

Workers' Compensation Board – Alberta's

Research Grants Program Guide

*Program information, application
tips & FAQs*

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Program information

Introduction

WCB-Alberta's Research Program collaborates with the local research community to find solutions for workers' compensation issues, develop research in the areas of work-related injuries and illnesses and improve the administration of injury compensation systems.

The program enhances the relationship between our organization and the scientific, academic and medical research communities. Our Research Program facilitates the development and application of knowledge in practical ways that benefit the operation of Alberta's workers' compensation system.

Our goal is to foster, support and promote research excellence in workers' compensation issues by:

- Developing research capacity in Alberta in disciplines pertaining to workers' compensation.
- Promoting research initiatives of strategic benefit to the workers' compensation system in Alberta and our stakeholders.
- Increasing and expanding current knowledge or promoting the use of existing knowledge in ways that benefit Alberta's workers' compensation system and stakeholders.

Research priorities

Our Research Program provides support to high-quality scientific and scholarly research projects that address the most pressing issues facing the workers' compensation system in Alberta and beyond.

Our overarching research priorities include:

- Obtaining optimal clinical outcomes and return-to-work outcomes for injured workers.
- Improving the efficacy, efficiency and fairness of claims management and the workers' compensation system.

General areas of research that may be considered are listed [on our website](#). This is not an exhaustive list, and other areas of inquiry may also be considered for funding or other support, at the discretion of WCB-Alberta's Research Committee.

In addition to these general priorities, we may request research proposals to address specific priority areas of interest. Priority topics may change over time, so it's best to consult our website for the most up-to-date information.

Funding grants are made available to researchers from a broad spectrum of disciplines, including but not limited to medical science, economics, law, epidemiology, population health, rehabilitation, general sciences and social sciences.

How to apply for funding

Typically, we will issue a request for proposals once per calendar year. Requests for proposals are posted in on the [Research Program section of our website](#).

Annual research grants competition funding

Letter of intent (LOI)

Researchers interested in pursuing grant opportunities will submit an LOI to WCB-Alberta's Research Committee. An LOI lets us know you're interested in requesting funding support from WCB. The LOI application form is available on our website during the formal competition process, often early each calendar year.

Before submitting your LOI, you may wish to informally discuss your ideas with our Research Program Coordinator. This consultation may help identify related projects or materials and prospective research partners. It may also help to determine if your application is a good fit for our funding program.

After you submit your LOI, our Research Committee will assess whether the plan outlined in your LOI meets the goals and general criteria of WCB's research priorities and assess the project alongside other applications received. If your project passes this initial screening review, and the Committee feels that it may be a good fit, you'll be invited to take the next step and submit a full, detailed proposal. Unsuccessful applicants at the LOI stage will be notified by the research program coordinator as soon as possible.

Notes:

- *You may be asked to consider revising some aspects of your project plan or to provide clarifications when drafting the full proposal.*
- *An invitation to submit a full research proposal does not guarantee final acceptance. Not all proposals will be accepted.*

Full proposal

If we invite you to submit a full proposal, you'll receive a full research proposal template to complete and submit for final review by our Research Committee. A deadline for this will be communicated to you directly. Please attach all supporting material and relevant appendices to your full proposal submission (e.g., letters of support and partnership, copies of survey instruments, measurement tools, clinical protocols, ethics and biohazard/biosafety certificates, curricula vitae).

Notes:

- *You may be asked to consider revising some aspects of your project plan or to provide clarifications before a final funding determination can be made.*
- *An invitation to submit a full research proposal does not guarantee final acceptance. Not all proposals will be accepted.*

Other funding

WCB's Research Program prioritizes funding for proposals received during our annual request for proposals application period early each year. However, we may accept requests for research funding (in the form of a concept outline) outside of this competition period on a limited basis. A concept outline is a brief, high-level synopsis of a problem or issue to explore. The synopsis should provide the Research Committee with sufficient information to assess the proposal with respect to WCB's research goals and priorities.

If you intend to submit a concept outline for consideration, we suggest you first discuss your ideas with our research program coordinator, who can advise you on whether the proposed research is a good fit for our funding program, help you refine your questions, and advise whether there is available funding at the time of your application. We can also provide a template, if desired.

The Research Committee will review your concept outline. If the proposal is of interest and if it meets the goals and general criteria outlined in WCB's research priorities, the committee will ask you to submit additional project details for consideration. Feedback from the Research Committee will allow you to determine the level of interest and support for the project.

Notes:

- *You may be asked to consider revising some aspects of your project plan or to provide clarifications.*
- *An invitation to submit additional project details does not guarantee final acceptance. Not all funding proposals will be accepted.*

Eligibility criteria for funding

Who can apply for research funding?

Any researchers within Canada may apply for WCB's research funding, but grants are most commonly awarded to Alberta-based researchers. However, we will consider out-of-province proposals, multi-jurisdictional proposals, or proposals where out-of-province researchers are collaborating with Albertan researchers if the focus is a high priority for and relevant to our organization and stakeholders. We cannot support researchers outside of Canada.

The committee will also consider co-funding research that is supported by other organizations, including occupational health and safety institutes or workers' compensation agencies. All projects are subject to the same budgetary parameters and review process.

We encourage collaboration amongst various parties and researchers. Where advisable, the committee may suggest possible research partnerships in the early stages of your proposal development.

Please see 'Application tips' and 'Frequently asked questions (FAQ)' sections of this document for specific guidance on eligible project expenses.

What projects are considered?

We favour research projects that are relevant and practical for Alberta and focus particularly on compensation, disability management and return-to-work issues. Structured reviews or consolidation of scientific literature or case law may also be considered.

Proposals must be consistent with our program goals and the research priorities listed [on our website](#) and you must articulate the benefit and relevance of your research project to WCB-Alberta. Applicants must demonstrate that their research objectives have not been achieved elsewhere or cannot be met more efficiently or appropriately through other funding sources.

We encourage diversity in projects and your project's team members. Project team members can include those with expertise in clinical medicine, epidemiology, population health, rehabilitation, general sciences, law, economics, social sciences and other disciplines related to your research project's area of study.

How are projects judged?

Each proposal's merits are judged on a case-by-case basis with special attention given to the potential significance of your project's findings. Your project should provide practical outcomes for WCB-Alberta, those we serve, and to whom we are accountable.

We're particularly interested in creative, well organized and systematic proposals that add to current knowledge or use existing knowledge in new and innovative ways.

When evaluating your project proposal, we will look for:

- Relevance of the problem to WCB-Alberta and to our research priorities.
- Probability of demonstrating a meaningful effect.
- Potential impacts of the project outcomes (e.g., improve/reduce costs, reduce disability duration, etc.)
- Probability of your research outcomes translating into practice or policy in Alberta.
- Appropriateness and thoroughness of your methodology
- Attention to equity and diversity considerations throughout the life of the project.
- Qualifications, experience and capability of the research team.
- Feasibility of the research work plan.
- Timeline in which your research can be accomplished.
- Appropriateness of the budget request and any attempts to secure project co-funding.

We reserve the right to be selective in the number, type and nature of projects we fund.

What funding is available for each project?

We do not have set maximum or minimum amounts of funding per project. Both smaller projects (under \$10,000) and larger projects (\$60,000+) can be accommodated. Based on recent competitions, an average grant is approximately \$40,000. Each project will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Researchers have the option to apply for partial funding (e.g., first year funding only, or support for imaging costs only, etc.). You're welcome to reapply in subsequent grant competitions using the same project plan with the understanding that we are under no obligation to fund subsequent years or additional project costs if partial funding was previously awarded.



Research funding is always conditional upon and subject to availability of research funds.

Our funding program will disburse the total grant amount in the first year of a project, typically to an institution's Research Services Office (or equivalent) for financial management. They are responsible for maintaining any specified disbursement schedules along the life of the project. **Project funding must begin – and be disbursed – in the calendar year of award; we cannot defer acceptance to a later calendar year.**

Co-funding is encouraged. Funding is not provided where it simply replaces funds which may be otherwise available from another source or where funding is more appropriately sought elsewhere.

Contracts require successful applicants to inform the Research Committee, in writing, of any other funding obtained to support the same research initiative, including the source and amount.

We do not cover indirect or overhead costs related to research grant administration. Research funds also cannot be used to cover expenses incurred prior to the proposal's final approval date from the Research Committee.

After the completion of a funded research project, researchers are obliged to return any unspent funds from their grant to WCB-Alberta.

What are the methodology and project management requirements?

Applicants must demonstrate sufficient subject matter expertise to competently complete the project. Proposed methodologies must be technically sound. Applicants must also demonstrate the necessary project management skills to control and be accountable for all aspects of their plan, including financial control.

We expect that equity, diversity, and inclusion considerations will be designed into the life of the proposed project, in an appropriate manner.

We reserve the right to monitor or audit all approved initiatives with penalties for non-compliance or mismanagement including possible termination of support for projects that are not progressing in a satisfactory manner. Should your application for funding be successful, please expect to provide brief quarterly project updates to WCB-Alberta's research program for the entire duration of the award.

Are there project timeline requirements?

Our funding is flexible; we do not have set start or end dates for funding and only specify that the start date is within the calendar year of award. We are willing to consider funding timelines proposed by researchers on a case-by-case basis, per project. The average timeline for our funded research projects is two years.

Will WCB provide data? If so, what type of data can be requested?

We're usually restricted to providing aggregate, anonymous data. However, in exceptional circumstances where researchers can demonstrate that they require access to personally identifiable data, and where WCB-Alberta agrees to provide such access for our mutual benefit, the researcher must sign a research confidentiality agreement as specified by Section 42 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*.

Our FOIP office and the Research Committee must approve the provision of personally identifiable data before any data is released. No personally identifiable data will be released until the research confidentiality agreement is signed.

The research agreement states that researchers shall not use information provided to them to directly contact workers or employers.

Upon request, and within reasonable limits, a WCB technical resource can be made available to you for consultation on database issues and to assist with WCB data extraction, should this be approved.

Assistance with WCB data is provided at the discretion of the research committee and is subject to reasonable limits on our employees' time and workload commitments.

Does WCB require an ethics review and approval for research projects?

Yes. Unless we have specifically dispensed with ethical approval requirement, we will not approve a proposal unless appropriate ethical approval is obtained from the university host institution or, for non-university projects, another recognized authority. Common exceptions to this requirement include projects that involve systematic literature reviews or environmental literature scans.

It is the principal investigator's responsibility to ensure an appropriate ethical review is received and that a copy of the approval is forwarded to us prior to the start of your project.

Research teams should obtain the required ethics approval or ensure the process is underway before submitting their proposals for review. Our Research Committee may accept a project pending ethics approval; however, all approvals must be completed before any funds are released.

All research proposals must adhere to Canadian ethical standards for research involving human subjects, as well as our own [disclosure policy \(WCB policy 01-02, part II, application 2\)](#). See the [University of Alberta](#) and [University of Calgary](#) websites for more information on their ethics review processes.

If your application is selected

If your project is selected for funding, we will draw up a research contract that will need to be reviewed, approved, and executed before funding can be disbursed (note: funding MUST be disbursed in the calendar year of award and cannot be deferred to a later calendar year). You will be required to provide quarterly updates throughout the duration of your project and supply a final report at the conclusion of your study.

We post a project summary for each successful research grant proposal [on our website](#). Quarterly progress results and the final research reports will be made available to WCB-Alberta employees.

Contact information

WCB-Alberta Research Program
Attn: Research program coordinator
P.O. Box 2415
9925 - 107 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 2S5

Telephone: 780-498-4816

E-mail: research@wcb.ab.ca

Application tips

The following tips will help you complete your letter of intent application form. For answers to general questions about the grants program itself, please refer to the FAQ section below.

If you have any questions that are not addressed here or in the FAQ section, please email us at research@wcb.ab.ca.

Drafting your letter of intent

Contact information

Current contact information must be included for the applicant(s). The primary contact person for the research project may be one of the investigators or may be another individual (e.g., a research coordinator).

1. Project purpose

State a clear definition of your research purpose here. Include your research theme and goal with an explanation of the need for the project and expected benefits. Describe how the project fits with [WCB's identified research priorities](#) or our general research agenda.

Please include a brief statement on why your initiative is a high priority for Alberta's workers and employers and explain how it aligns with WCB-Alberta's vision of *a safe, healthy and strong Alberta*.

2. Research objectives and outcomes

Outline your major research objectives. Provide clear, concise statements about the anticipated outcomes of your proposed research and how these anticipated outcomes will reduce the impact of workplace illness and injury on Albertans. Explain whether or how your research will add to existing knowledge or create value. Please include a brief statement regarding possible targets and strategies for sharing research findings once your project is complete.

3. Methodology

Describe the approach you plan to take to conduct your research. Provide details as to the assessment instruments, surveys, questionnaires, blinding techniques and/or statistical methods you will use. Describe how the study population will be selected. For randomized studies, provide justification for the sample size and the expected power of the results. Provide an approximate timeline for the proposed research.

4. Diversity considerations

Please explain how this project will account for diversity in participants, including variations in sex and/or gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, Indigenous perspectives, and other factors. Diversity should be considered in each stage of your research, including the design, methodology, analysis, and results sharing. If diversity is not considered in your project design, please explain this decision. In addition, please explore or consider the diversity of your research team or investigator(s).

For guidance, you may consider consulting resources from the [Canadian Institutes of Health Research \(CIHR\)](#) on how to integrate sex and/or gender in health research.

5. Data requirements and sources

Specify the data elements you require, why you require this data and how you plan to gather it. Also describe any safeguards you will use to protect sensitive data. Be as specific as possible about the data required and the sources. If you require data from WCB-Alberta, explain what data is required and why the project cannot be accomplished without it. The WCB Research Program cannot guarantee the availability of all required data, and cannot guarantee that we will have the capacity to consult on/assist with data gathering or analysis.

Please note that WCB data is usually restricted to the provision of aggregate, anonymous data only. All data provided is subject to the protection and disclosure provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act* and our own [disclosure policy](#), at minimum.

6. Supporting organizations and/or individuals

Please include the names, addresses and telephone numbers or email addresses of all organizations or individuals who recognize and support the need for this research. Please attach a signed letter of support for all organizations or individuals identified in this section.

7. Estimated project costs

Submit all estimated costs for the project with as much detail as possible. If applicable, describe how costs could be shared with an additional funding source.

8. Signatures

Provide the names and contact information for all investigators on the project. The applicant(s) and the head(s) of the sponsoring organization(s), if applicable, must sign and date the completed letter of intent. Please see the FAQ section of this document for examples of who may be considered an authorized officer of a sponsoring institution/organization and for acceptable signature types.

Attachments

Attach curricula vitae (CVs) for all investigators. We will accept a CV, short CV, resume or biosketch in any legible format, provided it offers relevant background information about an individual and their qualifications.

Other information, such as letters of support from an individual or organization, or survey instruments, should also be attached.

Please include an appropriately formatted citation/reference list if works are referenced in the body of your application. We will accept citation/reference lists in any common academic formatting style. The list may appear at the end of the application or in parts throughout the application, as appropriate.

Submissions

Email your letter of intent proposal to research@wcb.ab.ca and address it to:

WCB-Alberta Research Program
Attn: Research program coordinator

Please ensure you receive confirmation that we received your submission. If you have not received written confirmation within one business day of submission, please contact the Research Program at the email address above. Overly large file sizes are to be avoided, if possible.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

General application questions

Is there a word limit/page limit or any other such specifications for the letter of intent?

No. Due to the variety of research proposals we receive, we do not place any length requirements or limits on your letter of intent proposal. In the past, successful applications have varied greatly in length, with an average length of four to five pages, not including attachments. Please make sure you include enough information to provide our decision-making body with a clear picture of the proposed research, regardless of the resulting proposal length.

Are there restrictions on who can be the principal investigator listed on a project?

Typically, as the funding is administered by a university's Research Services Office (or equivalent), the principal investigator should be someone who is able to establish and maintain an account with this Office. The rules on this may vary by institution and it's wise to check your Research Services Office's rules before applying. If this is not the way funding will be managed for your particular project, then the principal investigator designation can be applied more flexibly (e.g., if funds are managed via a private corporation).

Can a principal investigator submit more than one letter of intent in any given competition? Is there a limit to how many applications any individual can submit?

You can certainly submit more than one application if you're involved in multiple research projects that require funding. There is no limit to how many you can submit per competition cycle. Each application will be evaluated on its own merits by the review panel.

Do you require a hard copy of the proposal?

No. An electronic submission is sufficient.

Funding questions

Are there any restrictions on what funding can be used for?

We cannot cover indirect or overhead costs for research grant administration. Directly research-related line items are always considered. Requesting funding to be used:

- as salary support (e.g., for graduate students),
- for travel expenses for research-related purposes or the dissemination of research results,
- for conference registration costs at conferences where the research will be presented, or
- for open-access publication fees

is acceptable if appropriate and costs are within reason, and the expenses are necessary for the project's successful completion and/or results communication.

The most economical method of travel should be chosen. Funds are not to be used for entertainment or hospitality purposes at any time.

Compensation for research participants is also a potentially eligible expense. However, compensation offered to a participant must have a symbolic value only. It must not constitute an incentive for a person to take part in research when it can reasonably be believed that the person would have refused to do so without the compensation offered. (As an example, chances to be selected for a gift card prize would be preferred over a set amount of compensation per participant.)

Notwithstanding the above, WCB's Research Committee will evaluate all proposed budgets on a case-by-case basis and expect you to make reasonable requests for funding, in line with governing institutional policies and ethical guidelines. We reserve the right to question the funding requested, and to request revisions to proposed budgets in projects that are considered for funding.

I'm not sure yet if I'll have co-funding for this project. What should I say in my application?

No problem! Please indicate any co-funding you have applied for (or intend to apply for) at this stage. Of course, if you have already secured co-funding, please include this information. If your co-funding applications are successful, please let us know in writing as soon as possible.

Sponsor and signature questions (section 8)

Who might be considered an authorized officer of a sponsoring institution/organization?

Authorizes officers of a sponsoring organization may include representatives from the Research Services Office at an institution, an academic departmental representative such as a dean or chair, a grants officer, or a director/manager/CEO of a private corporation, as determined by the content of the research proposed and the institutional affiliation of the investigators.

What are the signature requirements?

We will accept PDF signatures, typed signatures, e-signatures, secure e-signatures or scanned handwritten signatures. We consider all of these to carry the same legal weight as a pen-and-ink signature.

Review and evaluation questions

What happens after WCB receives a proposal? And who evaluates it?

First, you should expect to receive confirmation that your submission was received within one business day. If this doesn't occur, please contact the research program coordinator.

WCB-Alberta's Research Committee will review your proposal alongside all others received in each grant cycle. This committee consists of individuals who are experienced in, and knowledgeable about, current research practices in the areas of interest indicated. The committee is broadly composed, and members have varying areas of expertise within the workers' compensation system.

When drafting your proposal, don't assume all reviewers are subject matter experts in your particular area of research. Proposals are evaluated by the committee and judged on overall quality, relevance to our organization and our goals, potential for impact of research findings, ability to fit within the current annual capacity of our funding program and relative merit to other research proposals received.

What is the approximate timeline for review?

Reviews are typically conducted within six to eight weeks of the application deadline. Once reviews are

complete, the research program coordinator will communicate all decisions (via email) as soon as possible.

What happens after I submit my application?

If we invite you submit a full proposal, the research program coordinator will provide a template to complete at that time and a deadline for submission, which typically falls four to five weeks after the full proposal invitation. Being invited to submit a full proposal does not guarantee funding support.

The Research Committee again evaluates full proposals using similar (but expanded) criteria to that used to evaluate the letters of intent. Fine-tuning may still occur at this stage, and the Research Committee may ask for clarifications or feedback from researchers in an iterative process. Final funding decisions are often made in the summer or early fall. Funding is disbursed once a research agreement (contract) that is suitable to both parties has been drafted, reviewed, approved, and fully executed by both/all parties. **Project funding must begin – and be disbursed – in the year of award; we cannot defer acceptance to a later calendar year.**

Other questions

Please contact our research program coordinator if you have any additional questions that are not addressed in this document.

E-mail:

research@wcb.ab.ca

Telephone:

780-498-4816

Mailing address:

WCB-Alberta Research Program

Attn: Research program coordinator

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