

**HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES, HEALTHY SOCIETIES:
THE INCREASING ROLE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**

Many thanks for inviting me to this promising event.

First, it gives me the chance to thank Sara Diamond for her multiple contributions to the world of social sciences and humanities research. Sara is a well-known champion in Ottawa and a compelling voice in the discussions about how we can best design Canada's future. At SSHRC, Sara has been a key figure, most recently serving as the Chair of our Awards Committee, and just a couple of weeks ago, she participated in Sagacitas, our awards celebration at the National Arts Centre, where we all had the chance to meet the outstanding students and scholars selected for these prestigious awards.

Cultural Knowledge and the Healthy Society is such a great title for this summit - and a great challenge for researchers. This title points to the key shift in our thinking about health that has characterized recent decades. The conceptual shift has put humanity back to centre stage - or, as I like to say, has put people in the picture.

We can trace this conceptual shift in the history of Canada's research granting agencies, but before I mention some highlights in that history, let me emphasize that the roots of our thinking today go back at least to the early 20th century.

For example, it is too often forgotten that Albert Einstein cautioned that "concern for man and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavours. Never forget this in the midst of your diagrams and equations." Although we would express that sentiment differently today, it took several decades to acknowledge that the real focus of our work must always be our humanity.

When the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council was created in 1977, for example, the founding legislation explicitly excluded NSERC from supporting medical research since that was considered the sole purview of the Medical Research Council that had been created a decade earlier.

Revealingly, when the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council was created in the same year, no similar stipulation was added. No one thought that it was needed; at that time, there were no conferences on cultural knowledge and the healthy society.

But twenty years later, the Kuhnian paradigm had indeed shifted, and the Medical Research Council of Canada was transformed into the Canadian Institutes for Health Research with an explicit mandate to support all disciplines in health research, not only the biomedical aspects of health, but indeed all aspects of health, including the promotion of healthy living.

And now under its president, Alain Beaudet, CIHR is determined to pursue this new mandate and has embarked on a new strategic plan that is holistic in its approach. He and his colleagues are now collaborating actively with us at SSHRC

to ensure that CIHR supports the top students and scholars in the social sciences and humanities who are focused on any aspect of health research.

In other words, and in keeping with the concept of discipline-based interdisciplinarity and with partnerships across the campus and community, SSHRC is collaborating with NSERC and CIHR to create effective ways to support innovative research efforts attuned to both the insights of scholars and the needs of Canadian society; I am delighted that all three federal granting agencies are here this week. We appreciate the patience and collaboration of the social sciences and humanities research community as we move forward with these changes, which I am convinced will result in more effective support to the kinds of research being discussed at this summit.

But let me emphasize to you that we know that we still have a great deal of work to do. Indeed, we all have a great deal of work to do, and we need to collaborate effectively and urgently. Like any deep conceptual change, the move from medicine to health is not linear, and indeed, this summit offers a splendid opportunity to explore key dimensions of how research and innovation can enhance our prospects for a truly healthy society.

The to-do list is indeed long. Almost 70 years ago, Winston Churchill quipped that “we shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us.” But we still have so much work to ensure a built environment that promotes, rather than undermines, healthy living.

We need more effective systems of prevention, of care. We need to engage and respond to users of health care - and not just to some, but to all, especially to the disadvantaged, at-risk communities, the marginalized. Our scholars have made clear that no cookie-cutter approach can be inclusive.

History says that the healthier we get, the more we spend on health care. However, we cannot conclude that more spending means more health. Rather, our researchers are making clear that how we imagine the challenge is key to determining how successfully we can confront it.

Over the decades, fire insurance premiums have steadily gone down. In many settings, fire has been significantly tamed through a complex constellation of technological and behavioural change.

The importance of behavioural change is complemented by the importance of conceptual change. Canadian scholars are now leading the world in bioethics. Most recently, Canadians developed the Stem Cell Charter that describes ethical principles for research that are now being considered world-class.

The burgeoning field of medical humanities is showing how poetry, fiction and non-fiction can help those who need healing, in some cases, far better than any other intervention. However, scholars and their research partners are only beginning to understand the ways in which literature can heal, can promote health, can underpin a healthy society.

At SSHRC, our support for researchers in the social sciences and humanities draws upon what we learned from our previous efforts to embrace the changing world of research, including the emerging fields of art and design.

Since the 1990s, the Major Collaborative Research Initiatives program has supported large-scale, multi-disciplinary research efforts to address complex questions that transcend institutional and disciplinary boundaries.

The Community-University Research Alliance program has connected researchers with local groups to tackle urgent problems affecting everyday life.

- 3 -

More recently, the International Opportunities Fund has enabled Canadian researchers to join global research networks that focus on key questions familiar in diverse societies.

And the Strategic Knowledge Clusters program has created a critical mass of research expertise by linking researchers in different institutions in keeping with the ambition of making the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

We have begun experimenting with programs such as Image, Text, Sound and Technology that have fostered pioneering efforts in new media, augmented reality, and cyberscholarship.

Most recently, we launched our Research Creation program, which attracted world-class proposals and has now begun producing stunning results that are themselves attracting world-class attention.

We are now building on such initiatives as we collaborate with the other research granting agencies, including CIHR's support for health research across all disciplines. Moreover, we are drawing on our experience as we renew our own program architecture with a view toward offering user-friendly, nimble programs that embrace imagination, creativity and innovation. In other words, we are working hard to embrace the changing world of research, and this event gives me the chance to learn more about what we can do to ensure that Canada and the world benefit from research and innovation in our efforts to make a successful, healthy 21st century.

When our children and grandchildren look back on our efforts to renew and increase Canada's long-standing investment in knowledge and talent, research and innovation, we hope that they will recognize us for having done our best to create, to design, a healthy society. Better understandings of how we can do so may not guarantee a peaceful, just, resilient, healthy future, but what else is more promising?

Remarks delivered by Dr. Chad Gaffield, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada at the opening of *Cultural Knowledge and the Healthy Society: A Research and Innovation Summit* at OCAD on Monday November 23, 2009.