

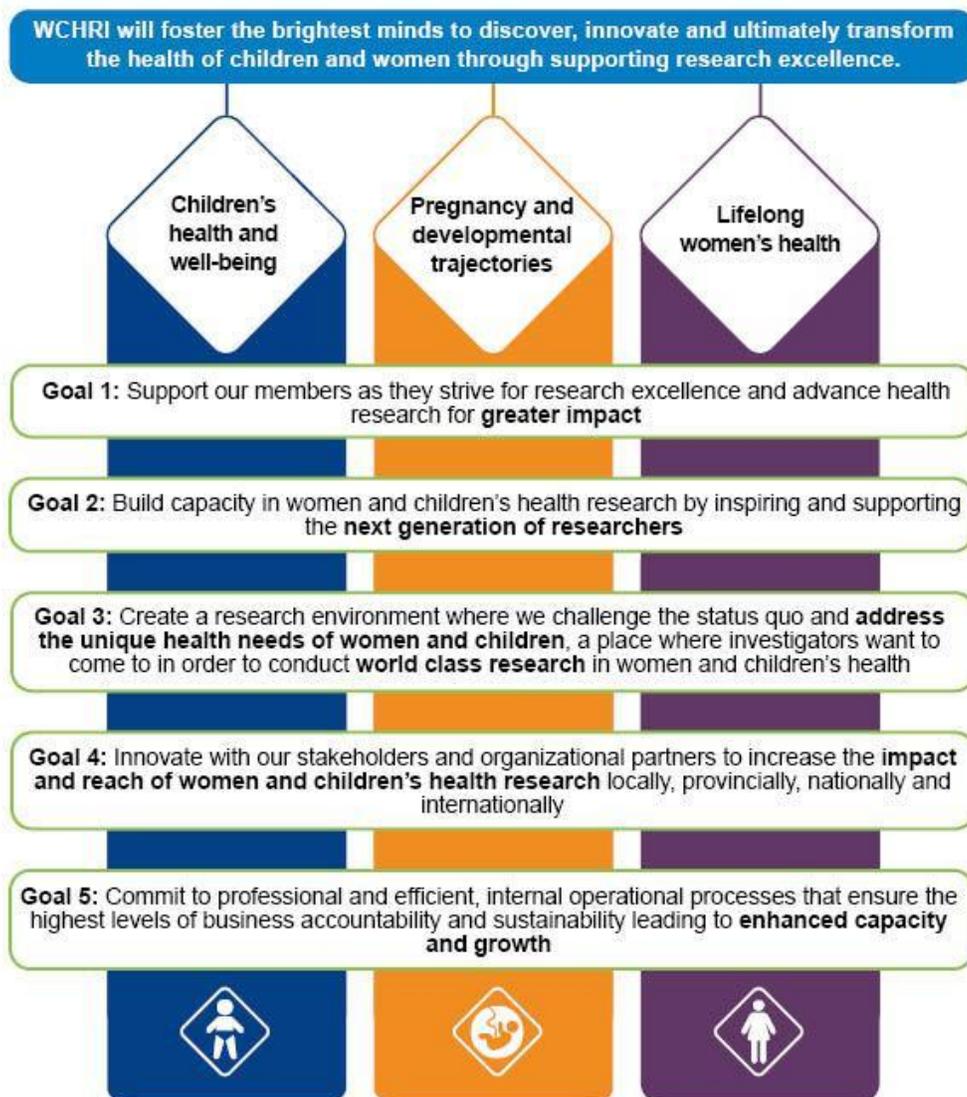
# Executive Director Progress Report

**Presented to:** Oversight Board

**Date:** June 11, 2021

**Reporting Period:** April to June 2021

## Strategic Plan Overview



## Goal 1: Our academic members

Support our members as they strive for research excellence and advance health research for **greater impact**

- **Objective 1.1** Promote research leadership and collaborations in theme areas
- **Objective 1.2** Support our members to advance their research in our changing environment
- **Objective 1.3** Recruit and retain research excellence

## Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers

In April, Dr. Michael Hawkes was featured as a Stollery Squad Doc by the SCHF.

## Recruitment

With the recruitment of Yifeng Wei (assistant professor, department of psychiatry) we are re-connecting with various organizations in the child and youth mental health field, including CASA, AHS Edmonton Zone leadership (Tracy Palmquist), Alberta Family Wellness Initiative / Palix, Addiction and Mental Health SCN. As our domain lead, Yifeng will be working with us to coordinate and develop a child and youth mental wellness strategy over the next several months.

## Membership renewal

Beginning in June 2021, WCHRI is instituting an annual academic member renewal process. This is something we have been working on for many months. A main purpose of renewal is to ensure that WCHRI has correct and current searchable data for each academic member in our "[Find a researcher](#)" listing on our recently launched website.

## CIHR Internal Review Process

We worked closely with the Department of Pediatrics to develop a CIHR internal review opportunity for those applying for Fall 2021 CIHR Project Grants. Our goal is to develop broad support of an internal project grant review and concept discussion process, ultimately increasing success in obtaining CIHR grants. The "pre-review phase" began in June and we will begin accepting applications for review in July and August.

## Goal 2: Our in-training members

Build capacity in women and children's health research by inspiring and supporting the **next generation of researchers**

- **Objective 2.1** Attract the best trainees and support their research training

### Trainee grant programs

The [Summer Studentship Program](#) competition received 75 eligible applications. 20 applications were funded, with 15 supported by the SCHF and nine supported by the AWHF (see attached award listing).

### Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC welcomed six new members in May. The TAC mentorship program completed its first year with a final workshop/event. An evaluation survey was distributed in order to assess the program and adjust for next year.

### Research Day

With the safety of in-person events still a concern due to COVID-19, we have decided to once again host our Research Day (RD) entirely virtually. The RD committee is now researching possible vendors for an online platform and event management. You should have received a "save the date" announcement last week.

### Learning Sessions

This year we are coordinating several sessions with the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute (ACHRI) and the Canadian Child Health Clinician Scientist Program (CCHCSP). During the reporting period, we offered two learning sessions: *Introduction to writing research proposals* and *Pursuing "reasonableness" in the communication of research evidence to parents*.

### Clinician Scientist Training

WCHRI nominated two graduate students (Neelam Punjani, Nursing and Caitlyn Hurd, Rehabilitation Medicine) to participate in the inaugural [Canadian Clinician Scientist Training Program \(CCHCSP\)'s PILLAR pathway](#). This program provides candidates access to CCHCSP curricula, the CCHCSP annual symposium, international exchange opportunities, and mentorship. We have also been working with the Department of Pediatrics to explore opportunities for physician clinician scientist training by offering a research intensive residency pathway.

## Goal 3: Our environment

**Create a research environment where we challenge the status quo and address the unique health needs of women and children, a place where investigators want to come to in order to conduct world class research in women and children's health.**

- **Objective 3.1** Position WCHRI as a national / international leader in women and children's health research; an institute that supports fundamental / preclinical research through clinical to population health focused on the unique health needs of women and children.
- **Objective 3.2** Position WCHRI as a national leader in interventional research in order to ensure safe and effective treatments for children and women; and to provide patients at our partner hospitals access to novel therapies.

## LHH Women's Research Centre

The Women's Health Research Committee met to review and approve three research protocols that will take place at the Lois Hole Hospital for Women.

Our clinical research program lead:

- is assisting the Allard Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Clinic team to get their dataset ready to complete Quality Assurance Assessments in their clinic;
- assisted Dr. Sophia Pin/Dr. Helen Steed to develop a database to collect patient health outcomes for their patient population; and,
- is finalizing a central registry for women of all ages, to improve their ability to participate in research studies.

A Women's Cardiovascular Health Network is in development. In the first meeting a subset of researchers:

- Defined their niche: Cardiovascular Health during and following pregnancy.
- Identified their need: Developing a cohort to study women's cardiovascular health following a complicated pregnancy.

33 women were recruited for research; from those 33 women, 48 samples (blood samples, placenta samples, omentum samples) have been used.

## Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 48 active pediatric studies (27 cohort studies and 22 clinical trials) with several more on hold or in start-up/close-out phases.

### **Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Epilepsy**

The WCHRI Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit is about to start a new trial for children with Dravet Syndrome, with Dr. Jay Kassiri. Dravet Syndrome is a rare, severe, drug-resistant type of epilepsy; a neurological disorder in which brain activity becomes abnormal, causing seizures, periods of unusual behavior or sensations and sometimes loss of awareness. Treatment options are currently very limited, so testing promising new products is imperative.

## Goal 4: Our ecosystem

Innovate with our stakeholders and organizational partners to increase the **impact and reach of women and children's health research** locally, provincially, nationally and internationally

- **Objective 4.1** Improve health outcomes for children and women and increase dissemination and implementation of high quality health research evidence by supporting stakeholder\* engaged research and research that is embedded at the point of care.
- **Objective 4.2** Ensure research strategies are aligned with and adaptive to our ecosystem

### National initiatives and partnerships

PWHR-Canada continued to prepare its application for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Health Research Training Platform (HRTTP) grant as part of the Girls and Women's Health and Wellness Pool. Application team members were identified and we are now working on collecting the required materials from each member. We are on track to meet the June 2021 application deadline.

We are also working with a team on a second HRTTP grant as part of the Human Development, Child and Youth Health Pool.

### Provincial partnerships

WCHRI is meeting regularly with MNCY SCN and ACHRI in order to establish a series of goals and strategies that would guide our work together as provincial partners. One example of this is the establishment of a [Pediatric Health Outcomes Program](#) which aims to support provincial research partnerships that will answer questions regarding impact of health system changes on child health outcomes.

### Precision health strategy

We continued to host precision health research seminars on a monthly basis, with the following speakers:

- March: Bo Cao (department of psychiatry) - Precision mental health through computational psychiatry
- April: Oana Caluseriu (department of medical genetics) - The Translational Genomics Hub
- May: Piush Mandhane (dept of pediatrics) - Leveraging the CHILD study to examine child health: An example of precision health research

The seminar series will take a break for the summer and start up again in September.

WCHRI's clinical trials support team recruited a new research coordinator (Farah Hassan) to support genomics medicine studies associated with the new Undiagnosed Disease Program at Stollery Children's Hospital and the Translational Genomics Hub. In addition to these projects Farah is supporting three industry sponsored rare disease trials as well as coordinating enrollment into the Care 4 Rare project (led by CHEO).

## Goal 5: Sustainability and growth

Commit to professional and efficient, internal operational processes that ensure the highest levels of business accountability and sustainability leading to **enhanced capacity and growth**

- **Objective 5.1** Prioritize operational and leadership succession planning; optimize internal business processes in order to continuously improve the quality and accessibility of programs/platforms.
- **Objective 5.2** Be accountable and responsive to our funding partners needs

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

We have mapped out an initial action plan for EDI at WCHRI - the plan is organized around the University's EDI strategic plan and helps us think about how we implement EDI at a vision/leadership level, how we thoughtfully and rigorously incorporate EDI into the research we support, considerations around workforce (hiring, training), access to WCHRI programs for students and fostering a culture of EDI. We've been conducting consultations with WCHRI and non-WCHRI members and creating a reflective space at meetings to have conversations about EDI and to build our knowledge and skills.

## Stewardship activities

- On March 11, WCHRI released our [Spring 2021 eNewsletter](#), featuring Margie Davenport's research on improving the mental health of pregnant and postpartum women during the pandemic, [Carla Hilario's](#) work to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health of young Albertans and [Pieter de Vos'](#) work to bridge the gap in knowledge on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected early childhood development.
- On March 17, WCHRI member Maria Ospina shared her research at a "What the Health" event for the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Society - discussing Maternal and Perinatal Health among the Métis in Alberta.
- WCHRI is participating in the SCHF's Teddy Bear Fun Fest event, with 17 team members.
- There were 13 media mentions of the Alberta Women's Health Foundation for the month of March and six for the month of April. During that time, WCHRI also published one AWHF story on our website.
  - Jane Schulz, Helen Steed, Nese Yuksel, "U of A researchers push scientific boundaries, overcome stigma so women don't have to 'suffer in silence'," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [New Trail Digital](#).
  - Sandy Davidge, "Alberta takes lead role in Canada-wide initiative to raise awareness, funds for women's health research," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Global News Edmonton](#), [Mirage News](#), [Taproot](#), [The Message](#) and the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry's monthly update email](#).
  - Sandra Davidge, Colleen Norris, Jane Schulz, "Women's health panel," in [Real Talk - Ryan Jespersen](#).
  - Margie Davenport, "Regular exercise may help new and expecting moms stave off depression during the pandemic," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [Taproot](#).
  - AWHF and WCHRI, "Alberta Women's Health Foundation refocuses the research," in [City News](#), [My McMurray](#) and [660 News](#).
  - Anita Kozyrskyj, "Causal link found between food allergies and changes to infant gut bacteria due to method of childbirth, mother's ethnicity," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [Taproot](#).

- SCHF Media:
  - Media mentions including stories published on WCHRI's website: 30
  - Carla Hilario, "Health equity expert advises Canadian government on how to re-engage women in the economy after COVID," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Troy Media](#).
  - Michael Khoury, "Innovative fitness program encourages kids with heart disease or transplants to train safely at home," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [Troy Media](#) and [Taproot](#).
  - Anita Kozyrskyj, "Causal link found between food allergies and changes to infant gut bacteria due to method of childbirth, mother's ethnicity," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [Taproot](#).
  - Jacob Jaremko, "Innovator Spotlight: Jacob Jaremko," in [The Quad](#).
  - Spencer Proctor, Geoff Ball, Donna Vine, Mary Jetha, Jacqueline Krysa, "Researchers discover better measure of future risk for heart disease, diabetes in youth living with obesity," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [Taproot](#).
  - Chris Holt, "Research reveals why kids often don't stick with physiotherapy exercises," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [India Education Diary](#).
  - Simon Urschel, Lori West, "Pediatric heart transplant method developed by U of A doctors allows for more surgeries, better outcomes: study," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [EurekAlert](#), [Medical Xpress](#), [Mirage News](#) and [Taproot](#).
  - James Benoit, "Blazing new trails in digital child health: 'Canadian parents deserve information that is trusted, practical, and accessible'," in [Faculty of Nursing news](#). This story was amplified by [Taproot](#).
- **Published by WCHRI:**
  - Rhonda Bell, "[Women's Health Spotlight: Rhonda Bell](#)."
  - Postdoctoral fellowship profiles:
    - James Benoit, "[Improving health decision-making for Canadian parents](#)."
    - Forough Jahandideh, "[U of A research examines how perinatal stressors impact babies' cardiovascular development](#)."
    - Hamid Maadi, "[Shedding a light on why children with high-risk neuroblastoma don't respond to current therapies](#)."
    - Linn Moore, "[Determining how pregnancy impacts children's asthma symptoms](#)."
  - Spring eNewsletter:
    - Carla Hilario, "[The declining mental health of Alberta's youth](#)." This story was amplified by [Taproot](#).
    - Pieter de Vos, "[COVID-19 and early childhood experiences](#)," This story was amplified by [Synaptic Post](#) and the [Evaluation Capacity Network Newsletter](#).
- WCHRI was awarded a Gold Quill for our 2020 Annual Report, an internationally-recognized communications award.