



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
Postdoctoral Fellows Office (PDFO)

Towards a minimum stipend for UBC Postdoctoral Fellows

**UBC Postdoctoral Fellows Office
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies**

The **Postdoctoral Fellows Office** (PDFO) within the **Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies** is the central unit supporting Postdoctoral Fellows appointed at UBC.

Authors

Dr. Mary De Vera, Associate Dean, Postdoctoral Fellows

Sarah Henderson, Coordinator, Postdoctoral Affairs

Dr. Michael Hunt, Dean *pro tem*

Hourik Khanlian, Senior Manager, Postdoctoral Affairs

Contributors

Laurie Milne, Postdoctoral Affairs Assistant

Achintyaa Sreenath, Student Assistant Postdoctoral Fellows Office

To cite this report: UBC Postdoctoral Fellows Office. (2025). Towards a minimum stipend for UBC Postdoctoral Fellows.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Background.....	6
<i>Financial landscape for UBC Postdoctoral Fellows.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Minimum Postdoctoral Fellow Stipend</i>	<i>6</i>
Consultations.....	7
<i>Objectives.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Process</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Key findings.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Recommendations.....	14
<i>Justification for implementing a Minimum Stipend Policy</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Considerations for implementing a Minimum Stipend Policy</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Bibliography.....	19

Executive Summary

Financial landscape for Postdoctoral Fellows at UBC

The financial challenges faced by UBC postdoctoral fellows were highlighted in the [UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey](#), conducted jointly by the UBC Postdoctoral Fellows Office (PDFO) and the Postdoctoral Association (PDA), and released in June 2024. Findings revealed that postdoctoral fellows in British Columbia, particularly in the Lower Mainland, face significant financial challenges. These challenges stem from the combination of relatively modest average stipends and the region's high cost of living, including steep housing expenses. UBC currently lacks a minimum postdoctoral stipend policy, in contrast with all other U15 Group of leading Canadian universities.

Consultation process

Between July and October 2024, a consultation process involving town halls and a follow-up survey was conducted with UBC postdoctoral fellows and faculty to gather input and perspectives on the report's first recommendation: implementing a **minimum stipend policy**.

Key findings

- **Support for a minimum stipend:** Both postdoctoral fellows and faculty largely agreed that a minimum stipend would improve equity, support recruitment and retention, and address living costs.
- **Considerations for implementing a minimum stipend policy:** Faculty highlighted challenges around funding limitations, which may affect their ability to support the recommended minimum stipend, especially within grant-funded research environments. They further emphasized the importance of a sufficient timeline for implementing such a policy.

Recommendations

We recommend a minimum stipend policy for UBC postdoctoral fellows with a staged implementation, starting in the range of \$50,000 - \$55,000 per annum for the first 12 months, increasing by fixed annual amounts as appropriate. We also recommend the implementation of an annual increase based on performance for postdoctoral fellows with stipends above a set threshold to offset inflation and ensure competitiveness. Our proposed staged annual increase to the minimum stipend aligns with the increase schedules of other U15 Group universities, such as the University of Calgary, University of Toronto, and McGill University.

Implementing a minimum stipend policy for postdoctoral fellows aligns with UBC's mission to equitably support its research community while addressing the financial challenges faced by postdoctoral fellows. Such a policy acknowledges their advanced qualifications and substantial contributions to UBC's research excellence while positioning UBC alongside leading Canadian universities. Furthermore, this initiative would enhance the well-being and productivity of postdoctoral fellows while solidifying UBC's reputation as a premier destination for promising young researchers.

Conclusion

Establishing a minimum stipend policy is essential to ensure that UBC remains a top-tier research institution and provides a clear message that the university is committed to recruiting, supporting, and retaining high-calibre research talent.

Background

Financial landscape for UBC Postdoctoral Fellows

Funding levels are a major concern for postdoctoral fellows, and UBC is no exception. In 2022, a survey was jointly administered by the UBC Postdoctoral Fellows Office (PDFO) and Postdoctoral Association (PDA) to UBC-appointed postdoctoral fellows to gather information on demographics and funding levels for postdoctoral fellows. The outcomes from this survey were featured in the recently published *UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey: Final Report*. Key findings were:

- The mean self-reported postdoctoral fellow income was **\$56,222** ± 11,338 (median: **\$55,000**), with a range from \$20,000 to \$92,000.
- There were **no identified systematic changes** to postdoctoral fellows' stipends based on appointment duration, with 53% of survey respondents reporting an increase and 41% reporting no change.
- Postdoctoral fellows faced **considerable financial struggles**, particularly due to high costs of housing and living in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

Additional details of these findings, along with other insights, can be found in the [full report](#).

Minimum Postdoctoral Fellow Stipend

The UBC Postdoctoral Fellows Policy ([Policy AP10](#)) is the governing policy for postdoctoral fellow appointments, compensation, and conditions.¹ It stipulates that determining a postdoctoral fellow employee's compensation requires consultation with the postdoctoral fellow and supervisor, followed by approval from the academic unit head. The policy states that postdoctoral fellows' compensation should reflect their relevant experience and responsibilities, but must, at a minimum, comply with the *BC Employment Standards Act* (i.e., minimum wage).

¹ University of British Columbia Board of Governors, "Policy AP10: Postdoctoral Fellows" (University of British Columbia, July 2019): https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2022/05/Postdoctoral-Fellows-Policy_AP10.pdf.

An environmental scan of publicly reported minimum funding amounts for postdoctoral fellows at the U15 Group of leading Canadian universities revealed that UBC is the only institution without a minimum funding policy for postdoctoral fellows (**Figure 1**).

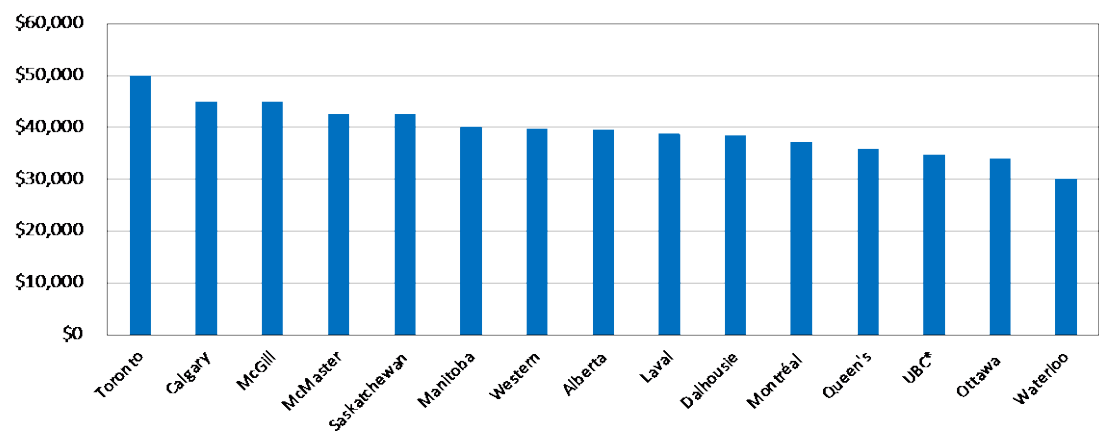


Figure 1. Comparison of U15 minimum stipends for postdocs
(*For UBC, no minimum stipend set through institutional policy; amount listed is minimum wage set by the British Columbia Employment Standards Act as at June 1, 2024)

Reviewing both the survey responses and the environmental scan led to the first of three report recommendations: to **implement an institutional minimum postdoctoral fellow stipend with a rising scale**. Thus, a commitment was made by the PDFO to begin consultations with key interest holders.

Consultations

Objectives

Following the release of the *UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey: Final Report* in June 2024, the PDFO initiated a consultative process with postdoctoral fellows and faculty throughout UBC. With the report serving as a catalyst, the primary objective of these consultations was to gather specific inputs and perspectives on the implementation of a minimum stipend policy.

Process

Town halls: Town halls with postdoctoral fellows and faculty at both UBC Vancouver and Okanagan served as the primary means of consultation, and were conducted between July and October 2024. The following were considered in the planning and conducting of the town halls:

- **Creating a safe space:** Separate town halls were held for postdoctoral fellows and faculty to facilitate participants' comfort in sharing information and perspectives. We did not record town halls. However, PDFO staff took notes during the town halls, which were subsequently used in qualitative summaries.
- **Facilitating participation:** In-person town halls were conducted at UBC-affiliated sites (i.e., BC Children's Hospital, Vancouver General Hospital) to facilitate the participation of postdoctoral fellows and faculty at these locations. We also held virtual town halls via Zoom to provide another means of access.

We held an additional virtual town hall with administrators responsible for appointing and onboarding postdoctoral fellows at their respective faculties/units. Town halls at UBC's Vancouver campus and affiliated sites were co-facilitated by *Dr. Mary De Vera (Associate Dean G+PS)* and *Hourik Khanlian (Senior Manager PDFO)*. Town halls at UBC's Okanagan campus were co-facilitated by *Dr. Mary De Vera, Dr. Margaret Reeves (Associate Dean College of Graduate Studies [COGS]), and Janie Bandringa (Postdoctoral Affairs Coordinator COGS)*. The timeline in **Figure 2** summarizes town halls conducted, which were attended by a total of **76 postdoctoral fellows** and **24 faculty members**. Additionally, we hosted an administrator-specific town hall.

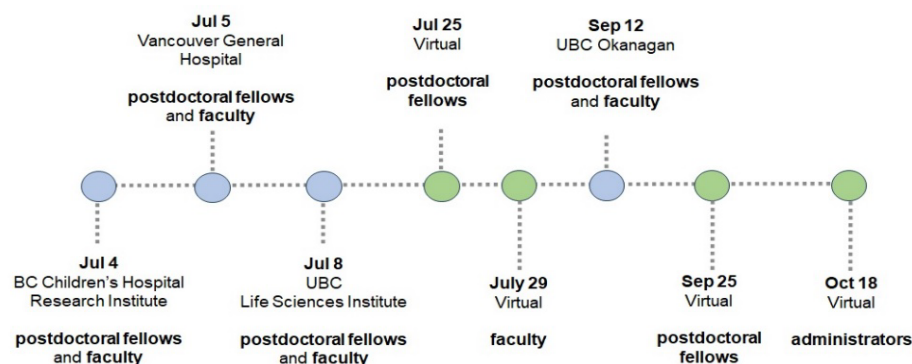


Figure 2. Timeline of 12 town halls held with postdoctoral fellows (6), faculty (5), and administrators (1) between July – October 2024
(In-person town halls are indicated in blue; Virtual town halls are indicated in green)

Survey: In addition to the town halls, a follow-up survey provided an opportunity for confidential feedback on implementing a minimum stipend policy and deciding an appropriate amount. The survey was created using Qualtrics, and attendees were provided with a secure link to access it after each town hall. The survey was also circulated to the wider UBC postdoc community from October 22 to November 4, 2024 via the PDFO’s weekly *News from the PDFO* e-newsletter and monthly *Postdoctoral Fellow Bulletin* administrator newsletter. The follow-up survey was completed by 11 faculty and 36 postdoctoral fellows who attended the town halls. An additional 64 postdoctoral fellows who did not attend the town halls also completed the survey. Please refer to **Appendix A (page 20)** for the survey and **Appendix B (page 23)** for detailed responses.

Key findings

What we heard from Postdoctoral Fellows

We identified two broad themes that captured postdoctoral fellows’ perspectives: strong and consistent support for a minimum stipend policy, as well as justification for its implementation; and considerations for implementing a minimum stipend policy.

There is strong and consistent support for a minimum stipend policy

Postdoctoral fellows shared that the current lack of a minimum stipend policy does not adequately reflect their contributions to research or the value of their work. Some postdoctoral fellows compared their stipends to minimum wage levels, highlighting the unfairness of being highly qualified (with doctoral-level degrees) yet receiving pay comparable to entry-level workers. Postdoctoral fellows also argued that a clearly defined minimum stipend is needed to avoid disparities, citing that some faculty members set unreasonably low stipends. Across both campuses, postdoctoral

*“[A minimum stipend would provide] Guaranteed adequate pay for all postdoctoral fellows so that being a postdoc is not only reserved for the most privileged who have some form of external support (partner, other funding, wealthy background, etc.).” –
Postdoctoral Fellow*

fellows emphasized that the minimum stipend must account for cost of living, particularly given the high cost of housing in Vancouver and Kelowna. This was corroborated by the follow-up survey: when asked on a five-point scale on the perceived usefulness of a minimum stipend, **73%** of postdoctoral fellow respondents indicated that this would be *extremely useful*, **22%** *very useful*, and **4%** *somewhat useful*.

We consistently heard that the **lack of negotiation opportunities** for starting stipends or stipend increases was a source of frustration among postdoctoral fellows. Some postdoctoral fellows noted that they had “*little room*” for negotiating their starting stipends. Many postdoctoral fellows shared that negotiating for stipend increases felt awkward and was influenced by the unequal power dynamics between them and their supervisor. Having an institutional minimum would alleviate some of these challenges.

Inadequate stipends were seen as a barrier to recruiting and retaining world-class talent and attracting new postdoctoral fellows. Participants compared their experiences with international counterparts, such as in Australia, where postdoctoral fellows receive better benefits and have better access to resources and protections, noting that postdoctoral fellows in Canada, and UBC specifically, are “*falling behind.*”

Throughout the town halls, postdoctoral fellows shared how financial stress from managing living expenses on limited stipends negatively affected their mental health, well-being, and research productivity. From the follow-up survey, respondents indicated that a competitive minimum stipend would positively impact their health and wellbeing, as postdoctoral fellows experience considerable stress due to the high costs of living – especially for rent and childcare – in the Lower Mainland. Several respondents further noted that improved financial security would improve research output by allowing postdoctoral fellows to focus more on their research and less on their precarious financial situations and the need to supplement their income with additional work.

“[A] positive outcome is to set a liveable minimum rather than agreeing on a bare minimum. If Postdoctoral Fellows know they don't need to be concerned about living expenses and looking for a second job, they could be way more productive and focused on research.” – Postdoctoral Fellow

Considerations for implementing a Minimum Stipend Policy

Some postdoctoral fellows suggested **benchmarking** a minimum stipend against Tri-Agency funding or market standards. There were also suggestions that the minimum stipend should increase with years of experience or be tied to performance evaluations, similar to how salaries are structured for other academic positions. Postdoctoral fellows also suggested the importance of regular reviews and adjustments to the minimum stipend to ensure it remains competitive over time. Postdoctoral fellows shared concerns

“Pls with less money will not able to take on Postdoctoral Fellows. However, if they cannot afford to pay a living wage, then they should not hire.” – Postdoctoral Fellow

about where the additional funding would come from when implementing a minimum stipend policy, with some suggesting that faculty may struggle to meet a proposed minimum stipend, citing examples of limited funding sources (e.g., NSERC Discovery Grant). Many agreed that a policy needs to balance competitive pay for postdoctoral fellows with funding constraints faced by faculty. Indeed, postdoctoral fellows identified **disparities** that exist in postdoctoral fellow compensation across different departments, Faculties, and funding sources. External grants amounts vary, which may lead to inequities for postdoctoral fellows doing similar work.

What we heard from faculty

Similar to postdoctoral fellows, we identified broad themes that captured faculty members’ perspectives: support for a minimum stipend policy, expected challenges, and potential considerations in implementing a minimum stipend policy.

There is faculty support for a Minimum Stipend Policy

Many faculty attendees supported the implementation of a minimum stipend and provided rationale behind it. Faculty indicated that a minimum stipend policy, set at a fair and livable amount, would help address the challenges posed by the high cost of living for postdoctoral fellows at UBC. They also indicated that implementing a university-wide minimum stipend would promote equity and consistency across faculties/units.

“[A minimum stipend] would create more diversity and equity in who applies - only those who are wealthy or have local family support can take postdoc positions at UBC.” – Faculty

A standardized minimum would provide a safeguard, ensuring that postdoctoral fellows can sustain themselves without undue financial strain. From the survey, faculty commented on the prospect of a stipend serving as a recruitment tool, with one respondent noting that the high cost of living can be prohibitive for promising researchers who do not have family financial support or a solid financial background. Faculty shared their understanding and awareness of the financial challenges faced by postdoctoral fellows and the factors contributing to these challenges. Faculty echoed postdoctoral fellows' concerns about the high housing costs in Vancouver and Kelowna, which are significant financial burdens that consume a large portion of postdoctoral fellows' incomes. Faculty, particularly those in Vancouver, also raised concerns about childcare costs for postdoctoral fellows with families, given the high expenses involved.

Expected challenges in implementing a minimum stipend policy

Faculty identified challenges with a minimum stipend policy, particularly regarding the feasibility of implementing it across all Faculties/units due to budget constraints. If a minimum stipend were set too high, it might exceed what faculty members can afford, potentially reducing available training opportunities for postdoctoral fellows. Additionally, there were concerns about the impact of raising postdoctoral fellow stipends on the ability to financially support graduate students, as faculty may struggle to balance funding between both groups. Faculty survey respondents noted that those with grants in progress may not have the funding available to accommodate a budget change, so a sudden or unexpected increase to postdoctoral fellow stipends could have a detrimental impact on faculty members unless bridge funding or other supports are made available by the University. Respondents also noted that setting a minimum stipend could impact the number of postdoctoral fellows they can recruit, which could, in turn, impact research productivity and output.

“There would undoubtedly be significantly fewer Postdoctoral Fellows as many people simply cannot afford it. The resulting decline in research productivity would negatively impact UBC faculty to be competitive for grant funding, reducing further their ability to pay for Postdoctoral Fellows in the future and decreasing the Tri-Council transfer payments to UBC, thus eroding research support at UBC.” –
Faculty

Faculty shared struggles with **fixed grant limits** (e.g., NSERC Discovery Grant), which are less able to cover both research project costs and postdoctoral fellow stipends, raising concerns about balancing the need for competitive stipends with limited Tri-Agency funding that does not account for higher stipends. Relatedly, faculty expressed concerns over stagnant research grant funding and its impact on their ability to pay competitive stipends. There was discussion about decoupling postdoctoral fellow stipends from faculty grants to reduce financial pressure on faculty, though others noted that faculty and external funding are integral to the stipend structure. Many felt that the current Canadian research funding model tends to focus on graduate students over postdoctoral fellows, adding to the difficulty.

Potential considerations when implementing a minimum stipend policy

Reflecting a key finding from the *UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey: Final Report*—that there is no systematic approach to adjusting postdoctoral fellow stipends—faculty discussed **annual increases**, with some indicating that they already implement modest yearly raises. Some suggested performance-based stipend increases but also noted the challenge of some postdoctoral fellows not being in roles long enough to justify such increases.

“We don't have magic money to make this happen; it will potentially take up to five years to be able to ask for larger budgets in grants (and, of course, we don't know what happens to them or their funding successes).”
– Faculty

Faculty also discussed the notion of **stipend scales** based on experience, citing experiences in other countries such as Australia and the US (e.g., National Research Service Awards stipend levels). It was suggested that such a tiered system would allow for flexibility and more equitable pay for postdoctoral fellows at different stages of their careers. However, it was cautioned that with such scales, some postdoctoral fellow stipends may approach entry-level faculty salaries, which could create tension.

In light of the challenges identified, we heard **calls for institutional support** from UBC to help manage the increased costs associated with implementing a minimum postdoctoral fellow stipend. Suggestions were made for UBC to consider providing targeted support for disciplines that may face challenges meeting minimum stipend requirements in order to prevent reductions in postdoctoral fellow positions and potential declines in research productivity. Several faculty respondents noted that it would likely take several years for faculty members with grants in progress to be able to afford higher stipends, especially for those with several postdoctoral fellows and graduate students. Some suggested that the University could counteract resistance from faculty members with lower research income by providing incentives like covering the cost of benefits or increasing teaching stipends.

Recommendations

Guided by insights and information from the consultation process and taking into account the current societal financial climate, to address financial hardship experienced by postdoctoral fellows we recommend a minimum stipend policy for all UBC postdoctoral fellows with a staged implementation: starting in the range of \$50,000 - \$55,000 per annum (annualized to 1.0 full time equivalent [FTE]) for the first 12 months, increasing by fixed annual amounts as appropriate. Our proposed staged annual increase to the minimum stipend is in line with the annual increase schedules for minimum stipends of other U15 institutions, including the University of Calgary, the University of Toronto, and McGill University.

We also recommend annual increases, based on performance, for postdoctoral fellows with stipends above pre-determined thresholds to offset inflation and ensure competitiveness. This recommendation is in line with what we heard during the consultations, with the majority of postdoctoral fellow (91%) and faculty (91%) respondents agreeing that stipends should be subject to an annual increase (**Appendix B, page 23**). Implementing annual performance-based increases would also be consistent with those provided to other University employees (e.g., through the AAPS merit program and CUPE 2950 step increases).

It is important to contextualize the recommended minimum stipend within the broader funding landscape for postdoctoral fellows in Canada, which has recently seen positive changes. In February 2024, the federal budget introduced new investments totaling \$825 million over five years, including an increase in the annual value of competitive Tri-Agency postdoctoral fellowships to \$70,000 starting in 2024-2025.² At the time of this writing, a minimum stipend of \$60,000 would equal the current stipend levels of other competitive fellowships such as the Michael Smith Health Research BC Research Trainee Award (\$60,000 plus a research/travel allowance of \$4,500),³ the UBC Killam Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (\$60,000), and the Mitacs Elevate Postdoctoral Fellowship (\$60,000).⁴

Justification for implementing a minimum stipend policy

Justification for establishing a minimum stipend policy is threefold: a competitive minimum stipend would help ensure that postdoctoral fellows are appropriately compensated for their significant contributions to the University's research enterprise; it would recognize the advanced education that postdoctoral fellows have achieved; and it would help to alleviate some of the financial stress experienced by postdoctoral fellows.

² Department of Finance Canada, "Budget 2024: Fairness for every generation." Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://budget.canada.ca/2024/home-accueil-en.html>.

³ Health Research BC, "Research trainee program," accessed November 8, 2024, <https://healthresearchbc.ca/fundingprogram/research-trainee-program/>.

⁴ Mitacs, "Elevate," accessed November 8, 2024, <https://www.mitacs.ca/our-programs/elevate-students-Postdoctoral Fellows/>.

Feedback from the *UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey: Final Report*, along with insights our consultative process on the report's first recommendation—to implement a minimum stipend policy for postdoctoral fellows—indicates that many postdoctoral fellows at UBC are facing financial difficulties. These findings of financial difficulties experienced by postdoctoral fellows at UBC are consistent with prior reports including:

- 2020 *Nature* survey⁵ of over 7,000 postdoctoral fellows across 93 countries reported that poor compensation is a key contributor to postdoctoral fellows' dissatisfaction with their positions.
- 2020 **Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars** (CAPS) National Postdoctoral Survey Report⁶ based on responses from 847 postdoctoral fellows at Canadian universities that revealed that postdoctoral incomes are insufficient to meet the cost of living in their respective cities, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and hardship.

"If UBC is not willing to raise the minimum stipend to a livable wage then [Postdoctoral Fellows] should be provided subsidized housing at UBC and access to UBC daycare at a subsidized rate. Other benefits need to be included to make the stipend a living wage, especially in Vancouver where rent is so high."
– **Postdoctoral Fellow**

Throughout the consultation process, the advocacy for a **living wage** for postdoctoral fellows was consistent. Defined as the *"hourly amount that someone needs to earn to meet their basic expenses [...] once government taxes, credits, deductions and subsidies are taken into account"*, the living wage calculation includes food, clothing, housing, phone and internet, transportation, childcare, parent's education, extended healthcare, and other expenses⁷ but does not factor in additional expenditures that postdoctoral fellows may face such as student loan repayments, RRSP or RESP contributions, or savings.⁸

⁵ Chris Woolston, "Postdoc Survey Reveals Disenchantment with Working Life," *Nature* 587, no. 7834 (November 18, 2020): pp. 505–8, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-03191-7>.

⁶ Joseph S. Sparling et al., "The 2020 Canadian National Postdoctoral Survey Report" (Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars / l'Association canadienne de Postdoctorantes et Postdoctorants, 2023), <http://capsacpp.ca/resources/publications/surveys/2020-national-postdoc-survey/>.

⁷ Living Wage BC, "Calculating the value of benefits," accessed November 6, 2024, https://www.livingwagebc.ca/living_wage_calculator.

⁸ Ibid, "Living Wages in BC and Canada," accessed November 20, 2024, https://www.livingwagebc.ca/living_wage_rates.

Living wage calculations also factor in benefits, which for eligible postdoctoral fellows are generally covered by UBC.⁹ The 2024 living wage for Metro Vancouver was calculated at **\$27.05**, a **5.3%** increase from 2023 and among the highest in Canada; based on a 40-hour workweek, this

“Had I known the financial stresses that it caused my family to move to and live in Vancouver while on postdoctoral salaries I would not have come to UBC. I cannot in good conscience recommend this position to potential future postdoctoral fellows, particularly those with children.” – Postdoctoral Fellow

is equivalent to an annual wage of **\$56,264**. For Kelowna, the 2024 living wage was calculated at **\$25.77**¹⁰ (a **4.8%** increase from 2023)¹¹ which would equate to an annual wage of **\$53,602**. Recognizing their significant education, as well as their needs related to family, housing, and future planning, it is fair and supportive to establish a stipend that meets or slightly surpasses amounts set by Living Wage Canada.

Considerations for implementing a minimum stipend policy

In developing a minimum stipend policy, considerations should include the following:

- Whether a minimum stipend policy would apply to **Postdoctoral Fellow Employees** (funded by the supervising faculty member) and/or **Postdoctoral Fellow Award Recipients** (individuals who hold a competitive fellowship from an external granting/sponsoring agency);¹²
- Whether the minimum stipend policy would be written into **Policy AP10** or into another policy;
- Whether the minimum stipend policy would apply only to postdoctoral fellows appointed after its implementation or to all postdoctoral fellows including those already at UBC at the time of implementation.

⁹ Living Wage BC, “Living Wages in BC and Canada,” accessed November 20, 2024, https://www.livingwagebc.ca/living_wage_rates.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Living Wage Canada, “Rates,” accessed October 29, 2024, <https://www.livingwage.ca/rates>.

¹² UBC Human Resources, “Postdoctoral fellows,” accessed November 8, 2024, <https://hr.ubc.ca/working-ubc/faculty-titles-ranks-and-descriptions/postdoctoral-fellows>.

Summary

As one of Canada's premier post-secondary institutions and a globally recognized leader in research excellence, UBC is committed to fostering an equitable and supportive environment for its academic community. Implementing a minimum postdoctoral fellow stipend not only upholds UBC's mission to support its researchers fairly but also addresses the pressing financial challenges faced by postdoctoral fellows. Implementing a minimum stipend policy would underscore UBC's dedication to attracting and retaining top talent by ensuring competitive, fair compensation that reflects the value of postdoctoral fellows' expertise and contributions to the university's world-class research.

*"If we're paid a living wage, then we can stop worrying about trying to survive in this expensive city. And perhaps it will stop us from thinking about quitting or getting a second job while doing [a] postdoc. There will then be more continuity in the research as well as our improvement in our research output. Well-compensated postdoc equals higher research output, which is ultimately more beneficial for the PI and UBC." – **Postdoctoral Fellow***

Bibliography

- Department of Finance Canada. "Budget 2024: Fairness for every generation," April 16, 2024. <https://budget.canada.ca/2024/home-accueil-en.html>.
- Health Research BC. "Research trainee award." Accessed November 8, 2024. <https://healthresearchbc.ca/fundingprogram/research-trainee-program/>.
- Living Wage Canada. "Rates." Accessed October 29, 2024. <https://www.livingwage.ca/rates>.
- . "What Is a Living Wage?" Living Wage Canada. Accessed October 29, 2024. <https://www.livingwage.ca/>.
- Living Wage for Families BC. "Calculating the value of benefits." Accessed November 6, 2024. https://www.livingwagebc.ca/living_wage_calculator.
- . "Living wages in BC and Canada." Accessed November 20, 2024. https://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/living_wage_rates.
- Mitacs. "Elevate." Accessed November 8, 2024. https://www.mitacs.ca/our-programs/elevate-students-Postdoctoral_Fellows/.
- Sparling, JS, Griffiths, E, Grasedieck, S, Madadian, E, and Gibb, C. "The 2020 Canadian National Postdoctoral Survey Report." Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars / l'Association canadienne de Postdoctorantes et Postdoctorants, 2023. Available in English and French at: <http://capsacpp.ca/resources/publications/surveys/2020-national-postdoc-survey/>.
- UBC Human Resources. "Postdoctoral fellows." Accessed November 8, 2024. <https://hr.ubc.ca/working-ubc/faculty-titles-ranks-and-descriptions/postdoctoral-fellows>.
- University of British Columbia. "UBC institutional rankings." Accessed November 8, 2024. <https://www.ubc.ca/about/institutional-rankings.html>.
- University of British Columbia Board of Governors. "Policy AP10: Postdoctoral Fellows." University of British Columbia, July 2019. https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2022/05/Postdoctoral_Fellows-Policy_AP10.pdf.
- Woolston, Chris. "Postdoc Survey Reveals Disenchantment with Working Life." *Nature* 587, no. 7834 (November 18, 2020): 505–8. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-03191-7>.

Appendix A: Postdoctoral Fellows Financial Consultation Survey

Postdoctoral Fellow Financial Consultation

In light of the recently published UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey Report, the PDFO is inviting perspectives and feedback on Postdoctoral Fellow stipends at UBC, including the idea of a minimum stipend.

We thank you for your time in completing this survey. This survey has up to 20 questions depending on your responses.

Question and Response Format	Available Response(s)
1) I am a: <i>Multiple choice, single answer.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Member • Postdoctoral Fellow
2) Which faculty are you appointed in? <i>Drop-down menu, single answer.</i> If 'Other' is selected: Please specify: <i>Free form text box.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Applied Science (e.g., Chemical and Biological Engineering, Medical Engineering, etc.) • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Arts • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Dentistry • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Education • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Forestry • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Land and Food Systems • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Medicine • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences • UBC Vancouver – Faculty of Science (e.g., Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Zoology, etc.) • UBC Vancouver – Peter A. Allard School of Law • UBC Vancouver – Sauder School of Business • UBC Okanagan – Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies • UBC Okanagan – Faculty of Health and Social Development • UBC Okanagan – Faculty of Management • UBC Okanagan – Faculty of Medicine, Southern Medical Program • UBC Okanagan – Irving K. Barber Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences • UBC Okanagan – Irving K. Barber Faculty of Science • UBC Okanagan – Okanagan School of Education • UBC Okanagan – School of Engineering • Other
3) What is your department/unit? (If your faculty does not have departments/units, please enter 'N/A') <i>Free form text box.</i>	
If the response to question 1 is 'Faculty Member' only: 4) Does your department/unit have a minimum stipend for Postdoctoral Fellows? <i>Multiple choice, single answer.</i> If 'Yes' is selected: What is this minimum stipend?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No • Don't Know

Free form text box.	
<p><i>If the response to question 1 is 'Faculty Member' only:</i></p> <p>5) What is your typical source of funding for paying Postdoctoral Fellow stipends? (please select all that apply)</p> <p><i>Multiple choice, multiple answer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian Tri-Agency grant • Grant from Canadian non-profit organization (e.g., Canadian Cancer Society, etc.) • Grant from international funding agency • Research contracts from industry • Other(s), please specify: <i>[free form text box]</i>
<p><i>If the response to question 1 is 'Faculty Member' only:</i></p> <p>5a) What is the primary Tri-Agency that you apply to for your research funding that would cover Postdoctoral Fellow stipend(s)?</p> <p><i>Multiple choice, single answer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIHR • NSERC • SSHRC
<p><i>If the response to question 1 is 'Faculty Member' only:</i></p> <p>5b) Please indicate the non-profit organization(s) that you apply to for your research funding that would cover Postdoctoral Fellow stipend(s)?</p> <p><i>Free form text box.</i></p>	
<p><i>If the response to question 1 is 'Faculty Member' only:</i></p> <p>5c) Please indicate the international funding agency/ies that you apply to for your research funding that would cover Postdoctoral Fellow stipend(s)?</p> <p><i>Free form text box.</i></p>	
<p>6) Did you previously attend one of the PDFO's in-person or virtual Postdoctoral Fellow Financial Town halls?</p> <p><i>Multiple choice, single answer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes – Attended In Person • Yes – Attended Virtually • No
<p>7) In your opinion, how useful would the implementation of a minimum Postdoctoral Fellow stipend be?</p> <p><i>Multiple choice, single answer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely useful • Very useful • Somewhat useful • Slightly useful • Not at all useful
<p>8) In your opinion, what is an appropriate minimum Postdoctoral Fellow stipend?</p> <p><i>Multiple choice, single answer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$45,000 • \$50,000 • \$55,000 • \$60,000 • \$65,000 • \$70,000 • Other, please specify: <i>[free form text box]</i>
<p>9) If a minimum Postdoctoral Fellow stipend were implemented, when would it be reasonable to do so?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2025 • May 2025

Multiple choice, single answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 2025 January 2026
10) What would be positive outcomes of implementing a minimum Postdoctoral Fellow stipend? Free form text box.	
11) What would be negative outcomes of implementing a minimum Postdoctoral Fellow stipend? Free form text box.	
12) What would be the potential challenges in implementing a minimum Postdoctoral Fellow stipend? Free form text box.	
13) Do you think that Postdoctoral Fellow stipends should be subject to systematic increases? Multiple choice, single answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No
<i>If the response to question 13 is 'Yes' only:</i> 14) How do you think this should be applied? Multiple choice, multiple answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase to the minimum stipend An increase that is applied to all Postdoctoral Fellow stipends Other, please specify: [free form text box]
<i>If the response to question 13 is 'Yes' only:</i> 15) How do you think this should be applied? Multiple choice, single answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1% 2% 3% Other, please specify: [free form text box]
16) Is there anything else that you would like to share? Free form text box.	

Appendix B: Detailed Responses from Follow-Up Survey

By the Numbers

The follow-up survey was completed by 11 faculty and 36 postdoctoral fellows who attended the town halls. An additional 64 postdoctoral fellows who did not attend the town halls also completed the survey.

Respondents: Table A-1 summarizes postdoctoral fellow and faculty respondents according to faculty (counts/proportions are not indicated given small cell sizes).

Table A-1: Summary of respondents	
Postdoctoral Fellows	Faculty
Vancouver <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Science • Arts • Forestry • Medicine • Pharmaceutical Sciences • Science Okanagan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Science – School of Engineering • Arts and Social Sciences • Education – Okanagan School of Education • Health and Social Development • Science 	Vancouver <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts • Medicine • Science Okanagan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and Critical Studies • Health and Social Development • Science

Perceptions on usefulness of a minimum stipend policy: When asked on a five-point scale on perceived usefulness of a minimum stipend, **73%** of postdoctoral fellow respondents indicated that this would be *extremely useful*, **22%** *very useful*, and **4%** *somewhat useful*. Of the faculty respondents, **36%** selected that it would be *extremely useful*, **46%** *very useful*, and **18%** *somewhat useful*. No respondents from either postdoctoral fellow or faculty indicated that a minimum policy would be *slightly useful* or *not at all useful*.

Perceptions on appropriate minimum stipend:

Respondents indicated which of six scenarios (e.g., \$45,000 to \$70,000) they considered appropriate for a minimum stipend. As shown in **Figure A-1**, of the postdoctoral fellow respondents, **47%** indicated that \$70,000 would be an appropriate minimum; faculty perceptions of an appropriate minimum trended lower with **45%** selecting \$55,000, which is consistent with the reported median stipend in the *UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey: Final Report*. Of note, several respondents indicated 'Other' and provided corresponding responses in the text box: for postdoctoral fellows these included '\$75,000', '\$80,000', and '\$83,000'; and for faculty this included a suggestion of '\$50,000 with increases over several years' (**Table A-2, below**).

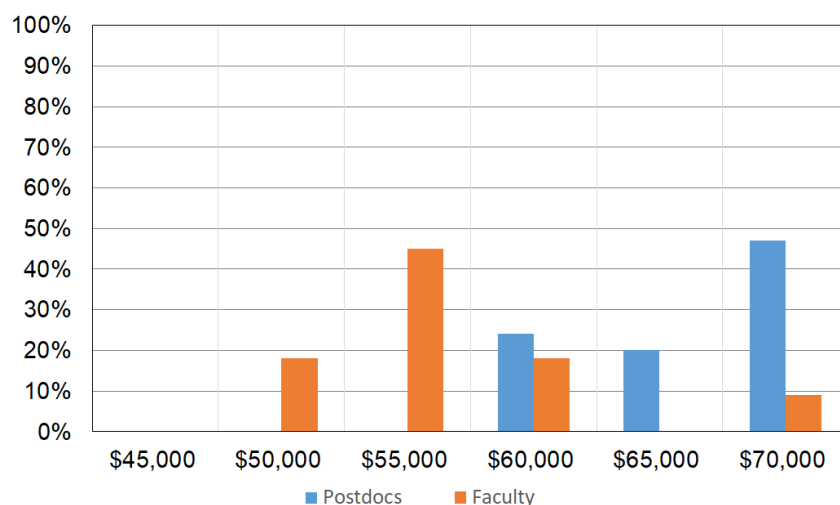


Figure A-1. Perceived appropriate minimum stipend

Table A-2: Perceived appropriate minimum stipend: - Other, please specify (free form text box):	
Postdoctoral Fellow Responses	Faculty Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$75,000 (x 3 responses) \$80,000 (x 3 responses) \$83,000 Postdoctoral Fellows typically move from other countries from short term contracts. This often means that their partners are not able to find work in Canada immediately or at all. Postdoctoral Fellows should be able to support a partner and even children on their salaries, otherwise Postdoctoral Fellows with families are implicitly being excluded from pursuing academic careers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least \$50,000 now and moving up higher over the next few years.

Perceptions on annual increases to stipends: Respondents were asked whether postdoctoral fellow stipends

should be subject to an annual increase; if they selected 'Yes', they were asked to indicate an appropriate increase amount. Postdoctoral fellows (**91%**) and faculty (**91%**) agreed that stipends should be subject to an annual increase. However, we noted differences in perspectives with

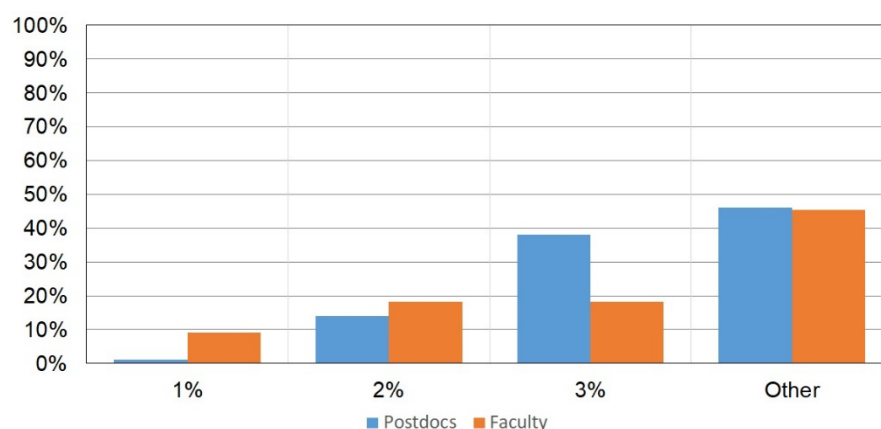


Figure A-2. Perceived appropriate annual increase to postdoc stipends

respect to the level of increase, with more postdoctoral fellows indicating the higher rate (3%) versus faculty who indicated lower rates (1% and 2%), as shown in **Figure A-2**. Postdoctoral fellows who selected 'Other' provided text responses ranging from '4%' to '56%' with several noting that *'annual increases should be tied to inflation'*. Text responses by faculty who selected 'Other' included suggestions that increases be *'tied to inflation'*, *'tied to cost of living'*, or *'match those of faculty'*. All responses are in **Table A-3 (below)**.

Table A-3: Perceived appropriate annual increase to postdoctoral fellow stipends - Other, please specify (free form text box):	
Postdoctoral Fellow Responses	Faculty Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-10% • 4-5% • 5% (x 4 responses) • No less than 5% (x 3 responses) • 5-10% • 10% • 15% • 20% (x 4 responses) • 30% • 56% • 8% - adjusted to inflation • Tied to inflation (x 12 responses) • Tied to cost of living • A mixture of indices: Baseline should be consumer price index plus job performance • A simple percentage may be too simple of an answer (inflation rates change, lab funding changes, etc.) but stagnancy should not be permitted • I don't think it's appropriate to increase by 1-3% of current stipends, probably an annual increase after the adjustment is done • Should be more than the inflation rate; increase should be applied above the minimum wage - some might be even not getting the minimum. • One could couple this to the inflation rate, but believe that 3% is the standard outside academia • the percentage required to reach a livable minimum • Up to a minimum and then up with inflation • What is the current minimum? • Not sure, follow precedent of faculty positions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2% • A regular increase in minimum stipend that approaches \$70,000 over the next few years • Cost of living increase to all stipends • Tied to inflation • Whatever faculty get each year as incremental increases

Perceptions on timeline for implementation of a minimum stipend policy: When on a reasonable timeframe to implement a minimum stipend policy, a majority of postdoctoral fellow respondents indicated that January 2025 was reasonable, while the most frequent faculty response was September 2025 (**Figure A-3**).

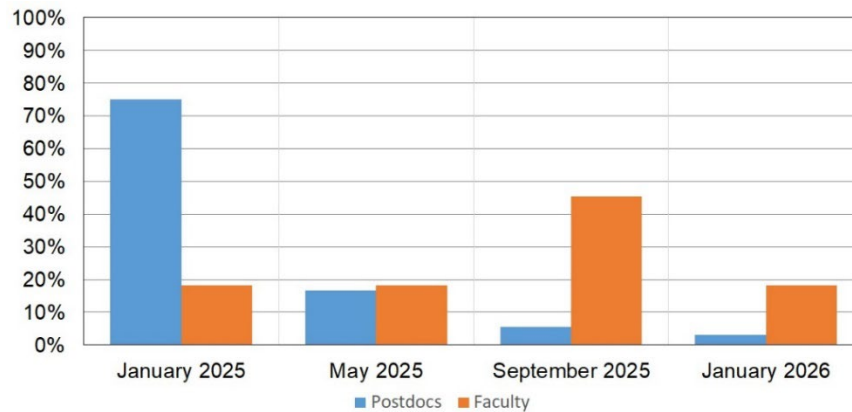


Figure A-3. Perceived reasonable timeframe to implement a minimum stipend

By Text: Narrative Responses from Survey

The follow-up survey also included three questions that asked postdoctoral fellows and faculty to provide their perspectives on 1) positive outcomes of a minimum stipend policy, 2) negative outcomes of a minimum stipend policy, and 3) potential challenges with implementation. Nearly all postdoctoral fellow respondents provided their perspectives on positive outcomes (**99%**), negative outcomes (**93%**), and challenges (**96%**). All faculty respondents (**100%**) provided narrative responses to all three questions.

Perspectives on positive outcomes of a minimum stipend policy

What postdoctoral fellows shared

Postdoctoral fellow respondents indicated that a competitive minimum stipend would positively impact their health and wellbeing, as postdoctoral fellows experience considerable stress due to the high costs of living - especially for rent and childcare - in the Lower Mainland. Several respondents further noted that improved financial security would improve research output by allowing postdoctoral fellows to focus more on their research and less on their precarious financial situations and the need to supplement their income with additional work. Other positive outcomes included improved pay equity across units and departments; improved transparency; and protection from “*financial abuse*” from faculty. Several respondents also noted that a competitive minimum stipend could aid in recruiting the best and brightest young researchers internationally, enforcing UBC’s position as one of Canada’s top post-secondary institutions, and could decrease the attrition rate among talented young researchers who leave “*the exploitative academic system*”.

What faculty shared

Faculty respondents noted that setting a sufficient minimum could improve postdoctoral fellows' quality of life given the high cost of living in the Lower Mainland. Respondents also commented on the prospect of a stipend serving as a recruitment tool, with one respondent noting that the high cost of living can be prohibitive for promising researchers who do not have family financial support or a solid financial background. Establishing a minimum stipend could more appropriately acknowledge the invaluable contributions that postdoctoral fellows make to the university community and improve pay equity by raising lower stipends closer to the median [*as per the UBC Postdoctoral Fellows 2022 Finance Survey: Final Report*] and setting university-wide pay standards.

Perspectives on negative outcomes of a minimum stipend policy

What postdoctoral fellows shared

Numerous postdoctoral fellow respondents noted that they did not foresee negative outcomes [*of a minimum stipend policy*] for postdoctoral fellows, with one indicating that *"the current situation is overwhelmingly negative"*. However, several respondents did identify the fact that increased stipends may lead to a decrease in postdoctoral fellow positions at UBC due to lack of affordability for PIs. Several respondents commented on the possibility of PI retaliation, with potential scenarios including PIs treating the minimum stipend as the recommended stipend, PIs increasing postdoctoral fellow workload whether to compensate for fewer postdoctoral fellow or to justify the higher stipend costs, or PIs taking their frustration about increased pay out on their postdoctoral fellow. Additional concerns included the concern that minimum stipends would remain stagnant and not keep pace with increases in inflation and the cost of living, therefore having little to no impact on the postdoctoral fellow community, and concerns that establishing a minimum stipend may strip postdoctoral fellow of their negotiation power.

What faculty shared

The availability of funding was the primary concern that arose from the faculty survey. Respondents noted that those with grants in progress may not have the funding available to accommodate a budget change, so a sudden or unexpected increase to postdoctoral fellow stipends could have a detrimental impact on PIs unless bridge funding or other support is made available by the University. Respondents also noted that setting a minimum stipend could impact the number of postdoctoral fellows they can recruit, which could, in turn, impact research productivity and output.

Perspectives on the challenges of implementing a minimum postdoctoral fellow stipend

What we heard from postdoctoral fellows

More than one postdoctoral fellow respondent cited pushback, whether from PIs or from the University, as a potential challenge to establishing a minimum stipend, with several respondents noting that support would need to trickle down from the highest levels of university administration.

Respondents also commented on the logistics of implementing a minimum stipend policy, including whether it would apply to current Postdoctoral Fellows or just new hires and whether implementing a minimum stipend would impact research productivity.

What we heard from faculty

The primary challenge raised by faculty respondents was finding the funding needed to cover a minimum stipend: several respondents noted that it would likely take several years for PIs with grants in progress to be able to afford higher stipends, especially for those with several postdoctoral fellows and graduate students. Some suggested that the University could counteract resistance from faculty with lower research income by providing incentives like covering the cost of benefits or increasing teaching stipends.

Responses to Faculty-Specific Questions

Faculty respondents' answers to specific questions about their funding sources offer additional context.

Respondents were asked whether their departments/units have a minimum postdoctoral fellow stipend; only the **Department of Mathematics** in the Faculty of Science was reported to have a minimum postdoctoral stipend of \$56,000.

Given that many faculty fund postdoctoral stipends through their research grants, we asked questions on their specific funding sources. Among respondents, **73%** indicated CIHR as a primary source of Tri-Agency funding and **18%** NSERC. Some respondents (**9%**) did not submit a response to this question. In addition to the Tri-Agency, respondents indicated that they fund postdoc stipends through the following sources, including:

- **Provincial funding agencies:** Michael Smith Health Research BC
- **Canadian non-profit organizations:** Alzheimer's Society Research Program; BrightFocus Grants; Canadian Cancer Society; Cancer Research Society; Diabetes Canada; Foundations Fighting Blindness; Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada; MS Canada
- **International funding agencies:** Human Frontiers Science Program; Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions; National Institutes of Health
- **Other funding sources:** Mitacs; Start-Up Funds

When asked for any other information they were willing to share on how they fund postdoctoral fellow stipends, one faculty respondent noted that they were able to bring on postdoctoral fellow only because they came with their own fellowship funding, and another noted that if a postdoctoral fellow had clinical training, they were able to secure supplemental clinical work for them.