Status of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

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Pfizer   adMare BIOINNOVATIONS   Shift HEALTH   LSO LIFE SCIENCES ONTARIO

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report has undergone remediation and includes the use of high contrast colours, alternative text to describe images and is usable with adaptive technology.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Embedding inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) in Canada's life sciences sector will elevate organizational performance, help Canada accelerate growth and innovation, and build a sector where everyone can belong, contribute and thrive. While many organizations have taken steps to embed IDEA in their cultures and practices, we do not yet have a clear picture of what is being done to advance IDEA across the life sciences, the barriers that are preventing progress or the greatest opportunities to drive meaningful change. To address this gap, a survey and focus groups with stakeholders in the life sciences sector across Canada was conducted. This report summarizes our findings, including priority actions for our sector to advance IDEA and realize the full innovative potential of Canada's diverse talent pool.

It is our hope that the findings and recommendations in this report will advance a community-based approach to embedding inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility into the life sciences sector so that we can unlock the full innovation potential of Canada's diverse talent pool and build an ecosystem where everyone can belong, contribute and thrive.

KEY FINDINGS

Through our national survey and conversations with identity-focused groups, we have identified areas where the life sciences sector has made progress in IDEA, as well as where barriers, challenges and shortcomings are holding us back. Building on these findings, there is an immediate opportunity for organizations to prioritize IDEA initiatives in the following areas:

- **TALENT DEVELOPMENT**
  Advance inclusive and equitable approaches to recruitment, training and performance management for all individuals studying or pursuing a career in the life sciences sector.

- **COMMUNITY AND CULTURE**
  Build a stronger sense of belonging for all employees by tackling the complex and challenging work of fostering human connection and building community.

- **KNOWLEDGE**
  Strengthen understanding and appreciation of the need for and benefits of IDEA initiatives among all employees and stay apprised of organizational IDEA needs and progress.

- **LEADERSHIP**
  Catalyze progress in IDEA by building leadership teams that are diverse, competent in IDEA and accountable to IDEA commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Talent Development

1. **Ensure job postings use inclusive language** and focus on the essential skills and competencies required for the role.

2. **Form diverse hiring committees** that are trained in equitable hiring practices (e.g. ensuring shortlists are diverse, assessing candidates objectively).

3. **Ensure all contributions to an organization are being assessed and rewarded** through unbiased performance reviews.

Community and Culture

1. **Support the participation of employees in employee resource groups** by providing time, financial support or other resources; build awareness of initiatives outside of the organization such as affinity groups (e.g. Canadian Black Scientists Network).

2. **Offer formal mentoring/coaching programs for employees** by providing training to build inclusive mentorship skills (i.e. how to tailor discussions and support to the needs of mentees) for all individuals who act as mentors; connect individuals to external mentoring programs (e.g. Impact Mentoring) if in-house capacity for mentorship does not exist.

3. **Ensure that individuals that support, plan and lead IDEA initiatives are recognized** and/or compensated for their time.

Knowledge

1. **Require IDEA training for all employees** during onboarding and deliver regular (e.g. annual) IDEA training modules to update staff on available resources and supports (e.g. employee resource groups, mentorship programs).

2. **Collect feedback on IDEA initiatives and report on the progress of IDEA** within organizations and to the public.

3. **Track and communicate data** regarding representation at each level of the organization and against the overall labour force, employee engagement/satisfaction, pay equity and organizational progress against IDEA goals/strategy.

Leadership

1. **Embed IDEA into the corporate strategy** or develop a dedicated IDEA strategy that links to the corporate strategy.

2. **Hold leaders accountable to IDEA** by building IDEA metrics into performance management and positioning boards or oversight committees to monitor and support progress towards IDEA.

3. **Provide ongoing training to leaders regarding IDEA,** including emerging best practices in IDEA and issues/topics of relevance to specific equity-deserving groups.

SECTOR-WIDE OPPORTUNITIES

Our study also uncovered and validated several community-based initiatives that have great potential to scale and achieve broad impact in the sector:

1. **Articulating, documenting and disseminating the case for IDEA—**Ensuring access to sources that make a clear and compelling business case for prioritizing IDEA in the sector can help organizations build support for IDEA initiatives. IDEA leaders in the sector can come together to develop and share the case for IDEA—capturing its potential to foster innovation, talent retention, employee engagement and productivity—through ongoing discourse and reporting. Such resources, made broadly available, can help catalyze understanding and change.

2. **Creating and sharing a library of IDEA tools and templates—**Many organizations that are limited in time and internal expertise would benefit from access to a library of resources (e.g. methodologies for inclusive recruitment, performance management, mentorship, IDEA policies, company demographic and engagement surveys). IDEA leaders in the life sciences sector—and beyond—can come together to assemble and create access to these essential tools, templates and information sources.

3. **Establishing an IDEA community of practice for leaders—**Embedding IDEA in any organization is a journey marked by successes, challenges and numerous questions. Establishing safe spaces for organizations' IDEA leaders to come together to support each other on the journey has the potential to accelerate knowledge dissemination, build resilience and sustain progress.

INTRODUCTION

Canada's aspiration to accelerate growth and innovation in the life sciences sector hinges on our ability to attract and retain talent.

From drug and vaccine development to smart farms and crop sustainability, Canada's life sciences sector has a long history of delivering life-improving impact on a global scale. Despite these and many other successes, we know that the life sciences sector has not yet achieved its full potential. We must find ways to continue to grow and innovate so that we become increasingly globally competitive. Indeed, federal and provincial governments have set priorities to build innovation ecosystems in which industry, academia and other innovation stakeholders collaborate to develop talent, conduct transformative research and attract investment (Fig 1).[1,2,3,4]

A commitment to diversity and inclusion is central to building a more innovative and impactful sector.

Not only is embedding IDEA in life sciences organizations the right thing to do: It is a powerful way to increase creativity and innovation within teams[5,6] and to improve organizational performance by attracting and retaining talent, building and fostering engagement and increasing productivity.[7] Moreover, the innovations that stem from the life sciences sector stand to benefit all humankind, but will only achieve this level of impact when we have diverse voices, experiences and perspectives within our sector.

Figure 1. Canada Seeks to Drive Growth and Impact of the Life Sciences Sector
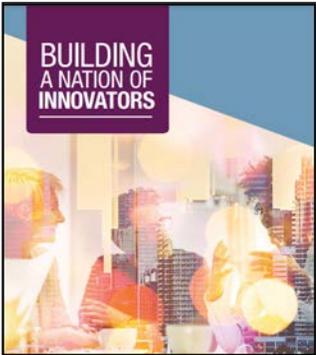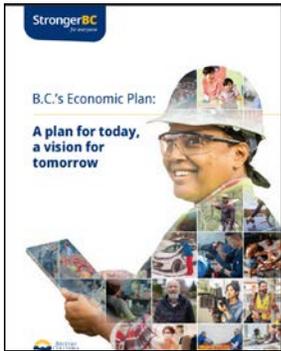
Our sector is not yet realizing the full potential of Canada's large and diverse workforce.

Diversity could be Canada's competitive advantage, but our sector does not yet reflect Canada's labour market in its representation of women, visible minorities, people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples.[8] Data on the diversity of leaders within the Canadian life sciences sector are sparse and data gaps exist related to certain equity-deserving groups (e.g. people who are neurodiverse, trans people). We do know that only about 10% of board positions are held by people of colour, Indigenous peoples or people with disabilities.[9] Further, while progress is being made in some settings, we know little about what is being done to embed IDEA in our workplaces and what impact has been achieved. Building a better understanding of the status of IDEA in the life sciences sector will allow us to develop and implement the right strategies to build a more inclusive and innovative future and determine where community-based approaches will allow us to accelerate and scale progress in IDEA.

With the support of Pfizer and adMare BioInnovations, Shift Health and Life Sciences Ontario conducted a study to assess the status of IDEA within Canada's life sciences sector.

To build a clearer picture of the status of IDEA within Canada's life science sector, we conducted a survey of organizations in Life Sciences Ontario's (LSO) network. Sixty-two (62) organizations responded,

providing a self-assessment of their organization's progress in IDEA based on a framework that was informed by the Dimensions Recognition Scheme[10] (Fig 2A). Respondents from organizations that have made more progress in IDEA (later stage; Fig 2B) were asked to provide details of their progress in nine dimensions (Fig 3); the majority of survey data presented in this report are from organizations that are in the later stages of the IDEA journey. We also report on insights gathered from focus groups with organizational leaders (17), capacity builders (10) and individuals (32) from equity-deserving groups (e.g. Indigenous peoples Black people, people of colour, people who are neurodiverse or who have a disability) working or studying in the sector across Canada. With the support of Montréal InVivo, consultations were conducted with stakeholders across Québec.

Status of IDEA in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

Figure 2A. IDEA Journey Assessment Framework

The IDEA Journey

Early Stage

Later Stage

WAITING
Our organization believes other demands must or should be prioritized before undertaking IDEA initiatives.

INITIATING
Our organization is in the early stages of addressing IDEA in an intentional way.

ESTABLISHING
Our organization has taken first steps to address IDEA.

ADVANCING
Our organization has made significant progress addressing IDEA in one or more domains.

TRANSFORMING
Our organization is a sector leader in IDEA, has embedded IDEA in multiple domains and can provide evidence of representational and cultural change with respect to IDEA.

Survey respondents self-assessed their organization's maturity in addressing IDEA using the IDEA Journey Assessment Framework. The above framework is adapted from The Dimensions program "Recognition Scheme".[10]

Figure 2B. Stages of Small/Medium and Larger Enterprises Along the IDEA Journey

Mapping of Organizations Across the IDEA Journey

Small/Medium Enterprises

13% Transforming
8% Advancing
25% Establishing

46%

29% Initiating
25% Waiting

54%

Large Enterprises

19% Transforming
37% Advancing
29% Establishing

82%

18% Initiating

18%
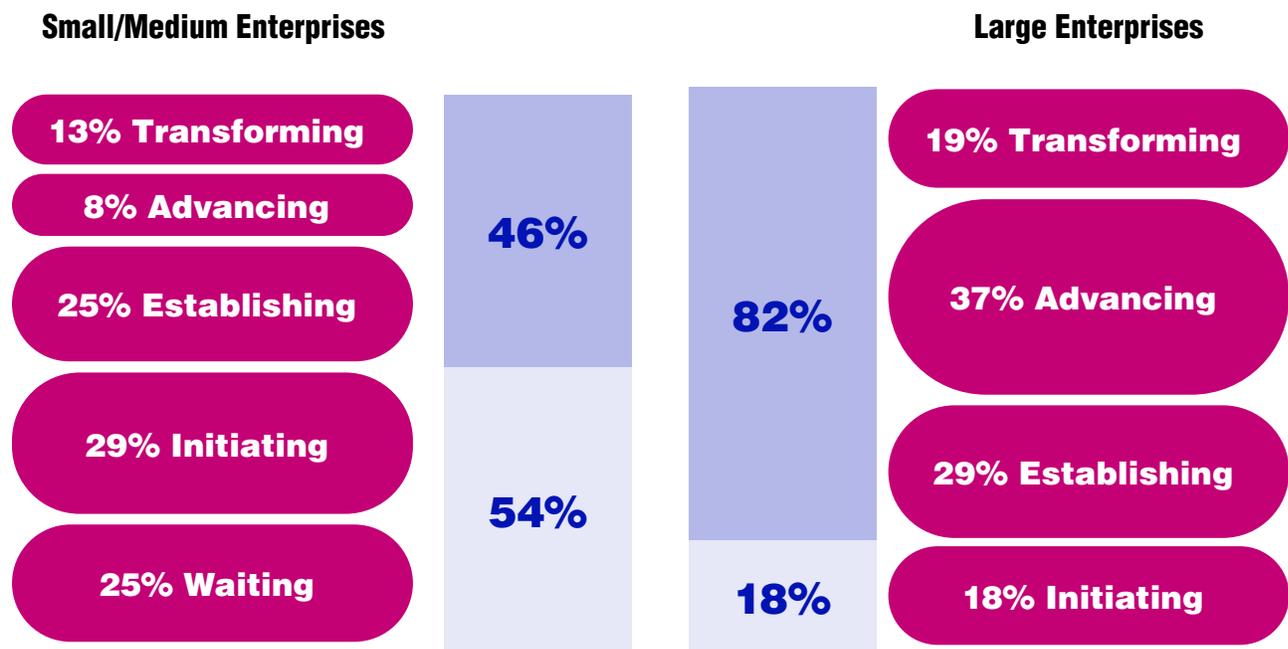
More than half of small/medium enterprises are in the earlier stages of their IDEA journeys.

Most large enterprises are in the later stages of their IDEA journeys.

Figure 3. Dimensions Evaluated Through the IDEA Survey

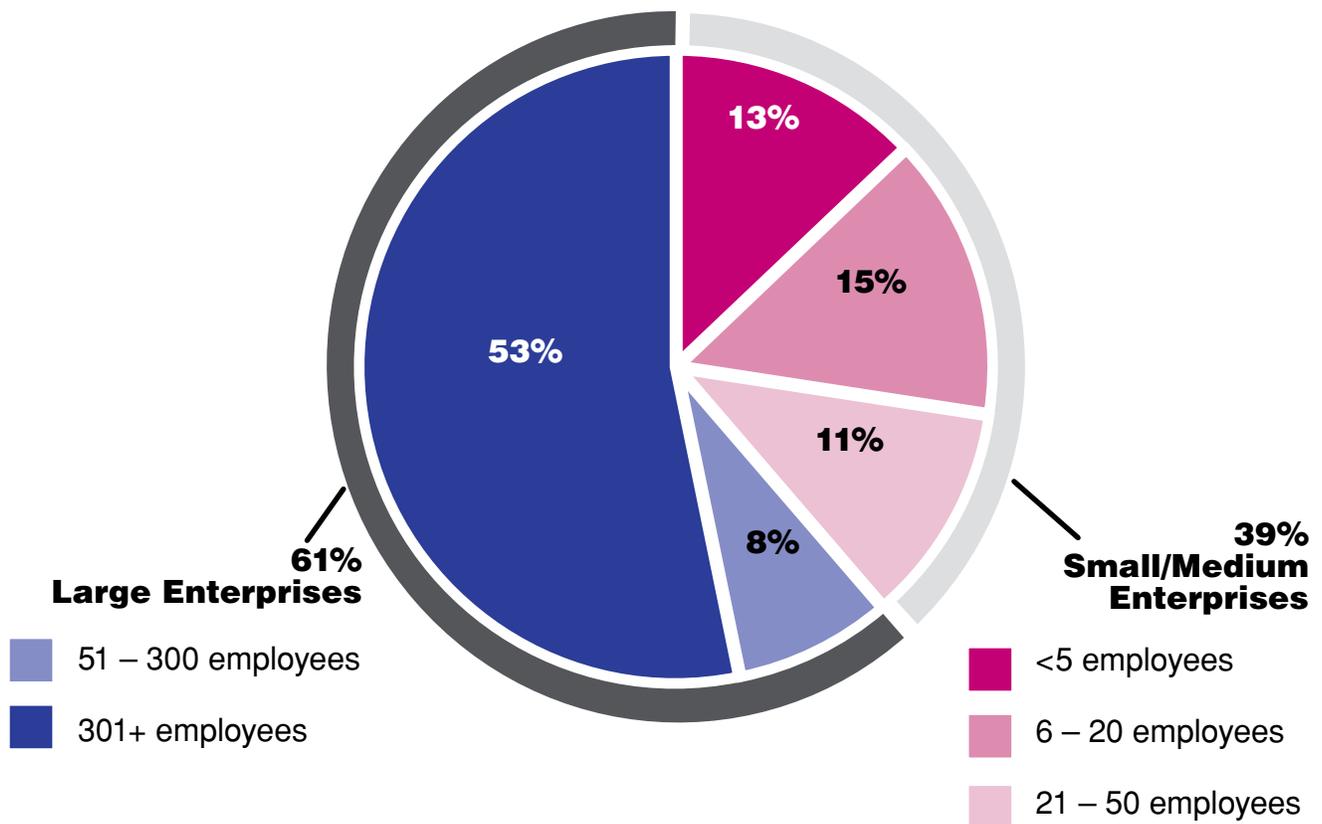|	
Workplace Policies	Formal workplace policies are in place to foster IDEA within the organization
Addressing Barriers to IDEA	Policies and practices are in place to identify potential barriers and promote accessibility
IDEA Tracking	Data related to IDEA progress/performance is gathered to inform decisions to improve IDEA within our organization/ community
Recruitment	IDEA is embedded within recruitment policies and practices
Performance Management	IDEA is embedded within performance management policies and practices
Training and Professional Development	Formal training and professional development programming is available to all employees, including IDEA-related training
Leadership and Governance	IDEA goals impact the make up and skills of the leadership team and board of directors
Value Chain	Vendors, product developers, program developers and other service providers are engaged through an IDEA-informed process
Community Outreach	Individuals from equity-deserving groups are targeted in outreach and philanthropic efforts

The survey data presented in this report are representative of organizations from different sub-sectors, jurisdictions, and years in operation. However, the sample size did not allow for meaningful comparisons across all these categories. More than half of survey respondents were organizations with more than 50 employees, even though we know these companies make up less than 20% of the sector and about 30% of Life Sciences Ontario's membership (Fig 4).

We recognize that each person's experience of equity, inclusion and accessibility is unique and important. A diverse set of stakeholders was engaged in focus groups, but not every experience or perspective was captured in this study. While we were honoured to hear the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous peoples working in our sector, we recognize the need for a purposeful and parallel approach to engaging Indigenous peoples in future studies. While future reports will seek to integrate these and other important perspectives more fully, the current report should be reviewed with these considerations in mind.

Figure 4. Breakdown of Survey Respondents by Organization Size

Most survey responses were from large organizations; half were from companies >300 employees.

13%

15%

11%

53%

8%

61% Large Enterprises
- 51 – 300 employees
- 301+ employees

39% Small/Medium Enterprises
- <5 employees
- 6 – 20 employees
- 21 – 50 employees

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the findings from the survey and focus groups, we have identified areas where the life sciences sector has made progress in IDEA, as well as where barriers, challenges and shortcomings are holding us back. Building from these findings, there is an immediate opportunity for organizations to prioritize IDEA initiatives in the following areas:

1. **Talent Development.**
   Advance inclusive and equitable approaches to recruitment, training and performance management for all individuals studying or pursuing a career in the life sciences sector.

2. **Community and Culture.**
   Build a stronger sense of belonging for all employees by tackling the complex and challenging work of fostering human connection and building community.

3. **Knowledge.**
   Strengthen understanding and appreciation of the need for and benefits of IDEA initiatives among all employees and stay apprised of organizational IDEA needs and progress.

4. **Leadership.**
   Catalyze progress in IDEA by building leadership teams that are diverse, competent in IDEA and accountable to IDEA commitments.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Inclusive practices in talent development will help us build and sustain a diverse workforce in our sector. This requires supporting diverse individuals at all stages of the education and career continuum through inclusive recruitment, skill/knowledge development and equitable performance management.[11] Inclusive approaches to talent development will help us attract, develop and retain talent, which are all critical to setting the foundation for our future growth and impact.

What We Found

While IDEA in recruitment has been a top priority for organizations of all sizes, there is still an opportunity to improve processes.

Inclusive talent development begins with intentional recruitment practices in the form of inclusive language in job postings (e.g. listing only the qualifications/skills required for the job, including an organizational IDEA statement) and diverse recruiting teams that are knowledgeable about IDEA best practices in hiring. Most organizations—small/medium or large—are posting jobs publicly, which ensures that opportunities can reach a breadth of candidates. Large enterprises are more likely than small/medium enterprises to include an organizational IDEA statement in job postings and to provide unconscious bias training to team members who participate in recruitment (e.g. reviewing of CVs, interviews). While steps have been

taken by organizations of all sizes to make recruitment more inclusive, leaders across Canada recognize that continued effort in this dimension is still required and continue to view it as the top priority moving forward (Fig 5).
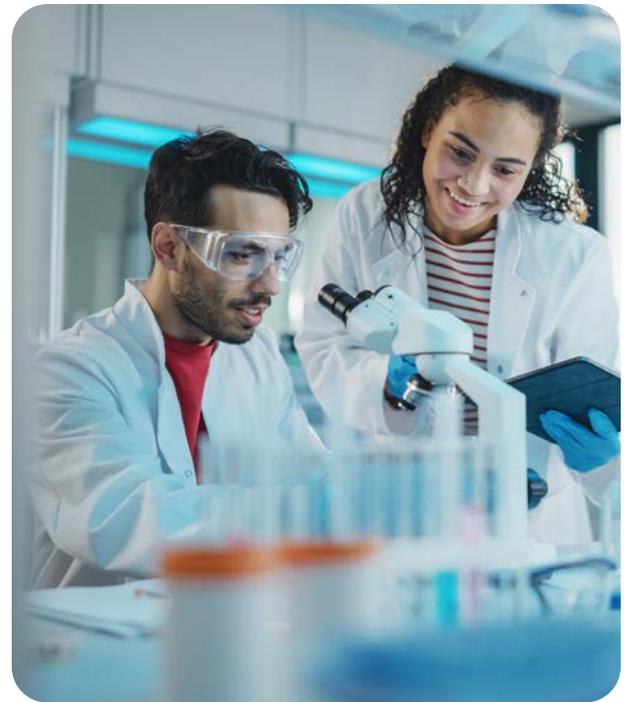
"Firms engage in recruitment that is intended to address IDEA issues head on… But there is still so much work to be done at our organization to change our process and equip our hiring managers with the right tools."

Organizational Leader, Large Enterprise

Equitable performance management programs will be key to retaining diverse talent in the life sciences sector.

Performance management systems that recognize, reward and incentivize all the ways that an employee can contribute and add value to an organization are important for employee development and retention. To establish equitable performance management systems, job descriptions and performance review frameworks should capture all the ways an employee contributes to an organization. Recognition of all contributions to an organization— including IDEA— affirms the importance of those efforts, enhances employee satisfaction and ultimately supports the retention of individuals who contribute most to an organization's success. In the near-term, organizations in the life sciences sector are not prioritizing efforts to refine performance management (Fig 5); however, reducing attrition is a priority for organizations in the sector given the costs associated with hiring and training new talent. If organizations aspire to be more equitable and retain top talent, they should prioritize refining performance management systems to embed IDEA and minimize bias.

"Employee retention is a primary focus for our company as every time we need to recruit and train a new employee it is at a significant cost. We want to ensure that our employees feel comfortable—and stay—at our company."

Organizational Leader, Small/Medium Enterprise

Figure 5. Near-term IDEA Priorities for the Life Sciences Sector

Which of the IDEA dimensions listed below would your organization like to make progress in over the next 1-2 years?

Large Organization

Small-Medium Organization

Recruitment

Training and professional development

Addressing barriers to IDEA

Workplace policies

IDEA tracking

Leadership and governance

Community outreach

Performance management

Value chain

Pink Rectangles = Frequency of Response

Building Diverse Talent in the Sector

Capacity builders help develop diverse talent and foster connections to employers.

Capacity-building is the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a changing environment.[12] Capacity builders play an important role in supporting diverse job seekers in the early stages of their life sciences careers. The Indigenous Student Achievement Pathways (ISAP) program has initiatives in place to increase the instructor to student ratio and connect new students with mentors within science technology engineering and math.[13] This program has resulted in more Indigenous students completing undergraduate programs at the University of Saskatchewan. Sustaining and developing new programs that develop and engage diverse talent in Canada's life science sector rely heavily on continued funding and partnership from sector stakeholders.

"With community-based learning programs, the four-year retention gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has halved."

Capacity Builder

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Ensure job postings use inclusive language** and focus on the essential skills and competencies required for the role.

2. **Form diverse hiring committees** that are trained in equitable hiring practices (e.g. ensuring shortlists are diverse, assessing candidates objectively).

3. **Ensure all contributions to an organization are being assessed and rewarded** through unbiased performance reviews.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Building a sense of belonging among employees critically depends on an inclusive work culture and sense of community. Workplace policies, if developed with IDEA in mind, can be effecting in conveying IDEA priorities and standards to employees and communicating behavioural norms.[14] Culture and community can also be strengthened through initiatives that foster connection between people such as mentorship programs or employee resource groups, as well as allyship.[15] When individuals feel a sense of belonging in the workplace, they will feel empowered to bring their whole selves to work and will deliver on their full innovative potential.

What We Found

There is an opportunity to focus on building inclusive cultures and a sense of community in the workplace.

A majority of small/medium and large enterprises reported significant progress in the development and deployment of workplace policies (Fig 6). While this progress is valued, we learned that many people from equity-deserving groups— including people of colour, Black people and women—feel that employee resource groups and mentorship programs have played an important role in enhancing their sense of belonging in the workplace. Women,

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Figure 6. IDEA Progress in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

In what IDEA dimension has your organization seen the most IDEA-related progress?

Large Organization | | Small-Medium Organization

Workplace Policies

Leadership and Governance

Training and Professional Development

Recruitment

Addressing Barriers to IDEA

Community Outreach

IDEA Tracking

No growth or progress has occurred

Performance Management

Value Chain

Pink Rectangles = Frequency of Response

Status of IDEA in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

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people of colour and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community also acknowledged the importance and benefits of allyship in enhancing their sense of belonging in the workplace. The majority of large and over half of small/medium enterprises have employee resource groups and mentorship programs in place. While this is a strong start, a clear opportunity exists for small/medium enterprises to strengthen inclusive cultures by hosting and/or connecting their employees to such programs.

Very often individuals from equity-deserving groups are burdened with the expectation that they will support planning for and participate in IDEA initiatives.

Many people from equity-deserving groups enjoy supporting IDEA initiatives by helping to plan efforts or sharing personal experiences with their communities during IDEA events. However, there is often an assumption that individuals from equity-deserving groups should be active members in planning and participating in IDEA initiatives (i.e. sharing personal experiences)—and this work is frequently unrecognized or uncompensated. When there are few representatives from specific equity-deserving groups within an organization (e.g. Indigenous peoples, Black people), a small group of people—or sometimes a single person—is often left with a greater proportion of work, placing extra burden on the intended beneficiaries.

"Since becoming involved with the employee resource group… I was able to confidently make the decision to be fully 'out' within my company."

Focus Group Participant, LGBTQ2S+ Individual

Building a Sense of Belonging in the Workplace

Inclusive mentorship, employee resource groups and allyship are best practices for strengthening belonging in the workplace. Small/medium enterprises that do not have a critical mass of employees from particular equity-deserving groups may need to look outside the organization to provide opportunities to join affinity groups.

Inclusive Mentorship: Inclusive mentorship is a mentorship approach that focuses on building mentor-mentee relationships that respect the unique values, perspectives, experiences, and interests of the mentee, rather than focusing exclusively on reflection/learnings from the mentor. Providing inclusive mentorship helps to make the mentee feel they belong and ensures that the knowledge and skills provided to mentees are focused on helping achieve individual career goals.[16]

Employee Resource Group (ERG): Employee resource groups (often referred to as ERGs or affinity groups) are groups of employees who come together in their workplace based on shared identities or life experiences. ERGs provide support and create safe spaces for networking, enhancing career development and contributing to personal development in the work environment. [17]

Allyship: Allyship is action taken by a person of privilege working in solidarity and partnership with an individual from a marginalized group of people. Allyship helps take down the systems that infringe upon basic rights, equal access and ability to thrive in our society.[18]

"Senior leaders speaking up on behalf of [all personnel] ensures everyone's voice is heard at the highest levels and builds confidence that there are [allies] within multiple levels of the organization. This builds trust across the organization and enables progress to occur."

Focus Group Participant, Woman

"There are many [Indigenous people in life sciences] who are responsible for advising on IDEA and being the conduit to their communities—we need to be financially compensating this work…"

**Focus Group Participant,
Indigenous Individual**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Support the participation of employees in employee resource groups** by providing time, financial support or other resources; build awareness of initiatives outside of the organization such as affinity groups (e.g. Canadian Black Scientists Network).[19]

2. **Offer formal mentoring/ coaching programs for employees** by providing training to build inclusive mentorship skills (i.e. how to tailor discussions and support to the needs of mentees) for all individuals who act as mentors; connect individuals to external mentoring programs (e.g. Impact Mentoring) if in-house capacity for mentorship does not exist. [20]

3. **Ensure that individuals that support, plan and lead IDEA initiatives are recognized** and/or compensated for their time.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge of IDEA is core to supporting the cultural change and talent empowerment that will drive success in the life sciences sector. It encompasses a wide array of topics, ranging from IDEA best practices (e.g. in recruitment, leadership in IDEA) to building understanding of the need for IDEA to IDEA tracking (e.g. tracking in recruitment/career progression). Building IDEA knowledge and tracking IDEA progress within organizations will provide a foundation for action and a basis for course correction and improvement through evidence-informed decisions.

"The initiatives I've seen fail are those that are enforced and lack proper socialization to share the "why" in order to encourage people to be sensitive to topics for which they were previously unaware. Without this, IDEA initiatives can feel alienating."

**Focus Group Participant,
Indigenous Individual**

What We Found

Gaps in knowledge of IDEA are a major barrier to advancing IDEA for many organizations.
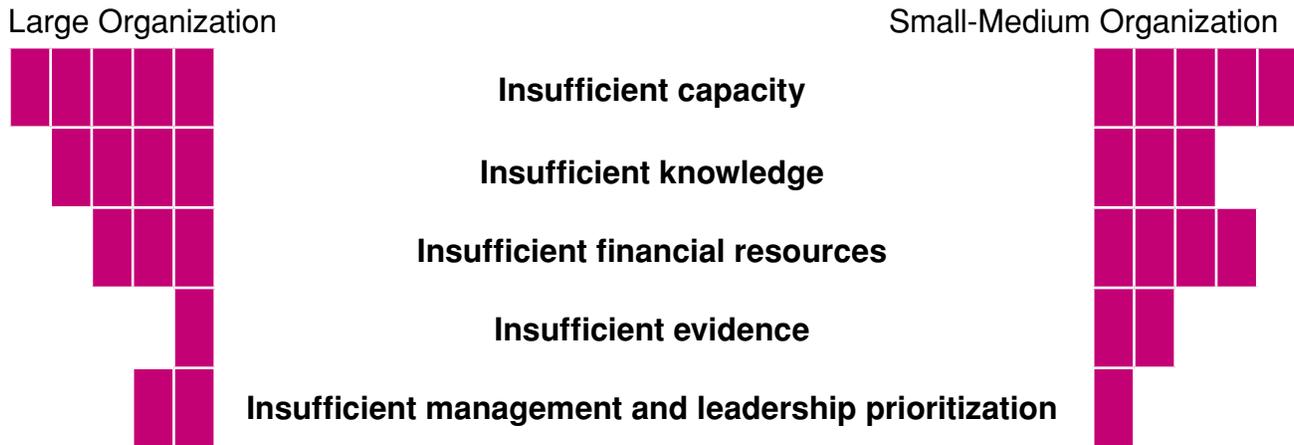
Leaders from organizations of all sizes indicated that insufficient knowledge (e.g. knowledge of IDEA best practices in recruitment, appreciation of the need for/value of IDEA in the workplace) has been one of the largest barriers to making progress in IDEA (Fig 7). When employees do not have a common understanding of the need for and importance of IDEA initiatives, IDEA efforts can alienate individuals from equity-deserving groups rather than enhance inclusion.

Organizations of all sizes would benefit from support with IDEA training as well as access to tools and templates to achieve their IDEA goals.

As enterprises of all sizes increasingly recognize the importance of building IDEA knowledge within the organization's employee community, training and professional development, including IDEA training for staff (Fig 8), have become organizational priorities. There is also broad consensus that many organizations would benefit from external support in building IDEA knowledge and capabilities among team members and that small/ medium enterprises would like to focus on building IDEA capabilities among leaders first (Fig 8).

Figure 7. Barriers to Advancing IDEA in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

What have been the main barriers to advancing IDEA priorities and initiatives at your organization?

Large Organization   Small-Medium Organization

Insufficient capacity

Insufficient knowledge

Insufficient financial resources

Insufficient evidence

Insufficient management and leadership prioritization

Pink Rectangles = Frequency of Response

Figure 8. Desired Supports to Advance IDEA in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

What types of supports would most help your organization advance IDEA priorities and initiatives in the workplace?

Large Organization   Small-Medium Organization

**Education/training
for senior leaders**

Access to tools and templates

Education for managers

Engagement with an IDEA consultant

Funding

**IDEA "Champion"or leader
in place within our organization**

**Education/training
for HR personnel**

Pink Rectangles = Frequency of Response

IDEA Tracking and Transparency

Tracking IDEA efforts and progress is critical to understanding where meaningful change has been made and identifying where improvements are needed.

Several tactics are commonly employed to monitor and assess IDEA metrics and progress:

- **Collecting demographic data** to understand diversity along the career continuum (e.g. within applicant pools, across an organizations and within specific levels and salary bands of an organization such as management or leadership).

- **Employee engagement surveys** to understand the level of motivation/engagement of employees and perspectives on the attitudes towards the work environment.

- **Feedback on IDEA initiatives** to assess the impact of IDEA-related initiatives (e.g. training, mentorship programs, knowledge/understanding gained through events).

Data and insights from tracking activities can be used to examine progress, track implementation and measure impact of IDEA commitments and initiatives, identify shortcomings, and uncover new opportunities to strengthen and embed IDEA within organizations. Organizations should ensure that employees feel safe sharing personal demographic data, such as information related to gender, ethnicity, disability and/or neurodiversity. This can be done by reassuring employees that data will be deidentified and letting them know how the data will be used (e.g. to track progress, inform IDEA initiatives) to incentivize the benefits of sharing information. Organizations should also commit to transparency by sharing findings, such as progress against goals and emerging IDEA opportunities for the organization. An opportunity exists to enhance transparency across the sector, as most large enterprises and almost a third of small/medium enterprises are collecting data to track progress in IDEA, but less than one third of all organizations share findings with employees.

"The best way to demonstrate the importance of IDEA is to create the winning conditions by highlighting the benefits of having diverse and inclusive teams."

Organizational Leader, Small/ Medium Enterprise

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Require IDEA training for all employees** during onboarding and deliver regular (e.g. annual) IDEA training modules to update staff on available resources and supports (e.g. employee resource groups, mentorship programs).

2. **Collect feedback on IDEA initiatives and report on the progress of IDEA** within organizations and to the public.

3. **Track and communicate data** regarding representation at each level of the organization and against the overall labour force, employee engagement/satisfaction, pay equity and organizational progress against IDEA goals/strategy.

LEADERSHIP

Leaders who are committed to IDEA will inspire and motivate teams to take action and achieve impact in IDEA. As champions of organizational goals, leaders need to develop IDEA as a core competency, align the organizational strategy with IDEA and ensure that structures are in place to hold them accountable to IDEA commitments.[21] Leaders who demonstrate commitment, competence and accountability to IDEA will accelerate IDEA change within their organizations and the sector more broadly.

What We Found

Success in IDEA depends on commitment and authentic action from leadership.

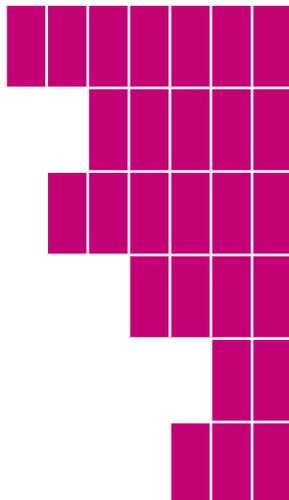For organizations of all sizes, commitment from leadership is the most significant factor in advancing IDEA (Fig 9). Commitment to IDEA from leadership involves incorporating IDEA into the organizational strategy or developing a distinct IDEA strategy as well as allocating resources and taking action to advance the IDEA priorities/goals that have been made. Over 80% of organizations of all sizes in the later stages of the IDEA journey have formalized IDEA priorities/goals through a dedicated IDEA strategy in place or by incorporating IDEA into their organizational strategy. While communicating commitment to IDEA is an important starting point for change, if an organization's actions—particularly those of its leaders—do not align with its stated commitment to IDEA, individuals from equity-deserving groups may question the authenticity of organizational leaders.
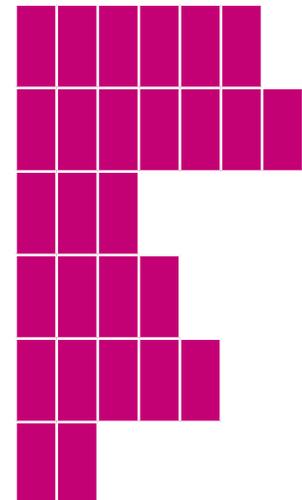
Figure 9. Success Factors for Advancing IDEA in Canada's Life Sciences Sector

What has been most helpful to advancing IDEA in your organization to date?

Large Organization — Small-Medium Organization

Commitment from organizational leadership

Formalizing IDEA goals

Hiring of an IDEA lead

Learning from peer organizations

Fee-for-service training programs

Community-run training programs

Pink Rectangles = Frequency of Response

"Even great ideas and initiatives can fall flat if there is no authenticity and engagement."

Focus Group Participant, Woman

Organizations in the life sciences sector have a sustained interest in building IDEA knowledge.

Building IDEA as a competency among leaders is key to successful implementation of IDEA goals. The majority of large enterprises and about two-thirds of small/medium enterprises provide training to leaders on IDEA. Further, about half of all organizations provide IDEA training to board members, equipping the board with knowledge around IDEA best practices and a greater capacity to hold leadership accountable to IDEA commitments. Organizations recognize the need for leadership to continue building IDEA knowledge and competencies as organizational contexts change and new knowledge and better practices in IDEA emerge. There is a great deal to learn (e.g. IDEA best practices; challenges faced by specific equity-deserving groups) and all organizations indicated a desire for support in building IDEA knowledge among leadership teams (Fig 7).

"Education, education, education. We run [IDEA training sessions] and all leaders must participate. These programs have helped us embed these principles in all of our interactions, which has become a value proposition of our organization."

Organizational Leader, Large Enterprise

Diversifying Leadership Teams

Individuals from equity-deserving groups want to see more diversity among leaders.

Women and people of colour value diverse representation in leadership positions. They also value initiatives that are aimed at supporting women on their career journey toward leadership positions (e.g. executive coaching/ training and mentorship). Diversity within leadership teams creates a sense of opportunity with respect to career progression among individuals from equity-deserving groups. Organizations are taking action to diversify leadership teams, but a lot of work remains to be done. Two-thirds of larger organizations and just over half of small/ medium enterprises have leadership diversity targets, while under half of all organizations have programs in place to facilitate the career advancement of individuals from equity-deserving groups.

Intentional efforts aimed at diversifying leadership teams will help to accelerate progress toward IDEA and create a greater sense of belonging among employees from equity-deserving groups.

"Early in my career there were few Asians or women in leadership positions. Now there are leaders who look like me, demonstrating that people like me can lead organizations."

Focus Group Participant, Person of Colour

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Embed IDEA into the corporate strategy** or develop a dedicated IDEA strategy that links to the corporate strategy.

2. **Hold leaders accountable to IDEA** by building IDEA metrics into performance management and positioning boards or oversight committees to monitor and support progress towards IDEA.

3. **Provide ongoing training to leaders regarding IDEA,** including emerging best practices in IDEA and issues/topics of relevance to specific equity-deserving groups.

SECTOR-WIDE OPPORTUNITIES

IDEA is a powerful area for collaboration among life sciences stakeholders, and mobilizing the community of life sciences organizations in Canada around IDEA initiatives that benefit the sector has great potential to accelerate progress and build goodwill. Further, organizations that take action to advance IDEA can show leadership in an area that is a priority for all levels of government and strengthen their reputation with other stakeholders in the life sciences sector. Those with the greatest potential to lead are typically larger organizations that are more likely to be at more advanced stages of the IDEA journey. Those with the greatest need for support are typically (although not exclusively) small- or medium-sized organizations that often do not have the time or resources required to prioritize IDEA. While small/ medium enterprises may have fewer resources to dedicate to IDEA, they can be more agile than large enterprises. As such, supporting small/medium enterprises by developing implementable IDEA tools and resources can drive significant and rapid impact across our sector.

Our study uncovered and validated several community-based initiatives that have great potential to scale and achieve broad impact in the sector:

1. **Articulating, documenting and disseminating the case for IDEA**—Ensuring access to sources that make a clear and compelling business case for prioritizing IDEA in the sector can help organizations build support for IDEA initiatives. IDEA leaders in the sector can come together to develop and share the case for IDEA—capturing its potential to foster innovation, talent retention, employee engagement and productivity—through ongoing discourse and reporting. Such resources, made broadly available, can help catalyze understanding and change.

2. **Creating and sharing a library of IDEA tools and templates**— Many organizations that are limited in time and internal expertise would benefit from access to a library of resources (e.g. methodologies for inclusive recruitment, performance management, mentorship, IDEA policies, company demographic and engagement surveys). IDEA leaders in the life sciences sector—and beyond— can come together to assemble and create access to these essential tools, templates and information sources.

3. **Establishing an IDEA community of practice for leaders**—Embedding IDEA in any organization is a journey marked by successes, challenges and numerous questions. Establishing safe spaces for organizations' IDEA leaders to come together to support each other on the journey has the potential to accelerate knowledge dissemination, build resilience and sustain progress.

Implementation of the recommendations in this study will help organizations build and sustain diverse teams in which individuals feel a sense of belonging as they contribute their full potential to a more innovative and impactful life sciences sector.

"Since we do not have the capacity or resources to develop an IDEA strategy, we seek to leverage our ecosystem and learn from peer organizations to accelerate our own advancement."

Organizational Leader, Small/Medium Enterprise

LOOKING AHEAD

The Canadian life sciences sector stands to be transformed by a growing commitment to IDEA. As organizations in the sector take steps to embed IDEA in the fabric of their organizations and cultures, this study can serve as a baseline against which progress can be monitored and measured. Reassessing the sector on a biannual basis will provide a regular opportunity to review priorities, examine progress and course correct on the journey to strengthen IDEA. In future iterations of this study there are opportunities to:

- **Expand Reach.** Engage a broader cross-section of Canada's life sciences sector and implement tactics that will make it easier for small/medium enterprises to participate in the survey.

- **Deepen Understanding.** Form partnerships with community-based organizations (e.g. affinity groups) and specialist facilitators to expand the range of perspectives gathered, with a particular focus on enhancing understanding and representation of Indigenous experiences and knowledges.

- **Foster Knowledge Exchange.** Compare findings and recommendations from this study to those from sectors outside the life sciences (e.g. energy, finance) to uncover innovative approaches and exchange better practices.

IDEA is key to unlocking the potential of Canada's life sciences future. We cannot build a more innovative and competitive life sciences future without embracing and embedding IDEA in our sector.
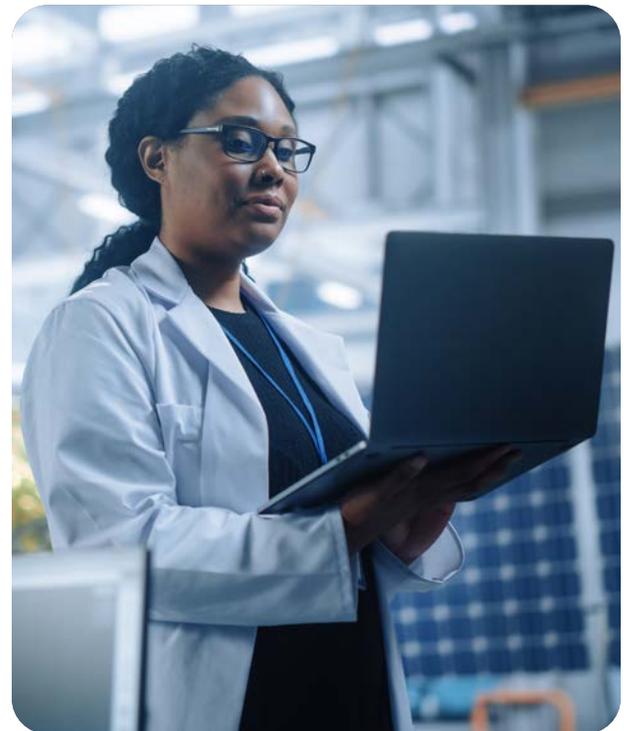
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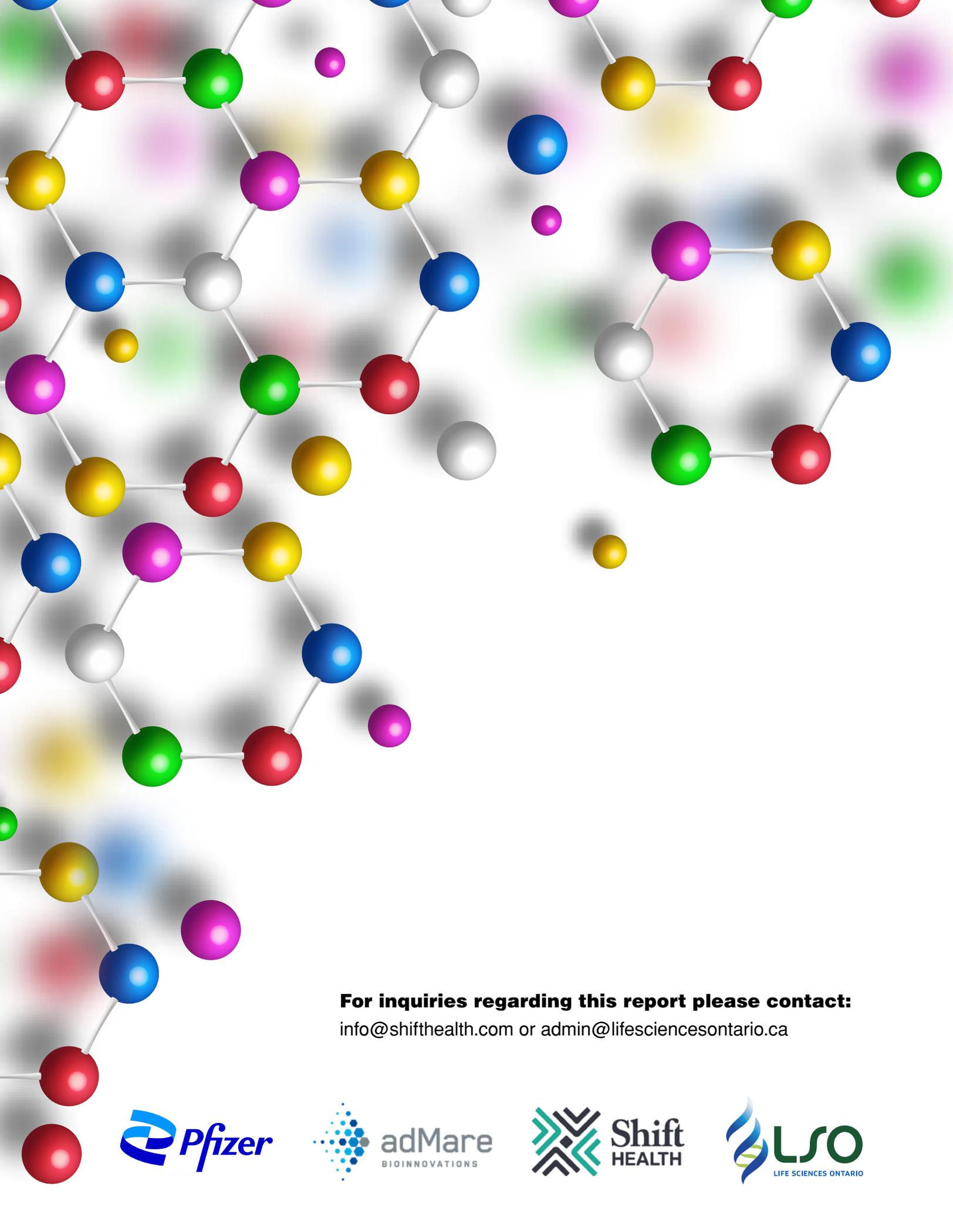
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