

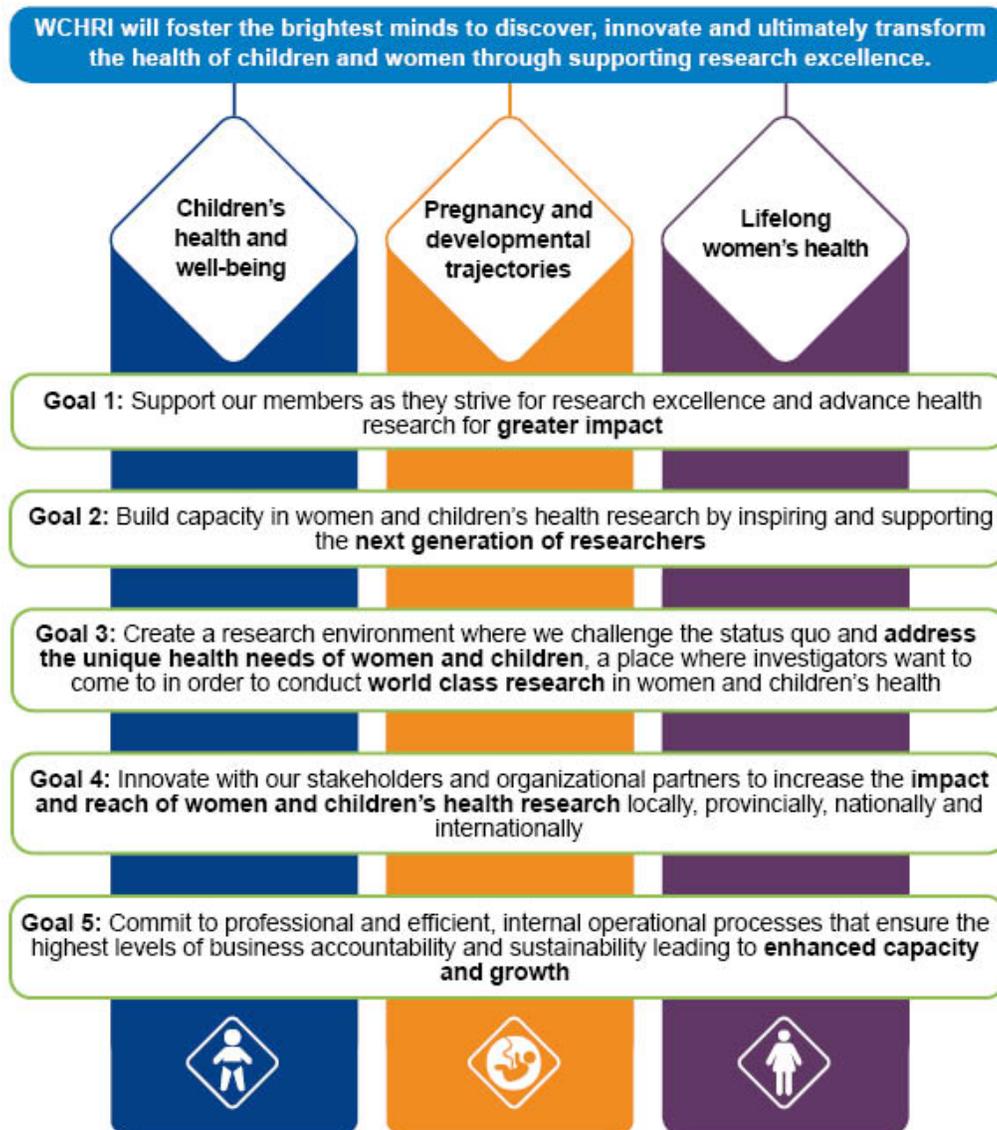
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: September 15, 2020

Reporting Period: May to August 2020

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

- We have started to organize meetings with the Distinguished Researchers to review their annual progress, discuss alignment with WCHRI strategic plan, and explore other opportunities for program support.
- We celebrated the SCHF's "Day of Thanks" by releasing [a video from the Distinguished Researchers](#).
- We unveiled [a video that saw the Distinguished Researchers](#) discuss their children's health projects and provide updates on how the funding has impacted their research.
- A media training workshop was offered to the Distinguished Researchers in July.
- Michael Hawkes acted as spokesperson for Mighty Millions Lottery and was interviewed for a promotional video.

Endowed Chairs

- The Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation's Chair in Autism Research endowed chair, Lonnie Zwaigenbaum, released his annual report. Highlights include:
 - Lonnie's team completed data collection on a longitudinal study and clinical trial of high-risk infant siblings of children with autism.
 - The team secured additional funding for a group-based version of [Social ABCs](#); a program that improves communication and social abilities of children with autism. The goal is to adapt the Social ABCs to other regions and international locations, including developing an online training component to increase accessibility of the program.
- The Cavarzan Chair in Women's Health Research endowed chair, Sue Ross, released her annual report. Highlights include:
 - Sue's team built on their work around exercise in menopause by developing a new technology intervention that helps menopausal women monitor behaviour and symptoms and provides access to a social support network.
 - Sue worked collaboratively with Dr. Vincent Agypong to develop a text messaging intervention for women in menopause, called Text4Menopause.
 - Sue continues to work with Elders and community members in Maskwacis, collaborating on several projects related to indigenous women's health.
 - She is also looking at cost-effectiveness research; to better understand how costs can be saved within women's medical procedures.

Grant programs

- All grant review panels met remotely, and all processes and documents are now managed 100% electronically.
- Innovation competition closed March 13 with 51 eligible applications. A total of 22 applications were awarded, with two funded by both the RAHF and SCHF, 15 funded by SCHF and 5 funded by RAHF. Full details are attached.
- WCHRI will be supporting the CIHR bridge grant program this year; we will be facilitating a centralized application portal and coordinated processes with institutional partners have committed additional funding: Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (FoMD), the Cancer Research

Institute of Northern Alberta (CRINA), the Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology (LKSloV) and the Northern Alberta Clinical Trials & Research Centre (NACTRC).

Recruitment

- In June, virtual interviews were conducted with two candidates for the recruitment of the Sawin-Baldwin endowed chair in Ovarian Cancer. WCHRI management team met with top candidate in August to learn more about proposed research program and how we can best support should they accept the position.
- In June, we partnered with the Department of Psychiatry to submit a formal case to the FoMD recruitment priorities committee in order to develop a new associate professor position for a PhD in child and adolescent mental health. The case was approved and is in the process of being posted to the careers section of the UofA website.

WCHRI member congratulations!

David Marchant, assistant professor in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (and also a member of Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology), and his team recently had their research published in the prestigious *Nature* research journal. This is the first Nature paper with a FoMD-based corresponding author in approximately 20 years and had great importance to the department of medical microbiology & immunology, the Faculty and the University. The publication is titled [*IGF1R is an entry receptor for respiratory syncytial virus.*](#)

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

- Graduate studentship competition closed July 6 with 61 eligible applications. A total of 15 applications were awarded, with three funded by both the RAHF and SCHF, 11 funded by SCHF and 1 funded by RAHF. Full details are attached.
 - Our second cohort of postdoctoral fellowship awardees attended the application review meeting virtually.
- Summer Studentship Program update: we have students that will be finishing their research while some have just gained access to the laboratory; some summer projects are expected to close throughout the fall.

Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

TAC has reviewed and updated its Terms of Reference and policies; including, member role selection and responsibilities. Throughout the summer, TAC worked on finalizing details around a new mentorship program which will be available to WCHRI graduate students starting this fall. The program aims to provide WCHRI trainees with a mentorship opportunity outside their current lab and/or discipline. 23 WCHRI members (faculty and research associates) have signed on to be mentors and TAC is now putting out a call to the 2019 and 2020 WCHRI graduate student cohorts.

Research Day

- We launched our new [Research Day website](#) in July. Registration and abstract submission is now open and we have finalized this year's virtual format.
- Cara Tanenbaum (Universite de Montreal and CIHR Institute of Gender and Health) will be our keynote speaker. She will be presenting on the importance of sex and gender in women and children's health research.
- We will be in touch with Foundation representatives for information on how our Foundations can participate in our virtual event this year.

WCHRI member congratulations!

2019 WCHRI postdoctoral fellow, [Tamara Saez](#) (funded by both SCHF and RAHF) was awarded a 2019-2020 Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship; the highest award available for a postdoctoral fellow.

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

In order to support the expansion of WCHRI clinical research support model to LHHW, we are in the process of recruiting two new staff positions:

- clinical research coordinator - Maya Henriquez was hired in August (will start mid-September) – her role will be to support specimen collection for perinatal researchers and patient recruitment for clinical studies.
- clinical research program lead – in selection process – incumbent will be responsible for developing, promoting, and supporting clinical research teams and projects at the LHHW; also responsible for designing, managing, delivering and/or performing a wide range of clinical research support services for multiple projects led by clinical investigators (e.g. proposal development, ethics/operational approval, budgets, documentation, training, etc..).

These positions will be working closely with the existing research nurse and leadership team at LHHW.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is still working on setting up studies in anticipation of research continuing to open up in September. A number of studies that switched to remote visits due to COVID-19 are now preparing to re-enter the clinic. The team is still primarily working from home unless they need to prep for a patient visit or see a patient.

Data Coordinating Centre

WCHRI's data coordinating centre (DCC) developed documentation over the summer to support electronic consent processes through REDCap (online research data collection tool supported by WCHRI). This will allow more clinical research teams to transition towards virtual clinical research and online participant recruitment.

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

Scientific Advisory Committee

WCHRI's external Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) met remotely on May 26 and July 20 to provide input and feedback on strategic progress and direction. The meetings went very well and we are looking forward to incorporating this feedback into our operations.

National initiatives and partnerships

- The pan Canadian women's health research initiative will now be known as the Partnership for Women's Health Research – Canada (PWHR-Canada) and is working closely with the Women's Health Collective Canada on driving forward a national women's health agenda. PWHR-Canada is currently working on developing a mission/vision, a definition of women's health research, key messages, and formalizing its governance structure.
- Maternal Infant Child and Youth Research Network (MICYRN) clinical trials consortium has been working closely with sites (including WCHRI) to better understand the pediatric clinical trials landscape in Canada. Over the summer they gathered information about pediatric clinical trialists at each site, so that we can assess where we have strengths and gaps. We are now working on a quality improvement initiative to better understand where we can make improvements in patient recruitment.

Precision health strategy

We have been meeting regularly with the new Chair of the Department of Medical Genetics, Peter Kannu around increased coordination and support for genomic medicine. We are exploring opportunities to support research endeavours associated with a newly planned "undiagnosed diseases" clinic. We have also started an early plan to host a WCHRI precision health seminar series in 2021 – the seminar series would showcase local women/child health research, ideally highlighting those aspects of precision health that are of importance to women/children/families, and interweaving unique strengths of WCHRI (such as psychosocial / community-based / patient oriented research).

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

Leadership and Governance

- In July, Lawrence Richer stepped down as WCHRI Associate Director in order to accept a position as Vice Dean Clinical Research in FoMD. We used this opportunity to revisit the position, update role description and responsibilities to better align with strategic plan objectives, then circulated to our program advisory committee and WCHRI academic membership to solicit candidates. **Todd Alexander was the successful candidate.**
- A detailed succession plan, including search and selection procedures, has been developed for the executive director position (see meeting package). Position descriptions for the data coordinating centre staff have been updated and reviewed through University HR. Position descriptions for grants administration team are currently in the process of being updated.

Stewardship activities

- On June 4, we released a video from our [inaugural cohort of postdoctoral fellows](#) -- providing an update about the progress they've made in their SCHF and RAHF funded projects.
- Our [Summer eNewsletter](#) was released on August 20. Included in the issue were stories on PhD student Ghazal Babolmorad and her work on identifying immune receptors linked to hearing loss in child cancer survivors; microbiologist David Marchant's research that identified how one of the most common viral infections breaks into our cells to cause infection; and, Carmen Charlton's project on minimizing sexually transmitted infections in pregnant women.
- We published a spotlight on [Christina Rinaldi](#) that highlighted her SCHF and RAHF funded graduate student, Chelsea Durber.
- There were 18 media mentions that showcased WCHRI/SCHF support and five that showcased WCHRI/RAHF support.

Updates on COVID-19 research impacts and responses

- Our budget for 2020-21 has been updated to reflect the confirmed SCHF funding of \$3 million rather than the full \$4 million MoU commitment. An additional \$500k (versus \$1 million) was approved for the Stollery Science Lab program. It also reflects RAHF funding of \$1,125 million rather than the full \$1,450 million MoU commitment. WCHRI and our members were able to accomplish these changes via:
 - Use of prior years' accumulated surplus
 - Split of \$60k Innovation grant into 2 annual payments
 - Deferral of start dates and/or annual payments
- Approved on campus and clinical (i.e. AHS) research is resuming. All WCHRI teams are following UofA and AHS COVID-19 operational guidelines.
- WCHRI research coordinators are working from the ECHA office on an occasional basis in order to support pediatric trials and clinical research projects – a return to campus plan has been developed in order to support their safe return. All other WCHRI staff continue to work remotely.
- WCHRI applied to the Canada Research Continuity Emergency Fund (CRCEF) through the UofA in order to account for lower cost recovery during the spring/summer due to research slow down.