

Cumming Connector Program Calgary-Melbourne Cumming Postdoc Exchange Guidelines

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Calgary-Melbourne Cumming Postdoc Exchange is jointly supported by the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne. The exchange is designed to strengthen international collaboration between the two Universities in areas of common interest and priority.
- 1.2 The exchange program will enable postdoctoral researchers from each of the University of Melbourne and Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary to spend time in a host laboratory/research group at the partner institution.
- 1.3 The program is designed to support exceptional researchers in pursuing ambitious, boundary-pushing scientific research via a postdoctoral position at the host organisation.
- 1.4 Bold proposals that challenge conventional thinking and have potential for paradigm-shifting discoveries and transformative impact in priority areas are encouraged.
- 1.5 Exchanges must be for a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 2 years. The program aims to create unique opportunities for postdoctoral researchers to develop world-leading expertise under exceptional research supervisors. The postdoctoral researcher will be expected to lead groundbreaking research while strengthening international collaboration in areas of demonstrated impact and excellence between the two institutions, thereby creating future research leaders and stars in their fields.

2. AREAS OF FOCUS

- 2.1 The Calgary-Melbourne Cumming Postdoc Exchange builds on areas of natural synergy and complementary strengths between the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences, University of Melbourne. The exchange is part of the broader Cumming Connector Program which aims to identify opportunities for collaboration across organisations, in areas of interest to Geoff Cumming, our common benefactor.
- 2.2 Successful proposals will clearly demonstrate innovative and ambitious projects that leverage these institutional synergies to foster strong, sustained research partnerships.
- 2.3 Proposals will be accepted from the following two priority research areas and may center on both lab-based and computational/data-driven approaches to address pressing, globally relevant research questions. We encourage innovative methodological approaches that best suit the scientific questions being investigated.

Priority areas of research:

Infection, Inflammation, and Immunity, for example:

- Microbiome research and microbial therapeutics
- Immuno-therapeutics for cancer and other diseases
- One Health and anti-microbial therapeutics
- Anti-microbial resistance
- Pandemic preparedness

Neuroscience and Brain Health, for example:

- Stroke
- Neurological disorders
- Neuro-inflammatory conditions

3. KEY DATES

Applications open: 23 June 2026

Applications close: 11.59PM AEST (Melbourne time), 1 October 2026

Outcomes expected: December 2026

4. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

4.1 Two awards will be made, one from each institution.

4.2 At time of application, applicants must be primarily affiliated with the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, or the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne, or the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health (Melbourne) or Doherty Institute (Melbourne Health/Royal Melbourne Hospital).

4.3 Applicants must hold a PhD, MD or MD/PhD conferred no earlier than July 1st, 2020. Extensions are granted for leave/time in industry/exceptional circumstances.

4.4 Research proposals must be jointly developed by the postdoctoral researcher and home and host lab supervisors from both Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne/Doherty/Florey.

4.5 The supervisor from the home institution may assist applicants making connections for new projects or where these collaborations do not yet exist.

5. FUNDING

5.1 Salary will be commensurate with national award-level postdoctoral salaries/institutional salaries in each of the respective universities.

5.2 For the researcher hosted by Calgary:

- Salary: CA\$80,000 + Benefits + Mandated increases
- Research Allowance: CA\$10,000/ year
- For more details, please visit the PDAC Agreement 'Postdoctoral Associate' (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/sites/default/files/teams/239/PDAC-CA.pdf>)

5.3 For the researcher hosted by University of Melbourne:

- Salary: Academic Level A6 (including oncosts), as per the terms and conditions of employment set out in the University of Melbourne Enterprise Agreement.

5.4 Relocation costs for each recipient (up to ~CA\$7500 per annum), dependent on applicant circumstances.

6. PROPOSAL COMPLETENESS

6.1 Applicants must complete and submit their application via the Smarty Grants online application form.

6.2 Any attachments provided must adhere to formatting/page requirements. Refer to: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29300.html>

6.3 Applications cannot be submitted after the advertised closing date; late applications will not be accepted.

6.4 Incomplete applications and/or failure to comply with the eligibility criteria may render an application ineligible.

7. SELECTION CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT

7.1 Eligible applications will be sent for scientific review from two identified experts (one from the University of Melbourne and one from University of Calgary) with expertise in the proposed research areas.

7.2 Reviewers will be provided with a review/scoring rubric.

7.3 A Review Committee, comprising two leaders from each institution (minimum four in total, with no stated conflicts of interest), will meet to evaluate applications.

7.4 The committee will consider the scientific reviewers' evaluations. Other factors taken into consideration include the research area and alignment with the program's goals and mandate.

7.5 Applicants will be scored on a numerical scale 1–5 (5 being the highest) based on the following criteria:

Excellence of the proposed research plan: (40%)

- Scientific merit, innovation, and potential for groundbreaking impact of the proposed research.
- Bold vision and potential to advance the field in significant ways.
- Feasibility of project timeline and research plan, with appropriate consideration for the inherent risks of the research.
- Alignment with program goals and focus areas.

Excellence of the applicant: (40%)

- Candidate qualifications assessed using both traditional metrics and DORA criteria.
- Track record for pursuing novel research questions and approaches
- Evidence of exceptional research potential and intellectual creativity.
- Strength of training plan, including specific benefits to the researcher's career development.

Suitability of the host lab and environment: (10%)

- Demonstrated research excellence and international reputation of collaborating research labs in the applicant's specified area
- Capacity of the host environment to support ambitious, cutting-edge research, i.e. supervisor and research environment
- Research infrastructure and mentorship to enable groundbreaking research projects.
- Is the chosen host lab a good fit for the proposed project, and does it provide the best opportunities for the applicant to achieve their scientific goals?

Strengthening Connections/Alignment with Program Goals: (10%)

- Articulation of benefits to both participating labs (home and host).
- Articulation of how the proposed work will promote long-lasting research connections between Calgary and Melbourne that will extend beyond the exchange period, such as opportunities for leveraging future grant applications.

7.6 To ensure consistency, reviewers must adhere to the following rating scale:

Descriptor	Range	Definition	Outcome
Outstanding	4.5 – 4.9	The application excels in most , if not all, relevant aspects. Any shortcomings are minimal .	May be Funded
Excellent	4.0 – 4.4	The application excels in many relevant aspects and reasonably addresses all others. Certain improvements are possible .	
Very Good	3.5 – 3.9	The application excels in some relevant aspects and reasonably addresses all others. Some improvements are necessary .	
Good	3.0 – 3.4	The application broadly addresses relevant aspects. Major revisions are required .	Not Fundable
Average	2.0 – 2.9	The application fails to provide convincing information and/or has serious inherent flaws or gaps.	
Below Average	1.0 – 1.9		
Not Acceptable	0.0 – 0.9		

8. CONDITIONS OF AWARD

- 8.1 Exchanges are intended to support a full-time position, commencing early 2027. A request for a delayed start date may be considered.
- 8.2 Awards are contingent on the recipient being able to meet necessary visa requirements to work at the host organisation.
- 8.3 Funding will be provided to support a salaried full-time position at the host organisation for no less than 1 year, up to a maximum of 2 years. Awardees will be employed by the host organisation (I.e.: Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary or Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences, University of Melbourne) for the duration of the exchange.
- 8.4 Postdoctoral researchers employed at the University of Calgary will fall within the PDAC Agreement 'Postdoctoral Associate' and will be required to align with all requirements of the PDAC agreement (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/sites/default/files/teams/239/PDAC-CA.pdf>)
- 8.5 Postdoctoral researchers employed at the University of Melbourne will fall under the University of Melbourne Enterprise Agreement <https://staff.unimelb.edu.au/human-resources/enterprise-agreement>
- 8.6 A research collaboration agreement between University of Melbourne and Calgary University will be entered into as part of the postdoc exchange acceptance process. The collaboration agreement will govern the conduct of the research (including IP, data, publications, confidentiality etc) based on the specific requirements and funding arrangements for the program of research.
- 8.7 All presentations, publications and IP arising from the research program must acknowledge the Cumming Connector Program, Calgary-Melbourne Cumming Postdoc Exchange.
- 8.8 Fellows are required to submit a final report detailing research outcomes and impact, including traditional metrics and [DORA](#) metrics, collaborations developed, and future research directions. Fellows are also encouraged to create a short video highlighting the benefits of the exchange experience for posting on the program website.
- 8.9 Successful awardees are expected to serve as research ambassadors between the institutions and to demonstrate leadership in advancing innovative approaches in their field and ongoing collaborations between the two institutions.
- 8.10 The salary component is subject to applicable taxation rules in both countries.
- 8.11 Recipients are expected to fully engage in their host institution's research environment and contribute to building lasting collaborative relationships between Calgary and Melbourne.