

Canadian network invests in solutions for children and adolescents' brain health

Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN) and Brain Canada, in partnership with other Canadian organizations, are investing nearly \$6.5 million to advance solutions that improve the lives of children and youth with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

Approximately 10% of children and youth in Canada live with a neurodevelopmental disability such as autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. While early identification approaches, interventions and supports for families are being developed at a rapid pace, many do not reach those who need them most. KBHN exists to catalyze the implementation of tangible solutions for children and families.

Brain Canada supports research across all areas of brain health and is committed to advancing projects that improve the lives of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities and their families.

To further the network's mission, KBHN, with the support of Brain Canada, launched the inaugural [Innovation and Implementation Programs](#) competition to fund the growth of [promising initiatives](#) in neurodevelopmental disabilities.

"Since 2024, we have shifted our focus on expanding access to programs, services and technologies that directly benefit thousands of children in Canada and worldwide," said KBHN CEO Geoff Pradella. "A significant step in moving towards implementation, spread and scale of practical solutions is funding projects that align with our mission and cultivating partnerships to support this goal."

A leading national convenor of those who support and advance brain research, Brain Canada is pleased to partner with KBHN on this initiative.

"By investing in research focused on early intervention and family-centered care, we are ensuring that the latest scientific discoveries lead to real-world impact," said Dr. Viviane Poupon, President and CEO of Brain Canada.

One of the projects funded is KidsAction Coaching

KidsAction is an evidence-informed coaching approach. We designed it to support children with disabilities in community physical activity programs. Our partners are Indigenous dance leaders in Northern BC. We will make a plan together to embed KidsAction into their dance programs. Together, we can make sure physical

activity programs meet the needs of each child. These dance programs also offer a way for children to connect to culture.

Our goals are:

To implement KAC within at least 2 community recreation programs

1. To journey with families and community partners to measure the impact of the work
2. To share back our findings and develop a sustainability plan for Northern BC;
3. To apply this learning to scale-up plans outside BC

KidsAction has valued Indigenous ways of knowing from the start. We partnered with Indigenous organizations and community members to co-design the approach. Our work centres cultural safety, while we learn to decolonize our research. By building trust and relationships, we aim to bring communities together.

Moving science to action

The KBHN Innovation and Implementation Programs are made possible through the support of the [Strategic Science Fund](#). Under the mandate of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, KBHN is advancing initiatives to help ensure that all children with neurodevelopmental disabilities live their best lives.

Supporting science-driven solutions reflects the federal government's commitment to improving health and well-being. The rigorous and merit-based process for awarding the Strategic Science Fund to organizations, including KBHN, ensures that Canada remains a leader in innovation and new technologies, according to a [news release](#) announcing the results.

KBHN's call for proposals, backed by an investment of over \$2 million, attracted 28 strong submissions from across the country. Following a competitive review process, KBHN awarded funding to [transformative projects](#), matched by nearly \$6.5 million in combined investments from Canadian businesses, institutions, philanthropy, and provincial governments to support children with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

An independent Programs Advisory Committee with expertise spanning academia, lived experience, clinical practice, and business evaluated the proposals.

"Including individuals with lived experience as equal members in the review process, and at all levels of the planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation processes, is critical to support implementation-ready, high-impact work," said Michelle Wan, KBHN committee member and mother of a child with medical complexities.

The successfully funded projects are collaborating with organizations in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Yukon.

“We are very excited to move forward with the project and partner teams. The committee received high-calibre proposals that reflect a broad range of expertise and innovation, which made it challenging to narrow down the ones to be funded within this call,” said KBHN Chief Scientist Dr. Jennifer Zwicker, who also holds the Canada Research Chair in Disability Policy for Children and Youth. “KBHN remains committed to leading initiatives with partner organizations that support the scale and spread of interventions and innovations to help more children and their families.”

Through its latest investment, alongside organizational partners, KBHN will extend the reach of innovations, programs, and services to benefit more children and youth with neurodevelopmental disabilities in Canada and beyond.

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About Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN)

KBHN is a Canada-wide network that invests in and supports the spread, scale, implementation and expansion of access to proven solutions for children with neurodevelopmental disabilities and their families. Since 2009, KBHN has partnered with communities, industries, foundations, investors, governments and not-for-profit organizations to improve early identification of neurodevelopmental disabilities, effective interventions, and family support. KBHN’s vision is for all children to enjoy a good quality of life, participate in every aspect of society, and reach their full potential.

About Brain Canada

Brain Canada plays a unique and invaluable role as a national convener of those who support and advance brain research. A greater understanding of how the brain works contributes to the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and cure of disorders of the brain, ultimately improving the health outcomes of people in Canada and around the world.

Support from Brain Canada is made possible by the Canada Brain Research Fund (CBRF), an innovative arrangement between the Government of Canada (through Health Canada) and Brain Canada. The CBRF increases Canadians’ support for brain research and expands the philanthropic space for funding brain research to achieve maximum impact.

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