

Centre for Urban Health Initiatives: Summary of Research Proposal

The environments where we “live, work and play throughout our lives” impact dramatically on health. Urban environments in particular pose unique health challenges. Recent advances in the physical, social, and health sciences have greatly increased understanding of urban environment-health relationships, and multidisciplinary research has begun *within* each science. However, there is a growing need for a core infrastructure to bring the sciences *together* to develop integrated research programs. Dedicated research initiatives that connect physical environments, social environments, and health in urban neighborhoods are needed to facilitate urban health improvement. Active partnerships that unite sectors and draw on the assets of urban communities would improve responsiveness to the distinct health challenges of urban settings.

We propose the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives (CUHI) to facilitate the development of high-quality, innovative, trans-disciplinary research that investigates the combined effects of local physical and social environments on the health of urban residents. CUHI will support scholarship in emerging areas by supporting the synthesis of existing literatures, promoting the development of innovative methodologies in pilot studies, and informing the design of neighborhood-level action strategies. The Centre will be home to an urban health data repository that will facilitate dissemination and the development of research projects.

CUHI will improve collaboration among diverse disciplines and sectors by actively connecting researchers, policy-makers, and community organizations with interests in environment-health links through regular communications and activities. It will draw together practitioners with expertise in diverse methods of investigation that range from community –based participatory research to sophisticated and highly technical laboratory studies. CUHI will provide training and mentoring for research on urban environment-health relationships by developing transdisciplinary curriculum and research opportunities at the undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate levels, funding inter-regional fellowships. It will also provide support to junior faculty through release and a formal mentoring program.

CUHI will build local capacity for intersectoral research on urban environment-health relationships by establishing a community/policy liaison, and by funding community research interns and community-based research. In addition, the Centre’s proposed governance structure ensures that stakeholders from the community, research and policy sectors across Canada can contribute to research project development and implementation, as well as to the circulation of research results. CUHI will develop and implement innovative approaches to knowledge exchange, including policy planning workshops, implication/application briefings, a community seminar series, research-related health promotion tools, and an active media program. Finally, CUHI will use the six-year funding envelope to move towards sustainability, to ensure that the Centre’s initiatives will continue well beyond the six-year framework.

CUHI adopts a cradle-to-grave approach to research that encourages longevity and impact by fostering local participation. The Centre for Urban Health Initiatives presents a unique convergence of disciplines, sectors, research track records, and outlooks, all unified by the goal of developing practical health interventions and policies for Canadian cities.