

2023

International Centre for Disability & Rehabilitation

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2026

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Executive Summary

The International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation's (ICDR) vision is to be "a leader in research and education in the rehabilitation sciences focused on improving the lives of people with disabilities globally" and its mission is "to advance the function and well-being of people of all abilities through a scholarly mandate."

In July 2022, Andrea Duncan and Tim Bressmann joined ICDR as the new Co-Directors and it was decided that it was time to develop a new strategic plan. The development of this strategic plan included deep consultation and collaboration with the existing ICDR community and potential target stakeholders for future collaboration.

Strategic Priorities and Objectives

Under the themes of Research, Education, ICDR Consulting, Networking and Communication and Administration, our strategic objectives are as follows:

- Objective #1: Create new pathways for RSI researchers to link their research to the ICDR.
- Objective #2: Review and strengthen the ICDR's processes for international fieldwork placement for students within the rehabilitation sector
- Objective #3: Develop and build out the ICDR's international educational offerings
- Objective #4: Strengthen ICDR-Consulting's processes for onboarding new consultants and proposal writing
- Objective #5: Review and update communication structures and procedures of the ICDR
- Objective #6: (Groups) Define what it means to be an ICDR Group
- Objective #7: (ICDR-Group Leadership) Define ICDR-Group Leadership Structures
- Objective #8: (Membership) Define, retain and expand ICDR membership
- Objective #9: (Financial stability) Ensure financial stability for ICDR's future

ICDR Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026

Introduction

The International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation (ICDR) has existed since 2004. It was established as an academic Centre in the Rehabilitation Science Sector in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. The ICDR has the mission to advance research and education in the rehabilitation sciences in order to improve the lives of people with disabilities worldwide. The last self-study and external review of the ICDR had been conducted in the 2014/2015 academic year.

In July 2022, Tim Bressmann and Andrea Duncan joined ICDR as Co-Directors. Dr. Bressmann is the lead on the research portfolio and Dr. Duncan is the lead on the education portfolio. In discussions with the outgoing ICDR leadership, as well as in internal discussions with Cathy Cameron, ICDR Coordinator, and Christian Noumi, ICDR Strategic Advisor, it was decided that it was time to develop a new strategic plan to guide the activities of the ICDR over the coming years.

Reaffirmation of Vision, Mission, and Values

The ICDR leadership team reviewed the foundational principles of the ICDR as laid out in the 2014 self-study and concluded that these still serve the ICDR well. The ICDR's vision is to be "a leader in research and education in the rehabilitation sciences focused on improving the lives of people with disabilities globally." The ICDR's mission is "to advance the function and well-being of people of all abilities through a scholarly mandate", with an educational goal of "enriching the educational experience of rehabilitation science students locally and globally, and providing professional development for rehabilitation professionals to become more responsive to global needs", and a research goal of "contributing to new knowledge and innovation on international issues in rehabilitation and disability." The work of the ICDR is guided by the core values of respect, partnership, a rights-based approach, innovation and excellence, inclusion, and sustainability. The leadership team decided that a modification or extension of these foundational principles is not necessary at the present time.

Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process sought to solicit the input of members and stakeholders in the ICDR and co-design the goals and priorities of the new strategic plan with them. We also used the strategic planning process to begin reaching to faculty and students in the Rehabilitation Sciences Institute (RSI).

From March to September 2022, the incoming co-directors Drs. Duncan and Bressmann had a series of meetings with the ICDR transitional leadership team, the chairs of most ICDR country groups, ICDR students and ICDR consulting. In these meetings, the co-directors were oriented

to the organizational structure and processes of the ICDR, which was an important prerequisite to begin a more formal strategic planning process.

In order to consult the members of the ICDR as well as the faculty and students in the RSI, three activities were then developed and implemented. We conducted an online survey of ICDR members, we organized two focus group discussions with ICDR members, and we conducted an online survey of the faculty and student members of the RSI. These three elements of our consultative process are described in more detail below.

Online Survey of ICDR members

In September 2022, we developed a survey on Microsoft Forms which was distributed to all 82 members on the ICDR distribution list. Responses were received from 32 individuals, for a response rate of 39%. Quantitative responses were aggregated and qualitative elements were analyzed and emerging themes were synthesized. Based on the most frequent topics and suggestions, discussion questions were developed for the subsequent two focus groups. A PowerPoint presentation summarizing the survey results and the topics for the focus group discussions can be found in Appendix 1.

Focus group discussions

Members of the ICDR were invited to participate in two focus group discussions in October 2022. Four individuals participated in the first, and 6 participated in the second focus group. The sessions were conducted online. The results of the online survey were presented and three short discussions were guided by topics that had emerged from the online surveys. The three discussion topics related to:

1. Participants' information and communication needs and preferences;
2. Strategies to improve collaboration within the ICDR as well with its international and local partners;
3. Other strategic planning topics, such as more effective management of ICDR membership, education and research capabilities, and issues of cultural safety and equitable community partnership.

Independent notes of the discussants' statements were generated by the ICDR leadership team members during the conversations. These notes were compared and consolidated, and they form the basis for the strategic directions listed below.

Online survey of students and faculty in the Rehabilitation Sciences Institute (RSI)

In November 2022, an online survey was created and distributed to student and faculty members of the RSI. Thirty-five responses were received. The responses, which were mostly quantitative in nature, were aggregated. A summary of the survey results can be found in a

PowerPoint presentation in Appendix 2. The results were presented to the RSI faculty at the annual RSI faculty retreat on November 25, 2022. They will be used as a basis for further discussions and planning with the RSI leadership and membership.

Final ICDR Community Feedback on the Draft Strategic Plan

The final draft of the strategic plan was circulated to the ICDR country group chairs for their review in January 2023. A discussion session was held in February 2023 to solicit their feedback, and a final round of fine-tuning will be applied to the document based on the feedback of the country group chairs. This final strategic plan was prepared to share with the Rehabilitation Sciences Sector chairs a monthly meetings in the spring of March 2023.

Strategic Priorities and Objectives

Based on the findings of the co-design consultation process, it was determined that the following items are priorities for ICDR over the next three years. We present each priority, the key objectives and associated deliverables as follows.

Research

The ICDR has always had a research mandate, and while some ICDR country groups (e.g. ICDR Zambia) have existed primarily to conduct research, there has been little overall integration with research activities in the Rehabilitation Sciences Sector in general, and the Rehabilitation Sciences Institute specifically. The online survey found that the majority of the 35 respondents had not been involved with the ICDR in the past, and that 26 (74%) of them knew little or nothing about the ICDR. On the other hand, many of the respondents indicated that they had pre-existing international research collaborations, and that they would be potentially open to new collaborations. When presented with a range of suggestions for how the ICDR could support their research mandate, the respondents indicated that they would find the following helpful, by descending number of votes:

- Information about funding opportunities (30 votes)
- A data bank of RSI researchers' projects in countries of interest (26 votes)
- Information about the process of setting up international partnerships and collaborations (22 votes)
- A "match-making" service that connects researchers working in the same countries or on similar topics (21 votes)
- General networking opportunities with other researchers, such as an annual conference (17 votes)
- Country-specific work groups for researchers working in the same countries or on similar topics (13 votes).

The results of the survey were presented to the members of the RSI at the annual faculty town hall on November 25, 2022. Based on this first scan of the RSI membership, the following objectives were developed, which we hope to address in collaboration with the RSI leadership.

Objective #1: Create new pathways for RSI researchers to link their research to the ICDR.

The RSI comprises both faculty and students, and these two groups will be jointly referred to as RSI researchers below. Based on initial reactions from the RSI leadership, there seems to be mutual interest to create stronger links between the RSI and the ICDR. The details of the planned activities and deliverables will be discussed with the RSI leadership in more depth. The RSI is mostly a virtual institute, and there is often little contact between affiliated researchers apart from the faculty town halls and the annual RSI research day. A closer collaboration with the ICDR may therefore provide opportunities for RSI researchers to build their own community and foster new connections.

Deliverables:

1. We will initiate further discussions with the RSI leadership how to best connect interested faculty members to the ICDR (planned for January 2023).
2. The RSI membership will be included in the ICDR's communication efforts, such as mail-outs and newsletters (see the section on new Communication strategies). This will also include communication about funding for international research activities that may be of interest to RSI researchers (in line with the timelines for communication goals below).
3. ICDR networking activities such as the planned annual ICDR conferences (see Communication objectives) will be opened to RSI researchers (in line with the timelines for communication goals below).
4. We will explore with the RSI whether we can develop an international research database that will map the activities of interested RSI members and allow us to identify and connect potential clusters of researchers working in geographically or thematically similar areas. The first version of such a database could be as simple as an Excel spreadsheet that is fed with information through an MS Forms survey (to be completed by March 2023, contingent on the outcomes of our discussion in January 2023, see point 1 above).
5. Based on data gathered through this survey, we will explore how we can attract and attach RSI researchers (and their research) to any of the existing country groups (to be completed by September 2023 for the first round of interested RSI researchers).
 - a. We will use the RSI international research database (to be created, see deliverable 4 above) to identify research projects that are ready to enter into a collaborative project or a knowledge translation stage. Interested RSI researchers could then be put in touch with the ICDR country groups and their international partners (to be initiated during the fall term of 2023 for the first round of interested RSI researchers).
 - b. Importantly, the values of the ICDR will must guide the practical aspects of any such collaborative research or knowledge transfer processes. Research goals should serve the purposes of the local ICDR partners, and they must be developed collaboratively and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

6. We will explore if there is interest to develop new country-specific work groups based on geographic or thematic clusters of RSI researchers (to be initiated during the fall of 2023 for the first round of interested RSI researchers).
7. Dr. Stephanie Nixon, the previous director of the ICDR, had explored avenues of creating an appointment title such as “ICDR scientist” that could be bestowed to deserving RSI researchers and international collaborators to tie them more closely to the ICDR (with privileges such as an U of T e-mail account or library privileges). While this is not an urgent priority, we hope to further explore this idea collaboratively with the RSI and the university (idea to be acted upon or retired by September 2024).

Education

Education is a core pillar within ICDR and is represented in many of the key objectives in this three-year strategic plan. The ICDR has the educational goal of “enriching the educational experience of rehabilitation science students locally and globally, and providing professional development for rehabilitation professionals to become more responsive to global needs”. The educational work of the ICDR is guided by the core values of respect, partnership, a rights-based approach, innovation and excellence, inclusion, and sustainability.

Of note, ICDR has previously identified three components within the ICDR education pillar, which are: (1) implementation of safe, high-quality and equitable international clinical internships (ICIs) primarily for students in the Rehabilitation Sciences Sector; (2) research training related to disability and rehabilitation in the context of global health for graduate students at the University of Toronto; and, (3) capacity-building for rehabilitation providers in low and middle income countries. The feedback from the ICDR community as well as these three components have influenced the educational strategy.

Objective #2: Review and strengthen the ICDR’s processes for international fieldwork placement for students within the rehabilitation sector

At this time, we have approximately 40-50 outbound students from the Rehabilitation Sciences Sector per year who complete a fieldwork placement internationally. Additionally, we have a few exchange partnerships with international academic institutions that support a small number of inbound rehabilitation students for clinical fieldwork placements. These clinical fieldwork partnerships have evolved organically and are an integral part of ICDR. However, we have inconsistent practices for securing placements, finding preceptors, financial supports and conducting evaluations with students. The strategic review of the ICDR is a good opportunity to evaluate and revise the current practices and establish more robust and consistent processes, while respecting each country group’s unique history and specific needs.

Deliverables:

1. Dr. Duncan will meet with the Chair and Vice-Chair (VC) Education in each country group to learn about current practices. Findings from these meetings will be summarized in a brief document and shared with all country groups by July 1st, 2023.
2. In a collective meeting with all country group Chairs, VCs Education and Fieldwork Coordinators from all three Rehabilitation Sciences Sector programs (OT, PT, SLP), we will discuss opportunities for streamlining and standardizing the procedures in all units. This meeting will have taken place by October 1st, 2023.
3. Based on the collaborative decisions made at the collective meeting (see point 2), an ICDR Education policy and procedure document will be created and subsequently reviewed and approved by all key ICDR members involved in education. This will be complete by December 31st, 2023.
4. The current international clinical internships tend not to capitalize on opportunities for Interprofessional Education (IPE). In discussion with the international placement sites, the country group Chairs, the VCs Education, and the RSS Fieldwork Coordinators, strategies for adding IPE components to international placements will be explored. This is expected to be an ongoing, iterative collegial discussion with no fixed timeline for conclusion.

Objective #3: Develop and build out the ICDR's international educational offerings

Most ICDR country groups have one main institution in their country of interest that they collaborate with for clinical education opportunities. There are probably opportunities for the ICDR country groups to build on these relationships and onboard other health and social services agencies for international clinical internships. However it will be important that growth of new sites does not take away from internships with existing partners.

Deliverables:

1. Support all ICDR country groups to conduct environmental scans to determine key organizations to target. To begin in the winter/ spring of 2024.
2. Reach out to key agencies and engage in discussions about building contractual relationships with ICDR and the University of Toronto Rehabilitation Sciences Sector. This work will begin during spring and summer of 2024.

ICDR Consulting

The ICDR Consulting is a group of researchers who specialize in international rehabilitation and disabilities studies. The ICDR Consulting group has a strong history of building relationships with NGOs and INGOs, and the group members have been frequently invited to submit proposals for implementation and evaluation projects. While the ICDR had many years of success, it must be recognized that the work of the ICDR Consulting group provides the main source of revenue. Specifically, 10% of all ICDR Consulting revenue is added to the ICDR's general budget.

While this revenue generation model has worked well and provided reasonable financial stability, there are some risks that should be noted. Any ICDR Consulting proposal submission can only happen if a member of the ICDR Consulting group puts in the unpaid time and work to identify opportunities and develop proposals. Our track record demonstrates a ~30% success rate since 2012. This is excellent compared to other consulting practices. On the flip side, the time and work invested into 70% of the proposals is lost.

Both a strength and a weakness of ICDR Consulting is that it is a small and tight-knit group of researchers who have a long-standing history of working together. This has led to many successes. However, based on the time commitments required for each proposal, the group has to be very selective which projects to apply for. There is currently no onboarding process for new members on the ICDR Consulting team. There is also no strategic vision how to grow this valuable relationship-building and revenue-generating service component of the ICDR.

Objective #4: Strengthen ICDR-Consulting's processes for onboarding new consultants and proposal writing

The strategic review provides a good opportunity to review and revise the procedures, workflow and membership structure of the ICDR Consulting group. The collaborative improvement goals detailed below will enable the ICDR Consulting group to expand their membership and streamline their processes to generate more successful applications and complete the work on the projects.

Deliverables

1. Create an online repository of previous submissions and use these to develop proposal boilerplate documents to facilitate the writing of requests for proposals. Repository to be created by the end of 2023.
2. Create processes for screening and onboarding new potential candidates for the ICDR Consulting team. A potential recruitment pool could be researchers and students associated with the RSI. When surveying the RSI researchers and students to create a database of their international activities (see Objective 1, deliverable 4), we will also scan for their interest to be involved with the ICDR Consulting services. Interested individuals could then be associated with ICDR Consulting projects as appropriate. This is expected to be an ongoing, iterative process with no specific timeline.
3. Review and improve the internal processes for organizing ICDR Consulting applications. In particular, guidelines or criteria will be developed about what qualifies an individual to serve as a lead on an ICDR Consulting project. This deliverable will be developed collaboratively by the members of the ICDR Consulting group by the spring term of 2024.
4. To improve the financial workflow, a separate ICDR Consulting CFC account will be created. To be completed by the summer of 2023.

Networking and Communication

Communication, both within ICDR, between ICDR Groups, and externally was identified as a priority in the online survey and during the focus group discussions with the ICDR members. This section describes the objectives and activities to strengthen this important priority area.

Objective #5: Review and update communication structures and procedures of the ICDR

Currently, the flow of information in the ICDR is almost exclusively top-down from the ICDR Executive to the country group chairs (versus directly to group members). This approach has worked well in the past but should be revisited as part of the development of a more general and comprehensive communication plan. There is an ICDR Communication group, which is currently dormant and needs to be revisited.

The internal communication between the different elements of the ICDR is a cross-cutting theme that extends to all education, research and consulting activities. There is currently minimal information sharing between groups and the Exec, between groups, and to external stakeholders such as the RSI. In the online survey and the focus groups, ICDR members stressed that better information sharing would help identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration. In the past, there were in-person ICDR Forums held once or twice a year, which provided an opportunity to share information between groups. There were also regular meetings between the respective country group Chairs, Vice Chairs Education, Vice Chairs Research and Vice Chairs Finance. These meetings have fallen by the wayside since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The last major redesign of the ICDR's website (icdr.utoronto.ca) was completed in 2014 to update it to the University of Toronto branding. The website was designed to have primarily static content, with occasional reviews and updates by different ICDR constituents (e.g., semi-annual group updates, annual international placement information updates, quarterly banner updates). The ICDR has fallen behind on these updates in recent years. An update of the website is therefore an urgent priority since this is the ICDR's face to the public.

In addition to the website, there is a Facebook page that is managed by the ICDR Students. It is not clear how actively this content is updated, who is linked to this group, and what structures are in place to monitor content.

There is an ICDR listserv that is used infrequently to share information on items such as upcoming events or clinical supervisor positions. Information for the listserv is received passively when someone from within ICDR sends the Coordinator information to circulate. The number of subscribers on the listserv is currently under 40.

Finally, the ICDR has also not strategically utilized existing University of Toronto communication mechanisms (e.g. FoM, RSS listserv, PT Link, OT, SLP, GDRS communications with clinical and student communities, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, etc.).

Deliverables:

Between ICDR Group information exchange

1. A knowledge exchange strategy within and between ICDR groups will be developed by the ICDR Executive in consultation with the ICDR Country Group leadership by September 30, 2023. Based on ICDR member feedback in the focus groups, different strategic options to be considered are a regular semi-annual e-mail newsletter, a revived ICDR listserv, revived group leader meetings, and an annual ICDR conference allowing members to meet and interact. (To be decided upon and launched by September 2023, possible ICDR conference to be launched by May 2024.)

External ICDR information exchange

2. A knowledge exchange strategy for sharing with external stakeholders (especially the RSI) will be developed by ICDR Exec in consultation with ICDR Group leads and UoT communication structures by September 30, 2023. Based on RSI member feedback in the online survey, different strategic options to be considered are a regular semi-annual e-mail newsletter, an ICDR research listserv, and maybe interested RSI members could be invited to participate in a possible annual ICDR conference, allowing RSI researchers to meet and interact with ICDR members. (To be decided upon and launched by September 2023, possible ICDR conference to be launched by May 2024.)

Website

3. Request a detailed review of content and updates from each country group Chair for group specific content by April 30, 2023
4. Request a review of Education specific content and updates from the ICDR Students, the departmental coordinators of international clinical internships and country group Vice Chairs of Education by April 30, 2023
5. Incrementally update website content, with the complete overhaul to be completed by Fall 2023
6. Ensure that content review and update schedules are followed and that stakeholders are periodically reminded of their responsibilities (ongoing, no end date).

Listserv and social media

7. Review listserv enrolment and ensure that all current ICDR members have access (to be completed by May 2023).
8. Develop a strategy for increasing content to share on listserv (to be completed by December 2023).
9. In conjunction with 8, review new avenues of outreach and information broadcast, i.e., social media (to be completed by December 2023).

Review and revision of the ICDR's organization and administrative structure

In the focus groups and online survey, comments from the ICDR community indicated that not all administrative structures and processes have aged equally well. As a result, we will review the ICDR's organization and processes so that the ICDR can meet its mission and objectives.

Objective #6: (Groups) Define what it means to be an ICDR Group

ICDR country groups have all been organically developed based on longstanding partnerships and diverse membership with varying degrees of involvement in group activities. There is limited clarity regarding what it means to be an ICDR Group. Previously the requirement was a group needed to be active in one or both of ICDR's mandates related to research or education.

Deliverables:

1. Together with the ICDR community, develop clear criteria what it means to be an ICDR group (to be completed by June 2023).
2. Review current groups to determine if they are viable and they meet the criteria for an ICDR group (to be completed by November 2023).
3. Based on deliverable 1 above, develop guidelines for creating new groups (to be completed by October 2023).

Objective #7: (ICDR-Group Leadership) Define ICDR-Group Leadership Structures

Currently individual ICDR-Groups have a Chair, VC Education, VC Finance and VC Research.

Deliverables:

4. Review current Group leadership structure (to be completed by June 2023).
5. Develop clear roles and responsibilities for each role (to be completed by June 2023).

Objective #8: (Membership) Define, retain and expand ICDR membership

ICDR country groups have diverse membership structures with varying degrees of involvement in group activities. There is limited clarity regarding what it means to be an ICDR member. The engagement of country partners as 'members' within ICDR groups also varies.

Deliverables:

6. Together with the ICDR community, define what it means to be an ICDR member (to be completed by June 2023).
7. Develop strategies to retain ICDR membership (to be completed by June 2024).
8. Develop strategies to expand ICDR membership (to be completed by June 2024).
9. Strengthen engagement of country partners as members. See Objective 1, deliverable 7: Dr. Stephanie Nixon, the previous director of the ICDR, had explored avenues of creating an appointment title such as "ICDR scientist" that could be bestowed to deserving RSI researchers and international collaborators to tie them more closely to the

ICDR (with privileges such as an U of T e-mail account or library privileges). While this is not an urgent priority, we hope to further explore this idea collaboratively with the RSI and the university (idea to be acted upon or retired by September 2024).

10. Strengthen the inclusion of persons with disabilities in ICDR (ongoing, no fixed target date).
11. Develop an introductory module for new ICDR members (to be completed by June 2024).

Objective #9: (Financial stability) Ensure financial stability for ICDR's future

The University of Toronto and the Rehabilitation Sciences Sector provide in-kind support (e.g. support for co-Directors, financial administration, research ethics, library access etc.). However, ICDR has no source of predictable funding for operating costs. There are currently 3 sources of income:

- (1) ICDR-Consulting (10% administration costs per project). The amounts generated are not predictable and vary year over year.
- (2) 10% of revenue and donations received by ICDR-Groups (currently minimal amounts).
- (3) Advancement/ donations directly contributed to ICDR-General (currently minimal amounts).

Previously ICDR had also received \$2,500/year as an administrative portion related to MTCU funds. However, this is under review and will likely not continue.

Based on the current level of activities operating expenses are approximately \$15,000/ year (including stipends for the Coordinator, the Strategic Advisor, web hosting, ICDR Forums, ICDR Student events).

Deliverables:

1. Discuss advancement opportunities with the Senior Development Officer for the Rehab Sector (to be completed by June 2023).
2. Discuss expansion of the ICDR-Consulting team so that more requests for proposals can be applied for (see Objective 4).
3. Refine ICDR-Consulting processes and templates to further strengthen competitiveness (see Objective 4).
4. Strengthen relationships with potential funders for ICDR-Consulting (e.g. INGOs; ongoing goal).