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People Mentioned:

Dr John Root, (<https://researchmoneyinc.com/people/dr-john-root/>) Dr Thad Harroun (<https://researchmoneyinc.com/people/dr-thad-harroun/>)

Scientists disappointed with federal Budget's silence on nuclear research funding request

Researchers dependent upon the aging nuclear reactor operated by Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL) are disappointed that there was no response in the latest federal Budget to their request for modest funding to facilitate access to different sources of neutron beams.

Members of the Canadian Neutron Initiative (CNI) have been advocating for increased access to foreign facilities and upgrades to a small reactor at McMaster Univ. They were hoping the science-heavy Budget would support their research while a more permanent solution to the closure of the National Research Universal (NRU) reactor is explored. Operated by CNL, the 60-year-old reactor is being decommissioned at the end of March.

Their [pitch](https://researchmoneyinc.com/articles/scientists-raise-alarm-over-future-of-neutron-beam-research-capacity/) for \$24 million over the next three years and \$19 million a year between 2021 and 2029 was supported by the [latest report](http://cins.ca/docs/HC_FINA_report_2017_12.pdf) from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance – *Driving Inclusive Growth: Spurring Productivity and Competitiveness in Canada*.

In response to Budget 2018, CNI members tell RESEARCH MONEY they have entered into discussions with federal departments and agencies that received new funding in the Budget to see if there's any money that can be allocated to help realize CNI's funding objectives.

"In the budget, there's a big emphasis on boosting science funding, but there are many ways to target that money; infrastructure, individual grants and fellowships, new chairs, industrial partnerships, and the like ... Of course, we were happy to see the boost to the tri-councils. But on the infrastructure side, we also really need a new coordinated program to connect Canadians with alternative neutron beam labs, here and abroad. We've really been cut off from this important tool," says Dr Thad Harroun, president of the Canadian Institute for Neutron Scattering, member of the CNI working group and associate professor at Brock Univ.

According to Dr John Root, executive director of the Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation at the Univ of Saskatchewan and head of the Canadian Neutron Beam Centre (CNBC), their funding request could be considered along with other major science initiatives. But while Budget 2018 specifically mentions funding for other major science projects, such as the Canadian Light Source of Saskatoon, SNOLAB research in Sudbury On, and the Canadian Research Icebreaker Amundsen, funding for access to neutron beams wasn't included.

Harroun says the members of CNI have met with officials in Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, National Research Council and Canada Foundation for Innovation, and will continue to explore whether a funding solution can be found.

"We drew their attention (to the fact) that there's no mention (of neutron beam funding in the budget). They're basically saying, 'We're talking about it,'" says Root. "We haven't been discouraged from dialogue," he adds. And what they're getting from the discussions is that the federal agencies are "definitely aware of the situation and ... they realize the value of neutron beams." He says the talks are also meant "to find out if there's money in the system to set up a pan-Canadian, university-led program to replace the operations at Chalk River."

Root adds: "The plan right now is that we will wrap up the Canadian Neutron Beam Centre in the coming year. That is a team of about 20 professional and technical people that enable hundreds of users to access the facility effectively ... We also have to decide what to do with our equipment. We have six neutron spectrometers and a number of (other) equipment that have a total replacement value of \$30 million and those are assets that belong to the crown ... so we have to decide whether and how to redeploy those — whether that could be a resource for building a partnership with an alternate neutron source, or maybe that we end up just folding it all. That has yet to be thought out and that's one of the jobs for this year."

The NRU is used by hundreds of scientists from across Canada and other countries. These scientists are from different disciplines – from biology to chemistry, clean tech , engineering and more – conducting materials science research.

Roots urges that there should be proper management of the NRU as a national asset, by way of a priorities road map as discussed in the Fundamental Review of Science (aka Naylor report).

“The trouble is it’s not in place now, and there’s no one to go to now to deal with our immediate emergency situation. I’m quite anxious about how we’re going to survive,” he adds.

Harroun says a wind-down plan is in place because there’s considerable knowledge that could be lost as researchers move to jurisdictions where facilities exist.

“Once it’s gone, it may be hard to recapture. A lot of that expertise is just going to evaporate over the next year if we don’t do something. And the demand for Canadian expertise is there. We’ve had requests for Canadian neutron expertise from around the world. Canada needs to be a partner,” he says.

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