



## Canadian Institutes for Health Research Health System Impact Fellowships Dignitas International

The CIHR's [Health System Impact \(HSI\) Fellowship program](#) is founded on partnerships with health system and related organizations that are committed to providing novel experiential learning opportunities for PhD graduates that accelerate their professional growth and career readiness.

[Dignitas International](#) is a Canadian medical and research organization with operations in Malawi and Northwestern Ontario. We innovate sustainable solutions to global health challenges, build resilient health systems, and advance the right to health for marginalized people and underserved communities.

**Dignitas Operating Model:** Dignitas' unique operating model, with its intersection of medical care, research and knowledge translation and exchange, enables us to engage at all levels of a health system. We strengthen frontline clinical capacity and develop innovative programs to address health systems barriers experienced by communities facing a high burden of disease and unequal access to services. Our research agenda builds from our medical programming by studying these gaps and barriers, tests interventions to improve patients' health, and informs our work to develop new models of care to improve patient outcomes. We utilize three main approaches in carrying out our research: operational, clinical and social science research. But we do not conduct research for research's sake. We design and carry out research that is policy and practice relevant. We utilize an integrated knowledge translation methodology to engage policymakers, practitioners and fellow researchers in the development of our research questions to ensure relevance, during implementation and once we have generated new evidence during dissemination to maximize impact and research uptake.

**Dignitas HSI Fellowships:** Dignitas aims to develop innovative solutions to emerging health challenges affecting indigenous communities in Canada and the Global South. We are seeking to host three HSI fellows for 12 or 24 months beginning in September 2017. This is an excellent opportunity for post-doctoral fellows to gain hands-on scientific and programmatic experience in developing innovative, sustainable solutions to global health challenges.

**Program of Work:** The HSI fellow(s) will have a range of opportunities to lead and/or contribute to the following depending on the focus of their placement: proposal and partnership development; design and test new program ideas; conceptualize and implement new areas of study; perform quantitative and qualitative data analysis; conduct systematic reviews and design and produce knowledge products (e.g. evidence briefs) for Canadian and international knowledge users; coordinate internal planning processes with staff and external processes with partners.

Prospective fellows may express interest in more than one of the three program areas, but should clearly possess subject matter expertise/experience in at least one of the following:

1. **Climate Change and Health**
2. **Non-Communicable Diseases in Underserved Populations**
3. **Indigenous-led Models of Care**

The first two program areas contribute to Dignitas' Impact Goal of *Developing Solutions to Emerging Health Challenges*. The third program area contributes to Dignitas' Impact Goal of *Developing New Models of Care to Improve the Health Indigenous Peoples* living in remote communities in Canada, which focuses on the development and expansion of our [Indigenous Health Partners Program](#).

### **Program Area 1: Climate Change and Health**

A growing body of evidence examines the relationship between the causes and effects of climate change, an increasing burden of chronic diseases and infectious diseases, and the social determinants of health. Due to this negative confluence of factors, climate change disproportionately impacts low-income, rural and remote populations experiencing high rates of disease. Dignitas has an important role to play in supporting health system policymakers, managers and frontline staff to prepare for emerging health challenges, such as climate change, that will significantly impact populations where we work.

Dignitas will launch a feasibility study to explore climate change and health with the aim of identifying a strategic niche for Dignitas in the field and informing the design of a pilot initiative. The study will determine how Dignitas can best work with partners to strengthen health system preparedness and response to climate change with a focus on addressing the needs and priorities of Indigenous and underserved populations that are at increased risk to the impacts of climate change due to their location, relationship to the land, health, gender, socio-economic status and other related social determinants. This study will advance a "multidirectional" strategy by applying a common but iterative and exploratory framework to both our work in Canada and overseas, enabling international knowledge exchange, while allowing for customization reflecting the distinct contexts in which our programs operate.

### **Program Area 2: Non-Communicable Diseases in Underserved Populations**

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are on the rise in almost every region of the globe. There is growing recognition that within high-income countries, such as Canada, there are populations that experience disproportionately high rates of NCD-related morbidity and mortality and have limited access to relevant health services. These include Indigenous peoples, underserved populations living in rural and remote communities and other marginalized groups. Existing sub-national, national and international frameworks do not adequately capture health disparities among diverse populations and related health care experiences. As a result, health inequities within countries and common challenges across low-, middle- and high-income countries are often masked, and opportunities to exchange knowledge on evidence-based solutions are lost.

As new NCD policies and programs are formulated in Canada and around the world, there is an opportunity to include populations experiencing high rates of NCDs and unequal access to health services in these processes. Meaningful engagement with target groups is critical to designing models of care that are accessible and culturally appropriate. Dignitas' vision is to build a body of evidence that drives equity-focused NCD policy and practice based on international best practice and knowledge exchange. We have developed a network of health leaders from Canada, South America and Africa - Knowledge Translation Platform for Equity-focused Health Evidence and Research (KT-PEER) – that is committed to this goal. Working with our partners, we will develop and disseminate high-impact research and other KT products focused on models of care that promote prevention, earlier diagnosis, and better treatment of NCDs for marginalized people and underserved communities.

### **Program Area 3: Indigenous-led Models of Care**

Remote First Nation communities in Northwestern Ontario experience a very high burden of diabetes, which is linked to other serious conditions. These communities face unique barriers to accessing quality health care including limited or no road access to hospitals and specialists, inadequate numbers of community-based health care staff and a lack of culturally safe care to meet community needs. In response to this critical health issue, Dignitas partnered with the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority

(SLFNHA) to launch a Community Health Worker (CHW) [pilot program](#) to improve community-based diabetes care. Using customized training tools and quality improvement methods, we are training and mentoring CHWs to provide critical care, carry out support tasks and bridge the health care gaps that often put people living with diabetes at risk of developing serious complications. As Dignitas supports SLFNHA to strengthen and grow this CHW program, we will deepen this model of care to include mental wellness and self-management support for diabetes patients, integrate cultural practices with diabetes health promotion and education, and explore other diabetes-related chronic conditions.

Dignitas will also explore new geographies and programmatic areas that reflect community health priorities and enable us to support the development of Indigenous-led models of care. We will implement a program strategy to: i) partner with Indigenous organizations and communities to develop, implement and evaluate customized health interventions; ii) develop knowledge translation and exchange strategies to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge users to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making; and iii) support the development of Indigenous-led chronic disease strategies with scientific evidence and relevant local and international best practice learning.

**Desired Competencies for HSI Fellowship:**

- Graduate-level training and work experience
- Subject matter expertise related to one or more of the impact goals;
- Training or background in implementation and/or evaluation science, and knowledge translation and exchange;
- Experience with using qualitative and/or quantitative research methods;
- Experience working in global health or low-resource settings;
- Experience or exposure to working in the non-profit sector;
- Experience or demonstrated commitment to advancing equitable, inclusive and culturally safe health care;
- Proven ability to work in cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary settings;
- Strong desire to learn and innovate.

**Supervisor(s):** Successful fellows will be mentored and supported to design and test the next wave of novel ideas for programs that respond to current and emerging health challenges in Canada and the Global South. Fellows will be supervised by senior program staff and scientists, and assigned based on program area.

**Location and Duration:** Dignitas International's headquarter office is in Toronto. Fellowships are 12 or 24 months with an ideal start date of September 1, 2017. Dignitas is well positioned to offer fellows a unique opportunity to develop Canadian-based programming, which will also have application to Dignitas' work in Malawi and other global health settings. If relevant, fellows may have the opportunity to visit Dignitas' Malawi Program.

**How to Apply:** For more information please review the [Eligibility](#) and [How to Apply](#) sections of the funding opportunity. Applicants interested in exploring a HSI Fellowship with Dignitas International must contact Emmay Mah, Director, Programs and Policy at [e.mah@dignitasinternational.org](mailto:e.mah@dignitasinternational.org) no later than **March 27, 2017**. We encourage individuals who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis to apply.