

Federal budget increases spending on applied research and development

Ottawa's 2013 budget acknowledges the value of investing in research and development even during times of fiscal constraint, providing just over \$1 billion in total new spending to initiatives focused largely on applied research.

"Scientific discovery and its deployment through new technologies, products and services into the marketplace provide economic and social benefits for all Canadians," states the *Economic Action Plan 2013*, the federal budget document. "Our country's world-leading public research also contributes to the strength of our communities and to the competitiveness of Canadian businesses."

The budget funding concentrates on programs that encourage commercialization and respond to industry challenges, rather than on basic or fundamental science. That thrust has raised alarm bells among some researchers and university associations in the past. They are concerned that money for curiosity-driven research, which may produce unanticipated results from basic science, is drying up.

The budget announces two big-ticket items for research and development. Genome Canada receives \$165 million for new research competitions, international partnerships and the operations of its regional centres. Sustainable Development Technology Canada gets \$325 million over eight years to develop and demonstrate clean technologies.

The money also includes \$225 million to the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) — although this particular funding comes from interest the CFI has been accruing on its lump-sum federal disbursements. Also included is a \$37-million increase to the three granting councils, and \$141 million to the National Research Council (NRC).

The additional investment to the granting councils breaks down as:

- \$15 million more to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research



© 2013 Thinkstock

Scientific discoveries and the ensuing technologies, products and services provide economic and social benefits for Canadians, states the 2013 federal budget.

Council, including \$12 million for the College and Community Innovation Program. The program supports partnerships between colleges and industry on projects to help companies become more innovative and productive.

- \$15 million more to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research.
- \$7 million more to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to, in part, support research about how to bring more people with disabilities into the labour market.

"Through these new initiatives, the Government will be fully reinvesting the savings from the granting councils' efficiencies identified in last year's budget to take effect in 2013-14 and later years in priority research areas," the budget documents contends.

For the last three years, beginning with the 2009/2010 budget, the granting councils had seen their budgets cut as part of an ongoing federal "efficiency" program. The 2009/2010 federal budget saw a \$147.9-million reduction in budgets for the three granting councils, over three years.

In this budget, the NRC receives \$121 million in new money over two years to encourage the growth of innovative businesses in Canada. The money supports NRC's new business-oriented thrust, with a concentration on providing companies with access to specialized labs, testing facilities and technical

services. The NRC will also receive an extra \$20 million over three years for its Industrial Research Assistance Program, which provides advice and financial assistance to improve innovation at small- and medium-sized businesses.

In addition, the federal government is allocating \$141 million of new money

over two years to prop up Atomic Energy of Canada Limited's Chalk River Laboratories, ensuring a continued supply of medical isotopes and the safe operations of the nuclear reactors there.

— Laura Eggertson, Ottawa, Ont.

CMAJ 2013. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.109-4447