

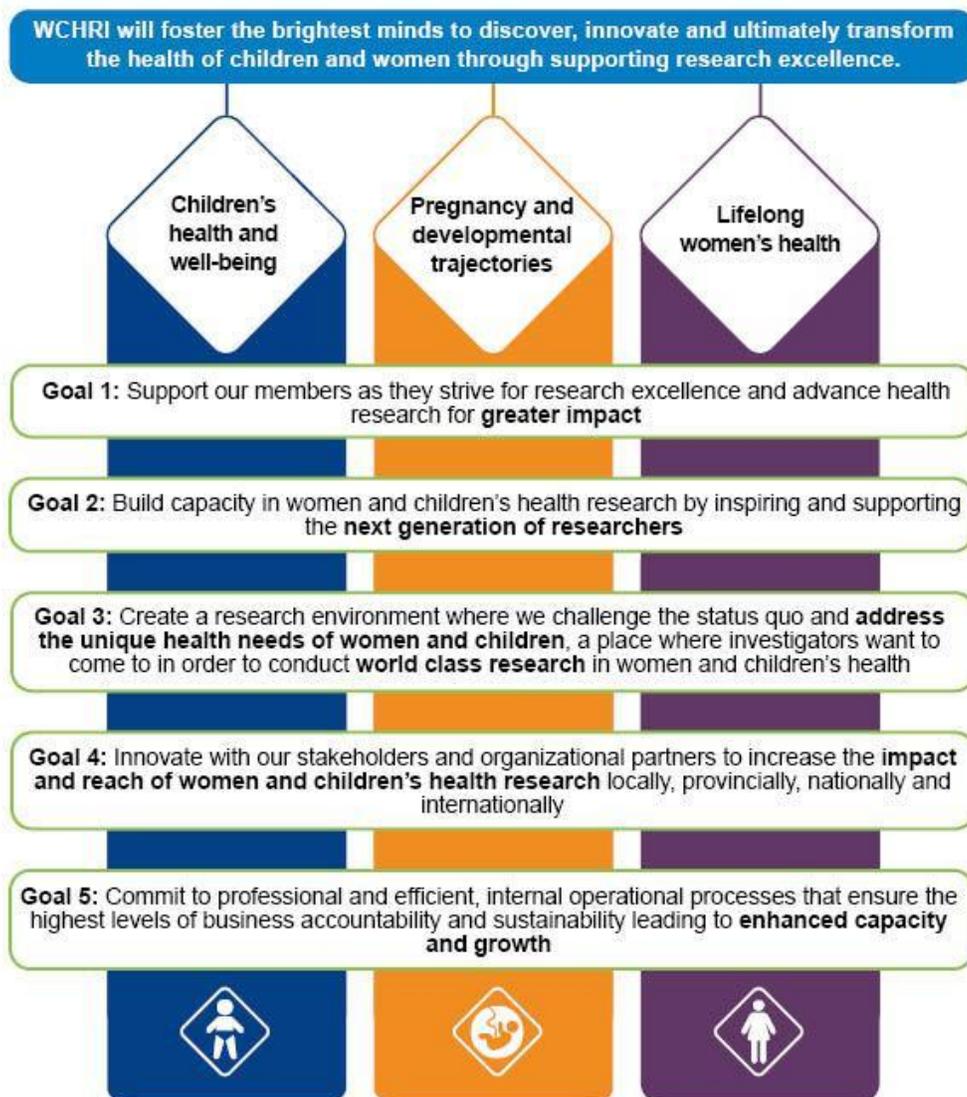
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: March 22, 2022

Reporting Period: January to March 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

Grant programs

The new WCHRI [Grant Review Support Program](#), including external/ internal review with research champion engagement, was offered to five participants to support potential submission to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

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 (list attached).

Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers

- Kate Storey received a media mention for her article “The magic of mentorship: How an after-school program is building brighter futures for Indigenous youth” in [Folio](#). This story was amplified by [India Education Diary](#) and [Troy Media](#).
- Andrew Mackie was interviewed during the SCHF Radiothon event on 630CHED.
- Andrew Mackie received a media mention for his article “Learning sessions help teen heart patients prepare for the adult world” [Folio](#).

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 is in the middle of recruiting its new group of members; to be confirmed at their April meeting.
- TAC hosted its Mentorship Program career panel workshop for mentees on February 17, which was very well received. They are currently collecting mid-point feedback from mentees to get an understanding of how things are going with their mentors.
- TAC is finalizing plans for its Summer Studentship workshop series and mapping out potential speakers to reach out to for presentations at our workshops.
- The latest [WCHRI TAC spotlight](#) was published in the February issue of the WCHRI newsletter.

Research Day

We have already begun planning for Research Day 2022. As we are still not yet sure what the COVID situation will be next fall, we are looking at a few different event formats including a hybrid of in-person and virtual.

Dr. David Nicholas of the University of Calgary has agreed to be our keynote speaker. Dr. Nicholas will present 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 60 different types of samples for research from 51 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. Integrating a decision support tool into practice guidelines for antenatal corticosteroids and then asking patients and doctors whether this improved the counseling process
 2. Investigating the role of amniotic fluid and the placenta in mediating the external environment in relation to lung development in women with healthy pregnancies and women with pregnancies complicated with diabetes
- Our clinical research program lead, Laura Reyes Martinez, presented to the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Society the results of the work in progress at the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Research Centre. Since its opening in 2018, the centre has received over 200 patients, leading to the publication of seven manuscripts, two knowledge translation articles and eight presentations in national and international events.
- Laura also helped physicians from the Allard Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Clinic (AHBOC) get their quality assurance database completed. This will be their first step in fully understanding their population and will help develop potential research projects. Laura is also facilitating a research meeting between the physicians from the AHBOC and Cheng-Han Lee to start research collaborations.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 54 active studies (287 cohort studies and 26 clinical trials) with several more on hold or in start-up/close-out phases.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Metachromatic Leukodystrophy (MLD)

The WCHRI Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit, with Dr. Komudi Siriwardena, recently started a new trial for a child with Metachromatic Leukodystrophy (MLD). MLD is a rare, genetic disorder in which an enzyme (arylsulfatase A [ASA]) is missing or not working properly. This enzyme breaks down certain fats. When those fats aren't broken down, they interfere with the body's ability to send information through nerves and to properly control muscle activity. Children with MLD are usually diagnosed at an early age and the disease worsens over time, with a low rate of survival in the following years. There are currently no approved therapies for MLD, so testing treatment options that could potentially stabilize or slow progression of neurological dysfunction is crucial. Our local participant was previously traveling from Edmonton to Toronto for weekly infusions of the study medication, but can now receive them here at the Stollery.

Data Coordinating Centre (DCC)

WCHRI has been asked to support the DCC functions for the upcoming [CIHR funded Canadian Pediatric COVID Research Platform](#). This grant opportunity includes a considerable amount of funding (~\$1.65M over two years) that must go towards a "coordinating centre". The Maternal Infant Child and Youth Research Network (MICYRN) will be the coordinating centre, and \$600K has been budgeted for the WCHRI DCC. These funds will allow us to grow our DCC team to support this platform and other research projects that are currently in the national pipeline.

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

The UofA/WCHRI is partnering with University of Calgary on a new initiative called One Child Every Child. This is a large grant opportunity through the [Canada First Research Excellence Fund \(CFREF\)](#). If successful the potential funding envelope is upwards of \$126M over 7 years. While the details are still evolving and emerging, the research framework will focus on themes situated at intersections between our research strength and areas of greatest potential impact on child health and wellness. Challenges will be approached by walking parallel paths - Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Themes and areas of focus will be supported by innovative, cross-cutting accelerators and a robust pathways to impact plan. Please see diagram below for visual representation of themes, accelerators, and pathways to impact.

National partnerships

[PWHR-Canada](#) and the Women's Health Collective Canada (WHCC) have instituted a quarterly information sharing meeting. Communication and collaboration will continue to be essential as WHCC has the intention to fundraise for women's health research. Therefore, research information / outputs will be necessary for initial fundraising and subsequent stewardship of donors, and the early establishment of these channels and processes is important. PWHR-Canada continues to investigate options for a new partner in Quebec as part of the strategy to be a truly national organization.

- On March 2, PWHR-Canada held its "2022 Update." The purpose of this meeting was to discuss gaps and opportunities in women's health research; share PWHR's vision, mission, goals and proposed actions for 2022-2023; and, ask for feedback to shape priorities and upcoming events. The WHCC also shared its vision and model for raising funds for women's health research.

The Maternal Infant Child & Youth Research Network (MICYRN) continues to work on initiatives aimed at improving support for multi-centre maternal-child research in Canada.

- One of the recent initiatives is a proposal to the federal government to establish a Canadian pediatric clinical trial infrastructure to support Canada's [National Strategy on High- Cost Drugs for Rare Diseases](#).

Precision health strategy

WCHRI's Translational Genomics Hub (TGH) launched in January. The TGH is a research platform designed to help families affected by undiagnosed disease where a clear genetic cause could not be found through initial genetic testing and where there is a need for further experimental work to find a cause. TGH is designed to remove many of the barriers for busy clinical investigators by taking care of the ethics requirements, much of the enrollment process, sample collection, logistics and tracking, and by facilitating access to local scientists and funding, which the investigator may not even be aware of.

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) has been meeting with a range of key informants to map out research priorities, strengths and gaps. Themes are starting to emerge, including developing validated measures that can be used to assess patient outcomes, focusing on community-based research priorities, developing a framework to test new ways of accessing / navigating mental health services and programs and establishing a more robust knowledge translation platform to ensure current known evidence is mobilized within the health system.

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

Scientific Advisory Committee

WCHRI finalized our Scientific Advisory Committee for the next term. We have our annual meeting (online) scheduled for June 21, 2022. Our current membership includes:

- [Stephanie Atkinson](#) (new), McMaster University
- [Annette Majnemer](#), McGill University
- [Paul Franks](#) (new), Lund University, Novo Nordisk Foundation
- [Pat McGrath](#), Dalhousie University
- [Chuck Nelson](#) (new), Harvard University
- [Paula Rochon](#), University of Toronto

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). We developed learning modules for all WCHRI staff to take and we are working towards annual reflections for staff (conversations with supervisor re: what we would like to learn, how we would like to grow).

In February we brought in Sagal Yusuf, from the University of Alberta's Office of Safe Disclosure & Human Rights (OSDHR), to present an all staff Learning Session "*creating an inclusive workplace.*"

We also hosted our first session of the *Encountering Expertise in Intersectional Health Series* in partnership with the [University of Alberta's Intersections of Gender Signature Area](#). Over 150 attendees attended a panel on "[Addressing Inequities in Women's and Children's Health.](#)" We are planning our second session for April.

Stewardship activities & Foundation support

- Three WCHRI researchers were interviewed during the SCHF Radiothon event on 630CHED - Andrew Mackie, Amit Bhavsar, James Benoit.
- WCHRI and the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Society partnered for the final 2021 event in a research seminar series offered to monthly donors to the society. This event was titled "Work in progress at the Lois Hole Hospital Women's Research Centre".
- On February 15, WCHRI released our Spring eNewsletter, featuring [Sophia Pin's study](#) to improve surgical outcomes for women with obesity and uterine cancer. The story was featured by Folio and picked up by the media in a number of ways (as per below).
- On February 17, WCHRI co-led a "What the Health" event with the Alberta Women's Health Foundation on women's heart health. The event featured two WCHRI researchers, Lisa Hornberger and Tanya Berry.
- Sandra Davidge presented to the University of Alberta Senate on March 4. Dr. Davidge explained WCHRI's unique position within the UofA and the community and its strong relationship with its funding partners; and also highlighted WCHRI's priorities for the future and opportunities we are facing.
- On International Women's Day (March 8), UofA External Relations in partnership with WCHRI, hosted a public webinar that highlighted the university's progress in women's health research and addressed how women can advocate for their specific health needs. The event, *Break the Bias: Dismantling disparities in women's health research and care*, featured WCHRI researchers Sandy Davidge, Colleen Norris and Nese Yuksel, who spoke on the triumphs and challenges of working in the women's health research space, all while fighting to change a system of exclusion and inequality.

- SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories (7):
 - Roman Pabayo, Claire Benny, “Income inequality in secondary schools contributes to higher rates of adolescent depression” in [Folio](#).
 - Vivian Biancardi Rossato, “Spotlight on: Child health researcher Vivian Biancardi Rossato” on [WCHRI website](#).
 - Todd Alexander, “FoMD faculty member renewed as Canada Research Chair” in [FoMD News](#). This story was amplified by [The Quad](#) and [India Education Diary](#).
 - [James Benoit](#) on Corus Radiothon.
 - [Andrew Mackie](#) on Corus Radiothon.
 - [Amit Bhavsar](#) on Corus Radiothon.
 - Sandra Davidge, “Women and Children’s Health Research Institute celebrates 15-year anniversary” in [The Gateway](#).
- AWHF media mentions / WCHRI stories:
 - Jane Schulz, “A Flood of Relief for Incontinence” in [New Trail](#).
 - Sophia Pin, “Weight loss points to better surgical outcomes for women with obesity and uterine cancer” in [Folio](#). This was amplified by [Global News Edmonton](#), [India Education Diary](#), [Mirage News](#), [Medical Xpress](#), [Taproot Edmonton](#) and [Troy Media](#).
 - Devon Heath (supervisor: Dana Hayward), “WCHRI summer studentship inspires career in research for Devon Heath” on [WCHRI's website](#).
 - Margie Davenport, “Policy changes needed to better support pregnant elite female athletes, say researchers” in [Folio](#). This was amplified by [Troy Media](#).
 - Jane Schulz, “Risk of Injury From Forceps Births Much Higher in Canada” in New Trail. [Paper copy, no link.]
 - Jane Schulz, “Gaps in Women's Health Care” on [Real Talk - Ryan Jespersen](#)
- Foundation support:
 - In July, foundation staff answered questions in the form of a survey on communications materials they use for their own purposes and what stewardship activities they find most effective. Staff shared that they find value in our current communications/stewardship strategies, but would like to see more infographics, videos, short profiles and in-person donor events from our team. We will endeavour to deliver on this where possible in 2022.