



PROGRAM GUIDE: Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentships in Patient-Oriented Research

Program Overview

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 capacity 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 training, monitoring, and management of activities throughout the funding year. The Knowledge Translation, Methods, and Patient Engagement Platforms of AbSPORU are also key contributors to the 2019 competition.

Program Details

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 Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship provides one year of funding support towards the first year of a thesis-based Master's or Doctoral degree, consisting of a stipend of \$30,000.

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

Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship recipients ("SPOR Students") 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.

Broadly defined: "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" [CIHR \(2014\)](#)

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Eligibility

(a) SPOR Student Eligibility Criteria - To qualify as a SPOR Student, the student is required to satisfy the following criteria:

- 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;
- be in or entering their first year of graduate program at an Alberta university in either September of the competition year or January of the following year;
- does not hold an Alberta Innovates or CIHR award;
- must not be a previous Alberta SPOR Graduate studentship recipient;
- must participate in capacity development activities;
- will engage in full-time research activities throughout the duration of their award; and
- must participate in the following capacity development activities:
 - attend AbSPORU capacity development activities (mandatory and self-selected) to demonstrate competency development in each of the competency theme areas (Appendix B)

- 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 held every Spring that offers workshops, training, speakers, and presentations to all members of the Alberta health research community;
- SPOR Students 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; and
- participate in any other opportunities provided by AbSPORU during the term of the award.

(b) Project Eligibility Criteria

AbSPORU has operationalized the definition to clarify the minimum requirements for a Project to be considered as patient-oriented. AbSPORU’s operationalized definition of patient-oriented research includes **at least one** of the following (see Appendix A for detailed descriptions):

- Meaningfully engages patients as partners
- Focuses on patient-identified priorities
- Aims to improve patient outcomes

(c) Primary Research Supervisor Eligibility Criteria

SPOR Students are required to complete their training with the support of a Primary Research Supervisor and co-primary research 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-primary research supervisor may also be identified if the SPOR Student has a secondary research Supervisor for their degree program.

Program Objectives and Performance Measurement

The objectives of the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship include:

- Supporting and building capacity for 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 students, thesis Primary Research 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

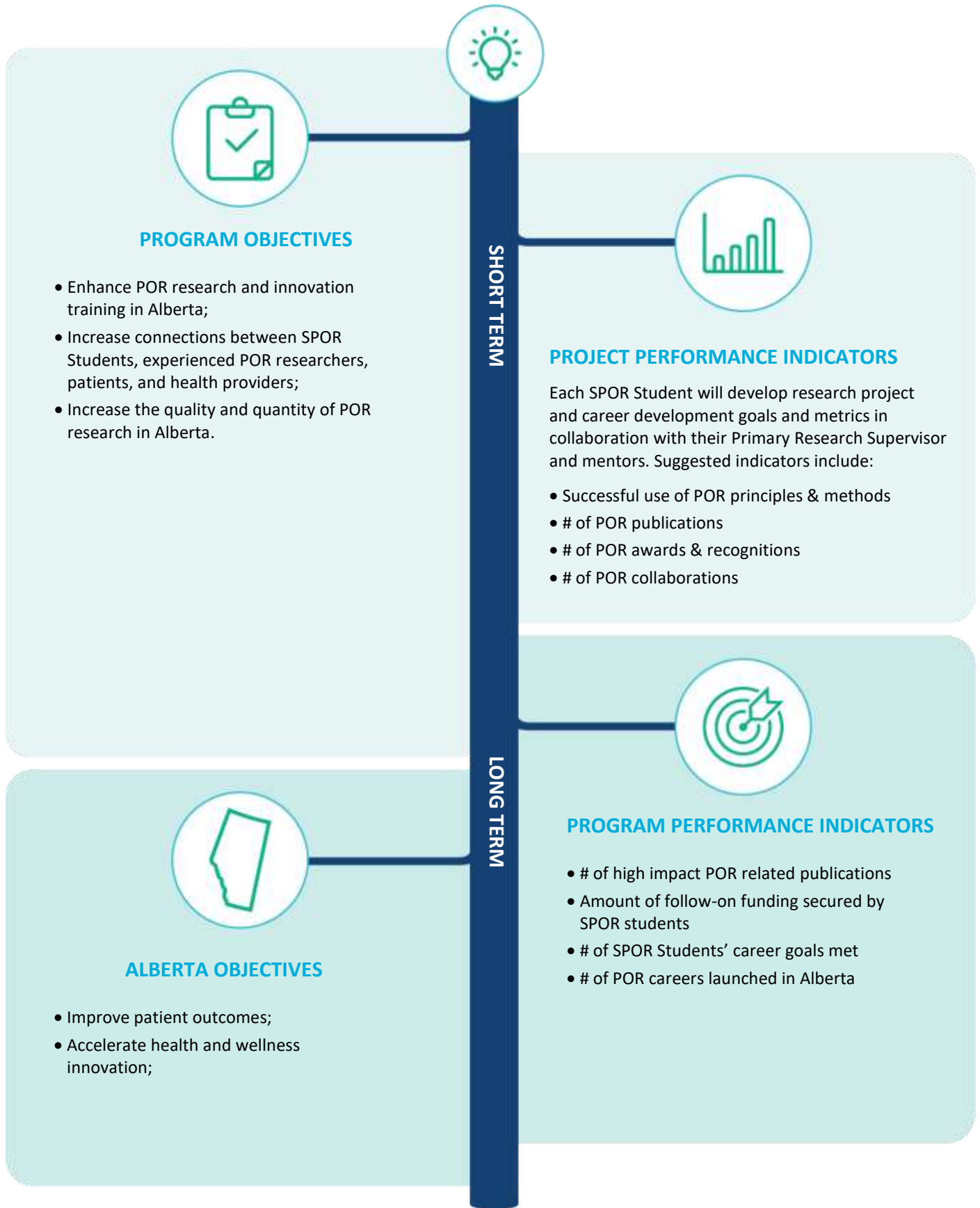
As a short-term award, the SPOR Graduate Studentship program is intended to provide a foundational program of support, network building, and capacity development to contribute to the development and implementation of a graduate thesis Project.

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.

Once Projects are completed, 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 is the responsibilities of the Applicant 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



How Funding Works

(a) Project Funding

The Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship funding year will begin January 1 and continue until December 31. SPOR Students can receive a Stipend of up to \$30,000 for the term of the award.

(b) Stipend Incentive

Alberta Innovates encourages SPOR Students to apply for and accept awards from other national or international agencies. Trainees and their Institution must inform Alberta Innovates of receipt of any other major comparable awards secured during the tenure of an award.

If a Trainee receives another major comparable award, he/she will not be eligible to receive the full value of the award at the same time. Instead he/she 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 award offered by Alberta Innovates (subject to any maximums allowed by the other funding agency).

The minimum stipend Incentive offered is \$12,000 CAD per year. Alberta Innovates will increase the stipend Incentive as necessary to ensure the combined value of the awards does not fall below \$30,000 CAD per year.

Trainees should note that stipend Incentives are still considered SPOR 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 Alberta Innovates and AbSPORU.

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

(c) Eligible and ineligible expenses

The Stipend of the Investment is to be used exclusively to pay the SPOR Student and the SPOR Student may use it without restrictions.

HOW TO APPLY



STEP 1 Application

Graduate students who have gained the support of the required Primary Research Supervisor may apply online at <https://albertainnovates.ca/>

Deadline: October 11, 2019 at 4:00 p.m.



STEP 2 Evaluation & Agreement Execution

Each Application will be evaluated, and successful SPOR Students will be required to sign an Investment Agreement authorized by their university.

Results of all Applications 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 and such formal letters will serve as the official decision should there be any discrepancy with the material on the website.



STEP 3 Project Management

A Studentship Impact Narrative will be required from the SPOR Student and Primary Research Supervisor at the end of the award.

EVALUATION PROCESS

During the different phases of the program, Alberta Innovates and AbSPORU leverages internal staff and external expert reviewers to evaluate the Applications submitted. Alberta Innovates and ABSPORU evaluate promising technologies based on the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship.

Alberta Innovates 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 Alberta Innovates.

The assessment criteria include the SPOR Student's academic record, relevant work and/or research experience, career development plan, and research training and mentorship environment, and all investment decisions are at the sole discretion of Alberta Innovates.

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 Alberta SPOR 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 Alberta Innovates. Please be aware Alberta Innovates may modify this guide from time to time in keeping with any changes to the program.

Alberta Innovates will only correspond in writing and provide copies of the Application to the person named in the Application form as the one authorized to speak for the Applicant.

Once we have evaluated and approved an Application for funding, Alberta Innovates will require the Applicant and the SPOR Student to sign our standard form Investment Agreement. A copy of the Investment Agreement is available on the Alberta Innovates website. The Investment Agreement sets out in detail the roles, responsibilities and obligations of the various Parties to ensure a successful Project. Alberta Innovates will not provide any funding until the Investment Agreement has been signed by all Parties.

Alberta Innovates will only fund SPOR Students who have satisfied all eligibility criteria. Meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee access to funding, and all funding decisions will be made by Alberta Innovates at its sole discretion.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Training & Early Career Development

Alberta Innovates

grants.health@albertainnovates.ca

780-423-5727

Appendix A: AbSPORU Operationalized Definition of Patient-Oriented Research

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 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>).

COMPETENCY THEME	COMPETENCIES/LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Patient-Oriented Research	Participants are able to define and describe patient-oriented research (National competencies #5)
Patient Engagement	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
Health Research	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)
Communications & Collaborations	Participants are able to communicate effectively with others (National competencies #1)
	Participants are able to work with others in collaborative teams (National competencies #2)
Methods	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
Knowledge Translation & Knowledge Synthesis	Participants will be able to describe and define knowledge translation and knowledge synthesis
	Participants are able to explain the Knowledge to Action Cycle
Data	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
Clinical Trials	Participants will be able to demonstrate an understanding of pragmatic clinical trials and its role in health research