



THE SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING
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November 23, 2006

Mr. Geoff Hynes
Consultation on the Access to Research Outputs Policy
Canadian Institutes of Health Research
160 Elgin Street, 9th Floor
Address Locator 4809A
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0W9
Canada

Dear Mr. Hynes:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Canadian Institutes of Health Research "Draft Policy of Access to Research Outputs," circulated in October. I am writing on behalf of SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), an international alliance of academic and research libraries, including the libraries of 17 leading universities in Canada and the Canadian Association of Research Libraries. We have been at the forefront of advocacy for public access to research funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health and other U.S. Government agencies and are among the founders of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access.

Having responded on May 15, 2006 to your earlier request for comments, we are pleased that such a forward-looking and well-considered draft has emerged from the public consultation process. The draft policy recognizes CIHR's responsibility as a public institution and acknowledges key realities of today's scientific environment, including: the practicality of freely sharing research results, the increasing complexity of the challenges faced by science and society, the need for interdisciplinary approaches to addressing these challenges, the growing need for scientific communication processes and norms that support new research techniques, and the increasingly global nature of scientific research.

Our response to the draft policy, outlined below, focuses on peer-reviewed journal publications, with which SPARC's experience is most extensive. However, we do want to note our strong endorsement of the broader CIHR objectives with respect to sharing other research outputs, particularly data. As science becomes increasingly data-driven, the need to ensure broad, timely, and persistent access to this material rises in importance. We feel it is

particularly notable that the CIHR calls for grant holders to provide high-quality metadata to ensure effective future sharing of data and datasets.

We support the notion of a requirement for CIHR funding recipients to make peer-reviewed articles stemming from their research openly available online. Although we believe an embargo on public access of up to six months is less than ideal for the advancement of science, it is a compromise between the overarching societal interests at stake and the need to ensure research continues to be vetted and filtered. However, we *strongly* oppose any delay in providing public access that is beyond six months and we urge that you consider indicating your intention to reduce the embargo period in the future, as further evidence supports the wisdom of such a move.

There are three areas in your October 2006 draft to which we recommend potential refinements:

- The draft policy states that the “CIHR requires grant and award holders to *make every effort* to ensure that their peer-reviewed journal publications are freely available.” We believe that the policy should simply require grant holders to comply, and that the use of the term “make every effort to ensure” leaves the CIHR vulnerable to the same type of compliance problems faced by the U.S. National Institutes of Health’s voluntary policy.
- The requirement that articles be deposited in an “open archive initiative [OAI] compliant digital archive” is too narrow a prescription since, literally, it speaks only to the accessibility of metadata. We believe the policy should specify that qualified archives or institutional repositories must provide: 1) *interoperability* via the use of standards or protocols (e.g., the OAI metadata harvesting protocol) that allow applications to interact with heterogeneous repositories in an efficient and consistent manner; 2) persistent *free online access*; and 3) *long-term preservation* of digital files.
- The draft policy’s “second option” for delivering free access to articles – under which authors either publish in an open access journal or a journal that allows open archiving by authors – does not directly address the three requirements outlined above. CIHR policy should specify that articles must be deposited immediately upon publication in an open archive, but offer the flexibility of allowing the grant or award recipient to perform the deposit herself or to require the journal (or another agent) to make the deposit on her behalf and in compliance with CIHR requirements.

Additionally, until journal publishers revise their publishing agreements with authors to recognize the necessity of open archiving – as we believe they will ultimately do in response to demand – there is a need to provide authors with guidance on how to ensure their publisher agreements are not at odds with their obligation to CIHR. We urge CIHR to take account of this by undertaking educational efforts with its investigators and offering practical tools such as language to insert in or append to publishing agreements.

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We commend your goals as well as the overall draft policy, which is strong, timely and consistent with emerging practice internationally. We encourage you to implement a policy that effectively ensures the open sharing of CIHR research outputs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "H".

Heather Joseph
Executive Director, SPARC