

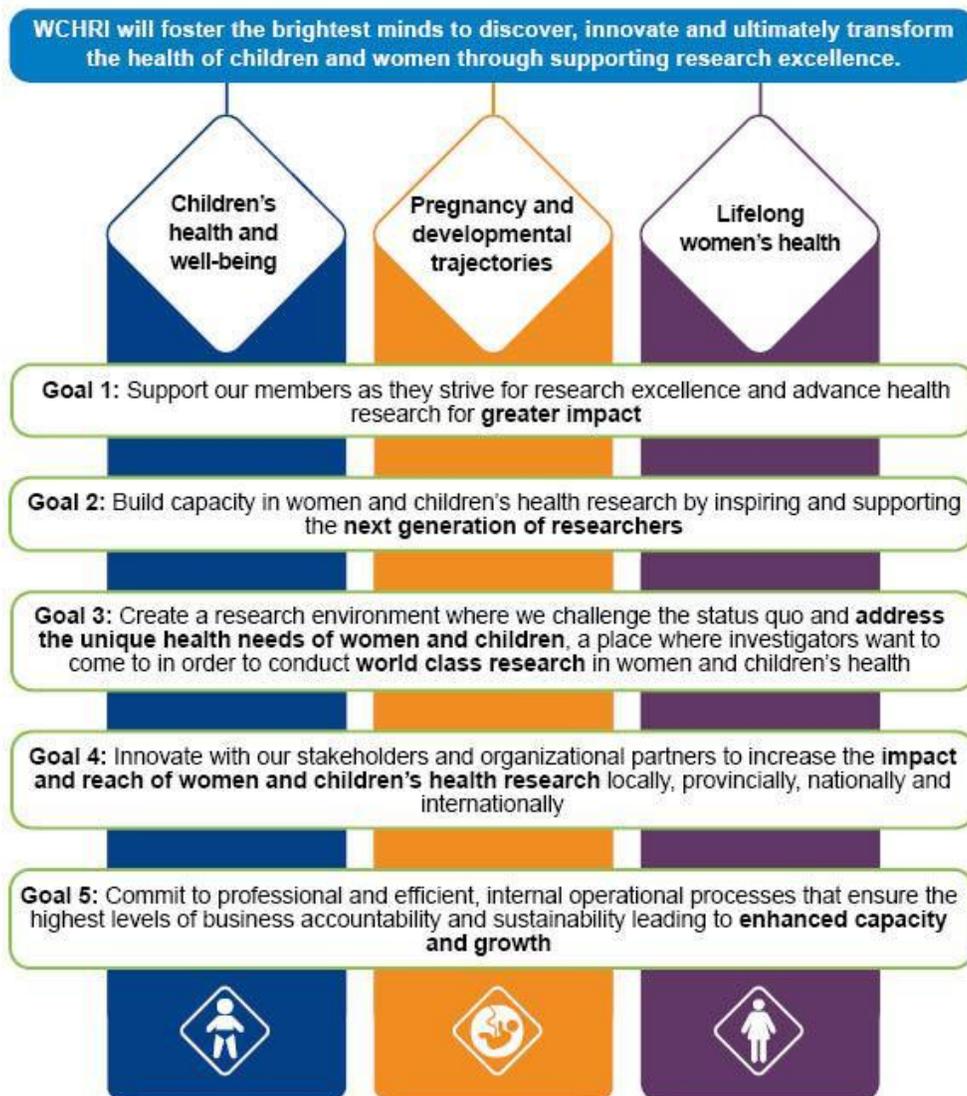
Executive Director Progress Report

Presented to: Oversight Board

Date: March 6, 2023

Reporting Period: January to March 2023

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

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

- Michael Hawkes, “Ebola may hit children harder and longer than adults, study suggests” amplified by [Medical Xpress](#).
- Andrew Mackie, “[Stollery joins global network for research on heart defects](#)”.
- Lisa Hartling and Shannon Scott, “New research-backed tools ready to support parents in navigating COVID-19 pandemic” in [Folio](#) and amplified by [India Education Diary](#).

Lisa Hartling and Shannon Scott also provided a seminar, titled “[Co-developing evidence-based knowledge translation tools for parents: Overview of a research program](#),” through the [Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute \(ACHRI\)](#).

Grant programs

The [WCHRI Grant Review Support Program](#) supports academic members in the development of their Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) application through robust scientific feedback prior to submission of their application. Three of these members subsequently received CIHR project grants:

- [Meghan Riddell](#)—as populations delay having children, work is required to understand this growing higher-risk population. Meghan will explore maternal age as it relates to pregnancy and complications in pregnancy such as babies that are born smaller than expected given the mother’s stage of pregnancy.
- [Justine Turner](#)—focusing on increasing quality of life for children with short bowel syndrome by reducing the length of time nutritional support is required, decreasing patient infection rates and avoiding transplantation. Improving quality of life for these patients and their caregivers will result in decreased healthcare costs.
- [Silvia Pagliardini](#)—looking at how hormones affect breathing and sleep in women relevant to life stage (pregnancy, menopause). Increasing our knowledge on how hormones affect sleep and breathing may lead to novel therapies to support conditions such as sleep apnea.

Membership

During the reporting period, WCHRI welcomed two new academic members focused on child health. New members include:

- [David Ross](#)—working to make cutting-edge psychiatric neuroscience clear, relevant and accessible. Focuses on researching mental health and brain diseases in children and youth; and working to improve the mental health outcomes for children and their families.
- [Abhilash Rakkunedeth Hareendranath](#)—uses artificial intelligence (AI) to provide early, more reliable detection of hip dysplasia and fracture detection. Every day four children are born with hip dysplasia in Alberta, with a 30 times higher prevalence among indigenous populations.

WCHRI member success at CIHR

[14 WCHRI members were awarded \\$9.6 million](#) as part of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Fall 2022 competition.

Melissa Tremblay was also successful in the CIHR Mental Health in the Early Years Implementation Science competition. Her project, [Implementing Processes and Tools for Indigenous Children's Mental Health: A Community-Grounded Implementation Science Project](#), will examine the factors associated with successful implementation of an evidence-informed, community-grounded early childhood program with Indigenous communities in Canada, and co-create tools to evaluate implementation in ways that centralize Indigenous community priorities related to early childhood mental health.

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 [Postdoctoral Fellowship Award Program](#) competition received 11 eligible applications. Five applications were funded, with two supported by the SCHF and three supported by both ([list attached](#)).

Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

The WCHRI TAC hosted a Grad School 101 workshop for all undergraduate students interested in graduate research in women's and/or children's health. In this workshop, TAC members shared insights on how to match with a graduate supervisor; descriptions of the different streams of health-related research and relevant funding sources; and provided the opportunity to interact with their diverse panel of WCHRI graduate students.

The latest [WCHRI TAC spotlight](#) was published in the February issue of the [WCHRI newsletter](#).

TAC is also expanding their recruitment model. They are looking to switch from a once-a-year recruitment style to a rolling recruitment style in order to fill positions right away as members of TAC resign or require more committee members and adding a new communications lead position and additional roles under each subcommittee.

Research Day

We have already begun planning for Research Day 2023. We are very excited to announce this year's event will be October 18 in person; please mark your calendar! This year our keynote speaker will be [Bernard Thebaud](#), senior scientist of the Regenerative Medicine Program at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute. Bernard is a clinician-scientist in the field of stem-cell/regenerative medicine, a practicing neonatologist and a former WCHRI member.

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.

Dale Sheard Centre for Solutions in Women's Health

Maya Henriquez, clinical research coordinator, approached 40 women for research. From those women, 26 consented and 30 samples (e.g. placenta, maternal blood, amniotic fluid) were collected. In addition, the Dale Sheard Centre for Solutions in Women's Health enrolled 12 pregnant participants in two additional research projects and eight new patients were recruited for a preoperative weight loss in women with obesity and either pre-cancer or early cancer of the uterus.

Our clinical research program lead, Laura Reyes Martinez, focused on:

- Hiring two new clinical research coordinators positions. One position will support the Allard Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer (AHBOC) Clinic team, the gynecology oncology team, and

Oana Caliseriu in her maternal fetal medicine clinic. The second position will support the recruitment of families to the [Healthy Life Trajectories Initiative \(HeLTI\) Canada](#).

- Supporting Oana Caluseriu with a grant application to the College of Physicians & Surgeons from Alberta to secure funding for the Genetics Clinic in Maternal Fetal Medicine Space.
- Assisting the urogynecology team with the creation of a REDCap database to compile the data from their study with the Multicultural Healthcare Brokers. They will later seek statistical consultation with WCHRI to publish their findings on how a training program on pelvic floor disorders designed for the Multicultural Healthcare Brokers helps their clients (women) with pelvic floor disorders.
- Helping Jane Schulz prepare a grant application for the *Pan-Canadian Women's Health Coalition - Hubs*. The team partnered with the Canadian Society of Pelvic Medicine. The goal of this grant is to carry out knowledge mobilization and knowledge translation activities in pelvic health disorders. This will be a national initiative and the goal is to empower and motivate women with pelvic health disorders to outreach for enhanced care.

Data Coordinating Centre

- The Pediatric Outcomes Improvement through Coordination of Research Networks (POPCORN), of which our Data Coordinating Centre is a strong supporter, just launched its database with 44 users across 14 study sites, with more to be added. 14 participants are included so far.
- The team has been supporting a provincial initiative in a Health Canada funded study that aims to validate the use of the Abbott IDNOW system in providing a rapid, point of care, COVID-19 diagnostic test. The system is validated for use in adults but, until now, not in children. Data collection is now complete. In a little over a year, the study recruited 4,311 participants across 15 study sites, including the Stollery Children's Hospital.
- In 2011 WCHRI supported the development of a study database for a Canada wide cerebral palsy (CP) registry. Although funding for the database ended several years ago we continued to host the project. The registry provides researchers with the approximate number of children with CP across Canada, and data in the registry helps researchers explore reasons behind the causes of CP, as well as supporting studies which may lead to improvements in the overall care of children with CP.

Biostatistics

- The Biostatistics team is currently starting the analysis for three projects part of the national CHILD-BRIGHT network that were launched five years ago. WCHRI's Data Coordinating Centre and Biostats team actively participated in these projects since the very beginning and are now very excited with the analysis. More completed trials from CHILD-BRIGHT are expected in 2023.
- The team is also collaborating on other national networks: iPCT (Innovative Pediatric Clinical Trials) and POPCORN (Pediatric Outcome imProvement through COordination of Research Networks). They are working on the design of clinical trials, interim analyses and reports for DSMB (Data Safety and Monitoring Board), and at the end, the final analyses of the results.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Unit

WCHRI's pediatric clinical trials team is currently supporting 160 active studies (81 cohort studies and 79 clinical trials) with several more in start-up/close-out phases.

Pediatric Clinical Trials Spotlight: Helping children suffering from migraines

Anyone who has had a headache knows how painful it can be. For many of the children and adolescents seen at the Stollery Children's Hospital Pediatric neurology clinic, headaches are a chronic, daily issue. They are missing out on school, sports and spending time with friends. To add to the problem, many of the treatment options available to adults with migraines are not yet approved for use in children. The doctors at the Stollery are looking at ways to change that.

Our site is participating in several research studies—led by WCHRI members Thilinie Rajapaski and Lawrence Richer—to look at the safety and effectiveness of new drugs to prevent migraines. In some of our participants, this has meant going from having a migraine every day to only having five or six in a month. Because of being able to access these new drugs, these kids are missing less school and can do the things they enjoy more often. If the studies show that these drugs are safe and work at reducing the number of migraine days every month, this will be one more tool that doctors can use to try to help more kids who suffer from migraines.

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

National partnerships

As part of its [Women’s Health Research Seminar Series](#), PWHR-Canada held its third seminar on January 26 with a panel discussion about “Partnering with policymakers to implement and respond to women’s health research.” Jane Schulz was a panelist for this event.

MICYRN is one of the clinical trial networks participating in a newly funded CIHR clinical trials consortium called “[Accelerating Clinical Trials \(ACT\)](#)”. ACT is a national initiative that will bring together clinical trials researchers and networks (adult and pediatric) in order to streamline processes and create efficiencies in operations, accelerate implementation of findings into practice, and improve equitable access to clinical trials in Canada. As part of the ACT consortium, MICYRN and WCHRI will be able to continue to advance clinical trials access and resulting knowledge mobilization of evidence gained through trials in order to children locally and nationally.

Intersectional Research in Women and Children’s Health

WCHRI has partnered with [Intersections of Gender at the University of Alberta](#) to develop a workshop series titled “Encountering Expertise in Intersectional Health”. Each workshop has consistently had ~200 registrants, demonstrating the high interest in this area. Our final workshop in the series occurred at the beginning of March and included a panel on “[Healing-focused maternity care](#).”

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

WCHRI Town Hall

On February 8, we hosted our annual WCHRI Town Hall for members and staff. The meeting included a “year in review” update, information about our strategic direction and how we can add additional value to our members’ research. This year we were pleased to offer a hybrid event when people could attend in-person or virtually via Zoom.

Scientific Advisory Committee

This year we will be meeting with our Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) members in smaller groups to be more targeted with our discussions. Our current membership includes:

- [Stephanie Atkinson](#), McMaster University
- [Annette Majnemer](#), McGill University
- [Pat McGrath](#), Dalhousie University
- [Chuck Nelson](#), Harvard University
- [Paula Rochon](#), University of Toronto

Unfortunately due to changes to his position at his site, [Paul Franks](#), Lund University, Novo Nordisk Foundation, has had to step down from our committee; though he remains a strong supporter of WCHRI. We will be looking for a replacement in the coming weeks.

Stewardship activities & Foundation support

- A WCHRI communications evaluation saw 400 members (90% response rate) answering questions on stewardship and social media. Highlights include:
 - 93% of WCHRI members are willing to engage in at least one stewardship activity, including:
 - Feature in a story (54%)
 - Speaking engagement hosted by WCHRI or our foundations (49%)
 - Research tour with donors (42%)
 - Participate in a foundation (fundraising) event as part of the WCHRI team (40%)
 - Media Interview (36%)
 - 137 WCHRI members (34%), use social media in their role as a researcher. Of these, 82% use Twitter, 30% use LinkedIn, 30% use Facebook and 20% use Instagram.
 - 100 WCHRI members (or 73% of those who use social media in their role as a researcher are willing to be social media ambassadors for WCHRI.
 - We are currently developing a social media ambassador plan to engage with our members.
- After conversations with our partners, WCHRI launched an [Instagram account](#).
- On December 5, we celebrated the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation by attending the Snowflake Gala.
- Two WCHRI researchers were interviewed on January 27 during the SCHF Radiothon event on 630CHED - Yifeng Wei and Matthew Martens
- WCHRI researcher Thilinie Rajapakse and her SCHF-supported summer student Julia Craig recorded a video to support the Mighty Millions Lottery.
- SCHF media mentions / WCHRI stories include:
 - Toshifumi Yokota, "Our top stories of 2022: New treatment could benefit up to 45 per cent of patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy" amplified by [FoMD Dean's Message](#).
- AWHF media mentions / WCHRI stories include:
 - Colleen Norris, "Researchers call for more Albertans to complete post-COVID survey" in [CBC News](#).
 - Colleen Norris, "The heart of a woman" in [Faculty of Nursing news](#).
 - Stephanie Montesanti and Meghan Riddell, "WCHRI's 5 Inspiring Stories of 2022" on [WCHRI's website](#).
- Research stories published by WCHRI:
 - Samina Ali, Lisa Hartling, Stephanie Montesanti, Shannon Scott, Kate Storey and Samuel Yang "[WCHRI's 5 Inspiring Stories of 2022](#)".