The Canadian vaccinology landscape in a global context: Perspectives from different stakeholders

CAIRE Research Sponsor Advisory Board Meeting – November 20, 2023

Meeting Summary

This meeting presented opportunities for discussion on which factors make Canada an attractive place to undertake vaccine research, and what are the barriers that make Canada less competitive. Through having perspectives from different stakeholders, this meeting was able to explore how the Canadian landscape fares with other key countries/regions as well as to strategize potential solutions to minimize barriers.

Industry perspective on Canadian landscape

The aspects that make Canada an attractive place for clinical trials include the academic environment, clinical trials capability, government engagement, and advanced vaccine-related science. While Canada does have a global reputation as being a strong place to do clinical trials, the start-up phase continues to be a challenge, including the processes of contracting, ethics reviews, and frameworks. Companies will most likely go to sites that can recruit quickly and places that have a lower overhead fee as those seen in Canada. There is also a disconnect in what governments and public funders are ready to spend, and what big pharma has to spend to get something licensed.

Academia perspective on Canadian landscape

Areas for improvement within academia involve fostering better collaboration with regulators, researchers, and companies beyond the confines of a particular Clinical Trial Agreement (CTA), expediting academic Research Ethics Board (REB) review processes, and addressing delays associated with multicenter trials. Emerging trends in clinical trials is a shift towards digital records, a drive towards equity, inclusion and fairness, integration of trials into healthcare delivery, and applications of AI.

Biomanufacturing perspective on Canada landscape

Canada's Biomanufacturing and Life Sciences Strategy has five pillars, one of which is growing the sector and involves making investments in companies, and another is around clinical trials, which includes a new Clinical Trials Fund, administered by CIHR. Through the Strategy, have begun strengthening research and infrastructure to support coordination and improvements to the broader Canadian biomanufacturing and life sciences ecosystem, including the clinical trials ecosystem. There is a need for ongoing communication around what is being done in academia, industry and other parts of the ecosystem, then what in turn they can do to support the preparedness objective.

Solutions for challenges

For industry, it would be helpful to have a summary document that outlines what each network can do for research for industry. Also want greater liaison between academics to industry people, potentially need more specific roles in R&D. Having a template contract made from the academic institution may benefit timelines and add stability. Within institutions, can potentially allocate funds to support additional legal assistance for contract processing. Setting benchmark timelines within institutions for each stage of the process and having research ethics review reciprocity agreements between sites can also streamline efficiency. CAIRE could reach out to the ACT network to get involved, especially in bringing forwards the voice of industry.

In summary, increasing costs, delayed start-up times and REB approvals, and multicenter complexities were highlighted as key issues by representatives from industry and academia. Through the Biomanufacturing and Life Sciences Strategy, Canada has begun building a strong foundation to improve the environment.