

Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health Founding Statement

February 12, 2001

1. Preamble:

The bulk of Canadian adult life is occupied by work. Thus, disabilities and illnesses linked to working activities can have a serious impact, both on the individual and on Canadian society as a whole. Health Canada has estimated the annual cost for loss of productive time from short and long-term disability and early mortality to be over \$44 billion (Health Canada, Economic burden of illness in Canada, 1993). Estimates from other sources suggest that about half this is directly related to illness and injury associated with work.

The nature of work has changed dramatically in recent decades and new approaches to maintaining and promoting wellness for Canadians in the workforce are needed. The physical and emotional stresses of work and changes in the organization of work have joined chemical and biological agents as subjects requiring urgent research and policy attention.

Research on health and wellness related to work is carried out at the micro and macro levels, from basic biomedical research on toxic mechanisms of chemical, biological, and physical agents to studies focusing on the organization and management of work and its impact on health. Research on prevention and rehabilitation encompasses disciplines from engineering, management, ergonomics, law, economics, psychology and other social sciences, as well as the more traditional health disciplines.

In short, research on work-related health, safety, and wellness includes investigations of the complete range of social and physical environments in which we lead our working lives, and the evaluation of interventions to prevent or reduce the ill effects of work on health. Yet, work-related health research and researchers do not have a high profile in Canada and are not currently represented at the national level.

The Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health was founded in Montreal on January 12, 2001 to address this omission by providing a forum for interchange between researchers and by advocating, on the national level, for strategies to prevent work-related illnesses and to promote research related to work and health.

2. Mission:

To enhance and promote research on work health, safety, and well being in Canada and to advocate for research that fosters a better understanding of how work and work environments may be altered to improve the health, safety, and well-being of Canadians.

3. Goals:

3.1 to advocate for occupational health research in Canada

- to increase the profile of occupational health research in the eyes of funding organizations, government ministries, and other agencies
- to increase awareness of the importance of research among 'stakeholders' and the public
- to facilitate transfer of research knowledge to users
- to advocate for policies that facilitate occupational health research (e.g., regarding access to workplaces, privacy legislation, etc.)
- to develop, and advocate for, specific research programs and resources, especially those that would benefit from national initiatives (e.g., multi-centre studies, national hazard or disease surveillance or prevention programs), including those not directly related to compensation issues
- to advocate for prevention and rehabilitation activities (nationally and provincially)

3.2 to represent the community of occupational health researchers

- to advocate for resources and support needed to train, attract, and retain researchers in the field
- to facilitate interactions with relevant CIHR institutes and represent occupational health to CIHR Institutes
- to facilitate interprovincial and international collaborations
- to facilitate communication between researchers and policy makers, practitioners, professional associations, and workplace parties

3.3 facilitate collegial and scholarly links among occupational health researchers

- to facilitate communication and collaboration among Canadian researchers in this field
- to provide a forum for scholarly and collegial contact among researchers
- to encourage new researchers in fields related to work and health

4. Membership:

Membership in the association is open to anyone who identifies him/herself as a work and health researcher in Canada. Members will be asked to complete an application form that includes a description of their research activities.

5. Organizational Structure:

The association is being established with co-chairs, a steering committee, members, and working groups established as needed to address specific issues. Decisions will be made by simple majority of the members who cast a vote. Non-voting "institutional memberships" will be available for institutions or group affiliates (for purposes of sponsorship).

Steering Committee role :

- a) to act as spokespeople for the Association, although it is expected that all members will be able to represent and promote work and health research.
- b) to coordinate activities of the Association
- c) to communicate with the working groups

Steering committee members

Nicola Cherry, U. Alberta; Patrick Loisel, U. Sherbrooke, *co-chairs*
Stephen Bornstein, Memorial University; Susan Kennedy, UBC; Harry Shannon,
McMaster University

6. *Initial Working Groups*

6.1 Website, Inventory, Communications

Purpose: to set up a web site, develop mailing lists, take on other communications aspects of the Association

Initial members: Bruce Case, McGill University; Paul Demers, UBC; Susan Kennedy, UBC; Guy Perrault, IRSST

6.2 National Meeting

Purpose: to work with the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) to hold a meeting of researchers in November 2001, coinciding with the AWCBC meeting

Initial members: Katherine Lippel, UQAM; Bob Norman, U. Waterloo; Jean Yves Savoie, IRSST; Harry Shannon, McMaster University

6.3 Funding

Purpose: to raise money to fund activities of the Association - both administrative aspects and scientific exchanges / projects

Initial members: Stephen Bornstein, Memorial University; Karen Messing, UQAM; Sylvie Montreuil, U.Laval

6.4 Priorities

- a) to determine specific objectives of the Association and establish priorities among them;
- b) to propose a process by which national priorities for occupational health research may be identified and resources put into place so these priorities can be realised (e.g. development of research personnel, identification of areas of research, establishment of interprovincial programmes, activities, etc.)
- c) to review needs identified by agencies and organisations that represent interested parties in health and safety and articulate research priorities reflecting

some of these expressed needs (e.g. WCBs, employer and worker health and safety associations, injured worker groups, etc)

Initial members: Nicola Cherry, U. Alberta; Joan Eakin, U. Toronto; Mark Goldberg, McGill University; Patrick Loisel, U. Sherbrooke; Cam Mustard, Institute for Work and Health; Jack Siemiatycki, U. Quebec; Susan Stock, Institut national de santé publique du Québec

7. Future governance of the association

The Association was founded by an Organizing Committee made up of researchers in occupational health from across Canada (listed below) who volunteered to foster the development of research on work health, safety and well being as a national priority. The steering committee will propose to the present organizing committee a democratic way for future renewal of the governing committees that will originate from the whole membership of the Association.

8. Organizing Committee:

Kristen Aronson, Community Health and Epidemiology, Queen's University
Chantal Brisson, Hôpital du Saint-Sacrement, U. Laval
Stephen Bornstein, Centre for Applied Health Research, Memorial University
Bruce Case, Dept of Pathology, McGill University
Nicola Cherry, Occupational Health Program, U. Alberta
Joan Eakin, Public Health Science, U. Toronto
Paul Demers, School of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, UBC
Mark Goldberg, Dept of Medicine, McGill University
Susan Kennedy, School of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, UBC
Niels Koehncke, Centre for Agricultural Medicine, Saskatoon
Dan Krewski, Epidemiology and Community Medicine, U. Ottawa
Katherine Lippel, Département des sciences juridiques, UQAM
Patrick Loisel, Work Rehabilitation, U. Sherbrooke
Karen Messing, CINBIOSE, Department of Biological Sciences, UQAM
Sylvie Montreuil, Chaire en gestion de la santé et de la sécurité du travail dans les organisations, U. Laval
Cam Mustard, Institute for Work and Health, Toronto
Bob Norman, Dept of Kinesiology, U. Waterloo
Guy Perrault, IRSST, Quebec
Jean Yves Savoie, IRSST, Quebec
Jack Siemiatycki, Institut Armand-Frappier, U. Quebec
Harry Shannon, Occupational Health & Environmental Medicine, McMaster University
Susan Stock, Institut national de santé publique du Québec