

Good morning everyone.

Thank you for joining us today.

I'm Patricia Seaman, some of you may recognize me as the Director of Finance and Operations at the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation. I want to welcome you to the third NBHRF knowledge mobilization webinar.

As you may know, the NBHRF provides millions of dollars in the form of grants and salary awards to support New Brunswick health researchers and students each year. These funds are provided through the NBHRF's programs and its research partnerships. During a previous webinar, we reviewed our current open application programs and walked through some questions and answers. Today, we are going to look to the future and discuss the future directions of NB Health Research.

Before we get started, we do have some housekeeping.

First, please note this session is being recorded and will be available on the website later and hopefully will be there by next week. Also, we do want to hear from you and get your questions. We are going to answer them at the end of the webinar. So please type them in with the Q&A function.

Aujourd'hui nous parlons en anglais, mais vous pouvez posez vos questions en français. On va faire une transcription en français qui va être disponible sur notre site web le semaine prochaine. We are going to be speaking in English today, but we are going to make it available through a transcription in French next week on our website.

So let's get started! There have been a lot of rumours out there. A lot of people are asking about mergers and we want to hear your opinion. Should NBHRF merge with one or more other organizations? I'm going to put up a poll right away and get your feedback. Your options are:

- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, but only if it increases opportunities in health research
- Maybe, I'm not sure
- No

We have about 30 attendees here. We've heard from a quite a few of you already. We are getting closer to that 30 marks. There's a few of you left to vote! Once we get closer to 30, I'm going to close the poll. Two of you out there haven't voted, there's your last chance!

Okay. I'm going to share the results with everyone. One person is Yes, absolutely. The majority of people are Yes, but only if it increases opportunities in health research. A few are Maybe, I'm not sure. And one that is an absolute No. I'm going to stop sharing those results and get back to the webinar itself. So thank you everyone for answering.

Joining me today is NBHRF's Director of health research, Leah Carr and NBSPRN's Executive Director, Karina Leblanc. Good morning Leah and Karina.

We're going to kick it off by talking about that elephant in the room. Leah, I know you've heard the rumours before, because I have, that NBHRF is going to merge with NBIF. Can you comment on this?

Leah: Oh, well, I suppose I could! I think most of us are probably aware that the provincial government since they came into power have been pursuing an agenda of improving the effectiveness and efficiencies of pretty well every aspect of what the government is involved in, in the province. In that

regard, they have put together a working group to explore the research and innovation sector. The target of that review is to end up with a single point of entry for researchers, so for any support that the researchers are trying to obtain. That means that the merger with NBHRF and NBIF is something that needs to be explored. And it is being explored. Discussions have started and are ongoing at the Board level right now.

Patricia: When we talk about mergers and you mentioned NBIF, there are other organizations that are in that space, the research and innovation space, in New Brunswick. What other research organizations are involved in health research in New Brunswick?

Leah: I'll just back up a bit here, just to remind everybody of the mission for NBHRF. We exist to promote, coordinate and support all aspects of the health research enterprise and related innovation in New Brunswick. This includes actual financial support, funding of research projects. We obviously work very closely with the institutions and the researchers at those institutions who actually do health research. Mostly those are postsecondary institutions, the universities and the community colleges, but it also includes the Regional Health Authorities, because there are physicians and clinicians there that also conduct research. There's a few independent organization in the province that also conduct research, like ACRI, the Atlantic Cancer Research Institute, so we work closely with them as well.

There's at least one, actually at least two, other organizations in the province that are similar to NBHRF in their mission to support research, either including or not including financial support. One of those is the New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network, or NBSPRN. They support the social sciences and humanities research sector.

I want to throw one more thing in here, sort of along this line. There's something else going on right now in the province that supports the idea of the sustainable, more encompassing, health research enterprise in the province. You know, a lot of research, not necessarily specifically health, certainly does have an impact on, and can extend to, include the health of the people of New Brunswick. So you kind of have to keep an open mind a bit about exactly what we're talking about here. We're almost talking about all types of research. UNB is hosting a webinar on the future for health care in New Brunswick, a sustainable future. That again supports this whole idea of something more encompassing, something more comprehensive.

Health care is a lot of things. Obviously it's when you go and visit your doctor and they provide you with whatever help you need, or when you go to the hospital, or when you go to a support program. But research is also a part of health care. Sustainable research is where all the things that they do to provide health care to us come from. The comprehensive and the more encompassing landscape is something that a number of folks are thinking about here now.

Patricia: Yes, I agree with that statement. When we look at the history of research, we talk about institutions and we talk about other entities, and it's almost like little silos. And the push right now in most things in life is everything is getting more integrated. So looking at it with an integrated approach. And one of the ways that we are looking at, is by involving other groups in that research area.

Which is why we invited Karina to be here today. She is the Executive Director of NBSPRN. For those of you who may not know her, I thought it would be important for her to give us background on NBSPRN, its mandate and its role with health research.

Karina: Good morning. So nice to be here. Thanks Patricia and Leah for inviting me to this chat. Bonjour tout le monde, c'est un vrai plaisir d'être parmi vous ce matin.

I'll give you a bit of context around the organization and then talk about where we see ourselves in this discussion that we are talking about the future of health care and health research.

NB SPRN was established about a dozen years ago. It was a vision that came from Andy Scott when he noticed that one of the challenges that government was facing was a significant reduction in policy positions within government. So the civil service was shrinking at the time and a lot of that capacity was being eliminated within government. As a result, the ability to leverage evidence-based decision making was being weakened. So he believed, and it's still true to this day, that the capacity of our academic communities, of our postsecondary institutions, to produce the evidence to help government make informed decisions for policy and programming is something that we needed to strengthen and that could be a core competency in New Brunswick.

So the idea was to build NBSPRN as a conduit between the research community across the province and government, so that we could line up priorities in both sides. So a research agenda that supported government priorities, and government working in partnership with our academic capacity. And so that's why the network came to fruition, and it functioned for about 10 years or so (or maybe a little less than that) as a network. It was really designed to connect people, to host and convene conversations between those stakeholder groups.

We had the research policy forums, where we would bring research community members together to talk about relevant and prioritized research. To Leah's point, more specifically in the social sciences and humanities domain. That has really been our cornerstone, to advocate for that group of the research community.

We hosted GovMaker over several years, which was an Open Government Forum to be able to create more transparency in government, more collaboration between government departments and other stakeholder groups such as the academic community but also community groups and the private sector. We were a convener of dialogue. We also helped broad research communities and research teams build applications for funding in their domains. But we were never a funding agency.

Until a few years ago, where we realized that in order to really advance the social sciences and humanities research agenda in the province, the way that the health research community and the science and technology research community were being supported by NBHRF and NBIF, was to establish a provincial pool of funding specifically for applied research in the social science and humanities. And we did that in partnership with NBIF. So we are talking today about multiple organizations and how we can work better together. NBIF had the robust infrastructure to do funding, which we as an organization never had before. But we had the subject-matter expertise and the relationships with the social science and humanities research community. The partnership made a lot of sense. We built on both of our strengths, and we launched the Social Innovation Research Fund a couple of years ago. We've had three rounds of research funding since then, and we are in the process of launching the 4th round in the coming months. We are moving more toward this idea of collaborative research funding as a network, rather than just convening dialogue and bringing together players through the network, and supporting grant applications.

We are also (we'll talk a bit about this as we talk about the future) a partner with the Pond Deshpande Center at UNB in a program called New Lab, which is a social innovation. It is designed to take that evidence and put it into impact. It's seeded by research, by other sorts of evidence. It's designed to build prototypes around possible solutions for very complex socio-economic problems. I won't get too deep into that now, but that's just an overview of where NB SPRN is sitting at now. So we are very much focused on applied social science and humanities research and the systemic change that it can impact by working across multiple stakeholder groups. So that's a mouthful!

Patricia: It really sounds like another field that expands into health research and we have some areas that cross over. One of the things that you talked about is the future, and I feel that this is really timely with the government announcing their federal budget. There seem to be a lot of funds going into bioinnovation, there were funds for clinical research, there were funds for biomechanical engineering. I'm not a researcher, I'm a background support person. So it seemed really exciting to see that we've come together to see where can we come together and be more collaborative. And the funds are flowing, it sounds like, on a federal level. Based on that, what are your views on the future of health research and research in general for the future?

Karina: That's a big question. I'll also preface this with I'm not a researcher either. I come at this much more from the systems change level and from a lens of applied research. So that just prefaces my thoughts here as those from the research community who have more of a pure research side lens, and that's not my lens. I don't dismiss it, but that's not an expertise that I have.

The budget is pretty exciting, if we get the budget passed. It's a huge investment in socio-economic infrastructure, across the sectors, whether it be education, health care, poverty reduction, racial justice. It touched on so many different aspects of civil society that most of us would like to see improvements in. What does that mean from a health research perspective? I'll answer that from the perspective of how can we separate health from everything else? It's not a silo unto itself. Health is education. Health is social justice. Health is food security.

You cannot take health and put it into a siloed box, and say we're going to focus on the research that only touches what we traditionally know as the health care system. I think my personal hope, and I think where we're going, and I think you both alluded to this, is these things are systemic, they're so interconnected. We need to approach problem-solving and addressing some of our more complex challenges from an interdisciplinary approach. It doesn't mean that we diminish the things that dive deeply into traditional health care and traditional health research. But I think we need to really focus on where are the intersections and where can we work better together so that we have a more complete offering in terms of the research capacity and our ability to convert that research capacity into impact.

I'm really excited about these merger talks and the idea of collaboration and bringing partners together because I really believe, and I've always said this, we are small, but our smallness gives us an advantage in that we are so closely connected to each other, by one degree of separation maybe, that it should be easier for us to connect and work together and access funding and to get decisions made and to solve complex problems. And then share those wins and that understanding and that knowledge with the rest of Canada or the rest of the world. I really think New Brunswick can really be a living lab where a lot of these riskier experiments should be taking place. Which means we should be taking more leaps of faith in terms of blending research agendas, connecting organizations together, learning from each other. NBIF is super strong in commercialisation of research. They have a whole venture capital arm that fuels startup companies working in tech. NBHRF has this deep, rich health research expertise that is their core competency. And NB SPRN has this policy lens that is deeply embedded in our DNA, and this social innovation lab systems thinking. Imagine the possibilities of bringing those pieces together in terms of having an end-to-end innovative approach for New Brunswick. We could start with the problem, we could access a deep pool of research capacity, generate the evidence, test drive it in a prototyping model, and then embed it in community, whether it's through venture or whether it's through programming and policy.

I'm going to stop there, because that's a lot!

Patricia: I think you hit the nail on the head with a lot of those ideas. I'm going to pass it over to Leah. I would like to hear your input on the future of health research and research in general?

Leah: I really don't know if I could say it any better than how Karina just did. I'll just add that I share her enthusiasm. I think there is a great future for not health research in a silo, but for research in general in this province. I say that not only because there has been a significant growth in health research and in the type of research that is more integrated that NB SPRN support in the province, but also because how what Karina started her comments with, the latest federal budget. And about how the pandemic itself has certainly brought this all to the forefront. The entire world has become aware of research and how it directly impacts health care and the health of everybody on the planet. So if there's ever going to be a better time do what we are thinking about here today and within this province, I don't think there is one. I think it's now.

Patricia: Based on that, you've mentioned a few things. And one of the things that I know because I'm in the background, is that we are looking at developing a strategic plan. For that, we are going to be asking our stakeholders and people in the audience here for their input. Leah, would you like to talk a bit about that, and some of the timelines and how that's moving forward.

Leah: Sure. Because you just said that, we are starting the process now, at this webinar. In the next couple of weeks, our stakeholders, which include I believe everybody on this session, you will receive a survey asking a number of questions and soliciting your input to the development of the next strategic plan. Over the summer, we'll try to hold a number of meetings with various stakeholder groups to expand upon that input and obtain future thoughts and additional details from everybody. The goal is to have the plan completed so that we can launch it at Health Research Week 2021. Health Research Week 2021 is, I think, the week of November 15, so hopefully we'll be able to meet that.

Patricia: That is a lofty goal! November is not that far away. Do we have any other programs that we might be doing to get more feedback, separate from just a survey.

Leah: Funnily enough, we've just made available a new program, that's called Research-related Support Fund. It's designed to assist in developing, formulating and conducting research by funding or partially funding (a lot of the time there are partners and additional funds obtained by the researcher) to do research-related things that don't necessarily fall within our other programs.

This is one of the ways that we are hoping to learn about whether or not there are any gaps, what they are, to be able to incorporate that into the development of the strategic plan, and hopefully some future programs to address those gaps.

Patricia: That's right! We don't know what we don't know. So going to our stakeholders and going to some of our audience here, getting your feedback is really important. That way, we can frame it for what serves best for our stakeholder, in order to really get everyone involved in a process that I think will then in the end have a great strategic plan and a way to move forward.

I'm going to now just ask if there are any other points that you wanted to make ladies, anything that we didn't cover today, maybe in the process of the strat plan, or where you see the future. After I get you guys to touch on those, I am going to relaunch the poll that we had earlier. So first Karina, do you have any additional points today? Leah, any final comments.

Leah: Just that with the launch of this process right now, it doesn't matter, you don't have to follow the formal communications about the strategic plan. We're here all the time, we certainly want to hear from you. So please feel free to reach out any time.

Patricia: That is fantastic Leah. I'm now going to relaunch that same poll we had at the beginning. We'd love to hear what you as stakeholders, as the attendees, feel. We are going back to that same question: Do you think that NBHRF should merge with one or more other organizations. The options are:

- Yes, absolutely (last time, we had one person say that)
- Yes, but only if it increases opportunities in health research (last time we had about 18 people say that)
- Maybe, I'm not sure (I can't remember how many people say that last time)
- And last time we did have someone say No

We've heard from 22 people so far, so there's about 10 people left to vote. We would love to get your input and your input and your feedback. Once we round it out in a couple more seconds here to give you an opportunity, I'm going to end the polling. I am going to end the polling now and I will share the results with everyone.

So this time, luckily enough, no one said No! We are going in the right direction. We still have somebody say Yes, absolutely, and the majority by far saying Yes, but only if it increases opportunities in health research.

We are going to go to questions now from the audience. You can type in your questions in the Q&A. We did receive one earlier. Someone had emailed in a question. Let me find it here.

So ladies, "Do you think New Brunswick should go in the direction of several other provinces, having one funding agency for all areas of research, not just health?" Karina, would you like to take that on first?

Karina: Sure, absolutely yes! Given our size, I think we should be looking at common entities, and not having single small entities representing small sectors. But also everything we said before. I think somebody put in a question in there about scaling. I think we are hitting the ceiling on being able to grow each of our individual organizations and part of that is because of the size of our province and our provincial mandate and scope. And also because now we are running into each other. We can't move the agenda forward without think about how to we create an interdisciplinary approach. That's a very longwinded approach, but yes, I agree – one funding entity.

Leah: Yes, absolutely, same as Karina. Part of the background on this question, that I am aware of anyways. Every province, except 2 in the country, have a health research funding organization, similar to ours. Four of those provinces have already gone the route of establishing funding entities for all areas of research. It started out as the health research funding organization, but it has moved in these four other provinces to a more all-encompassing organization. There's various reasons for why each province did that, but they pretty well have all realized increases or growth in the sectors that health touches, so not just one or the other, but a more integrated approach. And they have all realized benefits. They are different in each province, and some have had longer to measure what happened since establishing those organizations. But they generally are all happy with the fact that that's the route that they have taken.

Patricia: Ok, so for the questions from the audience today. The first question that I have here is: "What do you think are the gaps in health research today, and how would a merger help with this?"

Leah: I do have one – I don't know that it's a gap – but I do have one area of funding that applies to all areas of research, not just to health, but it has come to my attention because I'm in the area of health research business. It is how students are funded to do research. I think that is an area that is ripe for review and an overhaul to make it more understandable for all concerned, including the students themselves. There are many options open to them right now, from many different sources, and it's very difficult for them to navigate. So that's one, I don't know if you'd call it a gap, but it's one thing that could be significantly improved.

With regard to gaps, I'll just say what I said before, and Patricia what you just said: We don't know what we don't know. That's one of the reasons we are embarking on the strategic plan and the consultation process to find out.

Patricia: Absolutely! Karina, do you see gaps in the health research support today?

Karina: Again, I'll preface it I'm not an expert in that areas. I think we are underrepresented in terms of the federal dollars that we get into New Brunswick. Part of it is because we don't produce the kind of projects that attract those federal dollars the way maybe some of the bigger provinces do, because they have a different kind of capacity because of their size. So I really believe this idea of improved interdisciplinary approach and collaboration will allow us to hit above our weight and attract more of those dollars into the province. I think that is one of the benefits of working more closely together, or the concept of a merger, is better able to access federal dollars.

Patricia: Yes, and I'm really happy you touched on that. One of our key priorities is building capacity. We have programs that are built around that whole idea. You've applied for funding federally, you've received a funding score that you are fundable, but the funds still don't make it to New Brunswick. We do have programs that then can allow people to start those research programs, in order to then be able to apply later on for those federal dollars. And then build capacity in those areas. I'm really happy you touched on that. That's one thing that in health research I'm really proud of! We here at the health research foundation, that we've been able to use our dollars efficiently to create those capacity building programs. And it's something that could then be expanded to other areas.

We did create an impact report last year which was provided to the government, which outlines how we were able to do that. I find that really interesting, for a very big area.

So the next question: "What are the provinces doing for health research support?" Leah...

Leah: I think I already touched on the fact that all but two provinces have research funding organizations similar to ours. So they go through the same exercises as we do here. We all talk to one another on a regular basis as well. If somebody is having a challenge, or if somebody is having a success in something in particular, we all share that information.

The other thing that we do is maintain a very close relationship with the federal health research funder, that is the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR. But of course there are two other federal research funding organizations. One is NSERC and one is SSHRC. One for science, technology, engineering, math, and the other one for social sciences. The expansion of what we do here in New Brunswick is well supported. I think by doing that, we will only be stronger in terms of how we interact with the federal agencies, just as Karina mentioned. The merging of the current organizations, making the support for all research more encompassing in this province, is going to be a real benefit to pursuing this direction and achieving what Karina said in terms of punching more than our weight in terms of attracting federal dollars to New Brunswick.

Patricia: I did scroll through some the questions, and I'm going to go to ones that a specific person has submitted not anonymously. So we know who these ones are coming from. I really feel that if a person put their name to it, you should really give them priority. So from Kevin Englehart: "Some other organizations have a mandate established by the Government of New Brunswick that requires demonstrated return on investment in terms of economic and/or social impact. Health research does not always align with these criteria. Is it the intention to keep health research free of these criteria and allow a balance of fundamental and applied research?"

Karina: I hear you Kevin. This has been a conversation at NB SPRN for a long time too because we are trying to manage a social innovation agenda. In working with NBIF, we had a heavier requirement to impose economic impacts into the research that we were proposing through the NB Social Innovation Research Fund.

It has fundamentally changed the conversation for the social sciences and humanities researchers that we typically work with. And I would see the same being true across the board in the other disciplines as well.

Economic impact is so easy to measure where you are commercializing something, because there is a bottom line. But it's really hard to measure in all other scenarios. If you think about the health care system, or policymaking, or programming at the community level, we have not been good at figuring out how to measure the economic impacts. That being said, I believe it would be irresponsible for us not to look at innovation and research with an economic lens. Because for it to be viable and sustainable as a society we need to incorporate that aspect of it. But we need to get better at measuring it when it's not about bottom lines.

Every innovation we do, every advancement we make, should have a positive impact, whether it's on individual economic prosperity or communal economic prosperity. But we need to be able to measure it when it's not about profit.

I totally agree with you on that. That should be part of the conversation as we talk about a larger or merger entity or interdisciplinary approaches is measuring social impact as an economic indicator as well.

Leah: I'll just add that the whole idea of measuring the impact of health research is sort of an entity unto its own. There are many models, structures, methods and processes that are used not only across this country, not only at every single institution, but around the world to measure health research impact. I don't know that there is one in particular that is any better than any of the others. It just depends on the objectives that you are looking at in terms of what the impact of the research is.

I agree with Karina. The intent is to keep the balance there obviously, the fundamental and the applied certainly. Everything is required in order to move things forward. That's the intent for sure. How that actually happens will be part of the discussion. How we measure it, and how much we want to measure, that will be part of it too.

Patricia: Absolutely. And our mandate, which was established when we were established, is to coordinate, support and promote health research in New Brunswick. I just thought I would put that out there. So it's not economic driven, that is correct. But we were able to do an economic impact report with our ten-year impact report. We looked at the tax space, that when you are doing fundamental research, how many dollars go back to government. Some people just want to look at those numbers, it can be identified and created. And like Leah said, that is a whole field in and of itself. It would not be my strength, but there are people out there who know how to do that.

The next question with a name, from Valérie Bernardelle-Vaquais: "One of the key success factors, if not the first and only, of a research funding agency, is proximity for research and partners. Up to my knowledge, none of the existing ones (NBIF, NBHRF, NB SPRN, BioNB) have a representative in Moncton, and maybe not one either in Saint John, not to mention the northern area of the province. How would a centralized, merged agency deal with and solve this issue?" Would either one of you like to take that on?

Karina: I think the advent of the pandemic has shown us that we don't need to be physically collocated in order to create organizations. NB SPRN actually has representation in Moncton because we operate

our New Lab social innovation labs all across the province, so we do have staff in Moncton. But I agree with you a lot of the work historically has been centralized in Fredericton, partially because of proximity to government and ease of access to our primary funders and drivers of our agendas. But you are right, you can't do systemic level change if you're not operating in the corners of the province and representing the languages, the races, the cultures that represent and make up the map of New Brunswick. I think we've learned a lot in the last year about working together remotely, which mean there's no reason we can't have partnership, whether is be staff or collaborators, from all reaches of the province.

We also work with the research community and every postsecondary institution across the province, and I'm sure NBHRF is the same. Even though our staff itself is in Moncton and Fredericton in our case, our research collaborators come from all over.

Leah: I would echo what Karina said. The first thing that popped into my mind when I heard the question was that we work very closely with all the postsecondary institutions. Doesn't matter where they are located. We have excellent, very productive relationships with all the individual researchers.

Patricia: Yes, agreed! And when we are talking about proximity, NBHRF is growing and we are going to have a business development person. Our partnerships are often with organizations that are not within New Brunswick. We are looking at getting funds from other areas into our province. That is looking not only at New Brunswick as a small space, but expanding that to the entire country. It's an interesting dynamic right now as we grow.

Based on that, I'm going to grab another question: "Can NBHRF grow if it does not merge with NBIF? Isn't NBIF required for better research support?" Leah, would you like to take a crack at that one?

Leah: This would touch on all the different aspects of research, whether it's health or not, and the different kinds of research that occur. Karina referred to applied and basic research. All of those types of research are essential. So the answer to the last part of the question is yes, that is also required, what NBIF supports, that perhaps is along the continuum further down the line than what NBHRF supports. So everything is still required, no question about it.

If there is no merger or mergers, there is still obviously potential for NBHRF to grow. I think the desired goals of increasing federal funding to the province still exists, attracting more and more dollars from outside the province invested the province is still a desired goal and that is still something that an organization like this one will be working towards.

Karina: Can't speak for NBHRF, but from NB SPRN, obviously we are excited about opening up talks to create a larger organization. Mostly because I think we will be able to punch above our weight better together than apart. Lobbying and advocating for and accessing more funding is a lot easier together than separately.

That being said we also have a growth strategy if we remain independent. We are trying to grow the Social Innovation Research Fund, trying to create a larger pool of provincial research dollars focused on the social sciences and humanities, which does not exclude health research either. Not to step on anybody else's toes either, but because our mandate has a broad subject matter such as wellness and food security and other social challenges, it overlaps. We are trying to bring in money for health research in that capacity as well, but more from an applied policy perspective rather than a more traditional health care approach.

Our plan is to continue to grow and scale that Fund, and create a stronger connection between government priorities and needs and the capacity of our research community to deliver on that.

Patricia: I have two more questions. The first is: "Is there not a concern that health research funding might suffer in the prioritization of funding when one body makes funding decisions? How would prioritization decisions be made by this one organization?" Would one of you like to take a crack first?

So in my opinion, that discussion is further down the line. Karina...

Karina: That is so funny, each organization has the same question. My Board of Director is asking how we make sure the social sciences and humanities research agenda doesn't get assimilated into a larger science and tech or health research agenda. It's an important question for us to address. In any design of a merged organization or larger organization, you have to have representation. You have to have people with deep understanding and expertise in each of the disciplines and they become the champions so you don't end up with priorities that are leaning heavily on one side versus the other. I think that's really important because we need to advance all the agendas together.

I truly believe that 1+1+1 could equal 10, instead of the mindset of scarcity that we have now with individual, separate organization. You are right Patricia, that is for the future, but those are very important things to keep in consideration when we design what that could look like.

Patricia: Absolutely. Another question came in: "Who will be consulted as part of planning? Is it only VPs, etc. or can anyone who has attended conferences in the past?" So who are we defining as who is going to be consulted? They don't say for what, but my understanding would be either the strategic plan, which is an NBHRF strategic plan, potentially funnelled into a larger entity. We have some questions in our survey related to that. So who are we consulting on these types of discussions?

Leah: For the strategic plan, we are consulting our entire health research community. That essentially boils down to everybody who gets our newsletter. If there are folks missing from that list, we depends on others to tell us that. We will also work closely with all of the research institutions to make sure that they all get the opportunity. Is there anything else that I missed?

Patricia: No, I think you've touched on it there. For the first initial email to go out, which will include the survey, it will go to our entire e-newsletter list. So if you do not receive our newsletter, please sign up for it. There is a link on our Facebook page. If you don't follow us on Facebook, follow us on Facebook. This is how we will be giving information out, through social media. We will be consulting with VPs, but we want to hear from researchers. We want to hear from all stakeholder groups. It's not going to be small, closed discussions. It needs to be open for it to be successful.

Karina, would you like to touch on that?

Karina: Are we talking about who we would consult with from a merger perspective?

Patricia: Yes, I think so.

Karina: That's a really good question. I don't think that has been part of the discussion yet. Obviously merger questions come up at the governance level of organizations. So Boards of Directors are leading the discussions to know does this make sense, can we do this, are we going to do this kind of questions. Obviously, management inside each of the organizations become part of that consultative process. Merging doesn't tend to require a lot of external consultation.

However, that being said, co-designing a vision for the future, rather than just cobbling together a Frankenstein version of squishing organizations together, could we imagine if we started from scratch, leveraging all our institutional research experience and wisdom from the past and what we want to leverage for the future, could we imagine something better, bigger for New Brunswick. That could require, or should require, external consultation and engagement.

And with our work in social innovation labs. We do open calls for participation to be part of developing prototypes for solving problems. That's a possibility. I'm just throwing it out there as an idea. It's not something that we've even got to in terms of conversations. I think consulting and engagement should be there and open and available to those who want to participate.

Patricia: So the final question which sort of relates, which is nice. Karina, "How to you see NB SPRN network or forums helping health research?"

Karina: I can't separate things, in my mind we are all in this together. I think about the healthy aging event we worked on. NBIF, NBHRF and NB SPRN all participated a couple of years ago now. The idea of taking something like healthy aging, you can't just look at it from a pure healthcare perspective. There is the social aspect of aging in place, or helping manage any kind of changes to delivery or fall reduction. You think about the health aspect, but you think about the social aspect, and the economic aspect or the tech aspect, which is NBIF. I feel as though NB SPRN coming into the mix will allow us to apply for bigger, more impactful, broader projects, which means more funding and more money. As I mentioned, there is no silo, you can't put health care in a box. It spreads out socio-economically, and I think that that's the piece that we bring to it. To have bigger, broader, more interesting innovative research projects that catch the imagination of the funders and pours more money into this province. That is my lofty, utopian vision.

Patricia: I just realized that we just got more questions, but they were in the chat and not in the Q&A, so I'm just quickly running through. "I'm curious. Why is NBIF not represented in this meeting? Given that Karina and Leah are there, it seems a curious omission. NBIF has a strong economic impact focus, particularly relative to its national counterpart NSERC. I'm concerned that any merger would force the other two agencies to justify any grant with economic impact, rather than social or health impact. Can you speak to this concern?" Leah.

Leah: In deciding whether or not there will be funding providing to any certain project, obviously you need the application. For research, part of that process is the peer review process. A merger would not impact how peer review needs to be done for anything that is received, no matter what research areas it's in. All applications will have to go through the peer review process in order for funding decisions to be made. A merger won't impact that at all.

Depending upon the criteria of the funding program, various methods of peer review will need to be used. In some of them, maybe economic impact will be a factor, but certainly not in all of them.

Patricia: The next question, from Shelley Doucet. "Do you think merging would increase, decrease or have no impact on the amount of funding for health research?"

Leah: I think that Karina just answered that in her previous comment, about how expanding the focus and bringing other people to the table and increasing the expertise in other things, not just health, we would be able to attract funding from more than just the federal health funding agency. That will definitely increase how much is available for health research too.

Patricia: Agreed! I think creating efficiencies on an operational level, there can also be additional funds created just from that. And then if you expand further and you use our strengths to build capacity further. Take something like NB SPRN, you are able to have that integrated right into a government and into the functions that are there, it's really just leveraging the capabilities more efficiently.

Now, we have reached time. I'm going to give each of you, Leah and Karina, one moment to say a final comment, and then we will end our session.

Leah: Thanks to everybody for attending, thanks for your questions. I'm looking forward to your input on the merger discussion, on the expansion discussion and the future strategic plan.

Karina: A big thank you for having me on. Thank you to the participants for the thoughtful questions. I can sense in the question that there is a lot of thoughtfulness behind. Let's not jump into this and lose what we already have. Let's make sure this is a win-win-win going forward, and it adds funding and capability. I hear that and looking forward to continuing having these conversations both with our organizations and with our partners across the board. Thanks for having me.

Patricia: Thank you both. Thank you Karina for joining us today. Thanks you Leah. I'm very proud to say that I work at NBHRF and I find this a really exciting time. I think every day Leah hears me say: "It's so exiting!". Hopefully we will be continuing with that over the next year and get that excitement going with everyone. I look forward to seeing you again when we have our next webinar next month. Thank you very much. Bye now!