

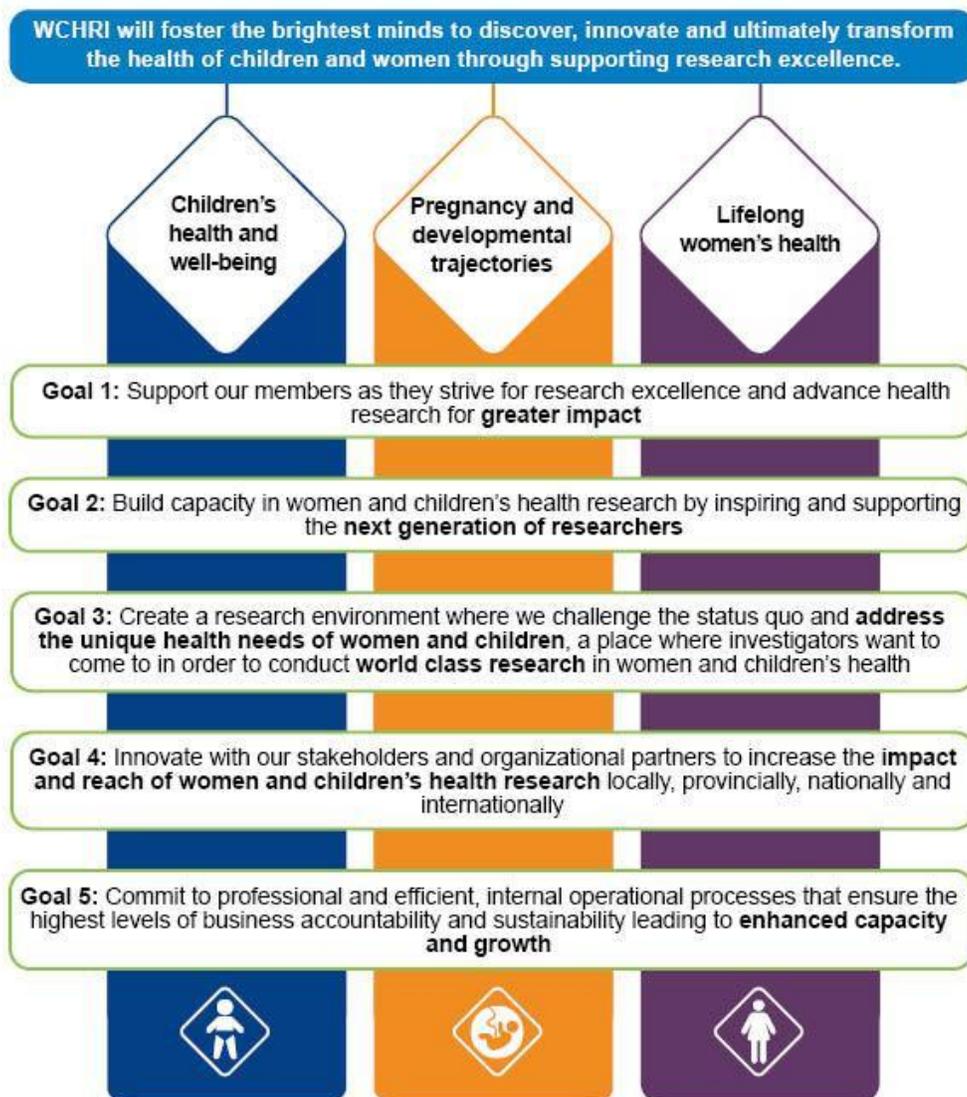
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: June 13, 2022

Reporting Period: April to June 2022

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

Three of our Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers received media mentions in the reporting period:

- Kate Storey, “The journey to Everest: ‘Small steps can make a huge difference’” in the [U of A Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation](#) news and [U of A School of Public Health](#) news.
- Andrew Mackie, “Learning sessions help teen heart patients prepare for the adult world” was amplified by [Troy Media](#), [Taproot Edmonton](#) and the [FoMD Newsletter](#).
- Todd Alexander, “Funding boost builds capacity for kidney research through expanded education and training” in [Folio](#). This was amplified by [Mirage News](#), [India Education Diary](#), [Troy Media](#), and the [FoMD newsletter](#).

Cavarzan Chair in Mature Women's Health Research

On March 24, the Cavarzan Chair in Mature Women's Health Research Search & Selection Committee held its inaugural meeting and shortlisted two outstanding candidates. Both candidates presented their current research projects and visions for this position on May 5 and 6. These presentations were well attended and very well received. After each presentation, the candidates also participated in a panel interview with the Search & Selection Committee. Sharlene Rutherford and Dale Sheard (donor to the endowment) both participated on the search and selection panel. Many thanks are extended to Dr. Sue Ross, whose successful 10 year term as the inaugural Chair will end on June 30, 2022.

Membership renewal

In June we initiated our second annual academic member renewal process. This is an annual activity whereby members are asked to confirm their membership details to ensure that WCHRI has correct and current searchable data for each academic member in our “[Find a researcher](#)” listing on our website. The annual member renewal process will also be an opportunity for WCHRI to query the membership on topics of strategic importance.

Stollery Children's Hospital Family Needs Survey

WCHRI member Samina Ali and a member of her team, Elise Kammerer, recently released the Stollery Children's Hospital site report from the Family Needs study. The team surveyed caregivers and children across ten of Canada's thirteen pediatric emergency departments (PED) between 2018 and 2020 to better understand families' needs when they are being seen in a pediatric emergency department. They are using this information to inform the development of local programs to improve the education, care and attention that families receive, as well as increase family engagement and participation in this setting.

Common themes that emerged across all sites, including the Stollery, are:

1. Almost one quarter of Canadian caregivers report that their overall needs were not fully met when attending the PED.
2. A safe PED was of utmost importance.
3. Nationally, caregivers value shorter wait times, rapid diagnosis, and better communication about perceived delays.
4. Top practical needs included internet access and more waiting room space.
5. Caregivers want innovative waiting systems, better methods to share wait time information, free internet access, and improved physical spaces in the PED.
6. Over 1/3 of caregivers had possible/probable limited health literacy.

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 WCHRI Summer studentship Award Program received 47 eligible applications; 21 awards have been implemented, 13 awardees were supported with SCHF funds, six awardees were supported with AWHF funds and two awardees were supported by both foundations (list attached). Of the awardees supported, 71% also received funding from another source. Where another funder also supports our awardee, we reduce our contribution to an incentive (or bonus) and the other funder pays a full award amount.

We recently posted our [2022 Postdoctoral Fellow profiles](#) on the WCHRI website. As a reminder, the WCHRI Postdoctoral Fellowship Award Program competition received 13 eligible applications. Six applications were funded, with two supported by the SCHF, two supported by the AWHF and two supported by both.

WCHRI's Postdoctoral Fellows (PDF) and Graduate Students are required to present their research in a community or school setting (primary and secondary) as a condition of their funding. These presentations discuss their interest in science, how their science "works", the opportunities that have enabled them to continue on in their chosen field (including funding and any teachers/mentors they have had), and how their science is relevant to children's and/or women's health. *These presentations were put on hold in 2020 as access to classrooms was limited with the rise of COVID-19, but we are excited to have our trainees reintroduce these in the next cycle.* Since 2017, our PDFs have made eight community presentations and our Graduate Students have completed 42!

- WCHRI 2019 Graduate Studentship recipient, Britt Voaklander, presented her research on the occurrence of diabetes during pregnancy among Metis women in Alberta to the students of the Oscar Romero High School Grade 12 Chemistry Class.

Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC completed recruiting its new members. Of the 9 new members, three were recruited directly to each of the three TAC subcommittees in support of the mentorship program, trainee spotlight program and summer student workshop series. New members will begin with the TAC and their respective subcommittees in May.

- This year's mentorship program concluded in May.
- Summer research students have been invited to all of the scheduled summer workshops.
- The latest WCHRI TAC spotlight will be published in the June issue of the WCHRI newsletter.

Research Day

WCHRI's 2022 Research Day will be held (virtually) on November 2, 2022. [David Nicholas](#) of the University of Calgary has accepted our invite to be our 2022 keynote speaker. He will present on his CIHR-funded research on the psychosocial and health consequences of COVID-19 on children with health vulnerabilities and their families.

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

- Our team collected 38 different types of samples for research from 38 women.
- The Lois Hole Hospital Women's Research Centre enrolled 16 research participants in urogynecology clinical trials and more than 20 pregnant participants were enrolled in two additional research projects.
- The Centre supported the launch of [Connect Care](#) in May.
- Our clinical research program lead, Laura Reyes Martinez, focused on:
 - supporting the Reproductive Science Division members to develop a plan to implement cost recovery for sample collection. This (partial) cost recovery model will allow leveraging of the AWHF funds and enable support of more clinical research projects.
 - anticipating WCHRI summer students' to work on different projects with the urogynecology team.
 - interviewing patient advisors for the Women's Health Research Committee.
 - mapping the area of research in mental women's health; finding the researchers, allies and common theme areas.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 61 active studies (40 cohort studies and 21 clinical trials) with several more in start-up/close-out phases.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Progressive Familial Intrahepatic Cholestasis (PFIC)

The WCHRI Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit, with Dr. Susan Gilmour, is involved in 2 trials for patients with Progressive Familial Intrahepatic Cholestasis (PFIC). PFIC is a genetic condition that impacts a person's ability to process bile produced by the liver, people with PFIC are unable to move excess bile through their gut which results in bile building up in their blood. The primary symptom for this condition is a debilitating, persistent whole body itchiness which affects the child's activities of daily living and impairs sleep and growth, in severe cases patients may also experience liver failure at a young age. There are no approved drug treatments for PFIC, current drug therapies are symptom related and are mostly ineffective, some patients may have relief with complex surgical interventions including liver transplant but these surgical options have their own associated morbidity and mortality. These studies are looking at a new type of medication to help control bile in the gut and minimize the symptoms of the disease. Both local participants in the study have completed the randomized, placebo-controlled study and have now moved into the open-label extension where all of the study participants receive the study medication.

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 partnerships

WCHRI and the Stollery Children's Hospital (STO) joined forces with 15 other institutions and the Maternal Infant Child Youth Research Network (MICYRN) to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on children. This new CIHR-funded initiative is called Pediatric Outcome Improvement through Coordination of Research Networks (POPCORN). While the current focus is COVID-19, the network will also create infrastructure and capacity to ensure the child health research community is ready for the next public health emergency. WCHRI researcher Bruce Wright is the STO site lead and WCHRI's data coordinating centre is supporting centralized data management.

Provincial partnerships

We continue to work collaboratively with our provincial partners—ACHRI, Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU) and MNCY SCN—on the [Pediatric Health Outcomes Research Program](#). A program to support research projects aimed at improving our understanding of how changes in care delivery are impacting children's health outcomes. Five projects are currently being supported.

We also continue to work with UCalgary-ACHRI on the One Child Every Child application to Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF) competition, which will be submitted at the end of August. Several WCHRI members are involved in teams that are working on different sections of the application. Should the application be successful, it will bring upwards of \$125M over 7yrs in funding to our province for maternal-child health research.

Local partnerships

WCHRI and Stollery Children's Hospital partnered to support our site in joining the [Fontan Outcomes Network](#). Under the leadership of Andrew Mackie and Jennifer Conway, our participation in this network will help advance research and care for children at the Stollery with single ventricle heart disease and Fontan circulation.

Precision health strategy

WCHRI's Translational Genomics Hub (TGH) continues to progress with 1-2 patient cases being reviewed each month. As a reminder, the purpose of the TGH is to help families affected by undiagnosed disease. Physicians present cases at an TGH scientific committee where the case is discussed and the scientific team provides advice, recommendations, and action plan for conducting further experimental work to find a cause. TGH is designed to remove many of the barriers for busy clinical investigators. TGH is currently supporting six patient cases.

Child and youth mental health

We are continuing to work on developing a child and youth mental health and wellness research strategy. Yifeng Wei (assistant professor, department of psychiatry) met with a range of key informants to map out research priorities, strengths and gaps. We currently have over 70 recommendations, so next steps will be to map these recommendations to WCHRI strategic objectives in order to develop an action plan.

At the end of May we hosted Stan Kutcher, a child psychiatrist and member of the Senate of Canada. Senator Kutcher met with SCHF team members (Katherine Sweet and Karen Faulkner), then participated in a discussion with WCHRI members around potential for building research capacity in the mental health literacy field.

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)

WCHRI has an EDI strategy organized around four core areas: Vision and Leadership, Research, Workforce, and Climate. During the reporting period, we focused on WCHRI's workforce (staff learning and hiring practices). In April we brought in Farha Shariff to present an all staff Learning Session "*anti-racism—creating an inclusive workplace.*" Farha is a teacher educator and advisor to the Office of the Dean on equity, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) and racial justice in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta.

We also hosted our second session of the *Encountering Expertise in Intersectional Health Series* in partnership with the [University of Alberta's Intersections of Gender Signature Area](#). Over 130 attendees attended a panel on "[Intersectionality: Qualitative and Quantitative Research Design](#)." Our third session is in the planning stages.

Stewardship activities & Foundation support

- On April 28, WCHRI co-led a "What the Health" event with the Alberta Women's Health Foundation on endometriosis and pelvic pain. The event featured WCHRI member Pieter Kruger.
- The WCHRI Warriors team participated in the SCHF's Teddy Bear Fun Fest, May 1 - 7.
- Media exposure ensures that the public is aware of the value of children's health research, and the investment that our Foundations have made in this field have made in this field. SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories for the reporting period:
- SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories include:
 - "AHS, foundations collaborate on COVID-19 supports" in [Alberta Health Services Research and Innovation 2020/2021 Annual Report](#).
 - Anastassia Voronova, "Adding molecule to brain could be key to treatment for myelin disorders such as MS, study show" on the [FoMD website](#).
 - Jacob Jaremko, "Making health care more equitable one ultrasound image at a time" in [Folio](#) and amplified by [Mirage News](#) and the [FoMD Newsletter](#).
 - Toshifumi Yokota, "Up to 45% of patients affected by Duchenne muscular dystrophy could benefit from a new "cocktail" drug in development at the University of Alberta" was amplified by [Taproot Edmonton](#), [Troy Media](#) and the [FoMD newsletter](#).
 - Meghan Riddell, "Mentorship key to breakthrough science in women and children's health" as part of Celebrating International Women's Day 2022, the stories and achievements of eight of the many women at the U of A whose work challenges the status quo in [The Quad](#).
 - Paul Veugelers, "Excess sugar consumption costs Canada's health-care system \$5 billion each year: study" in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#) and [Troy Media](#).
- AWHF media mentions / WCHRI stories include:
 - Colleen Norris, "Five ways women can champion their own health" in [Folio](#).
 - Adetola Adesida, "Discovery may explain why more females than males get knee osteoarthritis" in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#), [Troy Media](#).
 - Meghan Riddell, "Mentorship key to breakthrough science in women and children's health" as part of Celebrating International Women's Day 2022, the stories and achievements of eight of the many women at the U of A whose work challenges the status quo in [The Quad](#).

- Jane Yardley, “Research aims to help women with Type 1 diabetes live longer, healthier lives” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by the Alberta Diabetes Institute newsletter (no link) and [Taproot Edmonton](#).
- Jane Schulz, “Opinion: Women's health research deserves equal funding” in the [Edmonton Journal](#). This story was amplified by [University Affairs](#).
- Dawn Kingston, “UCalgary Nursing researcher offers digital mental health resources for women” in [University of Calgary News](#).