

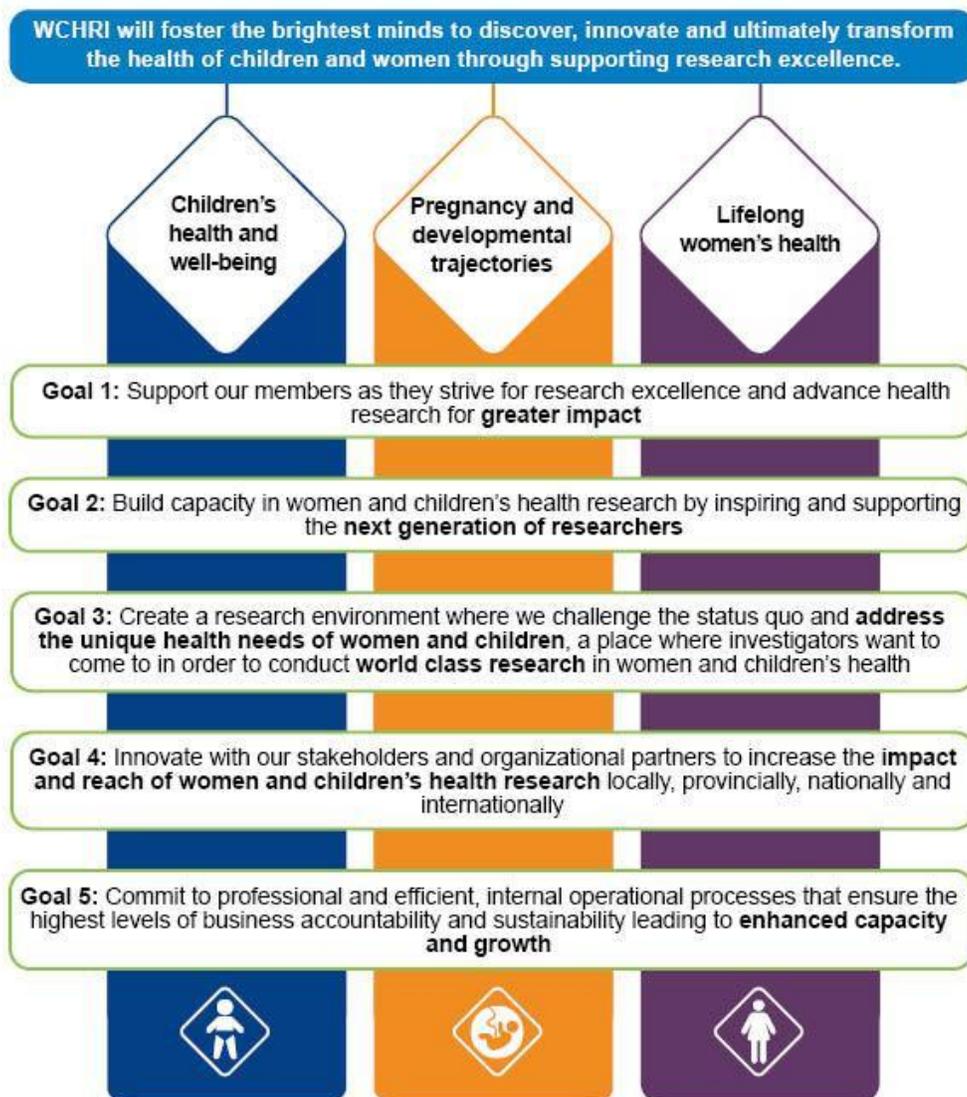
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: December 10, 2021

Reporting Period: October to December 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

WCHRI is launching its new [Grant Review Support Program](#) this month. This program offers WCHRI academic members the opportunity to obtain critical and robust scientific feedback on their proposal prior to submission to the CIHR Project Grant Program. This program is intended to support academic development and engagement in research at all career stages and phases, with the ultimate goal of increasing WCHRI member success in obtaining CIHR grants.

This program is offered in addition to our current [Bridge Grant Program](#) that supports WCHRI members whose applications to CIHR have just missed the funding cut-off.

WCHRI [Clinical/Community Research Integration Support Program \(CRISP\)](#) competition received eight eligible applications. 5 five applications were funded, with three supported by the SCHF and two supported by the AWHF.

Why is CIHR Important?

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is Canada's federal funding agency for health research. Success at CIHR is vitally important as these opportunities bring significant federal research dollars to support Women and Children's Health in Edmonton, are a benchmark of research success and can thus be pivotal in a researcher's career. The CIHR Project Grant program is one of CIHR's premier funding opportunities (\$400,000,000/cycle). It is offered twice a year (Spring and Fall) and supports projects (or programs) of research conducted by individual researchers (or groups of researchers) in all areas of health. Funding available is often sufficient to support a researcher program/project over several years.

Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers

- Kate Storey presented at an Stollery Women's Network spotlight event on her research involving sleep in children.
- Andrew Mackie presented his Stollery Science Lab project to SCHF staff at their monthly town hall meeting.

Endowed Chairs

The [Cavarzan Chair](#) in Women's Health Research, Sue Ross, will complete her second term at the end of June 2022. WCHRI is working with all stakeholders to update the terms of reference for this position and are initiating discussions for the next steps in the competitive recruitment process.

Membership renewal

We have completed our membership renewal for 2021. This process has confirmed we have ~430 members actively engaged in children's and women's health research. We are now in the process of streamlining the process for our 2022 renewal.

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 Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC developed a proposal for a new summer studentship workshop series. The topics are based on their experiences as undergraduate students and will offer summer students an opportunity to learn about potential research careers, how to use technology to advance their research career, and sessions to help with presentation skills. They are also working closely with WCHRI communications to produce a WCHRI Summer Student spotlight for the February issue of WCHRI Works.

Clinician scientist training and support

WCHRI partnered with the Dept of Pediatrics to launch a research intensive training program for pediatric residents called "[Training Researchers in Pediatrics](#)". This program will help us identify clinician scientists early in their clinical training program and provide support in the form of a tailored mentorship team, advocacy and support in accessing formal research training programs, access to research skill-building opportunities that are individualized to their unique needs, and offer funding and methodologic support so they can conduct a substantial research project during residency.

Research Day

On November 3 and 4 we hosted our 14th annual Research Day. The day was an outstanding success and we are incredibly proud of each participant who contributed in making this day an unmatched event for our trainee and academic members, partners and stakeholders. This year we once again utilized a virtual event platform to provide interactive presentations and networking opportunities. More than 400 researchers, students and stakeholders actively participated. A full summary of the day is attached.

The Foundations were involved in a number of ways this year - a pre-event "Meet & Greet" which offered donors and staff an opportunity to hear directly from a panel of researchers, volunteer judging opportunities, Mike and Sharlene's presentations during the opening remarks and a Foundation-hosted sponsor rooms.

Learning Sessions

This year we coordinated 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 one learning session: *A community presentation: Why, when and how*. We also offered the learning session *How to prepare your presentation for WCHRI Research Day* specifically for those trainees presenting in our event.

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 48 different types of samples for research from 40 women.
- The Women's Health Research Committee met online to review and approve two research protocols that will take place at the Lois Hole Hospital for Women:
 1. Evaluating the field performance of a dual HIV/Syphilis test to improve the diagnosis of these diseases among inner city, remote, rural and hard to reach populations in Alberta.
 2. Recruiting potential participants with people coming into the hospital to the HeLTI study: A preconception-early childhood telephone-based intervention for women and their partners to optimise growth and development among children in Canada.
- Our clinical research program lead, Laura Reyes Martinez, hosted the Cardiovascular Research Network meeting with researchers from the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary to discuss how to assess cardiovascular risk in women following a complicated pregnancy that have been recruited from previous studies.
- We met with Cheng-Han Lee to discuss his vision for the Sawin-Baldwin Chair in Ovarian Cancer.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 49 active studies (27 cohort studies and 22 clinical trials) with several more on hold or in start-up/close-out phases.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Inherited Heart Rhythm Studies

Inherited (meaning passed from parent to child) heart rhythm conditions can cause fainting, palpitations, chest pain, cardiac arrest and in the most severe conditions sudden death. Many patients present as teenagers or young adults but they can also present as babies or young children. The signs and symptoms of these rare conditions vary widely, so they are poorly understood by many healthcare providers. Tragically, they are usually only brought to the general public attention when children or adolescents fall victim to these disorders and die suddenly.

The primary goal of inherited arrhythmia studies is to gather and analyze clinical data and biological samples from affected children and their families. Investigators at the Stollery work closely with investigators nationally, to learn more about these disorders. The studies are designed to help the team to find better detection methods for those at risk of dangerous heart rhythms, and improve treatment, care and outcomes for children and their families living with inherited heart conditions.

Data Coordinating Centre (DCC)

The DCC operates the REDCap electronic data capture system as a research core, as such this software system is available to all researchers, students, and staff on campus. The DCC provides custom database development and management services to over 100 studies on campus and through MICYRN, including several Health Canada regulated clinical trials. One of these is a study aimed at identifying whether cheek swabs can detect COVID-19 with the same level of accuracy as nose/throat swabs in children.

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

Provincial partnerships

We launched a second round of the [Pediatric Health Outcomes Research Program](#) with our provincial partners - 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. Current projects that are being supported include:

- 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.

WCHRI has partnered with ACHRI to support the development of [Alberta-led research teams](#) focused on maternal-child health. In November we approved a proposal from a team who will be developing a team grant application aimed at improving mental health service delivery for youth with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

National partnerships

Partnership for Women's Health Research (PWHR)-Canada has proudly welcomed a new partner from the Maritimes: [IWK Health Centre](#), who is "respected for its world-class research into disorders and diseases affecting women, children, youth and families". PWHR-Canada continues to investigate potential additional institutional partners in Francophone Quebec, and other jurisdictions. They are working diligently on brand identity and will be launching a website in the near future.

The Maternal Infant Child & Youth Research Network (MICYRN) continues to work on a number of initiatives aimed at improving support for multi-centre clinical trials, including national ethics harmonization, relationship building with international organizations (USA, EU, AUS) to bring more maternal-child trials to Canada, youth consultation, advocacy with Health Canada, etc... MICYRN recently held its annual general meeting and during this meeting we explored how to:

- further advocate for "access to clinical research/trials" as a standard of care for our health care system (with government, health regions, and hospitals),
- better leverage Foundation investments in clinical research infrastructure - most institutions rely 100% on Foundation funding to support clinical research with no matching funds from provincial or federal governments.

Precision health strategy

WCHRI continues to work on initial approvals to launch the Translational Genomics Hub (TGH). In November we received University of Alberta ethics approval, which is the first step in operationalizing the initiative. We will now be working on AHS approvals to obtain patient clinical data not already collected (with patient/family approval) to conduct DNA re-analyses and move cases through the TGH pipeline. In order to support DNA re-analysis we have established an arrangement with the Centre for Computational Medicine at the Hospital for Sick Children to support DNA re-analysis. We have also secured strategic funding through the FoMD to support initial start-up costs (~85K/yr for two years). We hope to convene the hub and review the first case(s) in January 2022.

What is the Translational Genomics Hub?

The Translational Genomics Hub (TGH) is an initiative that will support patients primarily at the Stollery Children's Hospital. If a doctor suspects their patient's condition has a genetic cause (which has previously not been confirmed after undergoing appropriate genetic testing or the testing is inconclusive) they can offer to have the patient's DNA reanalyzed with current technologies, or an inconclusive result confirmed or refuted through the TGH. The 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 TGH 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 experiments. With these experiments, we hope to understand the role of the variant in disease which will assist in establishing new research and targeted treatments for patients suffering from the associated condition in the future.

Child and youth mental health

In October we held a small group meeting, facilitated by Yifeng Wei (assistant professor, department of psychiatry), to start developing a child and youth mental health and wellness research strategy. The group identified the following areas for strategy development:

- building research collaborations that intersect with practice,
- creating research connections between community and health system,
- initiating networking meetings with communities, families, clinicians, and researchers to discuss needs of unique/special populations,
- focus on knowledge mobilization strategies where we have strong evidence,
- contemplate needs at a universal level and how to engage families across the spectrum, including during early childhood development.

As a next phase, we will initiate individual key informant interviews to drill down further into each of these topics. We will also explore the role of the [Brain Story certification program](#) (delivered through the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative) as a potential research intervention given its uptake across sectors in the province.

Top 10 priorities for child & family health research at North East Community Health Centre

WCHRI member Geoff Ball, with his collaborator Andrea Eaton, recently completed a WCHRI CRISP-funded study—a survey of caregivers and clinicians from the Northeast Community Health Centre about their most pressing (Top 10) questions regarding child and family health. The team has built excellent relationships with clinicians and administrators at this site and is now looking for colleagues who might be interested in undertaking follow-up research, especially in relation to the priorities identified. A list of the top 10 priorities is attached.

AWHF Thought Leadership Paper: "Finding the Fractures"

The AWHF released a thought leadership paper, "[Finding the Fractures: The Pandemic, Women's Health Disparities, and the Path to Equity](#)," on their recent provincial-wide survey to understand how women in Alberta have been impacted by the pandemic. The paper references WCHRI in a number of ways, and includes some of the statistics and resources we prepared for the launch of the AWHF.

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

Leadership

Todd Alexander's appointment as associate director has been renewed for a second term. Todd will continue to advance Institute goals and objectives around training pathways (including clinician scientists), precision health, EDI, strategic recruitment, and supporting academic members in advancing their research.

Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) membership invitations have been sent out to new members.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Given the breadth of this area, WCHRI's internal EDI working group has decided to focus internally with WCHRI staff. Their first step is to provide a range of learning opportunities to assist WCHRI staff in accessing foundational knowledge that can expand understanding across a number of key EDI areas, including creating an inclusive work environment, Indigenous health research, intersectionality, etc. They are hoping to start this process early in the new year.

The UofA and AHS are partnering to develop Alberta-specific education for health practitioners, researchers and community members relating to Indigenous histories, knowledges, colonization and (anti) racism in a health context. A core group has been developed (including WCHRI's Bethan Kingsley) and will meet monthly. They are now providing feedback on a 'straw dog' curriculum outline for a micro-credential that would be widely available (and compulsory for medical students).

Stewardship activities & Foundation support

- On October 20, WCHRI in partnership with the University of Alberta launched a 15-years of WCHRI campaign to celebrate WCHRI's 15-year anniversary and the continued commitment of our foundations to women and children's health. This campaign included stories shared from the UofA, and a [digital content hub](#) that will live past the campaign; local media coverage; and, social media campaign using [#WCHRI15years](#), where our members and trainees share photos of themselves thanking WCHRI and our foundations for their support.
 - Thank you letters from UofA leadership to Mike and Sharlene.
- WCHRI-supported [Summer Studentship profiles](#) released.
- WCHRI and the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Society partnered for the third event in a research seminar series offered to monthly donors to the society. This event was titled "The next generation of women's health researchers" and included talks from WCHRI trainees who have been funded by the Alberta Women's Health Foundation.
- WCHRI sponsored the RAHF Harvest Celebration 2021.
- SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories (31)

- Anastassia Voronova, “Brain molecule helps ‘wake up’ cells that could help tackle MS and similar diseases, study shows,” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#), [Florida News Times](#), the [FoMD Connects Alumni Newsletter](#), [Synaptic Post](#) and [Taproot](#).
- Sandra Davidge, “Royal Society of Canada Announcement,” on [CBC Radio Active](#).
- WCHRI Summer Students, “Encouraging the next generation of researchers,” was amplified by the [FoMD Update](#).
- Alexa Thompson (Supervisor: Carmen Charlton), “[From summer student to PhD student](#)”.
- JuliAnn Thai (Supervisor: Jennifer Hocking), “[A summer of research](#)”.
- Greg Funk, “[The passionate mentor](#)”. This was amplified by [FoMD News](#) and [Synaptic Post](#).
- Kim Cuong Nguyen (Co-supervisors: Lawrence Le, Paul Major and Edmond Lou), “[New ultrasound tool will make orthodontic imaging safer](#)”.
- Adrienne Watson (Supervisor: Anastassia Voronova), “[Researchers take the first steps towards treatment of neurodevelopmental disorders](#)”. This was amplified by [FoMD News](#).
- Meghan Riddell, “Mentorship key to breakthrough science in women and children’s health” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by the [India Education Diary](#) and [Mirage News](#).
- Meghan Riddell, “Alberta lab growing placentas”, on [Global News Edmonton](#).
- Lisa Hartling, Shannon Scott, “Getting childhood health research into the hands of parents” was amplified by U of A Headlines [no link].
- Michael Hawkes, “Infections from respiratory viruses follow a predictable seasonal pattern, researchers find” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [ScienceDaily](#), [Florida News Times](#), [India Education Diary](#), [Global Health News Wire](#) and [Taproot](#).
- Bukola Salami, “#WCHRI15years: Transforming the lives of Black children in Canada” was amplified by U of A Headlines [no link].
- Ghazal Babolmorad, “#WCHRI15years: Improving quality of life for childhood cancer survivors” was amplified by U of A Headlines [no link].
- Kate Storey, “Indigenous mentorship program uses research to foster young people’s mental, physical and spiritual health” in [Folio](#). This was amplified by [FoMD News](#) and the [Edmonton Journal](#).
- AWHF media mentions / WCHRI stories (11):
 - Adetola Adesida, “Space designers take flight to test bioengineered knee cartilage in low gravity,” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [Mirage News](#), [Troy Media](#), the [FoMD Connects Alumni Newsletter](#) and [Taproot](#).
 - Sandra Davidge, “Royal Society of Canada Announcement,” on [CBC Radio Active](#).
 - WCHRI Summer Students, “Encouraging the next generation of researchers,” was amplified by the [FoMD Update](#).
 - Alexa Thompson (Supervisor: Carmen Charlton), “[From summer student to PhD student](#)”.
 - Alexander Howard (Supervisor: Jane Schulz), “[Exploring barriers faced by transgender Albertans](#)”. This story was amplified by the [FoMD Update Newsletter](#).
 - Nese Yuksel, “[Women’s health research spotlight](#)”.
 - Craig Steinback, “[Women’s health research spotlight](#)”.
 - Shokrollah Elahi, “[Sex matters when it comes to immune responses against infection and disease. study shows](#)” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by the [FoMD Update Newsletter](#).
 - Jane Schulz, “Canada should limit use of forceps in childbirth to prevent lifelong injuries to women: study,” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [India Education Diary](#) and [Mirage News](#).
 - Meghan Riddell, “Mentorship key to breakthrough science in women and children’s health” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by the [India Education Diary](#) and [Mirage News](#).
 - Meghan Riddell, “Alberta lab growing placentas”, on [Global News Edmonton](#).
- Foundation support:
 - We developed the [WCHRI/SCHF 101 document](#) to share our collective impact and common [research definitions](#) to onboard SCHF staff.
 - Information requests from the AWHF, related to partnership proposals, including breast cancer research (for the WHCC), homelessness in women (for sponsorship opportunity) and contraception, fertility and reproductive health (for sponsorship opportunity)
 - Briefing to RAHF on how we’re closing the 17-year gap of women’s health research
 - Patient story idea compilation for RAHF
 - WHCC pillars document for RAHF for potential researcher spokespeople in targeted areas of health.