

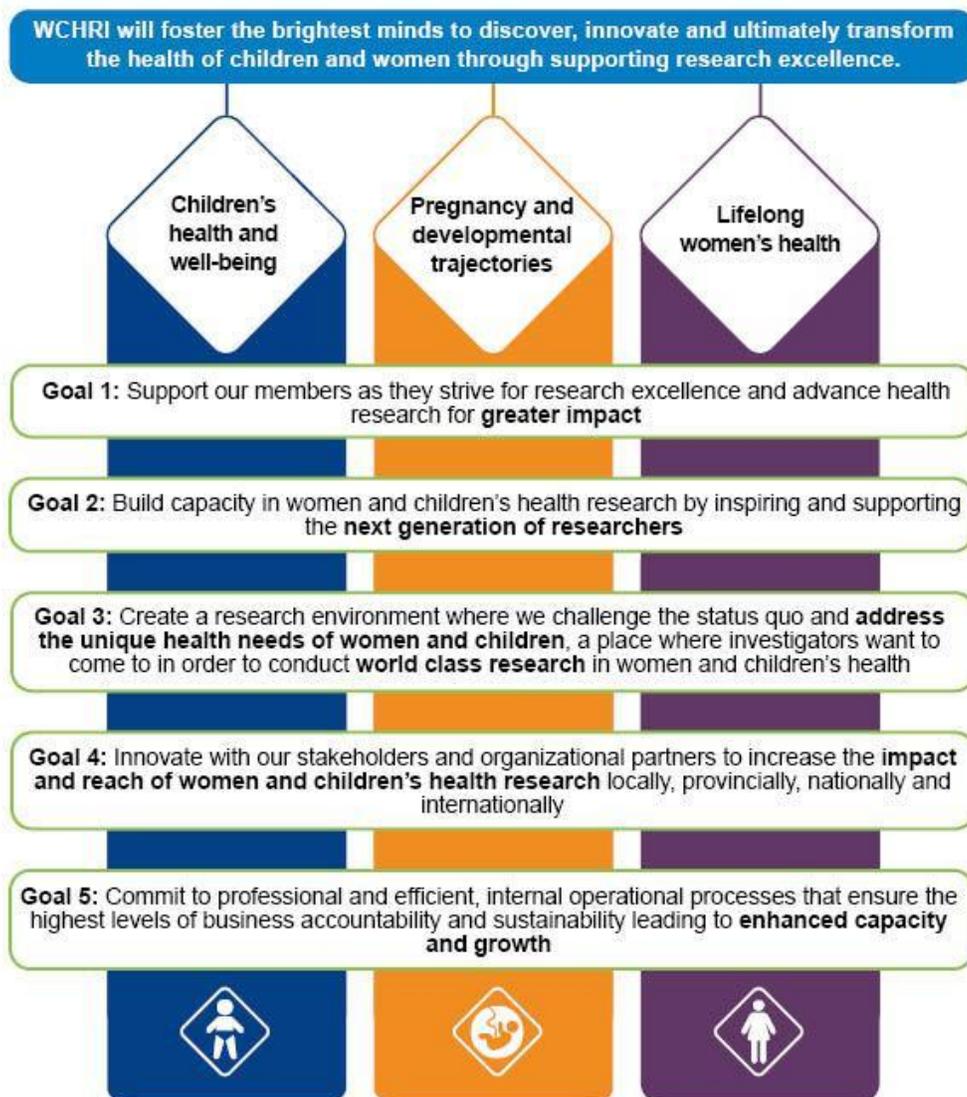
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: September 19, 2022

Reporting Period: July to September 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

Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers

Two of our Stollery Science Lab Distinguished Researchers received media mentions in the reporting period:

- Kate Storey, “5 Things I've Learned About Community,” in [New Trail](#).
- Todd Alexander, [“Unlocking the mysteries of biology”](#).

Cavarzan Chair in Mature Women's Health Research

On August 8, the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (FoMD) and WCHRI [announced the appointment of Dr. Colleen Norris as the Cavarzan Chair in Mature Women's Health Research](#), for a five-year term effective August 1, 2022. WCHRI is excited to expand its relationship with Dr. Norris to support her in promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative mature women's health research.

Grant programs

The [WCHRI Innovation Grant Program](#) competition received 29 eligible applications; 11 awards have been implemented, eight awardees were supported with SCHF funds, three were supported with AWHF funds and one was supported by both Foundations (list attached). We would like to congratulate WCHRI academic member, Georg Schmolzer, who had to decline his offered Innovation Grant to accept a CIHR project grant for "Development of novel vasopressor therapy during neonatal resuscitation of asphyxia"!

Membership renewal

Our second annual academic member renewal process concluded June 30. WCHRI received renewals from ~400 members. The purpose of renewal is to ensure that WCHRI has correct and current searchable data for each academic member for both our recording purposes and for our [“Find a researcher”](#) listing on our website.

Recruitment and Retention

In support of our strategic objectives, WCHRI spent much of the summer working closely with Faculties and Departments on a number of academic recruitment and retention cases. These activities are confidential in nature, so results cannot be disclosed, but WCHRI's role in supporting recruitment and retention is critical - in terms of start-up and/or retention funding support, establishment and/or expansion of research platforms to support a broader range of research, and providing valuable mentorship and personal support to our academic members.

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; 15 awards have been implemented, 11 awardees were supported with SCHF funds, four were supported with AWHF funds and one was supported by both Foundations (list attached). Of the 15 WCHRI Graduate studentship awards offered funding through this program, four have funding from alternative funding sources (overall program leverage of 27%). Students who are awarded alternative funding receive incentive funding from WCHRI. Leveraging allows WCHRI to fund more students that we would otherwise be unable to fund given budget constraints.

The [WCHRI Summer studentship Award Program](#) aims to encourage a new generation of talented young researchers; students receive direct experience working on specific research projects under the guidance of WCHRI academic members. Our 2022 program supported 21 students in areas including: a REsuscitation TrAINing (RETAIN) Computer Model Simulator Game to supplement standard neonatal resuscitation training for labour and delivery personnel; studying how using brain computer interfaces may support children with disabilities play; and, assessing the virtual care of urogynecology patients during the COVID-19. Also, almost all of our students participated in our Trainee Advisory Committee's new Summer Student Workshop series. Keep an eye out for our full 2022 Summer Studentship profiles launching on [our website](#) at the end of September!

Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC had a busy summer focused on delivering a workshop series for WCHRI undergraduate summer students. The series involved 4 workshops aimed at helping summer students gain research skills. In addition, the committee prepared for the launch of its 2022-23 mentorship program and prepared a trainee spotlight with a video component for the Sept WCHRI newsletter.

Training Researchers In Pediatrics (TRIP)

We had our first applicant to the [TRIP program](#) - a second year general pediatrics resident with strong interest in pursuing a hospitalist medicine research career. We have established a supervisory and mentorship team for the candidate and are in the process of assessing their project and developing a tailored research skill building strategy to support their development as a clinician researcher.

Research Day

Research Day (RD) planning is in full swing. The RD committee chose to keep the event platform ([PheedLoop](#)) and event management company ([The Virtual Effect](#)) from last year. Event registration opened July 13.

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 15 different types of samples for research from 15 women.
- Enrolled 31 pregnant participants in two additional research projects. Five focus groups were hosted in the LHH Women's Research Centre.
- Our clinical research program lead, Laura Reyes Martinez, focused on:
 - supporting Reproductive Science Division members in creating standard operating procedures for tissue collection. She is also ensuring laboratory space located in the Royal Alexandra Hospital is appropriately equipped for basic science research protocols involving placenta collection (risk management assessment).
 - conducting focus groups with physicians and patients in the urogynecology team.
 - working with summer students in their different projects with the urogynecology team.
 - helping the Allard Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Clinic (AHBOC) finish its database and supporting the hire of a data entry coordinator. This data will be used to understand breast and ovarian cancer in our population.
 - working with Bethan Kingsley to support research about the experiences of Indigenous women that deliver their babies at the Lois Hole Hospital for Women.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 92 active studies (13 cohort studies and 88 clinical trials) with several more in start-up/close-out phases.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Relapsing-remitting Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

The WCHRI Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit, with Dr. Colin Wilbur, is finalizing start-up for a new trial for pediatric relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (MS). This is an active-comparator study, meaning each participant will receive treatment—the study medication (ocrelizumab) will be compared to fingolimod. If ocrelizumab is approved as a result of this study, it will be the second medication (along with fingolimod) approved for use in kids that actually combats MS rather than just managing the symptoms. Ocrelizumab is administered as an infusion every six months rather than daily pills, if effective, will help children living with MS feel like a normal kid rather than a kid who has to take pills every day. This will be an intense study, with a large study team composed of both blinded and unblinded team members to ensure thorough safety and efficacy monitoring.

Data Coordinating Centre

WCHRI's data coordinating centre (DCC) recruited two new staff members in early summer in order to support the national POPCORN initiative. Over the summer the DCC worked closely with the POPCORN study teams to build a complex series of databases to support longitudinal data collection. POPCORN will follow children across their entire healthcare trajectory to advance our understanding of COVID in children and detect signals of other emerging syndromes in pediatric populations.

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

WCHRI spent much of the summer working with colleagues from UCalgary on the One Child Every Child application to the CFREF competition. WCHRI members contributed to the development of the scientific strategy and implementation plan, with a focus on EDI and knowledge mobilization strategies, engagement of WCHRI in the proposed governance structure and relevant operational areas (such as support from our Data Coordinating Centre). If funded, the One Child Every Child program will establish one of the most comprehensive child health research frameworks this country has ever seen.

Precision health strategy

WCHRI's TGH obtained operational approval from AHS in order to move to the next phase of activities and actively enroll patient cases. We worked with colleagues at SickKids and University IT to start establishing systems and processes in order to re-analyse patients' clinical exomes for research purposes. Case intake and advisory committees were paused over the summer and will resume in September.

Child and youth mental health

We built on conversations with Senator Stan Kutcher around building capacity in the mental health literacy field, including potentially establishing a mental health literacy consortium. Meetings were held with the Mathison Centre (UCalgary) and the Community University Partnership for the Study of Children Youth and Families (CUP - UofA) to further explore this idea and other opportunities for mental health research collaboration and strategy development.

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 held its annual Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting on June 21. Key points from the discussion with our [SAC members](#) include:

- WCHRI is unique in the country and should continue to increase awareness of its profile with the University of Alberta and other stakeholders; including major international initiatives like the World Health Organization and the United Nations.
- Continuing to explore the notion of how WCHRI can advocate, support and/or provide funding to increase protected research time for research intensivists. Perhaps providing additional support in grantsmanship and/or supporting the use of a consultant for grant development/management.
- Creative communications vehicles to ensure cohesion of branding/messaging among members, including more short videos and/or podcasts; adding QR codes to presentation templates.

WCHRI Research Impact

Through our evaluation summer studentship, we hired a graduate student to support an internal evaluation to understand the impact of WCHRI's work. This graduate student was mentored by a WCHRI staff member and did individual interviews with staff and leadership. The initial results of the evaluation have resulted in a series of research impact stories that will be shared with staff in early September, then more broadly with our partners. *This work is a continuation of the research impact / strategic evaluation project we initiated in 2021 (report attached as a reference along with refined set of WCHRI metrics).*

Stewardship activities & Foundation support

- On June 13 WCHRI launched its 2022 annual report, [Curious Minds](#), featuring six SCHF-funded researchers.
- WCHRI released our June 2022 eNewsletter, profiling seven SCHF-funded research projects.
- Seven WCHRI researchers and staff attended the SCHF Ambassadors Reception on June 21.
- WCHRI presented at a Town Hall for SCHF staff on June 29 about clinical trials.
- The WCHRI Warriors participated in LOVE YOU Run for Women on May 28. The team of 13 raised \$1,000 through their fundraising efforts.
- On June 24, WCHRI hosted the first Annual Deb Key Memorial Picnic. We raised funds for the Alberta Women's Health Foundation Sawin-Baldwin Chair in Ovarian Cancer.
- WCHRI received the highest honour in two categories at the [2022 IABC Edmonton Capital Awards](#):
 - Award of Excellence in Marketing, Advertising and Brand Communication for *Celebrating 15 years of the Women and Children's Health Research Institute*.
 - Award of Excellence in Publications for our [2021 Annual Report](#).
- SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories include:
 - Sandra Davidge, "Male and female offspring born from complicated pregnancies showed profoundly different response to heart drug" was amplified by the [FoMD Update newsletter](#).
 - Lisa Hornberger, "[Cardiovascular risks could start before birth for some babies](#)".
 - Samuel Yang, "[Connecting with communities to improve sleep education](#)".
 - Harissios Vliagoftis, "[A tiny molecule could unlock the potential of inhalable vaccines](#)".
 - Stephanie Montesanti, "[Recognizing family violence as a serious public health issue](#)".
 - Yi-feng Wei, "[Preventing mental health lessons from getting lost in translation](#)".
 - Carmen Rasmussen, "[Exploring the impact of perinatal stroke on children's cognitive abilities](#)".
- AWHF media mentions / WCHRI stories include:
 - Cheng-Han Lee, "Honouring Deb Key, Our 2022 Edmonton Elks "Pam's Hero" in [AWHFNews](#).
 - Stephanie Montesanti, "Red Dress Day: Honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S)" in [AWHF News](#).
 - Sandra Davidge, "Male and female offspring born from complicated pregnancies showed profoundly different response to heart drug" in [FoMD News](#). This was amplified in [FoMD Update](#).
 - Denise Spitzer, "Reproductive control of Indigenous women continues around the world, say survivors and researchers" in [Folio](#). This was amplified by [India Education Diary](#)
 - Stephanie Montesanti, "[Recognizing family violence as a serious public health issue](#)"
 - Cheng-Han Lee, "[Accelerating precision health for ovarian cancers](#)"
 - Carolina Archundia-Herrera, "[Illuminating the iron status of pregnant women and how supplements affect pregnancy and birth outcomes](#)"
 - Áine Brislane, "[Understanding maternal and fetal cardiovascular health during twin pregnancies to reduce complications](#)"
 - Alexa Ferdinands, "[Examining the health outcomes of zero-fee education for diverse young women in rural Alberta](#)"
 - Zeinab Momeni, "[How menstruation and hormonal contraceptives affect blood sugar levels during exercise in women with T1D](#)"