

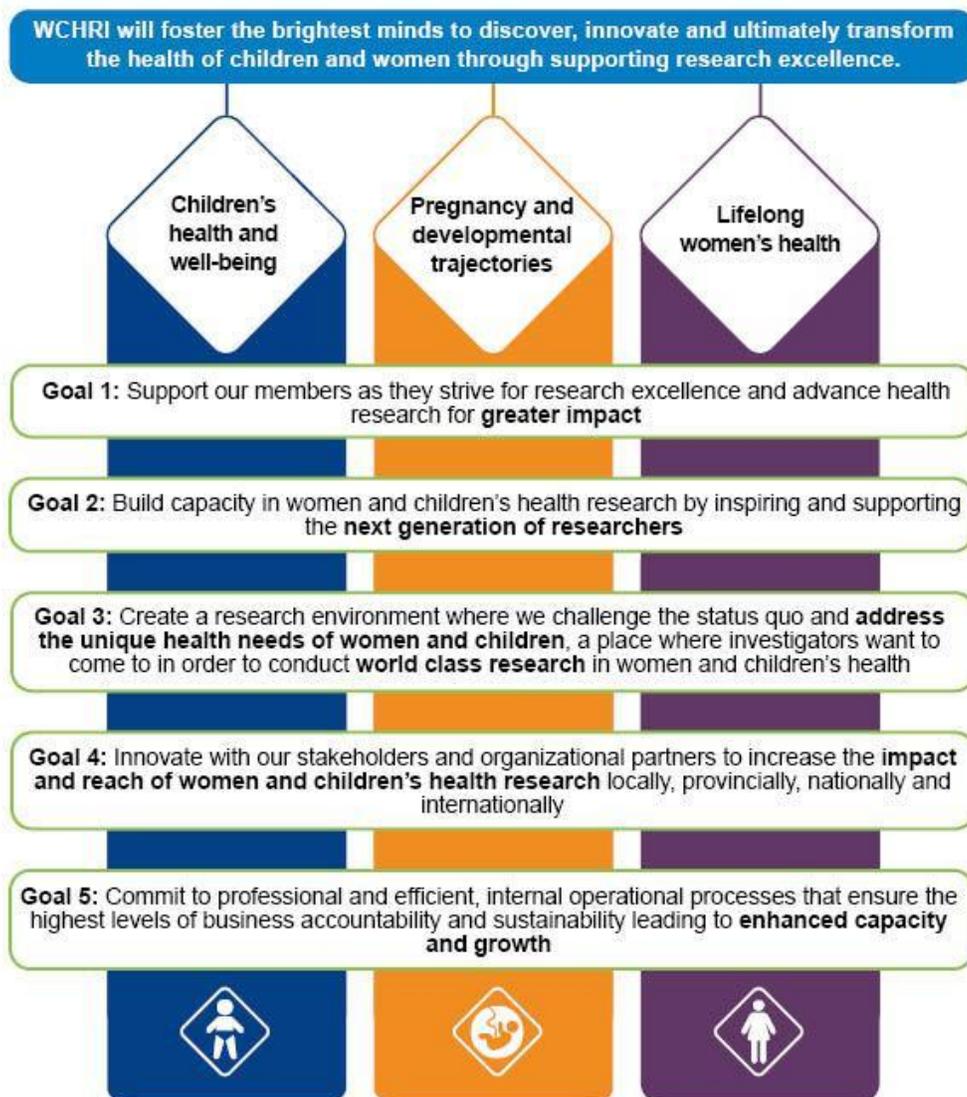
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: September 21, 2021

Reporting Period: July to September 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

Grant programs

The [WCHRI Innovation Grant Program](#) competition received 67 eligible applications. 27 applications were funded, with 17 supported by the SCHF, six supported by the AWHF and four were supported by both (see attached award listing).

Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers

Todd Alexander presented to SCHF staff at their monthly town hall meeting - sharing an update on his Stollery Science Lab project.

Endowed Chairs

Dawn Kingston was renewed as an Endowed Chair under the newly named Lois Hole Hospital for Women Cross-Provincial Chair in Perinatal Mental Health. We are proud to have partnered with the nursing team at the University of Calgary to renew this research leadership role.

The Cavarzan Chair in Women's Health Research, Sue Ross, will be retiring in summer 2022. WCHRI has worked with all stakeholders to update the terms of reference for this position and are initiating the recruitment process.

Membership renewal

We have completed the first phase of our first annual academic member renewal process. WCHRI received renewals from ~450 members. We are now working on refining this updated data for the "[Find a researcher](#)" listing on our website.

CIHR Internal Review Process

We worked closely with the Department of Pediatrics to develop an internal peer review process for those applying for Fall 2021 CIHR Project Grants (e.g. scientists review each other's grants in advance of application). We had four individuals register for this support with two project grants submitted (two individuals determined they were not ready for submission). Our goal is to develop a grants support program that will include internal review, ultimately increasing success in obtaining external grants (including, but not limited to CIHR).

CIHR Early Career Investigators

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research's (CIHR) Early Career Investigators in Maternal, Reproductive, Child and Youth Health program supports research programs that have the potential to have a significant impact on maternal, reproductive, child and youth health outcomes. This is an important program that can help launch a new researcher's career. The program requires a 1:1 match from the researcher's home institute in order to be eligible to apply.

This year, WCHRI members received four Early Career Investigator awards out of five applications; a success rate of 80%. SCHF (through WCHRI) invested \$420,000 resulting in \$840,000 in total grant funding (over the next 3 years) towards the following researcher programs:

- Dr. Carla Hilario—Racism and youth mental health care
- Dr. Salima Meherali—Co-designing a mobile application with immigrant adolescents for better sexual and reproductive health
- Dr. Qiumin Tan—Abnormal persistence of transient neurons and seizure susceptibility

- Dr. Lindsey Westover—Integration of artificial intelligence with surface topography for managing scoliosis

In comparison to other institutions who received these ECI awards this competition cycle:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Calgary - 3 • University of Manitoba - 2 • University of Toronto - 1 • Dalhousie University - 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Ottawa - 1 • University of Saskatchewan - 1 • Concordia University/University of British Columbia - 1 |
|--|---|

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 Graduate Studentship Program](#) competition received 45 eligible applications. 19 applications were funded, with 15 supported by the SCHF entirely and four in partnership with the AWHF (see attached award listing).

Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC welcomed three new members in August. TAC worked hard over the summer to update and modify the trainee mentorship program based on last year’s feedback. They launched the second round of this program in August with 13 mentee/mentor pairings. They also worked closely with WCHRI communications to produce an undergraduate trainee spotlight for the [September issue of WCHRI Works](#).

Research Day

Research Day (RD) planning is in full swing. The RD committee has chosen both a new event platform ([PheedLoop](#)) and a new event management company ([The Virtual Effect](#)) to assist with the backend programming of the platform. Event registration opened July 28 and the abstract submission deadline is September 15.

Learning Sessions

This year we are coordinating several sessions with the Canadian Child Health Clinician Scientist Program (CCHCSP) Prairies Collaboration, which includes WCHRI, Alberta Children’s Hospital Research Institute (ACHRI), and University of Saskatchewan . During the reporting period, we offered two learning sessions: *How to prepare your abstract for WCHRI Research Day* and *Developing meaningful research partnerships with Indigenous communities*.

Health Research Training Platforms

The CIHR Health Research Training Platform program is a new funding opportunity from CIHR aimed at providing trainees and early career researchers with access to interdisciplinary, inter-jurisdictional, and intersectoral training environments (i.e., “platforms”) where they will benefit from high-caliber mentors and gain the skills required for academic and non-academic careers. WCHRI provided support for several of these applications in areas of strategic priority (girls and women’s health, child and youth health, youth mental health, drug safety in pregnancy).

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

Clinical research coordinators reach out to potential study participants in the hospital, they explain the studies to the potential participants and answer questions, discuss risks/benefits and issues around privacy/confidentiality. At LHHW, the coordinator also collects placental, blood, and fat samples so the researchers can understand the mechanisms leading to pregnancy complications. Understanding this, leads to developing potential treatments for these women. In the reporting period, the LHHW clinical research coordinator, Maya Henriquez, approached 33 women for research participation and sample collection, 24 of whom consented.

The Women's Health Research Committee conducts the strategic planning for the LHHW Women's Research Centre, ensures all staff are familiar with new upcoming projects and that there is designated space and resources to support these new projects. During the reporting period, the Committee met online to review and approve two research protocols: 1) accessing gender affirming bottom surgeries in Alberta; 2) impact of urogynecology care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our clinical research program lead, Laura Reyes Martinez, is assisting the Urogynecology team (led by Annick Poirier) to develop a strategic plan so their team is successful at obtaining research grants. In addition, Laura is organizing a provincial Women's Cardiovascular Research Network meeting for the fall. One of the goals of this group will be to establish a research agenda that explores the role of reproductive status on cardiovascular health.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 49 active pediatric studies (29 cohort studies and 23 clinical trials) with several more on hold or in start-up/close-out phases.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: MiTy Kids

Several years ago, the WCHRI Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit completed a study (MiTy) with Dr. Edmond Ryan to determine if metformin, a drug used to treat women with type 2 diabetes during pregnancy, had any effects on the babies born from these women. The study found that there were no adverse effects from the metformin prescribed to the mothers and the most common result was that the babies were marginally smaller than the controlled group.

WCHRI research coordinator Heather Rylance, who also supported the initial trial, continued her work to assist Dr. Andrea Haqq (MiTy Kids) in continuing this research and determining if a mother taking metformin during pregnancy will reduce their child's risk of developing diabetes and/or risk factors for heart disease. Results of this study have not yet been released.

In the coming months, Heather and Dr. Haqq will expand this research to follow the children even further in the MiTy Tykes trial, which will check in with the children from 5 to 11 years old. About 450 mothers who participated in the original MiTy trial and their children, from approximately 30 centers in Canada and Australia, will participate. We anticipate enrolling approximately 10 families from Edmonton.

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

Scientific Advisory Committee

WCHRI's external Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) met remotely on August 25 and 27 to provide input and feedback on WCHRI's 5 Year Strategic Evaluation Report. SAC provided important insight into programmatic changes that will help us better align our funding opportunities with our strategic direction and valuable feedback on how we might refine our metrics and communicate these impacts to different audiences in a more lay friendly manner.

Provincial partnerships

WCHRI co-developed the Pediatric Health Research Outcomes Program with ACHRI, Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU), and MNCY SCN. The purpose is to support research projects aimed at improving our understanding about how changes in care delivery are impacting children's health outcomes. Three projects were selected to receive support:

- Pediatric intensive care (Gonzalo Guerra and Laurie Lee) - looking at cost of PICU survivorship in Alberta (e.g. prevalence and impact of post-intensive care syndrome).
- Pediatric neurology (Thilinie Rajapaske and Serena Orr) - looking at prevalence of pediatric migraine across Alberta (including geographic hot spots, care patterns, and drug dispensation).
- Pediatric hematology (Catherine Corriveau-Bourque and MacGregor Steele) - exploring incidence of severe iron deficiency pre-COVID and during COVID.

Precision health strategy

We are developing a Translational Genomics Hub (TGH). If a physician suspects their patient's condition has a genetic cause (which has previously not been confirmed after undergoing routine genetic testing) they will offer to have the patient's DNA reanalyzed with current technologies through the TGH. This reanalysis will look for genetic variants in a patient's DNA that are potentially the cause of their condition. If a variant is found and the expert committee agrees it calls for further investigation, the TGH will collaborate with laboratory researchers who will examine the biological effects of this specific gene variant by performing various experiments. With these experiments, we hope to understand the role of the variant in genetic disease which will assist in establishing new research and targeted treatments for patients suffering from the associated condition in the future.

In order to operationalize the TGH we have submitted an ethics application to the UofA and have met with the ethics committee; revisions are in progress. We have established an arrangement with the Centre for Computational Medicine at the Hospital for Sick Children to support DNA re-analysis. Finally, we have secured strategic funding through the FoMD to support initial start-up costs.

Child and youth mental health

Yifeng Wei (assistant professor, department of psychiatry) is working with us to coordinate and develop a child and youth mental wellness strategy. We met over the summer months to begin this process.

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 established regular meetings with the UofA VP Indigenous Programming & Research, Dr. Florence Glanfield. These are opportunities to gain her input on WCHRI Indigenous initiatives, identify areas of collaboration, and discuss ways we can build Indigenous health research capacity in the maternal-child field at UofA.

Stewardship activities & Foundation support

- WCHRI hosted a COVID-19 research event for the SCHF, providing SCHF donors and staff with an opportunity to learn more about COVID-19 research supported through their investment. Piush Mandhane and Lori West were the presenters, Sandy Davidge and Todd Alexander were the emcees.
- Carla Hilario was invited to speak at the Stollery Women's Network's virtual spotlight event. She shared her research project (funded by the SCHF) that looks at the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on children.
- WCHRI worked with UofA external relations to share the standalone Stollery Children's Hospital update further. Multiple faculties amplified the message and facts and figures related to the SCHF's partnership with WCHRI/U of A.
- Developed a WCHRI/AWHF 101 document to share our collective impact. This project was requested by the RAHF and [repurposed by their team for donors](#).
- The "WCHRI Warriors" fundraised and walked in support of the RAHF for the annual Shoppers Run for Women.
- Released [WCHRI's first digital annual report](#) - focused on how researchers have been breaking down barriers and exploring research that is transformative not only to women and children's health, but also important to society as a whole.
- SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories (18); some highlights include:
 - Michael Hawkes, "Canadian-led project saves lives in Somalia through innovative solar-powered oxygen system," was amplified by [Pediatric Pulse](#) and the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Update](#).
 - Toshifumi Yokota, "Online resource will speed up development of new approach to treating genetic diseases," on the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry's news site](#).
 - Anita Kozyrskij and Piush Mandhane, "Good gut bacteria in newborn boys equates to superior cognition, language skills: U of A research," in [The Edmonton Journal](#).
 - Lori West, "Exploring the connection between COVID-19 and ABO blood groups," was amplified by the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry news site](#).
 - Amit Bhavsar, "Genetic variant linked to hearing loss in children treated with common chemotherapy drug," in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Taproot](#).
 - "\$2M to kick-start new Edmonton children's hospital," was amplified by [Pediatric Pulse](#).
 - Bukola Salami, "[Transforming the lives of Black children in Canada](#)". This story was amplified by the [Faculty of Nursing news site](#).
 - Shannon Scott and Lisa Hartling, "[Getting childhood health research into the hands of parents](#)". This story was amplified by the [Faculty of Nursing news site](#) and [Pediatric Pulse](#).
 - Kate Storey, "[Building healthy futures in Indigenous communities](#)".
 - Peter Kannu, "[Seeking common ground for rare diseases](#)".
- AWHF media mentions / WCHRI stories (7); some highlights include:

- Anita Kozyrskyj and Piush Mandhane, “Good gut bacteria in newborn boys equates to superior cognition, language skills: U of A research,” in [The Edmonton Journal](#).
- Maria Ospina, “Digging into data, disrupting unhealthy patterns,” was amplified by the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry Dean’s Update](#) and the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry news site](#).
- Dawn Kingston, Sue Ross and Nese Yuksel, “Empowering women with mental health support,” was amplified by the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry news site](#).
- Cheng-Han Lee, “Women’s Health Research Spotlight: Cheng-Han Lee,” was amplified by the [Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry news site](#).
- “Research 101 - Getting to Know the Women and Children’s Health Research Institute,” was published by [RAHF News](#).
- Foundation support:
 - WCHRI worked together with the SCHF to compile virtual 4D tour ideas that fit within their new online strategy. These ideas highlight the work of some of our researchers funded through the SCHF.
 - WCHRI and the SCHF worked together on the final stages of the TD Trust Grant application - Adolescent Health Call for Proposals. The grant was submitted in June and final decisions are expected to be announced in September.
 - WCHRI helped code responses to the RAHF’s pandemic survey - data will be used by their team for future white papers related to what impact the pandemic has had on our lives.
 - Meetings with the RAHF were held to discuss ideas for a Max Bell Foundation Grant application. Based on this discussion, the RAHF team will be using a proposal developed by Maria Ospina for their next steps.