

Section of Researchers' *Blueprint for Family Medicine Research Success 2012-2017*

Laying the foundation for our future

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Family medicine research creates the evidentiary base that forms the foundation of our discipline. Members of the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) depend on this evolving evidence every day to support patient care.

The ability to identify relevant questions, rigorously study them, and cite our own evidence is essential to establishing the value of family medicine and its effect on our patients and the Canadian health care system. Despite its importance, family medicine research has remained poorly funded and is undervalued by decision makers, funders, leaders, and family physicians themselves.^{1,2}

The CFPC established the National Research Committee in 1955. In the early 1990s the Section of Researchers (SOR) was formed to represent many members with research interests and to report to the College's Board of Directors. In 2003, an SOR retreat led to the establishment of several research recognition awards and gave the SOR renewed energy and direction. In April 2012, recognizing that the family medicine research environment had changed considerably in recent years, the SOR organized a strategic planning retreat in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont, to plan the SOR's strategic activities for the next few years.

Our priorities and emphasis were defining the SOR's 5-year vision, refreshing its purpose, determining its areas of strategic focus, and defining its strategic goals, key objectives, and actions to carry it forward. The forum was designed to support open dialogue and creative thinking through respectful discussion based upon long-standing relationships and new collaborations.

Process description

A 4-day facilitated strategic planning retreat was convened with more than 50 leading family medicine researchers, educators, and decision makers from across Canada. An electronic survey was sent to participants in advance of the meeting to help focus the discussions during the retreat.

Participants explored the current mandate of the SOR to consider its relevance to family medicine research,

the section's membership, and its future direction. The participants worked collaboratively to develop a new vision statement, a new mandate, 5 areas of strategic focus, and 18 strategic objectives (**Figure 1**)³ that would be implemented over the following 5 years. Each has an objective achievement indicator, and specific, measurable, realistic, and time-based activities that support achievement of those objectives during the 5 years (2012 to 2017).

Outcome

Following the meeting, the SOR council members, through an iterative process, reviewed the draft summaries of the proceedings and developed the CFPC SOR's *Blueprint for Family Medicine Research Success 2012-2017*.³ The SOR blueprint was approved in principle by the SOR council in April 2013. The blueprint was widely reviewed by the CFPC board and other stakeholders, and accepted in principle by the CFPC executive during the summer of 2013.

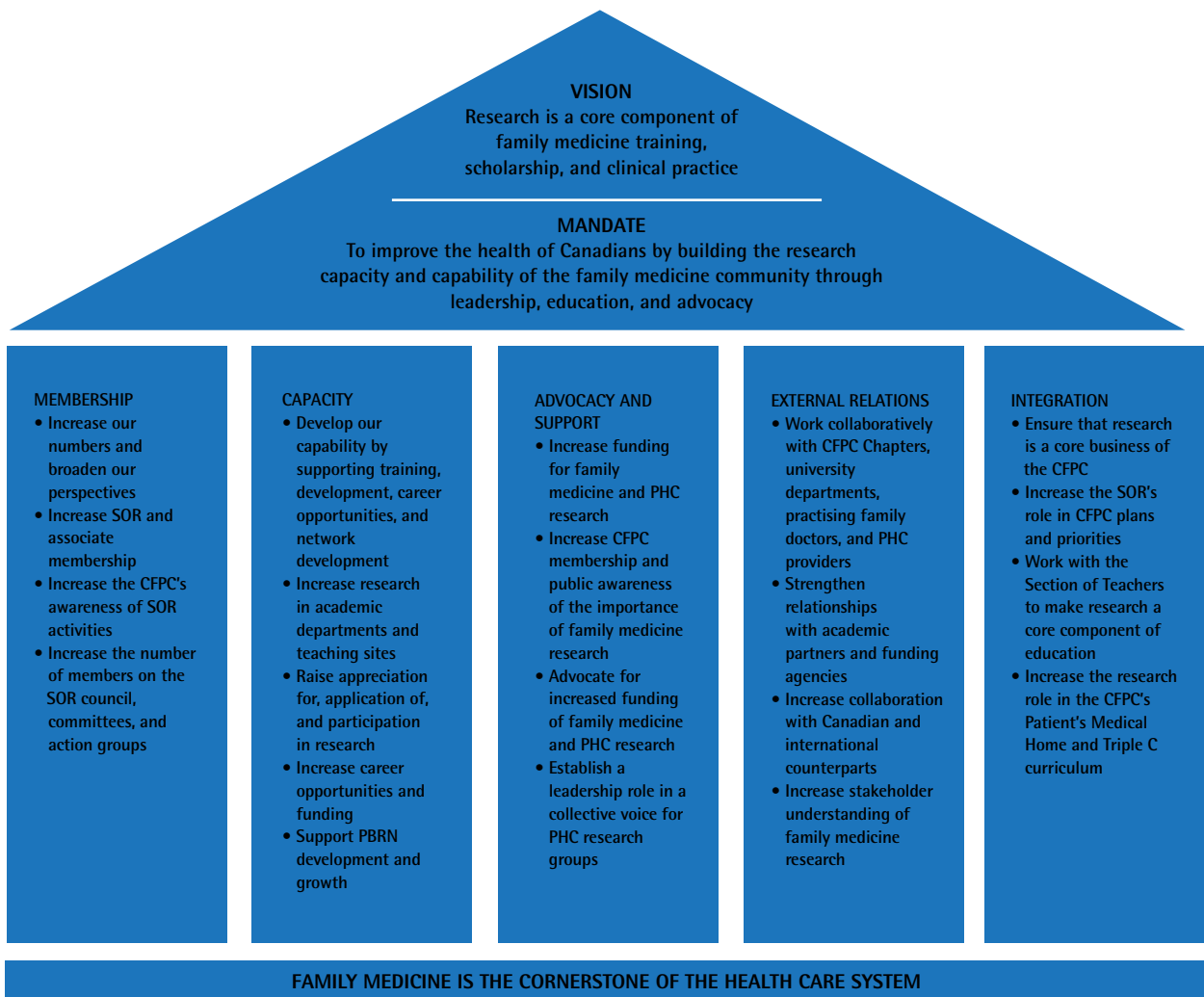
The blueprint was developed in parallel with and at the same time as the CFPC's strategic plan for 2013 to 2017. The CFPC's strategic plan includes 6 goals; goal 4 is to advance the discipline of family medicine through innovation, research, and transfer of knowledge. During the summer of 2013, the SOR council focused its work on aligning the SOR blueprint's objectives with the CFPC's strategic plan goals. Together with the CFPC executive, the SOR council identified the immediate priorities and obtained support for the work-plan activities for the next 18-month budget cycle.

Five areas of strategic focus

Membership. All members of the College have a role to play in research. There is a continuum of involvement in research for family physicians, from being users of research evidence in patient care, to generating questions, to recruiting for and involving patients in research studies, to participating in practice-based research networks (PBRNs), all the way to achieving an academic career as a researcher. These diverse roles in the development, execution, and utilization of research are all critical to the success of family medicine research. Family doctors depend on research to help them provide the best and most up-to-date care for their patients. We will strengthen the voice of research by inviting all

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Figure 1. Summary of the *Blueprint for Family Medicine Research Success 2012-2017*: 5 areas of strategic focus and 18 strategic objectives.



CFPC—College of Family Physicians of Canada, PBRN—practice-based research network, PHC—primary health care, SOR—Section of Researchers. Reproduced from the Section of Researchers.³

CFPC members and associate members, practising family physicians, community and academic physicians, primary care researchers, family medicine residents, and medical students to be members of our family medicine research family: the CFPC SOR. We will meaningfully engage SOR members on the SOR council, committees, and action groups in order to involve them in our research promotion strategy.

Building capacity. Partnering with academic departments of family medicine and teaching sites, we will advocate for and support an overall increase in research capacity and capability. We will collaborate with the Section of Teachers to define and model

research scholarship and ensure that research scholarship is meaningfully implemented and evaluated through the university accreditation process. Our Research Community of Practice Action Group will help early career and mid-career family physician clinician researchers and their mentors to develop research capability and capacity. We will support the development and growth of primary care PBRNs across Canada by establishing a PBRN action group.

Advocacy and support. Through our Research Advocacy Action Group, the SOR will increase CFPC member and public awareness of the importance of family medicine research; advocate for increased funding for

family medicine and primary health care research at the federal, provincial, and local levels; and establish itself as a leader in the collective voice of primary health care research in Canada.

External relationships. The SOR will work collaboratively with the university academic structures and funding agencies to increase awareness of the importance of family medicine and primary health care research. The SOR will collaborate with our international family medicine research counterparts to learn from their efforts, and to share our experiences, thus strengthening the voice of global family medicine research. The section will also engage external stakeholders to promote mutual learning and understanding as a means of extending the relevance of the work of the SOR.

Integration: ensuring that research becomes a core business of the CFPC. The SOR will increase its role and visibility in all of the CFPC's plans, priorities, and activities, including showcasing its accomplishments in research and recognizing the most notable research endeavours at the annual Family Medicine Forum. Working within the Academic Family Medicine department, the SOR will ensure that research is a core component in the preparation of future family physicians through curriculum reform, evaluation and assessment, and university training program accreditation. The SOR will play an increasing role in assisting the CFPC in research and evaluation, and in strengthening the role of research in the CFPC's Patient's Medical Home, Triple C Competency-based Curriculum, Section of Family Physicians with Special Interests or Focused Practices, and other priority initiatives. The SOR will work with CFPC Chapters to enhance their capacity to support and advocate for research in their own jurisdictions.


Next steps

The SOR has developed a priority plan for the first 18 months. The plan is focused on improving governance, increasing membership, developing a research community of practice, linking with at least 4 provincial chapters and university departments, and collaborating with the Section of Teachers to ensure that research is a core component in the preparation of future family

physicians. In addition, concerted efforts to improve and enhance the showcasing of research at Family Medicine Forum were planned and put into place. Finally, the SOR plans to provide research advice for the CFPC's Patient's Medical Home, the CFPC Continuing Professional Development department, the Section of Family Physicians with Special Interests or Focused Practices, and the Triple C Competency-based Curriculum.

The SOR will work to engage members in its new action groups, which will implement the vision and activities in the areas of strategic focus and provide input for the work plan for each of our objectives.

Conclusion

Family medicine is the cornerstone of health care in Canada. Family physicians use research in their day-to-day practice to guide their delivery of care. Although family medicine accounts for more than half of all health care encounters, only a tiny proportion of all research funds are invested in family medicine research.¹ Most of the research undertaken by specialists in hospital settings does not contribute useful information for community-based family practice. Research in family medicine is undervalued and underappreciated by funding agencies, decision makers, leaders, and practitioners alike. The main goal of the SOR is to make research a more core component of family medicine education and medical practice. 

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Competing interests

None declared

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The opinions expressed in commentaries are those of the authors. Publication does not imply endorsement by the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

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