2025-2026 Annual Report

ICORD Meaningful Engagement Committee

September 2025 - August 2026

ICORD and the Meaningful Engagement Committee

The Meaningful Engagement Committee (MEC) was established to help researchers associated with the International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries (ICORD) and knowledge users within the spinal cord injury (SCI) community build strong partnerships and work together on research that matters.

For more than a decade, ICORD members have been working alongside people with lived and living experience of SCI, community organizations, health care providers, and other knowledge users to strengthen meaningful engagement. As interest and demand for more inclusive, collaborative, and impactful research partnerships grew, ICORD established the Meaningful Engagement Committee, co-led by Drs. Heather Gainforth and Nancy Thorogood.

The MEC brings researchers and knowledge users together to build relationships, learn from one another, and support meaningful partnerships across ICORD's research and training environment.

Establishing the MEC

The MEC was formally established in October 2024 at the ICORD SCI Research Partnership Workshop in Kelowna, British Columbia. The workshop brought together more than 90 researchers, trainees, community members and organizations, staff, and health care providers from across the province. The workshop provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships between researchers and the individuals and communities connected to SCI research, and identify priorities for the MEC to focus on.

Following the establishment of the MEC, two complementary structures were created: the Management Team and the Learning Community

The Management Team is accountable to the broader MEC Learning Community and works to ensure that engagement activities are collaborative, responsive, and inclusive. Together, these structures provide a foundation for bringing researchers, people with lived experience of SCI, community organizations, health care providers, and other knowledge users together to learn, collaborate, and strengthen meaningful engagement practices.

Establishing a Strategic Direction

In October 2025, the MEC Management Team developed the committee's first Strategic Plan. The plan was informed by feedback from the October 2024 ICORD SCI Research Partnership Workshop and established shared priorities and key areas of focus for strengthening meaningful research partnerships.

PURPOSE

To create a connected environment where researchers and knowledge users co-create, share, and implement knowledge that matters.

MISSION AND VISION

Lead, support, and evaluate initiatives that build engagement skills, relationships, and practices across ICORD's research and training ecosystem.

WHAT IS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT?

Advancing and influencing research, dissemination, and/or implementation goals that are personally and socially meaningful, while maintaining a sense of responsibility to others throughout the process. Meaningful engagement involves shared decision-making, mutual respect, and co-learning. It is an ongoing process that requires time, trust, and reflexivity. (IKT Guiding Principles, Meaningful Engagement Committee Strategic Plan)

2025-2026 Strategic Plan

The 2025-2026 Strategic Plan organized the MEC's activities around three interconnected goals:

01 Strengthen relationships and networks

The MEC seeks to create opportunities for connection, collaboration, and community building across ICORD. This goal recognizes that meaningful engagement depends on strong relationships between researchers and the people, organizations, and communities who contribute knowledge and lived experience to SCI research.

02 Build capacity for engagement

The MEC seeks to enhance knowledge, develop skills, and foster a culture of mutual respect and shared learning. Building capacity supports researchers, knowledge users, and other partners in developing the knowledge and skills needed to participate meaningfully in research partnerships.

03 Promote and sustain engagement practices

The MEC seeks to provide recognition, resources, and support that enable research teams to embed meaningful engagement throughout the research process. This goal emphasizes the importance of moving beyond individual engagement activities toward sustainable practices that become integrated into how research is conducted.

MEC Activities and Accomplishments: 2025-2026

The 2025-2026 year represented an important period of development for the MEC. In total, 23 activities were completed in alignment with the three goals of the Strategic Plan. This Annual Report outlines some highlighted initiatives under each goal.

Goal 1: Strengthen relationships and networks

Goal 1 focused on creating opportunities for connection and knowledge sharing amongst researchers and people, organizations, and communities who contribute their knowledge and lived experience.

Strategic Plan Development and Launch

In October 2025, the MEC shared its first strategic plan, establishing a shared direction for the committee and providing a framework for its activities throughout the 2025-2026 year. Developing the strategic plan represented an important period of collaborative direction-setting, and was attended by 25 individuals from ICORD, its community partners, members of the community, and other SCI knowledge users.

To launch its first strategic plan, members of the Management Team introduced the purpose and mission of the MEC, the strategic plan and its goals, and the planned initiatives to implement and act on them. Attendees expressed excitement about the plan, agreement with the strategic plan goals, and interest in being part of its forthcoming initiatives.

Community Research Events

The MEC supported opportunities for researchers and community members to build connections and networks through community research events, delivered in partnership with Spinal Cord Injury BC (SCI BC) and Praxis Spinal Cord Institute.

Community Research Event- Vancouver

On November 3 2025, ICORD and SCI BC hosted Community Research Night in Vancouver. The event provided an opportunity for people with lived experience of SCI to learn about research taking place at ICORD. Eight ICORD research labs were represented and shared information and findings from their current projects, alongside six ICORD partner organizations. This event was a highlight in research and SCI communities, with over 100 registered attendees from across the province and such a positive turnout that more food needed to be ordered!

By creating opportunities for community members to engage directly with research and researchers, the event supported greater connection between the research community and people with lived experience of SCI.

Community Research Event- Kelowna

A second community research event took place in Kelowna on May 11 2026, extending opportunities for engagement and connection across the province. Over 100 people attended from SCI/disability community organizations, as well as researchers, trainees, and people who are part of SCI communities in the Okanagan region and across BC.

The event included poster presentations from ten different research labs related to SCI research, table demonstrations, and informational booths for six local SCI organizations. Attendees networked, and exchanged knowledge on current research and community-based supports within SCI communities.

ICORD-O Community Coffee

Throughout the year, four ICORD-O community coffee events were held in October, December, February, and May at Orchard Park Mall in the Okanagan. The community coffees provided an informal and welcoming setting for individuals, ICORD Principal Investigators and members of their labs, community organizations, and partners in the Okanagan to come together for conversation and networking.

Strong attendance across the events demonstrated the value of creating regular opportunities for connection; there were often more than 30 attendees, and as many as 50! These gatherings supported the development of relationships across the research and community sectors and strengthened community ties within the Okanagan.

The events were made possible through collaboration with SCI BC, Accessible Okanagan, and Praxis Spinal Cord Institute.

Youth Wheelchair Basketball Outreach

In April 2026, MEC members attended an Okanagan Junior Thunder wheelchair basketball game. The Okanagan Junior Thunder is a local youth wheelchair basketball team, and part of the BC Wheelchair Basketball Society.

MEC's attendance at this event was intended to boost awareness of the MEC more broadly in the community, create opportunities for authentic engagement with the MEC and groups within SCI communities, and promote inclusion of youth with SCI. Members of the MEC distributed UBC keychains to athletes, and shared their enthusiasm throughout the game. The turnout was excellent- The stands were packed!

Goal 2: Build capacity for engagement

A second area of focus during 2025–2026 was increasing awareness of the MEC and providing information and resources to support meaningful engagement.

MEC Website Launch

In October 2025, the MEC launched a dedicated webpage on the ICORD website. The webpage provides an overview of the committee, describes its priorities, and outlines opportunities for individuals and organizations to become involved. Establishing an online presence provides an accessible way for the MEC to communicate its purpose and activities and connect members of the broader community with opportunities for engagement.

MEC Newsletter

In February 2026, the MEC released 'The MEC Moment', its first newsletter. The newsletter provided updates about MEC activities to both the Learning Community and the broader public. It also highlighted opportunities for individuals to become involved in the committee's work.

The newsletter represents an important communication mechanism for maintaining connections within the MEC community and sharing information about meaningful engagement activities and opportunities. In 2026-2027 and beyond, the MEC aims to share newsletters twice per year to foster connection and expand awareness of its activities and collaboration opportunities.

The MEC Moment

WELCOME

Welcome to the first edition of The MEC Moment, a space to stay connected to the work, people, and momentum behind meaningful engagement at ICORD. This newsletter is designed for our learning community to share what we've been building, what we're learning, and where we're going next. Whether you've been closely involved or are just getting started, this is your window into the ongoing efforts to support SCI research partnerships across ICORD and beyond.

Check out what this newsletter is all about:

1. What is the MEC?
2. Progress in Action
3. What's next for the MEC?
4. Cheer & Volunteer
5. Partnership in Practice
6. Supporting Meaningful Engagment
7. Help Shape the MEC

"Know Before You Go" Resource

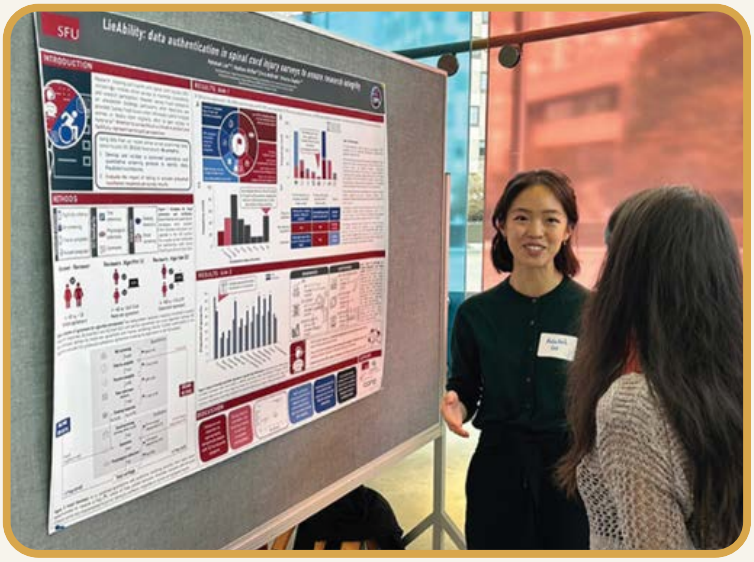
The MEC Management Team developed a "Know Before You Go" guidance document as part of its efforts to promote intentional, engagement between ICORD researchers and SCI communities. This resource was developed for the Community Research Night in Vancouver, to support researchers in best practices and key considerations when engaging with members of the SCI community. The resource illustrates Principle 1 of the IKT Guiding Principles, supporting SCI researchers to "develop and maintain relationships based on trust, respect, dignity, and transparency".

While developed for the Vancouver Community Research Night, the 'Know Before You Go' resource provides a foundational tool that can be adapted for other engagement activities, and can be shared and utilized to promote meaningful engagement more broadly.

Goal 3: Promote and sustain engagement practices

The third strategic goal focused on supporting the integration of meaningful engagement into research practices through recognition, resources, and practical supports.

MEC Award



The MEC Award was introduced at the ICORD Trainee Symposium during the 2025–2026 year. The award was established to recognize meaningful engagement in research and highlight the contributions of individuals who demonstrate a commitment to meaningful engagement practices.

PhD student Rebekah Lee, representing Dr. Victoria Claydon's laboratory at Simon Fraser University, was selected as the inaugural recipient of the MEC Award. Rebekah's poster shared about a study conducted in partnership with SCI BC that developed an 8-step survey screening protocol to identify fraudulent submissions in online surveys related to spinal cord injury. The study also evaluated the impact of fraudulent submissions on survey outcomes.

The introduction of the award provides an opportunity to recognize meaningful engagement as an important component of research and to celebrate examples of engagement within the ICORD community.

"Ask Me How I Engaged" Stickers

The MEC created "Ask me how I engaged" stickers for use on research posters. These stickers provide a visible way for researchers to identify their engagement activities and create an opportunity for others to ask about how people with lived experience, community members, and other knowledge users were involved in their research.

This initiative supports the MEC's goal of promoting meaningful engagement practices and encouraging greater visibility and discussion of engagement within the research community.

Looking Forward

The 2025-2026 Strategic Plan and subsequent initiatives provide a foundation for the MEC's continued work to support a research environment where people with lived experience of SCI, community organizations, researchers, trainees, health care providers, and other knowledge users can meaningfully contribute to the development, implementation, and sharing of research. The MEC looks forward to building on these initiatives in the 2026-2027 year, and continuing to support SCI research that is not only scientifically rigorous, but also relevant, collaborative, responsive, and meaningful to the people and communities it is intended to benefit.

Get in touch!

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The MEC is embedded in ICORD, a spinal cord injury research centre of the UBC Faculty of Medicine and VCH Research Institute. We are located in the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre at Vancouver General Hospital, 818 West 10th Avenue. (Map)

While its members are scattered across Turtle Island or what is colonially known as North America, the Meaningful Engagement Committee often gathers on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil- Waututh) Nations, and on the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) Peoples.