 2021
Application Deadline:	<p>Applicant's home university internal deadline date(s)</p> <p><i>**Universities must transmit all completed applications to AbSPORU no later than 4:00pm MT on November 15, 2021</i></p>
Award Announcement & Notification Date:	February 1, 2022
Award Start-Date:	March 1, 2022
Award End-Date:	March 31, 2023

Background

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has developed provincial partnerships across the country to support Patient-Oriented Research (POR) with expertise, resources, and knowledge. The Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU) is dedicated to supporting patient-oriented research in Alberta. Together, CIHR, Alberta Innovates and AbSPORU are fostering the integration of research into care by “putting patients first.”

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AbSPORU plays a critical role in training and capacity development for POR stakeholders including but not limited to researchers, graduate students, trainees, patients, health practitioners, and clinicians. AbSPORU, in partnership with AI, hosts and coordinates the AbSPORU Graduate Studentship, including training, monitoring, and management of activities throughout the funding year.

Program Details

The AbSPORU Graduate Studentship in Patient-Oriented Research awards are designed to provide incentive for graduate students to pursue their graduate projects with a patient-oriented research approach. The AbSPORU Graduate Studentship provides **13 months of funding support** towards a thesis-based Master's or Doctoral degree, consisting of a **stipend of \$30,000**.

The AbSPORU Graduate Studentship is funded by AbSPORU, which is jointly funded by Alberta Innovates (AI) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

AbSPORU Graduate Studentship recipients ("Recipients") will have the opportunity to develop the knowledge and experience to transition to careers in research and innovation areas and beyond that leverage their scientific training and expertise. To develop the required interdisciplinary and collaborative skill sets for Alberta's next generation of scientists, clinicians, and health services professionals, the AbSPORU coordinates competency development activities in POR for successful Recipients.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Eligibility

(a) AbSPORU Studentship Recipient Eligibility Criteria - To qualify as a Recipient, a student is required to satisfy the following criteria:

1. Be enrolled in any year of a Master's or PhD program as of the award start-date, at one of Alberta's four comprehensive academic and research universities¹ (CARUs), undertaking health-oriented research training leading to a thesis-based graduate degree -
 - a. **For Master's students:** Thesis defence must not occur prior to or during the term of the award. If the thesis defence occurs during the term of the award, the award will be withdrawn as of the last day of the month in which the thesis defence occurs, regardless of the outcomes of the thesis defence.
 - b. **For PhD students:** Candidacy exam must not occur prior to or during the term of the award. If the candidacy exam occurs during the term of the award, the award will be withdrawn as of the last day of the month in which the candidacy exam occurs, regardless of the outcomes of the candidacy exam.
2. Must not hold a simultaneous award from Alberta Innovates or CIHR;
3. Must not be a previous AbSPORU Graduate Studentship recipient;
4. Must not be an Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit staff member (employed through the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Alberta Health Services, or Alberta Innovates) at any point during the term of the award;

¹ University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, Athabasca University

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5. Be enrolled full-time in a graduate degree program that is linked to the award, and must engage in full-time research activities throughout the term of the award.
6. Be enrolled in only one (1) degree or diploma program during the term of the award, with the exception of formal joint degree programs.
7. Fulfil the following required capacity development activities during the term of the award -
 - a. Complete and pass an AbSPORU-affiliated training course to demonstrate competency development;
 - b. Attend and actively participate in consultation sessions with AbSPORU experts and patient-partner experts, coordinated by AbSPORU;
 - c. Present on their Research Project as a poster and/or oral presentation, as well as actively participate in the workshops and training opportunities offered during the AbSPORU annual conference event;
 - d. Complete supplemental equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and sex- and gender-based analysis+ (SGBA+) capacity development activities assigned by AbSPORU;
 - e. Participate in a monthly online journal club hosted by AbSPORU;
 - f. Participate in any other pertinent activities identified by AbSPORU during the term of the award.

(b) Project Eligibility Criteria

AbSPORU has operationalized the CIHR definition of patient-oriented research to clarify the minimum requirements for a research Project to be considered as patient-oriented. The research proposal must clearly articulate that the Project does or will do all of the following (see Appendix A for detailed descriptions):

- addresses patient-identified health priorities;
- aims to improve patient health outcomes; and
- engages patient-partners (and providers) in a manner appropriate to the health-oriented research.

In addition, the Project must aim to integrate principles of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and factors and outcomes relating to sex- and gender-based analysis+ (SGBA+) in a manner appropriate to the research. (If SGBA+ will not comprise primary outcomes of the Project, the Applicant must explain why, and must describe how they considered SGBA+ in making this determination.)

(c) Primary Research Supervisor Eligibility Criteria

Recipients are required to complete their training with the support of an Alberta-based Primary Research Supervisor. The Primary Research Supervisor will sponsor the Application and ensure adherence to the terms and conditions of the award. They must possess both a record of productive health-oriented research and sufficient resources to ensure satisfactory conduct of the research. They must provide direct supervision. A co-supervisor may also be identified if the Recipient has a secondary research supervisor.

AbSPORU Graduate Studentship objectives include:

- Supporting and building capacity for Master's or PhD graduate students in the principles and practice of POR;
- Providing POR activities to develop capacity -- through a multidisciplinary approach that embeds the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) -- for all stakeholders including students, thesis Primary Research Supervisors, patients, and community team members;

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- Creating opportunities for students to engage with stakeholders to work closely together from conceptualization of research questions to dissemination and implementation of results at the practice and community levels.

As a short-term award, the AbSPORU Graduate Studentship program is intended to provide a foundational program of support, network building, and capacity development to contribute to the development and implementation of a graduate thesis project.

How Funding Works

(a) Project Funding

The AbSPORU Graduate Studentship funding year begins March 1, 2022 and continues until March 31st, 2023. AbSPORU Recipients can receive a Stipend of up to \$30,000 for the term of the award.

(b) Stipend Incentive

AbSPORU encourages Recipients to apply for and accept awards from other national or international agencies. Recipients and their Institution must inform AbSPORU of receipt of any other major comparable awards secured during the term of their AbSPORU Graduate Studentship award.

If a Recipient receives another major comparable award, they will not be eligible to receive the full value of the AbSPORU Graduate Studentship award at the same time. Instead, they will be eligible to receive a stipend Incentive, which is structured to enable receipt of funding from both sources, while ensuring the combined total is equal to or greater than the value of the original AbSPORU Graduate Studentship award offered (subject to any maximums allowed by the other funding agency).

The minimum stipend Incentive offered is \$12,000 CAD per 13-month award term. AbSPORU will increase the stipend Incentive as necessary to ensure the combined value of the awards does not fall below \$30,000 CAD for the AbSPORU Graduate Studentship funding term.

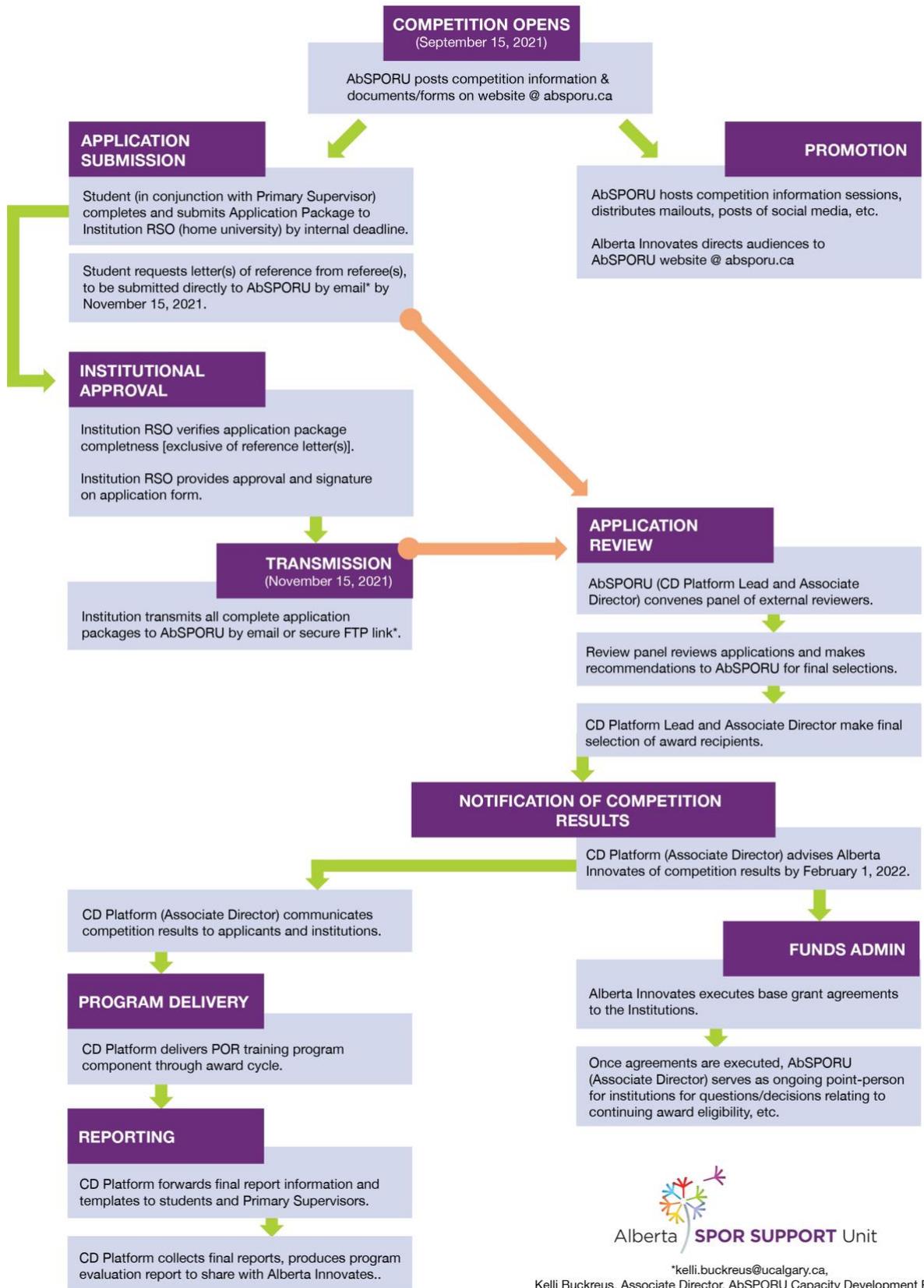
Recipients should note that stipend Incentives are still considered AbSPORU Graduate Studentship awards. All forms of these awards are covered by (i.e., count equally towards) the maximum eligible terms for graduate training support from AbSPORU.

Award recipients may not receive simultaneous support from another Alberta Innovates or CIHR trainee program.

(c) Eligible and ineligible expenses

The Stipend (or stipend Incentive) is to be used exclusively to pay the AbSPORU Recipient and the AbSPORU. The Recipient may use it without restrictions.

AbSPORU 2021 Graduate Studentship Competition Process Map



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Kelli Buckreus, Associate Director, AbSPORU Capacity Development Platform

APPLICATION EVALUATION PROCESS

All applications will undergo a comprehensive review and final selection process involving an external review panel convened by AbSPORU. The review panel will include patient-partner reviewers. Review panel members will be asked to complete training in advance relating to: 1) recognizing and mediating implicit bias; 2) equity, diversity and inclusion; and 3) sex- and gender-bases analysis.

Each application will be reviewed by a minimum of three panel members (including one patient-partner reviewer). Each application will then be brought forward for discussion and final ranking by the full review panel. The panel's final ranking will help inform AbSPORU's final selection of the applications for funding. **See Appendix B: Overview of Application Evaluation Areas.**

AbSPORU retains the sole right to determine the evaluation process and does not disclose the names of its external reviewers to ensure their objectivity and impartiality. All external parties are subject to both confidentiality and conflict of interest policies set by AbSPORU and Alberta Innovates.

The assessment criteria include the AbSPORU recipient's academic record, relevant work and/or research and/or lived experience, career development plan, and research training and mentorship environment. All funding decisions are at the sole discretion of AbSPORU.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

This Program Guide is intended as a high-level overview of the Program. It provides interested students with a roadmap of what to expect over the lifecycle of an AbSPORU Graduate Studentship Project, from the announcement of the program, through the Application stage, during the Project and post-completion. Should you have any questions about this guide or what is expected, please contact AbSPORU. Please be aware AbSPORU may modify this guide from time to time in keeping with any changes to the program.

Once AbSPORU has evaluated and approved an Application for funding, AbSPORU will notify Alberta innovates. Alberta Innovates will require the Applicant's institution to sign a standard form Investment Agreement. The Investment Agreement sets out in detail the roles, responsibilities and obligations of the various Parties to ensure a successful Project. Funding will not be provided until the Investment Agreement has been signed by all required Parties.

AbSPORU will only fund AbSPORU Graduate Studentship applicants who have satisfied all eligibility criteria. Meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee access to funding, and all funding decisions will be made by AbSPORU at its sole discretion.

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

For further information on the AbSPORU Graduate Studentship Program, eligibility requirements and funding, or for general application questions, please contact:

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Definition of patient-oriented research:

“Patient-oriented research is a continuum of research that engages patients and providers, focuses on patient-relevant priorities, and attempts to improve health care practices or policies to improve patient outcomes.” - (Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit, 2021)

To meet the minimum requirements for research to be considered patient-oriented, the research project proposal must clearly articulate all of the following:

- Where the proposed health-oriented research fits into and how it will contribute to the continuum of research described above;
- How the proposed research is or will be informed by and address patient-identified health priorities;
- How the proposed research aims to improve patient health outcomes, and what methods and tools will be used towards achieving these aims;
- How principles of equity, diversity and inclusion have been considered and will be integrated in and/or addressed through the proposed health-oriented research project;
- What community partner research outputs, if any, may be anticipated from the proposed health-oriented research.

- How the proposed health-oriented research will appropriately integrate meaningful patient (and provider) engagement:
 - If patient engagement will be an embedded component of the proposed research project, the proposal must clearly articulate how patients will be meaningfully engaged as partners -- Refer to the [IAP2 spectrum of engagement](#) the [PORLET \(Patient-Oriented Research Level of Engagement Tool\)](#) and/or the [IRLET \(Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool\)](#).
 - Meaningful engagement refers to active involvement in the project that is mutually beneficial for all parties across the research process. Examples include, but are not limited to engagement in:
 - Governance
 - Identifying research topics to investigate
 - Helping plan & organize a study
 - Helping recruit participants & carry out the study
 - Helping share the results with other patients/public
 - *Note: A student’s lived experience alone does not meet the qualification criteria of patient engagement.*

APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF APPLICATION EVALUATION AREAS

Applications will be evaluated by the AbSPORU review panel in seven (7) areas:

1. Academic Record
2. Research Outputs
3. Relevant Work, Research Experience, and/or Lived Experience
4. Career Development Plan
5. Personal Statement
6. Research Training & Mentorship Environment
7. Research Project Proposal - (*Project Overview; List of Project References; Alignment to POR*)

Additionally, evaluation will consider the information provided in the reference letter from the Applicant's Primary Supervisor and, if applicable, the letter of the support from the Applicant's affiliate SPOR Network.

More details are provided below.

For each of the seven areas listed above, the AbSPORU review panel will use a scoring system developed by Alberta Innovates. The scoring system utilizes a 9-point numerical category score (1 = exceptional; 9 = poor):

High Score

1. **Exceptional** Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
2. **Outstanding** Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3. **Excellent** Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

Medium Score

4. **Very Good** Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
5. **Good** Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
6. **Satisfactory** Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses

Low Score

7. **Fair** Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
8. **Marginal** A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
9. **Poor** Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen the application

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens the application

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits the application

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Details of evaluation areas:

- Academic record -
 - The Applicant's university-level transcripts must be appended to the application form
 - **Note: An Applicant will not receive a lesser score if there have been periods of interruption in their active training.**
 - The Applicant's academic achievements (prizes, honours, awards)
 - **Note: In the absence of academic achievements, review panellists will consider factors relative to the Applicant's lived experience, and whether non-academic accomplishments may demonstrate commensurate achievements.**

- Research outputs -
 - The Applicant is asked to provide their publications list and/or link to their online bibliography.
 - **Note: Alternative (i.e. non-traditional) research outputs may be included and described.**

- Relevant work, research experience, **and/or lived experience**
 - The Applicant is asked to identify relevant work/research experience, and to describe how their work, research, and /or lived experiences:
 - Have influenced their academic career path to-date,
 - Will support their ability to undertake their proposed Research Project, and
 - Will shape their future academic and career goals.
 - Review panellists will consider whether the Applicant demonstrates a strong foundation of research-related skills and achievements informed by relevant work/research/lived experience
 - **Note: In the case of those with non-traditional academic paths, consideration will be given to relative standards of research productivity for their level of experience/qualifications. Review panellists will consider individual workstyles, contributions, commitments, variations in disciplinary/community/cultural standards (e.g. collaboration).**
 - Review panellists will consider whether the Applicant demonstrates strong leadership qualities as demonstrated by accomplishments from their relevant work/research/lived experience, and whether these experiences are of high quality relative to the value they may add to the Applicant's research potential.

- Career development plan -
 - The Applicant is asked to describe their career goal(s) and development plan:
 - What types of career options is the Applicant considering?
 - How does the Applicant's program of study support progression towards their career goals?

- Personal Statement -
 - The Applicant is asked to explain their motivation for pursuing advanced research training in health in Alberta and why they should be considered for this award. Description of the Applicant's lived experience will be considered.

- **Note: Review panellists will consider whether funding the Applicant’s research will contribute to enhancing equity, diversity and inclusion in patient-oriented research, either by supporting the Applicant’s research career directly or through the impacts their funded research may have.**

- Research training and mentorship environment -
 - The Applicant (in collaboration with their Primary Supervisor) is asked to describe the training environment and the Applicant’s trainee role in the proposed Research Project. The description should include:
 - Detail about the resources available to support the trainee’s research and the broad training opportunities the environment provides.
 - An outline the benefits for the trainee training in this environment, highlighting the facilities, and other personnel the trainee will have the opportunity to interact with.
 - Details about the role of the trainee in the proposed Research Project and how it links to the Primary Supervisor’s research program and/or research group.

- Research Project Proposal that includes the following sections -
 - **Project Overview**
 - The Applicant is expected to write the Project Overview.
 - The Project Overview should be written in general scientific language that is understandable by a broad audience.
 - Describe the hypothesis/research question, objectives, anticipated study design and methodological approach, deliverables, expected outcomes, and knowledge dissemination/implementation plan in sufficient detail for the reviewers to be able to assess the feasibility and overall merit of the proposed research in terms of its suitability as a training opportunity.
 - **Describe how principles of equity, diversity and inclusion have been considered and will be integrated in and/or addressed through the proposed research project.**
 - **Describe how factors and outcomes relating to sex- and gender-based analysis have been considered and will be appropriately addressed and integrated – (If not appropriate as primary outcomes, please explain why, and what considerations informed this determination).**
 - **Describe any non-traditional research impacts/outcomes and measures of success that may be anticipated from the proposed Research Project (e.g. community partner research outputs).**
 - Include background information that provides rationale and helps to position the proposed research in the context of the current state of the field and the significance of the work being proposed.
 - Ensure sufficient detail for the reviewers to understand how the proposed research project will (or has the potential to) embody patient-oriented research (per Appendix A: Project Eligibility).
 - **List of Project Reference**
 - The Applicant is asked provide a list of key reference relating to the proposed Research Project
 - **Alignment to Patient-Oriented Research**

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- The Applicant is asked to provide a detailed description of how the proposed research Project embodies the principles of Patient-Oriented Research (POR), as defined by AbSPORU (per Appendix A: Project Eligibility Criteria).
- Primary Supervisory Letter of Reference
 - One reference letter will be considered in support of the application. The reference letter must be from the Applicant's Primary Supervisor. The letter should:
 - Include information regarding eligibility of the proposed Research Project.
 - Highlight the strengths and research & innovation leadership potential of the Applicant as a research trainee and future researchers (including but not limited to intellectual and motivational capacity, interpersonal and collaborative skills, and ability to generate and apply new ideas).
- *****NEW THIS YEAR***** SPOR Network Letter of Support
 - Up to five (5) awards will be reserved for Alberta-based Applicants whose Research Project will be conducted in affiliation with a [SPOR Network](#), and whom otherwise meet all eligibility, project eligibility, and overall review criteria.
 - Beyond the Applicants selected for the five reserved awards noted above, priority consideration will be given to other Alberta-based Applicants (among the remaining general pool of Applicants) whose Research Project will be conducted in affiliation with a SPOR Network.
 - One letter of support signed by the affiliate SPOR Network may be provided. The letter should outline:
 - The scope of the relationship between the Applicant and the SPOR Network with respect to the Applicant's proposed research project
 - How the Applicant's proposed research serves the mandate of the SPOR Network, and
 - How the SPOR Network anticipates actioning/ implementing the outcomes of the Applicant's proposed research project.
- *****NEW THIS YEAR***** **Submission of CIHR Competition Results**
 - If applicable/available, a copy of Applicant's results (ratings, etc.) from prior a CIHR competition application(s) relating to the proposed health-oriented research project may be submitted.

APPENDIX C: PROGRAM EVALUATION, IMPROVEMENT, AND IMPACT

For AbSPORU/Alberta Innovates, the ultimate impact of funding, facilitating patient-oriented research and innovation is to realize health, social, and economic benefits for patients and the health system.

AbSPORU/Alberta Innovates uses a comprehensive evaluation strategy developed from [Alberta Innovates' Research to Impact Framework](#) to systematically evaluate the benefits of AbSPORU/Alberta Innovates investments for the purposes of *accountability, analysis and learning*. The results and benefits from research are captured across broad categories of impact that include capacity building, knowledge generation, informing decision making, health, social, and economic benefit.

The information collected from Recipients by AbSPORU/Alberta Innovates will be used to inform decisions in terms of program planning, management and quality improvement. This information will also be used to communicate the impact of AbSPORU/Alberta Innovates to key stakeholders, partners, patients and the public.

Once Recipients' Projects are completed, AbSPORU/Alberta Innovates continues to monitor performance for five (5) years to accurately evaluate the economic, social and environmental benefits realized for the province.

All Investment Agreements outline performance indicators tracked over the course of the Project and it is the responsibilities of the Recipient, the Recipient's Primary Supervisor, and the Recipient's Institution to report on outcomes subsequent to the completion of the Project. Alberta Innovates has a common set of performance metrics it monitors, both at the individual Project level and for the aggregate Program. These are highlighted on the next page.

Objectives and Performance Metrics

