



# **Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship in Patient-Oriented Research**

## **Program Guide**

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## 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 for People and Patient-Oriented Research and Trials \(SUPPORT\) Unit](#) is dedicated to increasing the quantity and quality of patient-oriented research in Alberta. Together, CIHR, Alberta Innovates (AI) and the Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU) are fostering the integration of research into care by “putting patients first.”

The [Career Development in Methods and Health Services Research Platform](#) (CD Platform) of AbSPORU offered the inaugural Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship competition in 2015. The CD Platform plays a critical role in training and career development in POR for researchers, graduate students, trainees, patients, health practitioners, and other stakeholders from across Alberta. The CD Platform, in partnership with AI, hosts and coordinates the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship, including award recipient training, monitoring, and management of activities throughout the funding year.

## Description

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship in Patient-Oriented Research awards are designed to provide incentive for first year graduate students to pursue their graduate projects with a patient-oriented research approach. The 2018 Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship awards are funded through collaboration between the CD, [Methods Support & Development](#) (Methods), [Knowledge Translation](#) (KT) and [Patient Engagement](#) (PE) Platforms.

### Platform Areas of Expertise

The Methods and KT Platforms focus their efforts in specific areas of health research. Applicants may indicate that their patient-oriented research project aligns closely with a specific platform’s area of expertise, as defined in the Application Instructions. Please review the definitions and criteria in the Application Instructions before completing this section of the application. If successful in the competition, the awardee may be provided additional opportunities for learning and collaboration with that platform. There is no advantage to indicate alignment with a platform’s area of expertise versus the general competition; there will be a single ranking process and only the top ranked applicants will be funded in accordance with the amount of funding available.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship include:

- Supporting and training first year Master's or PhD graduate students in the principles and practice of POR;
- Providing POR activities to develop capacity through a multi-disciplinary approach for all stakeholders including applicants, thesis supervisors, patients, and community team members;
- Creating opportunities for stakeholder groups to work closely together from conceptualization of research question to dissemination and implementation of results at the practice and community levels; and
- Demonstrating the impact of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship for the student and the development of their project by completing a Studentship Impact Narrative at the end of the funding year.

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients will have the opportunity to attain the knowledge and experience to transition to careers in research and innovation areas and beyond that leverages 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 CD Platform coordinates competency development activities in patient-oriented research for successful applicants.

## Definitions

AbSPORU is using [CIHR's 2014 definition](#) of patient-oriented research:

*“Patient-oriented research refers to a continuum of research that engages patients as partners, focuses on patient-identified priorities, and aims to improve patient outcomes. This research, conducted by multidisciplinary teams in partnership with relevant stakeholders, aims to apply the knowledge generated to improve healthcare systems and practices”*

AbSPORU has operationalized the definition of POR, see Appendix A.

## Eligibility

Applicants must reside in Alberta and be enrolled in, or accepted to, a graduate program at an Alberta university undertaking health-related research training leading to a thesis-based graduate degree. Support is available only to applicants that are in or entering their first year of graduate program and is tenable only at an Alberta university. Applicants may be entering their first year of a graduate program in either September of the competition year or January of the

award year.

Please note, as the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is jointly funded by AI and CIHR, successful candidates cannot also hold an AI or CIHR award.

It is expected that Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients will engage in full-time research activities throughout the duration of their award.

## **Term of the Award**

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship provides one year of funding support towards the first year of a thesis-based Master's or Doctoral degree.

## **Value of the Award**

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship will consist of a stipend of \$30,000.

## **Application Assessment Criteria**

All applications will undergo a rigorous review process by an external committee whose membership is both interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral. Applicants for the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship will be assessed based on the focus on POR in relation to the graduate trainee, their career plan and the anticipated benefits they would gain from the opportunities provided by the proposed training environment(s) as measured by the following criteria, which will undergo both a relevancy review and a peer review:

- Academic record
- Relevant work and/or research experience
- Career development plan
- Research training and mentorship environment
- Research proposal

## ***Academic Record***

Refer to section: ***Academic Background of Applicant and Submitted Transcripts***

- Does the applicant's academic record show evidence of solid and sustained academic excellence and performance throughout their training?
- Has the applicant received academic recognition (e.g. Honors, Dean's list)?
- Has the applicant received several prizes/awards, and/or highly competitive, premier prizes/awards at the local, provincial, or national level?

## ***Relevant Work and/or Research Experience***

Refer to sections: ***University Academic Achievements***  
***Research and Other Relevant Work Experience of Applicant***  
***Applicant's Accomplishments***

- Does the applicant demonstrate a strong foundation of research skills and achievements evidenced by relevant work/research experience and formal presentations, abstracts and publications for their stage of research career? Are these of high quality?
- Is the applicant's research experience of high quality?
- Does the applicant show strong leadership qualities as demonstrated by relevant academic, leadership, work and/or leadership accomplishments? Are these of high quality?
- Does the applicant have the potential for becoming an important contributor to the health research and innovation environment in patient-oriented research?

## ***Career Development Plan***

Refer to sections: ***Career Development Plan***  
***Letter(s) of Reference***

- What is the likelihood that the career development plan will contribute substantially to the scientific development and productivity of the applicant in patient-oriented research?
- Does the applicant link past achievements, publications, award and related research and work experiences to the career plan?
- Is there strong linkage between applicant's proposed training program and career progression?
- Is the applicant's prior research and/or work experiences relevant to the career goals/objectives?

- Are the applicant's career plans well-articulated and illustrate a well thought out progression towards their career goals/objectives?
- Are there appropriate justifications for the selection of the mentorship advisors (as well as patient and/or community partners, if applicable) and their contribution to the career and scientific development of the applicant and the proposed patient-oriented research project?
- What is the likelihood that the award will contribute substantially to the continued scientific development and productivity of the applicant?
- Do the letters of reference provide strong support and considerable detailed assessments of the applicant's research strengths/capabilities and intellectual capacity?
- Do the letters of reference describe the benefits that the proposed research experience provides the applicant towards their career goals?

### ***Research Training & Mentorship Environment***

Refer to sections: ***Mentorship Advisors – Biographical Sketches***  
***Research Training Environment***

- Are the primary (co-) supervisor's research qualifications in the area of the proposed research appropriate?
- Are the proposed opportunities for professional growth of the applicant appropriate and of high quality?
- Does the research training environment provide the expertise and resources required for the proposed patient-oriented research project?
- Are the proposed collaborations for the applicant with other active investigators adequate and are there other opportunities for professional growth appropriate and of high quality?
- Is the benefit of the applicant training in the proposed research environment clearly described?

### ***Research Proposal***

Refer to section: ***Proposed Research Project and Patient-Oriented Research***

- Does the proposed research project embody the principles of patient-oriented research and is the description of the hypothesis and methodology of the caliber expected for the career stage of a researcher who is at the forefront of a field?
- Are the proposed research question, design, and methodology of significant scientific and technical merit?
- Is the research plan relevant to the applicant's research career objectives?

- Is the research plan appropriate to the stage of research development and as a vehicle for developing the research skills described in the career development plan?
- Is the research plan of high quality, and does it have potential to advance the field of study and exemplify patient-oriented research?
- If applicable, are there adequate plans for data and safety monitoring of clinical trials?
- If applicable, is the research plan an appropriate vehicle for developing the prospective mentee's skills and capabilities in patient-oriented research?

## Funding, Administration, Expectations and Responsibilities

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is intended to be an initial source of start-up funding and an incentive by which future sources of funding may be secured for the subsequent year(s) of the trainees' program.

### *Stipend Incentive*

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients are encouraged to apply for and receive awards from other provincial, national or international agencies. The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship provides an incentive to those individuals who receive additional awards during the funding year. Please note, as the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is jointly funded by AI and CIHR, successful candidates cannot also hold an AI or CIHR award.

If an Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipient receives another major comparable, peer-reviewed award, they may be eligible to receive a minimum incentive of \$12,000 per year or more to a maximum combined award value of \$30,000 per year; or the maximum allowed by the other agency. Individuals who receive their Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship in the form of a stipend incentive should note that the maximum eligibility of one year remains the same as those for individuals receiving the full stipend value.

### *Primary Research Supervisor*

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients are required to complete their training with the support of a primary research supervisor and co-supervisor (if applicable) in Alberta. The **primary research supervisor** will sponsor the application and ensure adherence to the terms and conditions of the award. He or she must possess both a record of productive health-oriented research and sufficient resources to ensure satisfactory conduct of the research. He or she must provide direct supervision. A **co-supervisor** may also be identified if the trainee has a secondary research supervisor for their degree program.

### *Application Process*

For the 2018 Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship competition, applications will be accepted until October 1, 2018 at 4:00 p.m. The AI administrative procedures are utilized for all application, review, and award funding processes.

### ***Release of Competition Results***

Results will be posted on the AI website approximately 2.5 months after the close of the competition. Results will not be released over the phone. Official letters with the competition results are sent to the applicants shortly thereafter. The formal letters will serve as the official decision should there be any discrepancy with the material on the website.

### ***Commencement of Funding***

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship funding year will begin January 1 and continue until December 31.

### ***Termination of Funding***

AbSPORU/AI reserves the right to terminate any award if the terms and conditions of the award are not met (as outlined below), if there is evidence of unsatisfactory progress, or if there are major changes in the proposed research project, supervisor, or training environment.

### ***Award Recipient Requirements***

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients are required to participate in self-directed learning activities to demonstrate development of patient-oriented research competencies throughout the funding year. Failure to participate in these mandated activities will result in termination of award. The self-directed learning activities will include the following awardee requirements:

- Attend AbSPORU training activities as selected by the awardee to demonstrate competency development in each of the competency theme areas (Appendix B). Awardees must participate in a minimum of ten hours of AbSPORU training activities.
- Participate and present their proposed project as a poster presentation, as well as participate in the workshops and training opportunities offered during the Alberta SPOR Summer Institute. The Alberta SPOR Summer Institute is a multi-day event offering workshops, training, speakers, and presentations to all members of the Alberta health research community.
- Awardees that are aligned with a specific AbSPORU platform may be mandated or offered additional platform activities. These requirements will be made available to the awardees prior to acceptance of the award.
- Play an active role in the promotion of their POR projects; this may include participation in videos, presentations, posters, and other activities as requested.

AbSPORU may offer additional opportunities to awardees during the funding year. These activities will allow students to become familiar with many of the provincial platforms, interact with AbSPORU platform leads and personnel, shadow meetings, participate on committees, and learn more about patient-oriented research and the patient-oriented research community in Alberta. These activities will create capacity for new researchers to conduct their POR project

and become ambassadors of POR across the province.

### ***Time Commitment Expectations***

It is expected that Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients will engage in full-time research activities.

Successful applicants are required to participate in the self-directed learning activities as indicated in Award Recipient Requirements.

### ***Notification Responsibilities***

The award recipient and their primary research supervisor must obtain written approval from AbSPORU/AI prior to any substantial alterations in supervision, mentorship, the training environment, or the research project described in the original application. Consideration may be given to proposed changes and will be assessed on a case by case basis. AbSPORU/AI reserve the right to terminate support if its requirements for supervision are not met, or if changes to the proposed training environment or research project are not approved.

## **Management of Awards**

For AbSPORU/AI, the ultimate impact of funding and facilitating patient-oriented research and innovation is to realize health, social and economic benefits for patients and the health system. AbSPORU/AI use a comprehensive evaluation strategy developed from [AI's Research to Impact Framework](#) to systematically evaluate the benefits of AbSPORU/AI investments for the purposes of *accountability*, and *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/AI will be used to inform decisions in terms of program planning, management and quality improvement. The information will also be used to communicate the impact of AbSPORU/AI to key stakeholders, partners, patients and the public.

### ***Final Report***

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients and their primary research supervisor are required to submit a final report within one month of termination of the award, or within one month of the award end date. A final report form will be sent to recipients and their primary research supervisor to complete.

The final report requirement is in the form of a Studentship impact narrative to demonstrate the impact of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship on the recipient's research project and overall capacity development in patient-oriented research. A studentship impact narrative is a brief (i.e.

3-4 page) description that outlines the key contributions of a research project/ program/ initiative to health, social and economic impacts. For the purpose of this award, the key contributions of the funding and learning opportunities to the awardees' project, personal, and professional development are described. It also highlights the pathways used to achieve the impacts. These impacts constitute the returns on the investments made in research and innovation.

### ***Extended Leaves***

Unpaid leaves of absence of up to six months may be granted following a formal request to AbSPORU/AI outlining the purpose of the leave. The request must be received prior to the commencement of the leave period. The support of the primary research supervisor and the host institution is required. Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis. AbSPORU/AI reserve the right to terminate the award should the required approval not be met.

Upon the trainee's return, AbSPORU/AI will consider extending the period of support by the duration of the approved leave.

### ***Communications***

AbSPORU/AI reserve the right to publish and/or disseminate information regarding its grants and awards. All publications, including public messages, arising from research supported by AbSPORU/AI awards must acknowledge this funding utilizing a designated funding statement. The following funding statement should appear on award recipient presentations, posters, and publications:

*The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship is jointly funded by Alberta Innovates and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.*

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients are asked to inform AbSPORU/AI in advance if their research will be published in a major journal such that it might result in a press release from the university and/or the journal.

### ***Support of Research Integrity***

AbSPORU/AI support Alberta research institutions in their efforts to promote and ensure the highest standards of research and scholarship practice and behavior. It is incumbent upon each applicant to adhere to all research policies and procedures in place at his or her institution, including those regarding integrity in research and scholarship.

AbSPORU/AI reserves the right to confirm, through independent means, representations of authorship, credentials or research support. In the event of material deviations in the submitted information, including citation sources (in the case of authorship), issuing organization(s) (in the case of credentials), or granting agencies (in the case of research support), AbSPORU/AI reserve the right to disqualify any applicant from the competition in question.



Further actions may include withdrawal of any remaining installments of support for any AbSPORU/AI award for which misrepresentation appears in the submission and seeking partial or full repayment of any past financial support under any AbSPORU/AI award for which misrepresentation appears in the submission.

## Contact Information

For further information on the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship, please contact:

### Training & Early Career Development

Alberta Innovates

[grants.health@albertainnovates.ca](mailto:grants.health@albertainnovates.ca)

780-423-5727

## Appendix A: AbSPORU Operationalized Definition of Patient-Oriented Research

AbSPORU is using CIHR's 2014 definition of patient-oriented research:

*“Patient-oriented research refers to a continuum of research that engages patients<sup>1</sup> as partners, focuses on patient-identified priorities, and aims to improve patient outcomes. This research, conducted by multidisciplinary teams in partnership with relevant stakeholders, aims to apply the knowledge generated to improve healthcare systems and practices.”*

Further information can be found at: <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/48413.html#a4>.

It is the aspiration of AbSPORU that over time, researchers in the province will conduct patient-oriented research which meets all components as outlined in the above CIHR definition. In the meantime, AbSPORU has operationalized the definition (below) to clarify the minimum requirements for a research project to be considered as patient-oriented. AbSPORU's operationalized definition of patient-oriented research includes at least one of the following:

### **1. Meaningfully engages patients as partners as identified in the adapted IAP2 spectrum of engagement (see Figure 1) (at any one or more phases of the research process)**

Meaningful patient engagement refers to ACTIVE patient engagement 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

### **2. Focuses on patient-identified priorities.**

These may be identified through:

- Core Outcome Sets for clinical trials that have been developed with stakeholder involvement
- Focus groups
- James Lind Alliance approaches or adaptations of this approach\*
- Online priority setting activities

\* The James Lind Alliance brings patients, carers and clinicians together in Priority Setting

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<sup>1</sup> an overarching term inclusive of individuals with personal experience of a health issue and informal caregivers, including family and friends

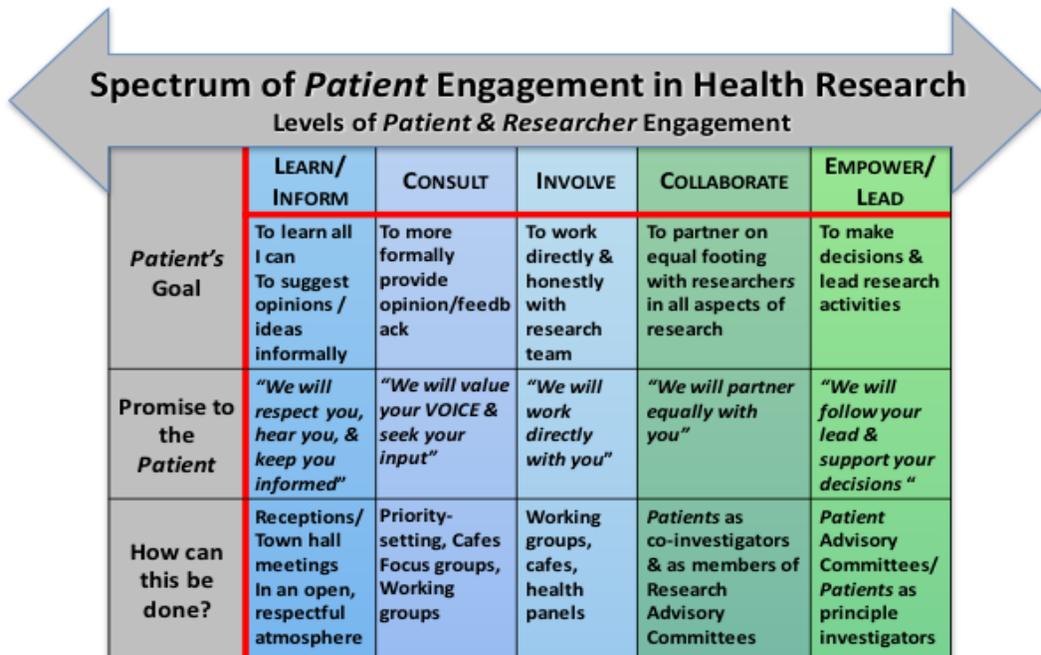
Partnerships to identify and prioritise the top 10 uncertainties or ‘unanswered questions’ about the effects of the treatment that they agree are most important (<http://www.jla.nihr.ac.uk/>)

**3. Aims to improve patient outcomes. Examples include, but are not limited to:**

- Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMS)
- Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMS)
- Patient satisfaction measures
- Quality of life measures
- Management of symptoms and pain measures
- Potential clinical improvement measures
- Length of stay
- Cost effectiveness

We are using CIHR’s definition of knowledge translation as "a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange, and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve the health of Canadians, provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system" (<http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29418.html#2>).

**Figure 1: Spectrum of patient engagement in research**



Adapted from IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement (2007) by Vandall-Walker (2016)

## Appendix B: AbSPORU Core Competencies in Patient-Oriented Research

COMPETENCY THEME	COMPETENCIES/LEARNING OBJECTIVES
<b>Patient-Oriented Research</b>	Participants are able to define and describe patient-oriented research (National competencies #5)
<b>Patient Engagement</b>	Participants are able to describe the evolution of patient roles in health care and health research (National competencies #6)
	Participants are able to demonstrate an understanding that patients can bring added value to research (National competencies #7)
	Participants are able to describe the different points in the research process where patients can bring value
	Participants are able to describe a continuum of patient engagement, and the different methods that might be used at the points along this continuum
	Participants demonstrate an understanding of the importance of patients being able to choose how they'd like to be involved
	Participants demonstrate an understanding of how to develop engagement processes that enable patients to bring their experiential knowledge to the table
<b>Health Research</b>	Participants are able to describe health research (National competencies #4)
	Participants are able to describe how the health system works within Alberta and within Canada (National competencies #3)
<b>Communications &amp; Collaborations</b>	Participants are able to communicate effectively with others (National competencies #1)
	Participants are able to work with others in collaborative teams (National competencies #2)
<b>Methods</b>	Participants will be able to define and describe Patient Recorded Outcome Measures (PROMs) and Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs)
	Participants will be able to describe a number of research methods that are suitable for patient-oriented research
	Participants will be able to describe a number of research techniques that will effectively identify patient priorities
	Participants will learn how individualizing information is a promising strategy that provides more meaningful patient-centered education to supports patients engaged in their health
	Participants will learn how electronic health data can be used to understand the patient journey and patient outcomes
<b>Knowledge Translation &amp; Knowledge Synthesis</b>	Participants will be able to describe and define knowledge translation and knowledge synthesis
	Participants are able to explain the Knowledge to Action Cycle
<b>Data</b>	Participants will be able to describe what secondary data is available and how to access it
	Participants will be able to describe how to use data to identify research priorities
	Participants will be able to describe how to use data to assess outcomes
<b>Clinical Trials</b>	Participants will be able to demonstrate an understanding of pragmatic clinical trials and its role in health research
	Participants will be able to describe patient-oriented research strategies appropriate to clinical trials
	Participants will be able to describe the importance of collaboration amongst clinical trials stakeholders across Alberta