

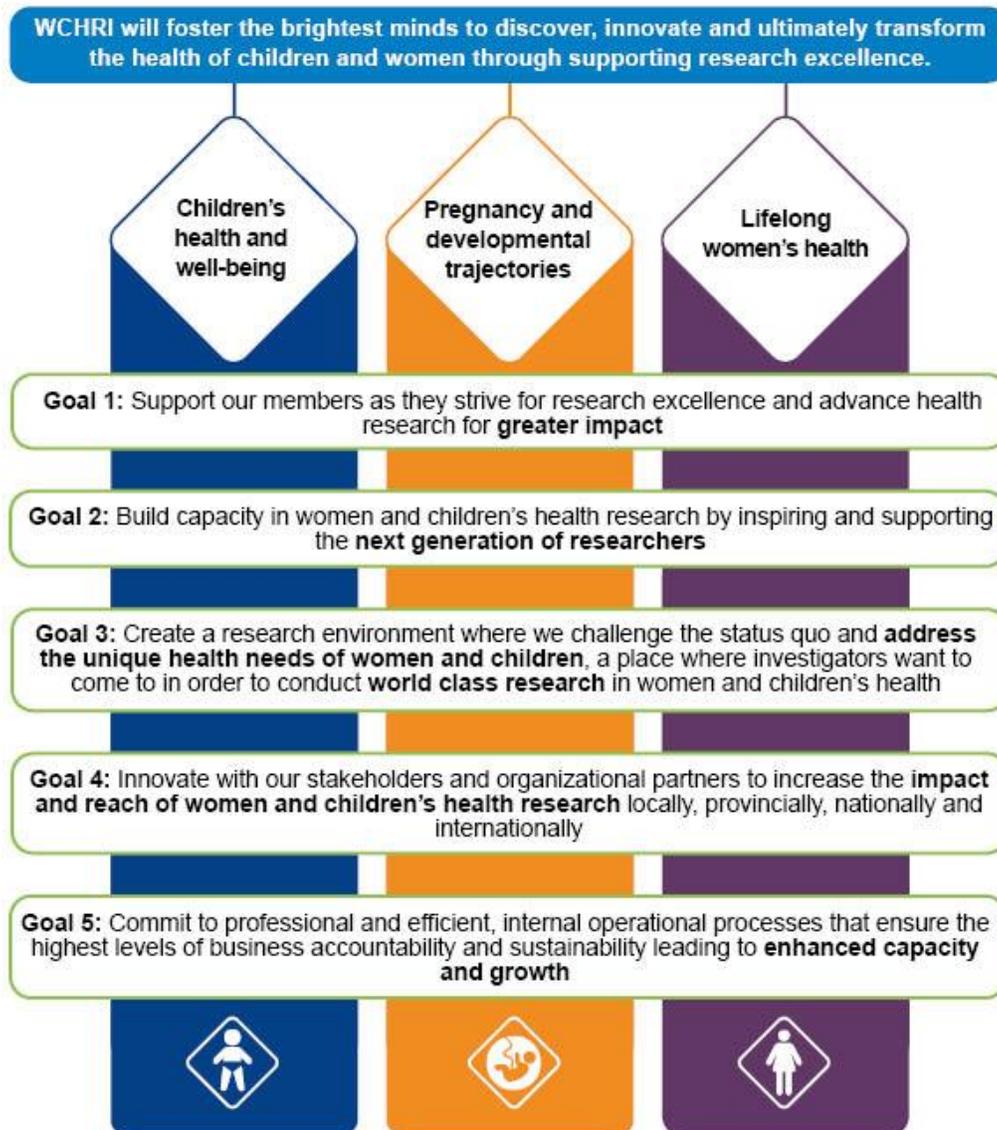
# Executive Director Progress Report

**Presented to:** Oversight Board

**Date:** March 23, 2021

**Reporting Period:** December 2020 to March 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

## Progress

### Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers

- Kate Storey and Lonnie Zwaigenbaum were featured in the SCHF 2019-20 annual report "[Making a mental leap in children's health](#)"
- Lisa Hartling and Shannon Scott took part in Radiothon, sharing information to [630CHED](#) listeners about their research supported by SCHF donors.
- Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers recently submitted their year 2 annual progress reports – highlights include:
  - Andrew Mackie's team has developed a passport for youth transitioning to adult care, called SmartHeartPass™.
  - Todd Alexander is working on animal modeling for new gene discovery for kidney disease.
  - Kate Storey – the IYMP was selected as a venture within the portfolio of LEAP Pecaut centre for Social Impact.
  - Michael Hawkes' – interim analysis has shown a 58% reduction in mortality after implementation of solar powered oxygen.
  - Lisa Hartling and Shannon Scott delivered two KT tools for parents about what to expect when visiting the ED during a pandemic.
  - Lonnie Zwaigenbaum's parent coaching intervention is showing positive rates of response in infants with autism.

### Recruitment

Cheng-Han Lee, our newly recruited Sawin-Baldwin endowed chair in Ovarian Cancer, will begin in June – his biosketch is attached.

Yifeng Wei has been recruited as an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry effective March 1, 2021. Her position is partly funded by SCHF and she will have a role within WCHRI as "domain" or "theme" lead for child and adolescent mental health research – her biosketch is attached.

### Recent WCHRI member awards

WCHRI member Matthew Hicks, and his co-investigator Liang Li, received a \$3.1 million award from the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) with \$2.6 million going to the U of A for their project "Canadian Analytics Network for Outcome Prediction In Exposures (CANOPIE)." The project will investigate the impact of exposures to toxins on health outcomes, including early childhood and prematurity.

WCHRI member Padma Kaul and her colleagues received a \$1.2 million award from CFI with ~\$330K going to the U of A for their project "Canadian Mother-Child Cohort". The project will investigate the impact of prescription drug use in pregnancy on mothers and their children.

The University of Alberta Precision Health Signature Area (PHSA) recently announced the recipients of the 2020 Precision Health Seed Grant Awards. This competition aimed to support new and innovative projects and pilot studies to advance multidisciplinary, pan-faculty research at the University of Alberta. Nine WCHRI members were included in these winning teams.

## 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

## Progress

### Trainee grant programs

The [Postdoctoral Fellowship Program](#) competition closed December 1 with 15 eligible applications. Four applications were awarded, all funded (in whole or in part) by SCHF and two were funded (in part) by RAHF (see attached award listing).

### CIHR H RTP (Health Research Training Platform)

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) launched its new Health Research Training Platform Pilot Funding Opportunity. WCHRI is working on coordinating and connecting our partners to build strong applications for the "Girls and Women's Health and Wellness" and "Human Development, Child and Youth Health" priority areas.

### Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC's mentorship program is mid-flight, so the committee is starting to look at new initiatives – they are particularly interested in working more closely with WCHRI communications team to develop stories and profiles about trainees and their research.

### Research Day

Planning is underway for Research Day 2021 – Janet Smylie has accepted our invitation as keynote speaker. Janet is the director of the Well Living House Action Research Centre for Indigenous Infant, Child, and Family Health and Wellbeing in Toronto and the Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Advancing Generative Health Services for Indigenous Populations in Canada.

### Learning Sessions

In September, we re-launched our "lunch and learn" seminars as online "learning sessions". 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 three learning sessions:

- How to write a lay abstract
- Engaging patients as partners in research
- Introduction to writing research proposals

## 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.

## Progress

### LHH Women's Research Centre

The Women's Research Committee was reinstated. This committee will be responsible for:

- 1) Facilitating research activities within the department of obstetrics and gynecology and the LHHW including Clinical inpatient units, Ambulatory Clinics and the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Research Centre.
- 2) Advocating for patients and their families to avoid stress and or "over-recruitment."
- 3) Encouraging women's health staff engagement in research.
- 4) Reviewing and providing timely approval for research studies where any of the research activities that involve patients, families or staff.

Maya Henriquez, clinical research coordinator, recruited and collected tissues (placenta, umbilical cord, whole blood, etc.) from 30 women. This has helped four researchers to conduct their studies.

Due to COVID, the research space is still closed. We are looking forward to its opening.

### Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 49 active pediatric studies (27 cohort studies and 22 clinical trials) with several more on hold or in start-up/close-out phases. The team has also just recruited a new research coordinator to support genomics medicine studies associated with the new Undiagnosed Disease Program at Stollery Children's Hospital and the WCHRI Translational Genomics Hub (see precision medicine section below).

The team does not anticipate they will be back to "normal" study volumes for several more months as the university is still mostly closed through the summer. They are keeping busy however and enrolling patients into trials.

### Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Achondroplasia

WCHRI is supporting clinical research into a relatively rare skeletal condition called achondroplasia (ACH), a type of dwarfism. While there are some treatments available, there is not agreement on the type of treatment that is best, or if treatment should be administered at all. The research we are supporting will gather data on growth patterns and potential blood markers, with the aim to learn more about ACH, and how it affects children and their families. Future treatment trials in ACH are coming soon, for those who are eligible and wish to participate.

## 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

## Progress

### National initiatives and partnerships

The focus of PWHR-Canada during this period is on preparing an application for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Health Research Training Platform (H RTP) grant application. PWHR-Canada will be submitting an application to the Girls and Women's Health and Wellness Pool. The application requirements are comprehensive and complex. This will be a truly national application and will require considerable effort until the deadline in June 2021. We are currently identifying the team of applicants. The trainee working group continues to investigate and analyse pan-Canadian trainee opportunities and these ideas will feed into the CIHR grant application.

### Provincial partnerships

WCHRI is co-developing two funding opportunities with our provincial partners:

- Pediatric health outcomes research fund – aimed at improving our understanding about how changes in care delivery are impacting children's health outcomes – initial focus is on the shift to virtual care; partnering with the children's hospitals, ACHRI, Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU), and MNCY SCN.
- Team based development fund – aimed at supporting the Alberta-led maternal-child focused research teams in developing complex, collaborative, high value research grant applications; partnering with ACHRI.

### Precision health strategy

We hosted 2 Precision Health Research Seminars during the reporting period:

- Peter Kannu spoke on January 27 about "The power of precision health research for women, children and families."
- On February 23 we co-hosted a second seminar with the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry; Prof John Bell (UK) spoke about "Using Genomics and Precision Medicine to Change Medicine and Public Health".

We are establishing a Translational Genomics Hub in order facilitate clinicians to work with researchers to explore suspected genetic abnormalities causing rare disease in patients from Northern Alberta. A seminar will be held on April 20 at noon to discuss this initiative – all are welcome!

### Alberta Women's Health Foundation

WCHRI transitioned all of our branded materials to reflect the new Alberta Women's Health Foundation brand.

## 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 the quality and accessibility of programs/platforms.
- **Objective 5.2** Be accountable and responsive to our funding partners needs

## Progress

### Strategic evaluation

As per WCHRI MoU, a strategic evaluation is planned for 2021; the evaluation will assess health research impacts resulting from investment in WCHRI programs/platforms and the extent to which WCHRI programs and platforms align with the strategic objectives of the organization. Several WCHRI team members are involved in compiling and collating data for the evaluation.

### New WCHRI website

In February, we launched our [new website](#). This new website was developed with stakeholder feedback in mind. We also worked to ensure the website reflects WCHRI's unique structure and highlights advancements made through our foundations' support.

### Stewardship activities

- WCHRI helped organize a Rare Diseases Day panel event, which is available to the public. SCHF staff were invited and encouraged to bring donors.
- On December 7, we celebrated the SCHF by virtually attending and donating to Snowed In. In total, 21 WCHRI staff members and researchers attended.
- There were nine media mentions that showcases WCHRI/SCHF support, including:
  - Research reveals how baby's first breath triggers life-saving changes in the brain ([Folio](#), [Mirage News](#); Gregory Funk)
  - New support allows Indigenous youth program to grow nationwide ([Folio](#); Kate Storey)
  - Researchers detect early signs of autism in at-risk infants ([Folio](#), [CTV News Edmonton](#), [Pediatric Pulse](#), [Global News Edmonton](#); Lonnie Zwaigenbaum)
  - Undiagnosed Disease Program ([Folio](#); Peter Kannu, Helly Goetz and Alison Eaton) -- published the week of February 22
- There was one media mention that showcases WCHRI-AWHF support: Moving Perinatal Mental Health Forward ([Psychology Today](#); Dawn Kingston)
- Colleen Norris was featured in the RAHF's What the Health February event, speaking to research in women's heart health.
- WCHRI was actively involved in campaign development for the AWHF launch, including:
  - Working with ZGM on facts and figures that demonstrate the importance of women's health research and how the AWHF has already had an impact.
  - Arranging a "spokespatient" for the campaign.
  - Working with University of Alberta central to develop a Folio article about the launch and the Women's Health Collective Canada.
- First event of the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Society research series took place - "Women's health research across the lifespan" this was a panel event, featuring Sandy Davidge, Sue Ross and Colleen Norris.