

2026 VCHRI SPARKS Guidelines

Summer Program Advancing Research Knowledge & Skills

The Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute (VCHRI) Summer Program Advancing Research Knowledge & Skills (SPARKS) provides an opportunity for highly qualified undergraduate and medical students to explore their interest in health research and receive hands-on experience by undertaking a summer project with a VCHRI Principal Investigator (PI).

Award Amounts

VCHRI SPARKS students will receive an award of \$5,000 (\$3,500 from VCHRI + \$1,500 from PI) to work 30 hours/week for 8 weeks, or \$7,500 (\$5,300 from VCHRI + \$2,200 from PI) to work 30 hours/week for 12 weeks, from June - August 2026, in world-class laboratories within VCHRI.

The award term starts on June 1, 2026, for 8 or 12 consecutive weeks, and must be completed by August 28, 2026. The requested number of weeks and start/end dates must be indicated at the time of application. Students are eligible to work longer than the award period, but additional funding from VCHRI will not be provided. Students will become VCHRI research trainees and will be eligible to attend VCHRI workshops and participate in educational and training opportunities.

VCHRI SPARKS awards are issued as a stipend to support research training, and PIs are required to provide a top-up to the stipend. VCHRI will transfer its contribution to the PI's academic department. VCHRI summer student appointments will be processed by the PI's academic department and the responsibility of the PI and their academic department to appropriately administer payment to the student.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a VCHRI SPARKS award, students must:

- Be an undergraduate or medical student registered at a recognized university during the program period: June - August 2026. If you complete your undergraduate program in spring/summer 2026, you are no longer eligible for this program.
- Primarily work under the supervision of a VCHRI PI. The student may work closely with research associates, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students in the lab. The VCHRI PI must be determined before applying. Affiliate investigators are not eligible.
- Have a proposed project that will be conducted at a VCH site, and is directly relevant to improving health outcomes, patient experience, and/or service delivery at VCH. This includes community-based research within the VCH region.
- Be a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or foreign national who is living/working within Canada to receive funding. International applicants may be considered in the future.
- Be the only student applying with the proposed VCHRI PI. Both the student and VCHRI PI may only be listed on one application.
- Not hold any other award (including UBC SSRP, USRA, WLIURA) during the tenure of the VCHRI SPARKS award.
- If the student applying has a personal relationship with the proposed VCHRI PI, please contact the VCHRI awards team at education.award@vch.ca prior to the submission deadline.

Applicants currently employed full-time on a paid co-op placement are eligible to hold an award during the placement period if: (1) the proposed PI supervisor and project are the same as the co-op supervisor and

project; (2) the co-op position is not receiving funds from a wage subsidy program (e.g., Biotalent); and (3) the applicant has approval from the supervisor and co-op coordinator to receive the additional funding.

Applicants that have received a VCHRI SPARKS award in the past may re-apply. However, funding is not guaranteed. All applications are subject to the same evaluation and review process each year.

The VCHRI PI is expected to provide the space, supplies, and/or resources that the student requires to complete the project. No research allowance is provided with this award.

Application Process

1. Review the eligibility criteria.
2. Reach out to a VCHRI PI who you are interested in working with. Best practice is to reach out over email, and then send a polished resume, cover letter, your transcript and/or a statement of interest. You can find eligible supervisors in the VCHRI [Research Directory](#) or through [Research Centres and Programs](#).
3. Once you have a supervisor, read through the program requirements together.
4. Submit application package via the submission link on our [website](#) by **Friday March 27th, 2026 at 4:00pm (PST)**.
5. Application results will be announced in the spring of 2026.

Application Package

The following documents need to be submitted online:

- **Application Form**
 - Student and VCHRI PI information.
- **Research Project Summary**
 - Includes scientific summary, training expectations and project relevance.
 - Information on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) considerations [here](#).
 - For any questions regarding Indigenous health research or for a consultation, contact the [Indigenous Health Research Unit](#).
- **Applicant Resume**
 - Maximum 2-pages any format, include scholarly achievements and any other relevant experience (e.g., volunteering, leadership)

Evaluation Criteria

All eligible applications are reviewed by members of the VCHRI leadership and research community. Applicants are assigned a final rank and funding is allocated to top-ranked applicants. Applications will be evaluated based on the student's academic merit, scholarly achievement and community involvement, the scientific merit of the research project, EDI and Indigenous health research considerations, research potential, and the potential benefit the student will obtain from the experience.

Program Requirements

All students are required to meet the following conditions, or as outlined in an award offer letter:

- Submit a written report that includes a summary of the research project and a reflection of program experience. This report should be sent to education.award@vch.ca by August 31, 2026. A template and instructions will be provided by the VCHRI awards team.
- Complete program evaluation conducted by VCHRI as requested (e.g., online survey).
- Submit a final financial statement at the end of the award term.
- Attend a VCHRI trainee career day in summer 2026: Date – TBD.

Contact Information

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