women & children's health research institute

WCHRI Town Hall

February 7, 2024
Noon – 12:45 p.m.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Alberta Health Services

STOLLERY CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

AWHF
alberta women's health foundation

Land acknowledgement

Agenda

- WCHRI overview
- Trainee Advisory Committee
- Strategic plan refresh

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Thank you, Todd!

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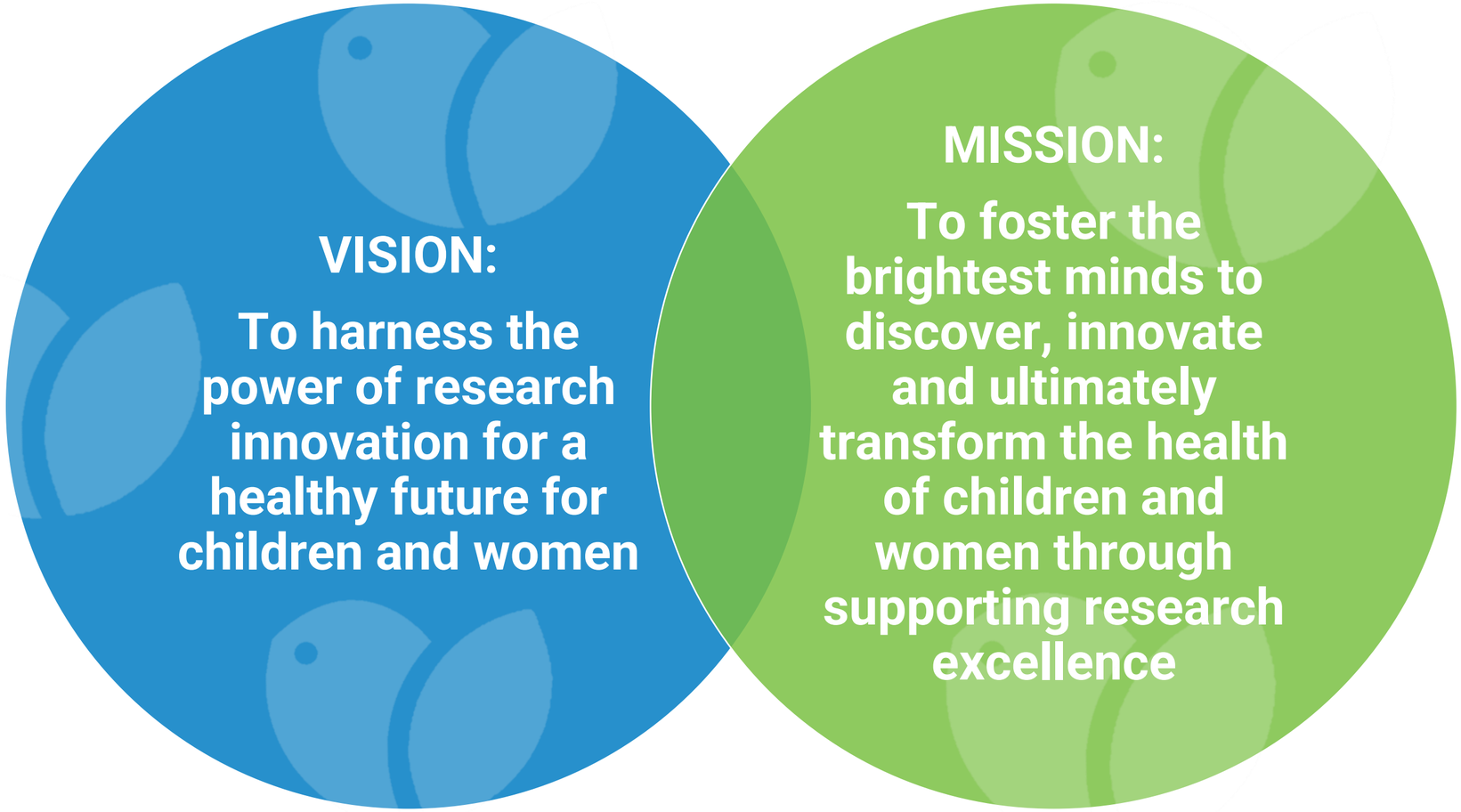
Why we exist



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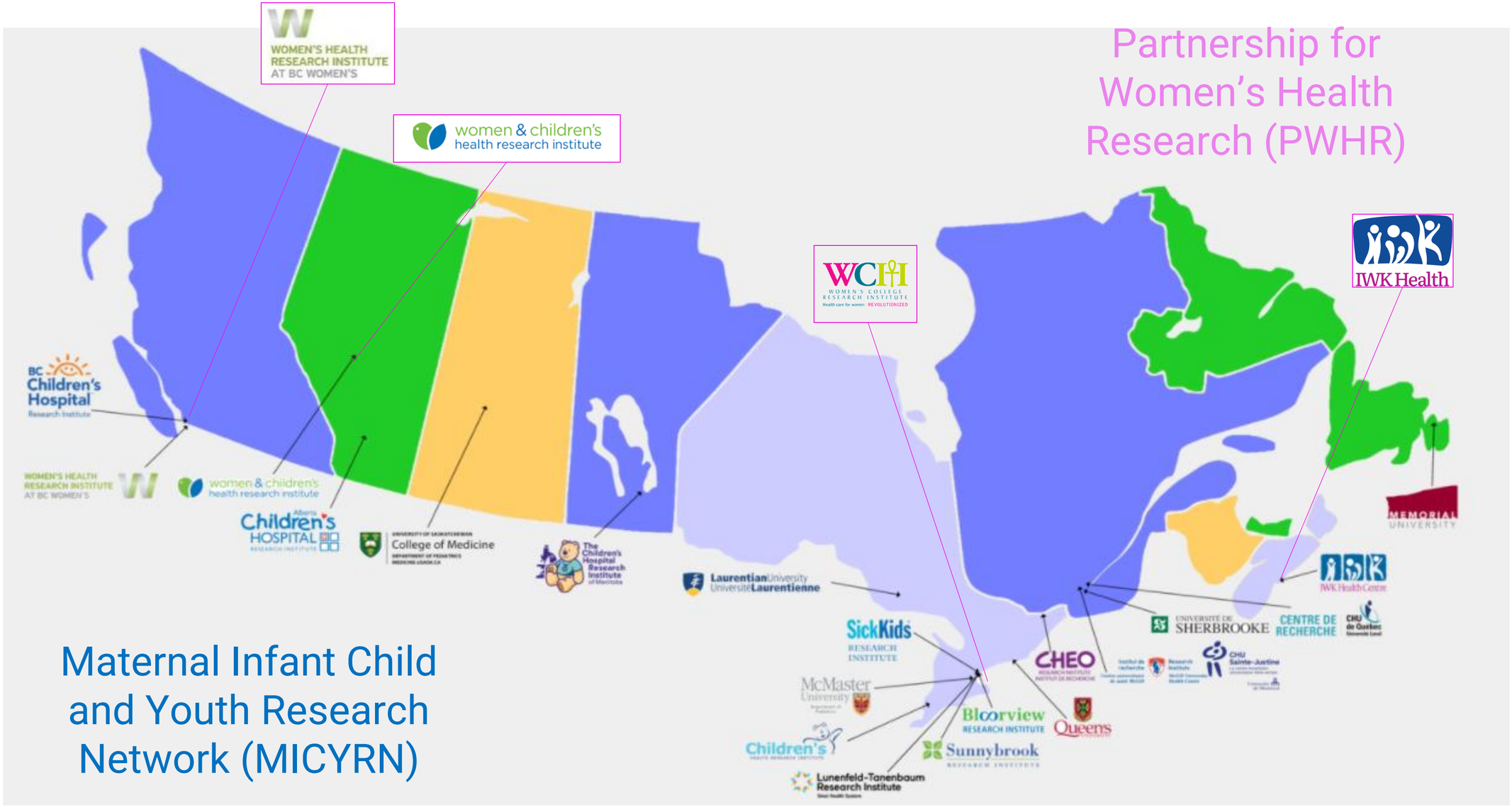

How we add value

Support over 400 UofA-based researchers by:

- Facilitating
- Advocating
- Communicating
- Training
- Translating
- Sustaining

Children's health and well-being

Lifelong women's health

Pregnancy and Developmental Trajectories

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Founded in 2006 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

- University of Alberta / Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry
- Alberta Health Services
- Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation
- Royal Alexandra Health Foundation

- MoU renewed in 2016 (for 10yrs)
- Planning for next MoU renewal in 2026

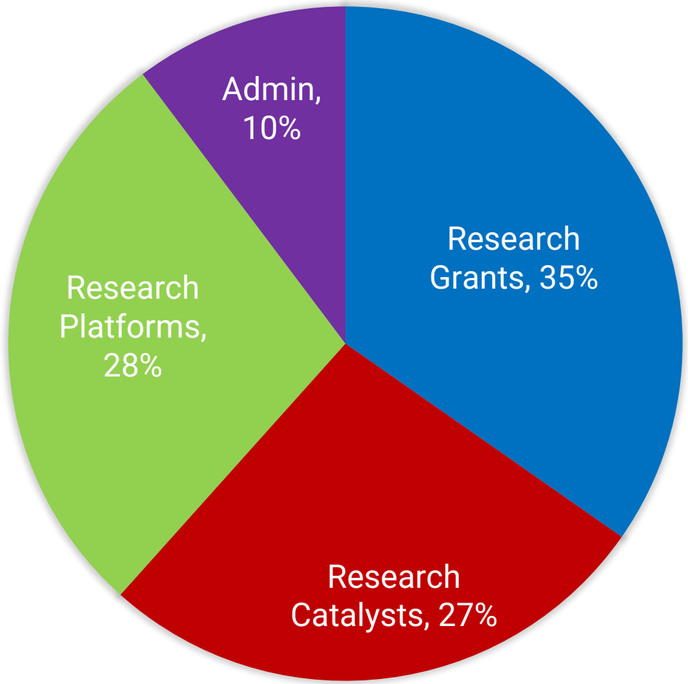
MoU funding model

Annual MoU commitments

- SCHF = $4M
- AWHF = $1.45M
- FoMD = $264K

Total: $5,714,000

How funds support research



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What we do – some program examples

Research grants

- Operating funds
- Studentships
- Travel and hosting awards

Research catalysts

- Recruitment and start-up awards
- Leveraged/matched funding
- Strategic alliances

Research platforms and supports

- Clinical research and trials
- Data coordinating centre / REDCap
- Biostatistics
- Qualitative research, KT, stakeholder engagement
- Translational genomics hub
- Grant review support program

Governance committees

Oversight Board

Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

Program Advisory Committee (PAC)

Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

WCHRI Trainee Advisory Committee (TAC)

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WCHRI TAC Composition

- Students and fellows from all academic levels (undergraduate, MSc, PhD, MD, post-doctoral fellows)
- All three WCHRI research disciplines (women, children, pregnancy) & pillars (biomedical, clinical, health services, social/cultural population health) represented
- Interdisciplinary across UofA colleges, faculties, & departments

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TAC objectives

- Provide feedback and suggestions to improve trainee engagement within WCHRI
- Create and facilitate programs that target professional development skills for WCHRI trainees
- Showcase WCHRI trainee accomplishments
- Provide career development/exposure opportunities
- Advise on and participate in WCHRI Research Day workshops, topics, and format

Mentorship program

Pairs WCHRI academic members (mentors) with WCHRI Graduate Students (mentees)

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Trainee Spotlight Program

Showcases WCHRI trainee research accomplishments in WCHRI Works Newsletters

June 15, 2023

Regenerating the brain one molecule at a time

A WCHRI student works with neuronal stem cells that could help alleviate neurological disorders

October 13, 2023

Developing a "weed killer" to treat a type of muscular dystrophy

A WCHRI student is researching a DNA-like molecule to prevent muscle damage.

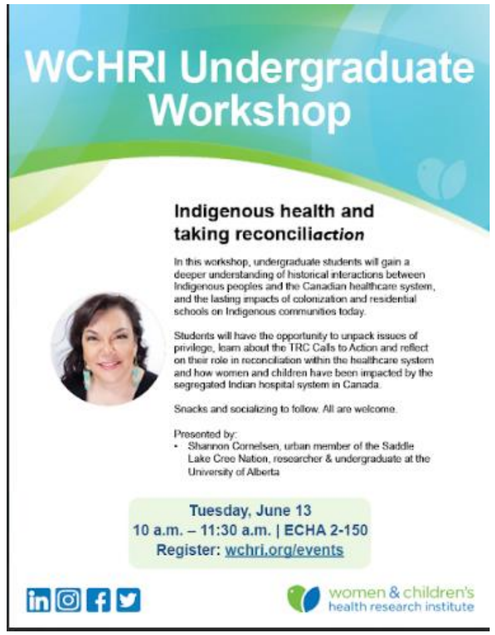
March 28, 2023

What does breast cancer have to do with heart disease?

A trainee takes research from inception to publication to examine how cancer cells impact the heart

Undergraduate Student Workshop Series

Professional development skill workshops for WCHRI undergraduate students



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Looking ahead

Membership:

Continue expanding TAC membership on an as-needs basis

Programs:

Explore new and innovative programs for 2024/2025, operationalize current programs

Communications:

Expansion of internal & external communications

Strategic Plan Refresh (2024-2027)

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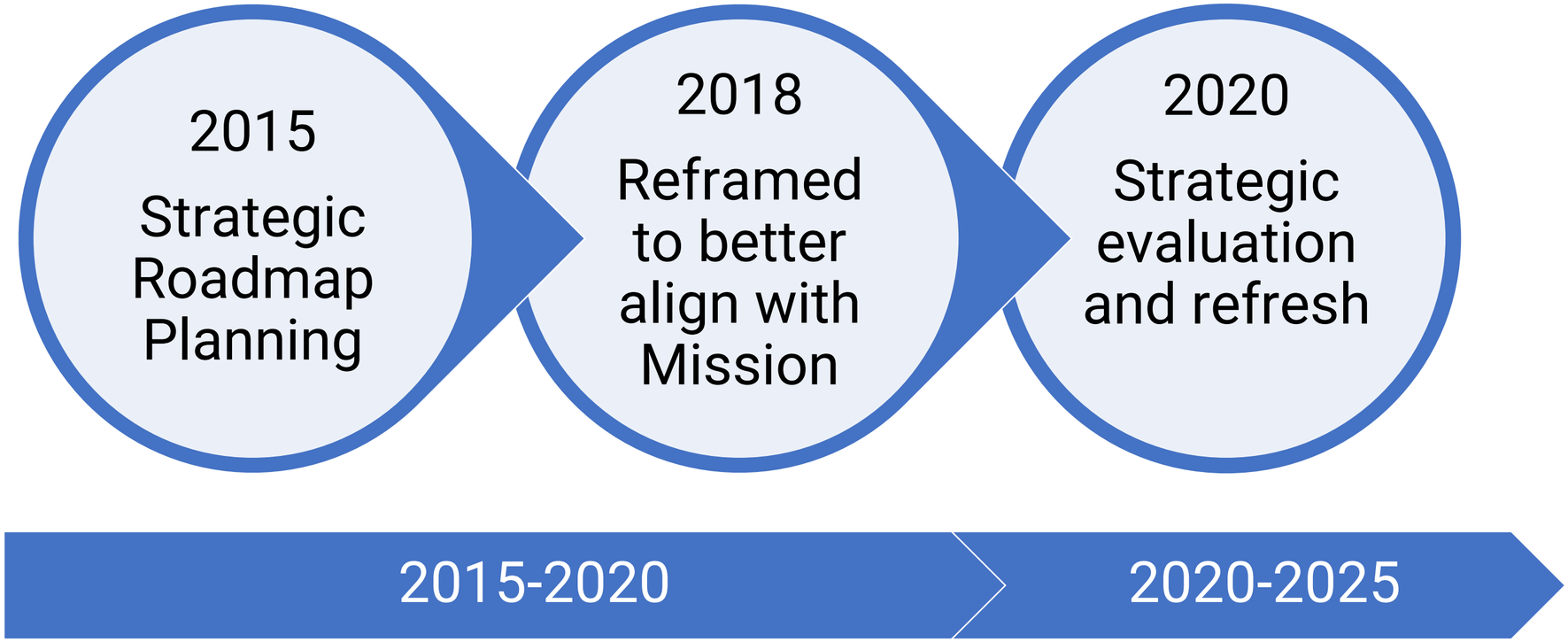
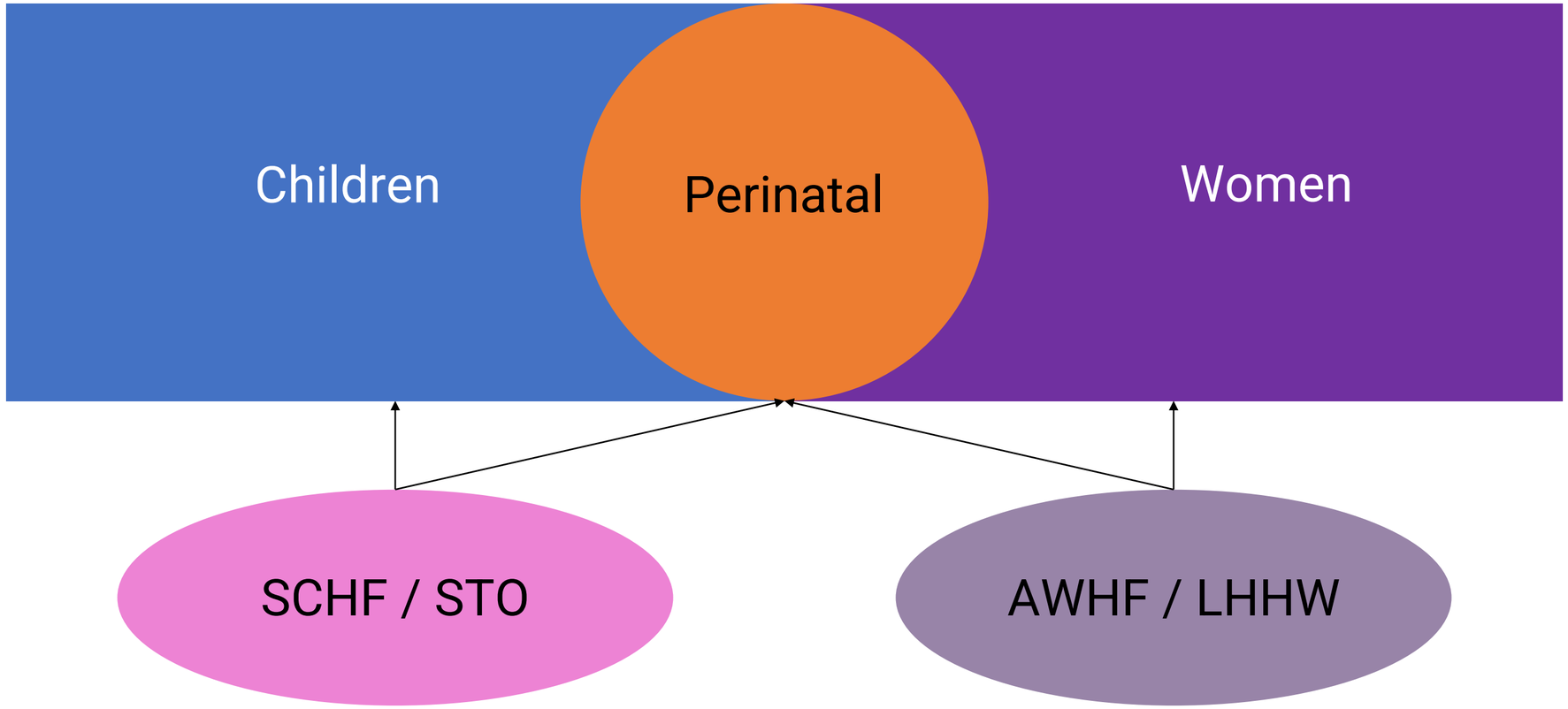
A brief history



Why refresh?

- Living document, we try to review every 2yrs
- Structure works well, but some objectives are complete / obsolete
- There have been changes in ecosystem that need to be considered
- Need to review and ensure alignment with institutional research strategies
- MoU renewal planning for 2026 – need to ensure objectives are current and forward thinking
- Leadership change – would like to have a plan that takes us through the Executive Director transition (2026-27)

How do we think about WCHRI research?



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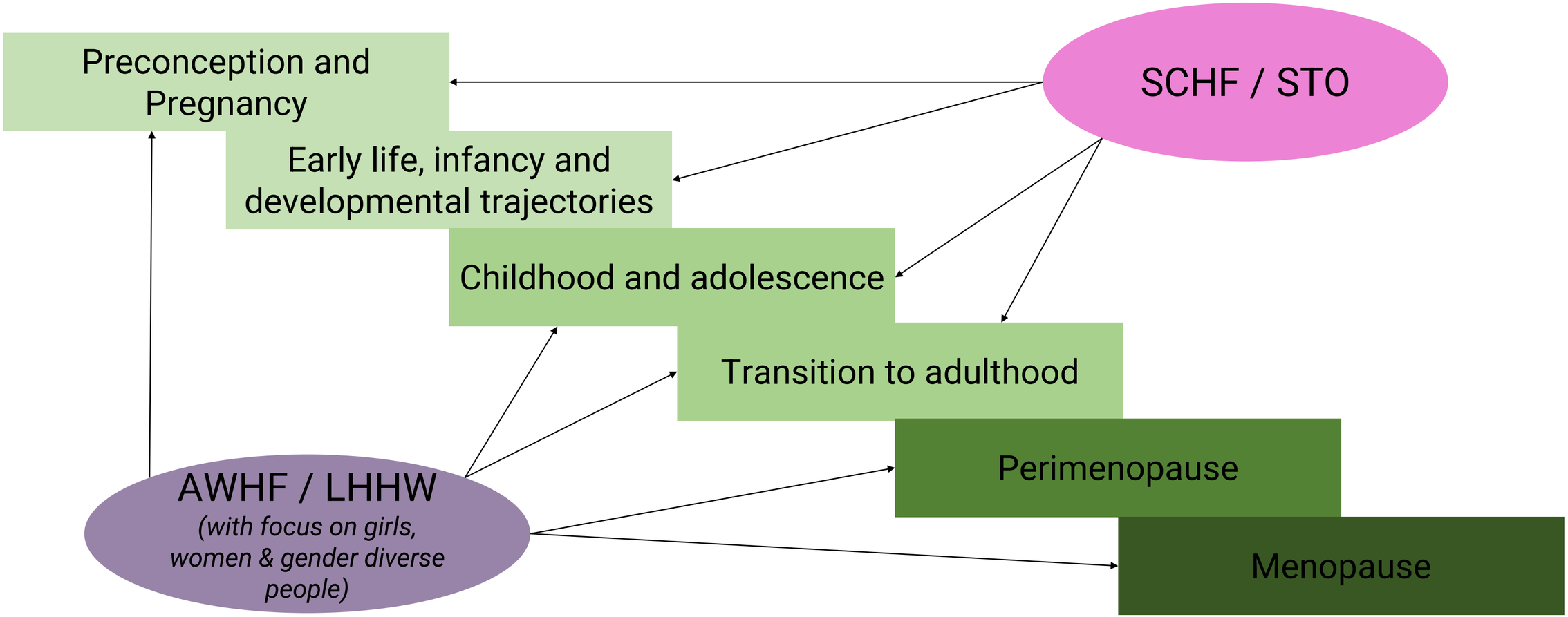

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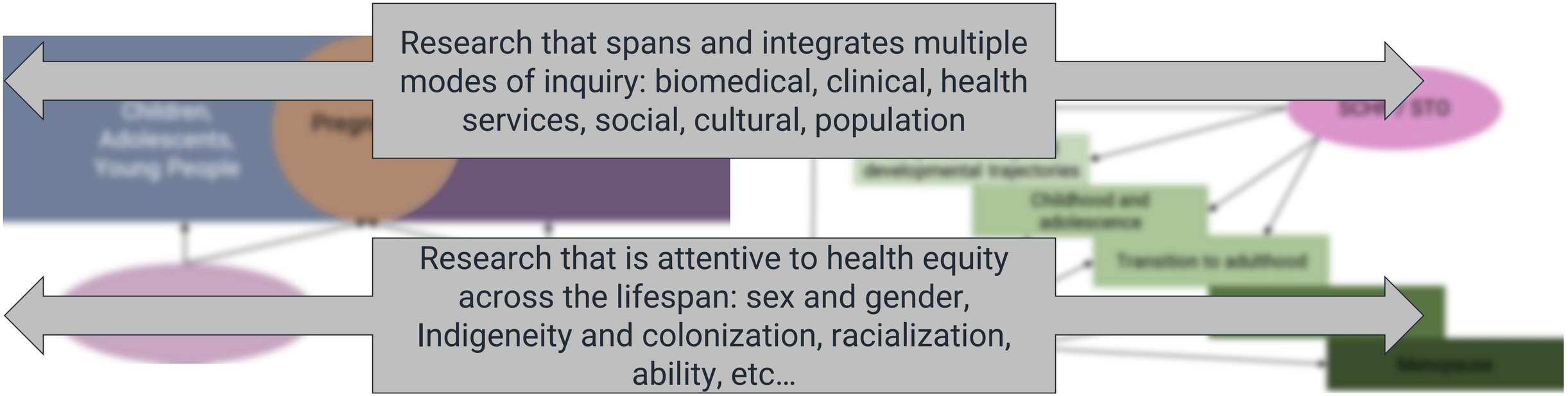
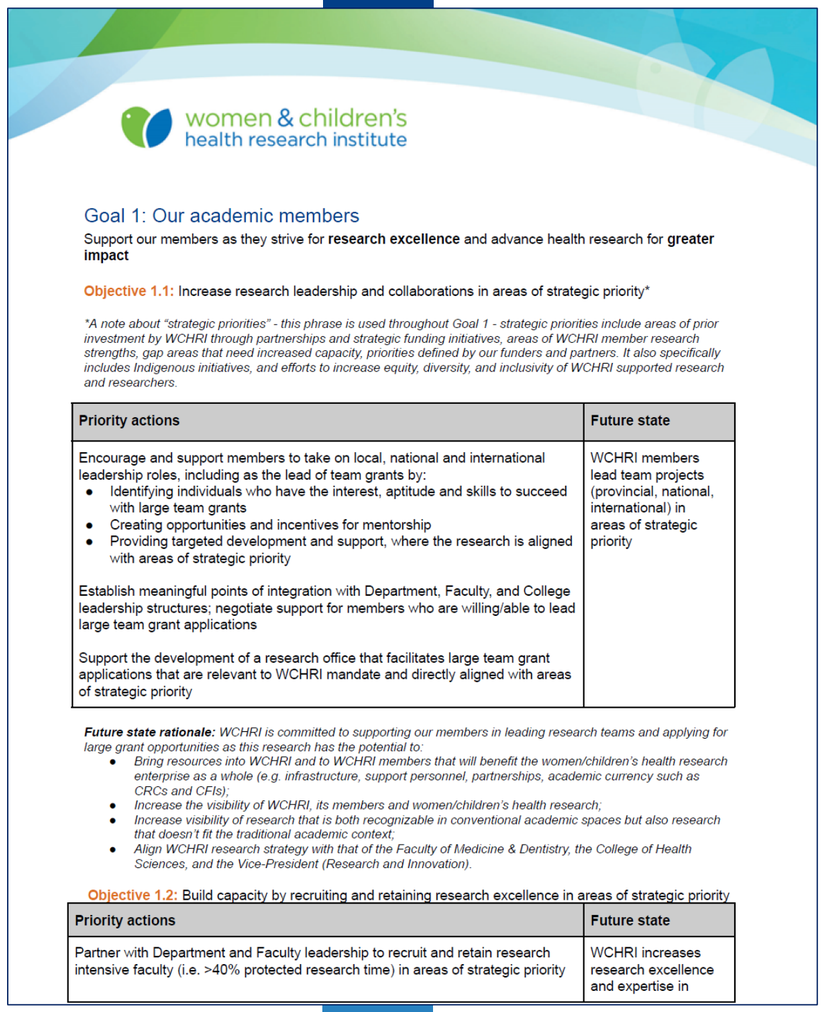


Strategic Plan Refresh 2024-2027



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Goal 1: Our academic members

Support our members as they strive for **research excellence** and advance health research for **greater impact**

Objective 1.1: Increase research leadership and collaborations in areas of strategic priority*

**A note about "strategic priorities" - this phrase is used throughout Goal 1 - strategic priorities include areas of prior investment by WCHRI through partnerships and strategic funding initiatives, areas of WCHRI member research strengths, gap areas that need increased capacity, priorities defined by our funders and partners. It also specifically includes Indigenous initiatives, and efforts to increase equity, diversity, and inclusivity of WCHRI supported research and researchers.*

Priority actions	Future state
Encourage and support members to take on local, national and international leadership roles, including as the lead of team grants by: • Identifying individuals who have the interest, aptitude and skills to succeed with large team grants • Creating opportunities and incentives for mentorship • Providing targeted development and support, where the research is aligned with areas of strategic priority Establish meaningful points of integration with Department, Faculty, and College leadership structures; negotiate support for members who are willing/able to lead large team grant applications Support the development of a research office that facilitates large team grant applications that are relevant to WCHRI mandate and directly aligned with areas of strategic priority	WCHRI members lead team projects (provincial, national, international) in areas of strategic priority

Future state rationale: *WCHRI is committed to supporting our members in leading research teams and applying for large grant opportunities as this research has the potential to:*

- *Bring resources into WCHRI and to WCHRI members that will benefit the women/children's health research enterprise as a whole (e.g. infrastructure, support personnel, partnerships, academic currency such as CRCs and CFIs);*
- *Increase the visibility of WCHRI, its members and women/children's health research;*
- *Increase visibility of research that is both recognizable in conventional academic spaces but also research that doesn't fit the traditional academic context;*
- *Align WCHRI research strategy with that of the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, the College of Health Sciences, and the Vice-President (Research and Innovation).*

Objective 1.2: Build capacity by recruiting and retaining research excellence in areas of strategic priority

Priority actions	Future state
Partner with Department and Faculty leadership to recruit and retain research intensive faculty (i.e. >40% protected research time) in areas of strategic priority	WCHRI increases research excellence and expertise in

Goal 1: Our academic members

Support our members as they strive for **research excellence** and advance health research for **greater impact**

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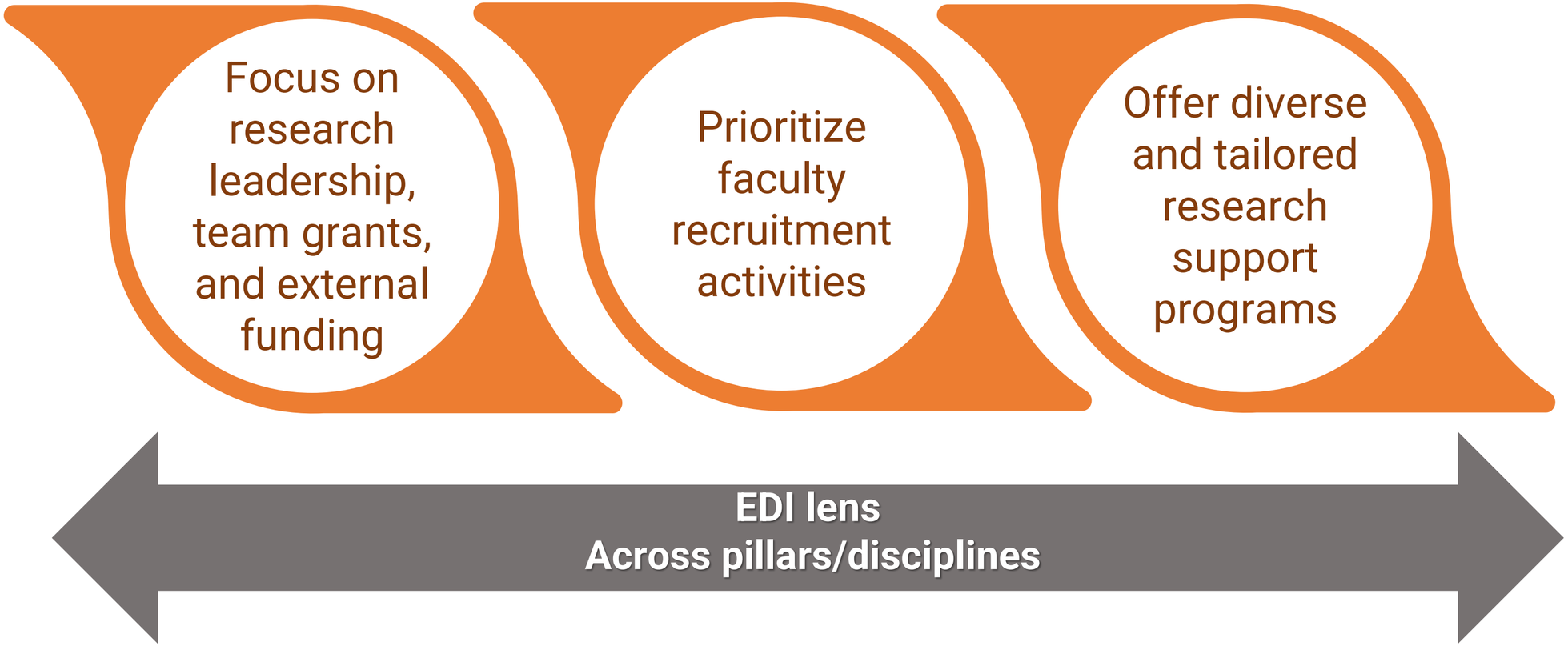
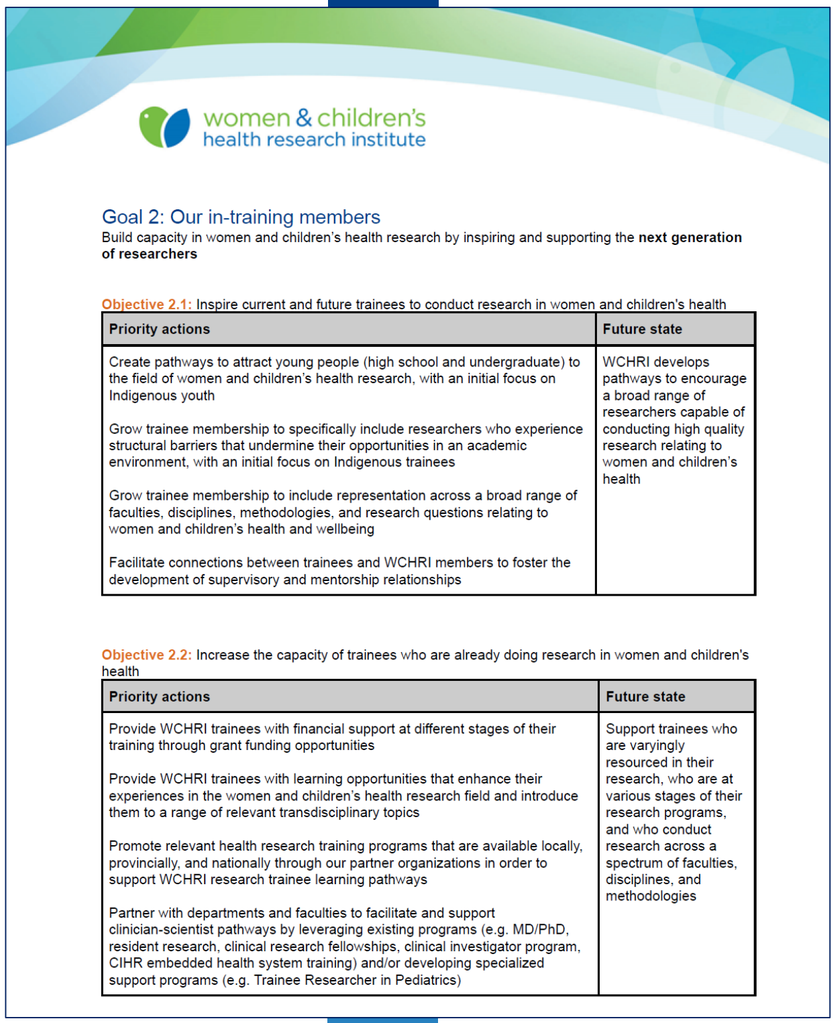
Objectives: Our Academic Members





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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: Inspire current and future trainees to conduct research in women and children's health

Priority actions	Future state
Create pathways to attract young people (high school and undergraduate) to the field of women and children's health research, with an initial focus on Indigenous youth Grow trainee membership to specifically include researchers who experience structural barriers that undermine their opportunities in an academic environment, with an initial focus on Indigenous trainees Grow trainee membership to include representation across a broad range of faculties, disciplines, methodologies, and research questions relating to women and children's health and wellbeing Facilitate connections between trainees and WCHRI members to foster the development of supervisory and mentorship relationships	WCHRI develops pathways to encourage a broad range of researchers capable of conducting high quality research relating to women and children's health

Objective 2.2: Increase the capacity of trainees who are already doing research in women and children's health

Priority actions	Future state
Provide WCHRI trainees with financial support at different stages of their training through grant funding opportunities Provide WCHRI trainees with learning opportunities that enhance their experiences in the women and children's health research field and introduce them to a range of relevant transdisciplinary topics Promote relevant health research training programs that are available locally, provincially, and nationally through our partner organizations in order to support WCHRI research trainee learning pathways Partner with departments and faculties to facilitate and support clinician-scientist pathways by leveraging existing programs (e.g. MD/PhD, resident research, clinical research fellowships, clinical investigator program, CIHR embedded health system training) and/or developing specialized support programs (e.g. Trainee Researcher in Pediatrics)	Support trainees who are varyingly resourced in their research, who are at various stages of their research programs, and who conduct research across a spectrum of faculties, disciplines, and methodologies

Goal 2: Our in-training members

Build capacity in women and children's health research by inspiring and supporting the **next generation of researchers**

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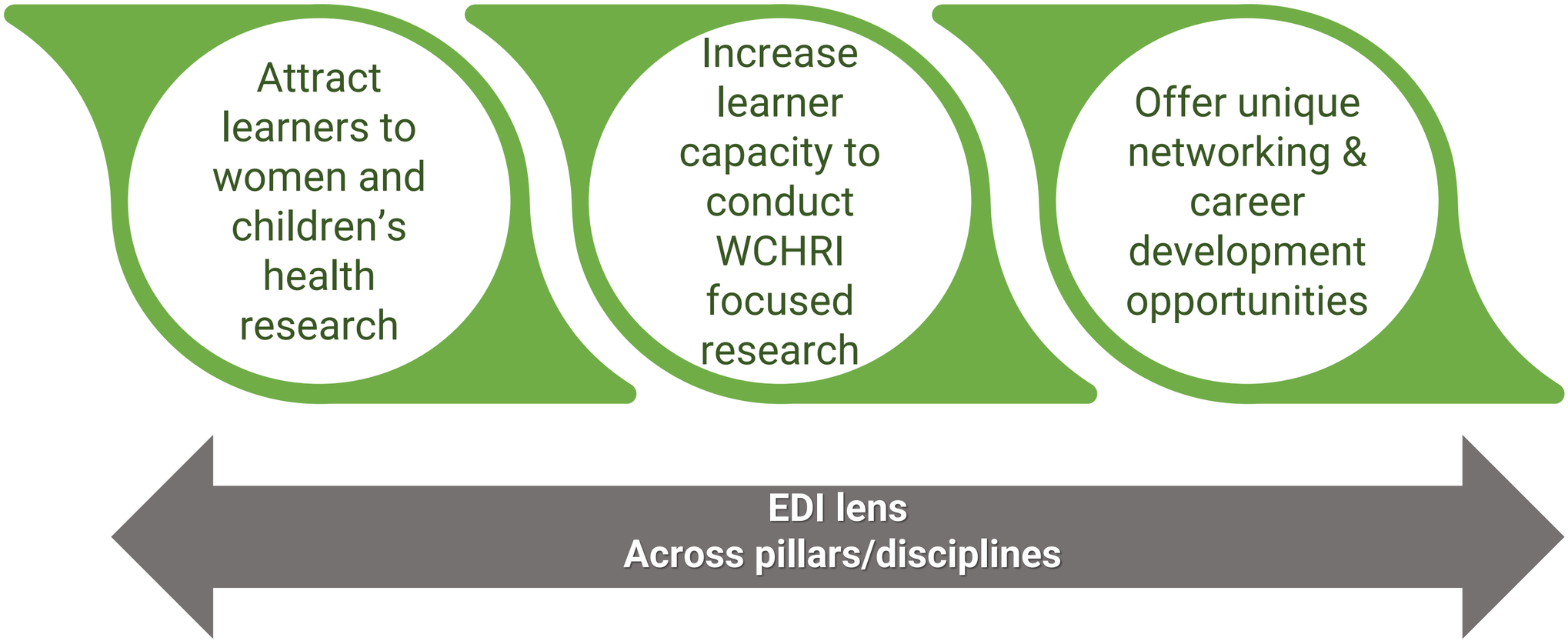
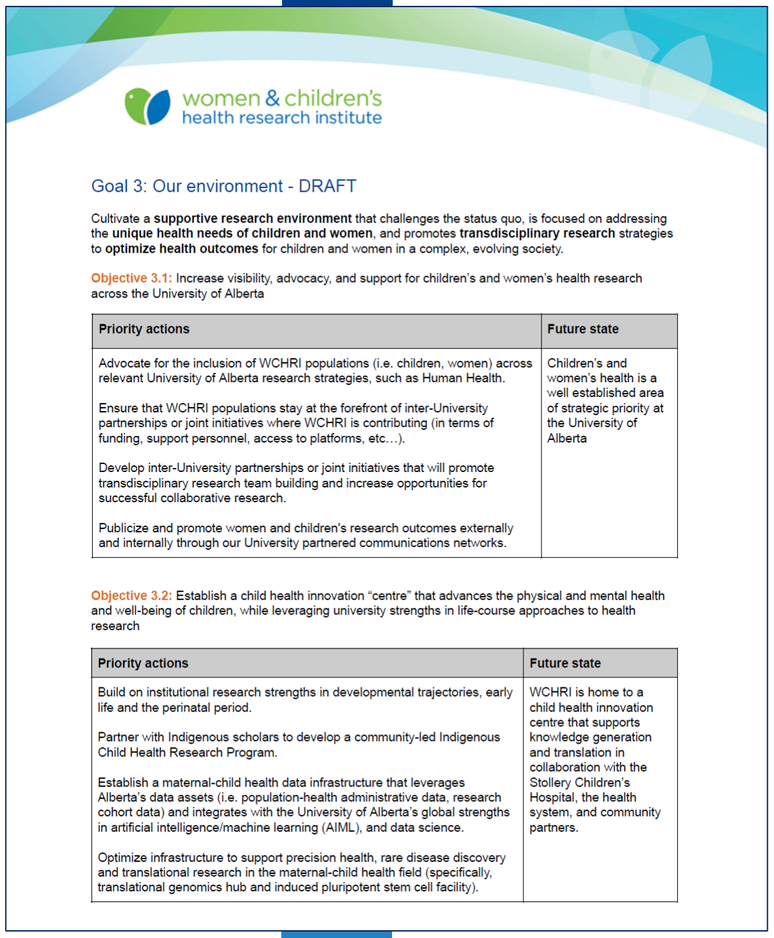
Objectives: Our In Training Members





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Goal 3: Our environment - DRAFT

Cultivate a **supportive research environment** that challenges the status quo, is focused on addressing the **unique health needs of children and women**, and promotes **transdisciplinary research** strategies to **optimize health outcomes** for children and women in a complex, evolving society.

Objective 3.1: Increase visibility, advocacy, and support for children's and women's health research across the University of Alberta

Priority actions	Future state
Advocate for the inclusion of WCHRI populations (i.e. children, women) across relevant University of Alberta research strategies, such as Human Health. Ensure that WCHRI populations stay at the forefront of inter-University partnerships or joint initiatives where WCHRI is contributing (in terms of funding, support personnel, access to platforms, etc…). Develop inter-University partnerships or joint initiatives that will promote transdisciplinary research team building and increase opportunities for successful collaborative research. Publicize and promote women and children's research outcomes externally and internally through our University partnered communications networks.	Children's and women's health is a well established area of strategic priority at the University of Alberta

Objective 3.2: Establish a child health innovation "centre" that advances the physical and mental health and well-being of children, while leveraging university strengths in life-course approaches to health research

Priority actions	Future state
Build on institutional research strengths in developmental trajectories, early life and the perinatal period. Partner with Indigenous scholars to develop a community-led Indigenous Child Health Research Program. Establish a maternal-child health data infrastructure that leverages Alberta's data assets (i.e. population-health administrative data, research cohort data) and integrates with the University of Alberta's global strengths in artificial intelligence/machine learning (AIML), and data science. Optimize infrastructure to support precision health, rare disease discovery and translational research in the maternal-child health field (specifically, translational genomics hub and induced pluripotent stem cell facility).	WCHRI is home to a child health innovation centre that supports knowledge generation and translation in collaboration with the Stollery Children's Hospital, the health system, and community partners.

Goal 3: Our environment

Cultivate a **supportive research environment** that challenges the status quo, is focused on addressing the **unique health needs of children and women**, and promotes **transdisciplinary research** strategies to **optimize health outcomes** for children and women in a complex, evolving society.

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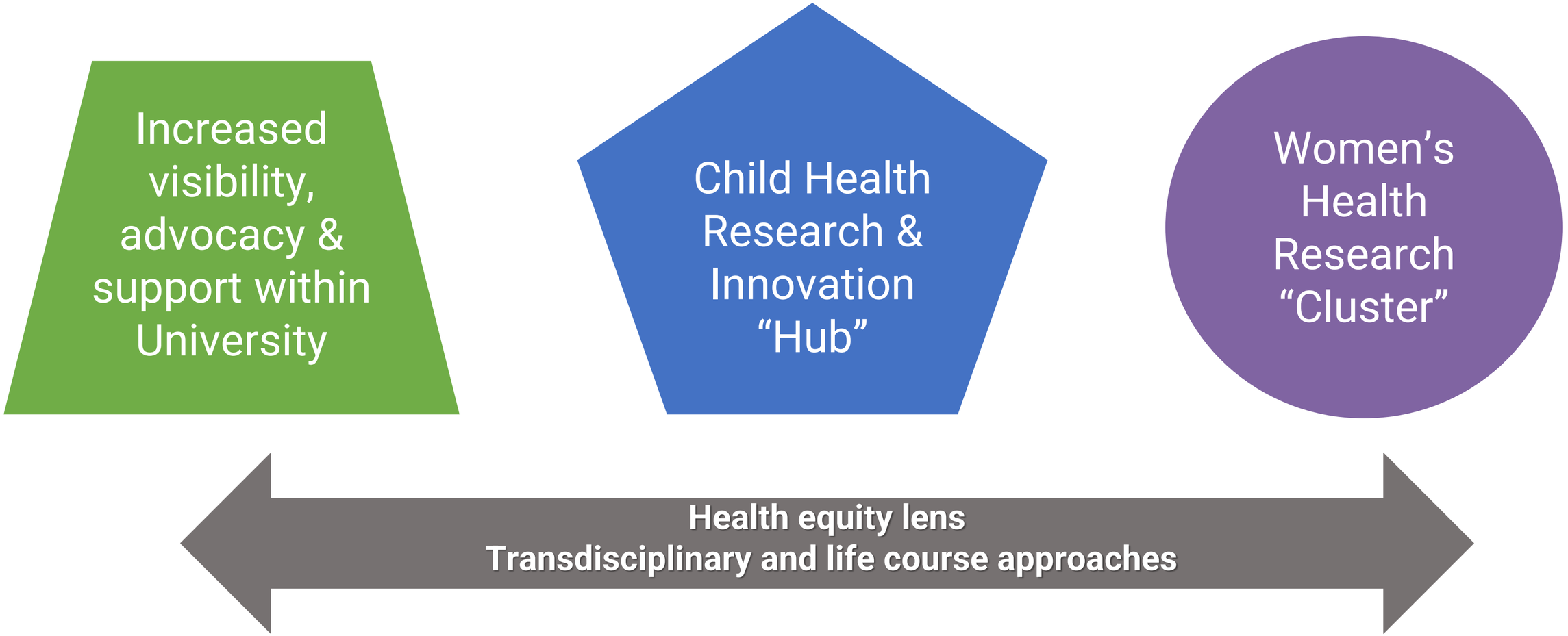
Goal 3: Our Environment - considerations

- WCHRI members – what do they need to be successful; how do we create “groupiness”; where do members want to lead and build
- University priorities and strategies – leverage / integrate
- Funding partners (SCHF and AWHF) – donor priorities and fundraising needs
- Opportunities in our ecosystem and external partner networks
- Continuity with prior WCHRI investments and capacity building

Objectives: Our Environment

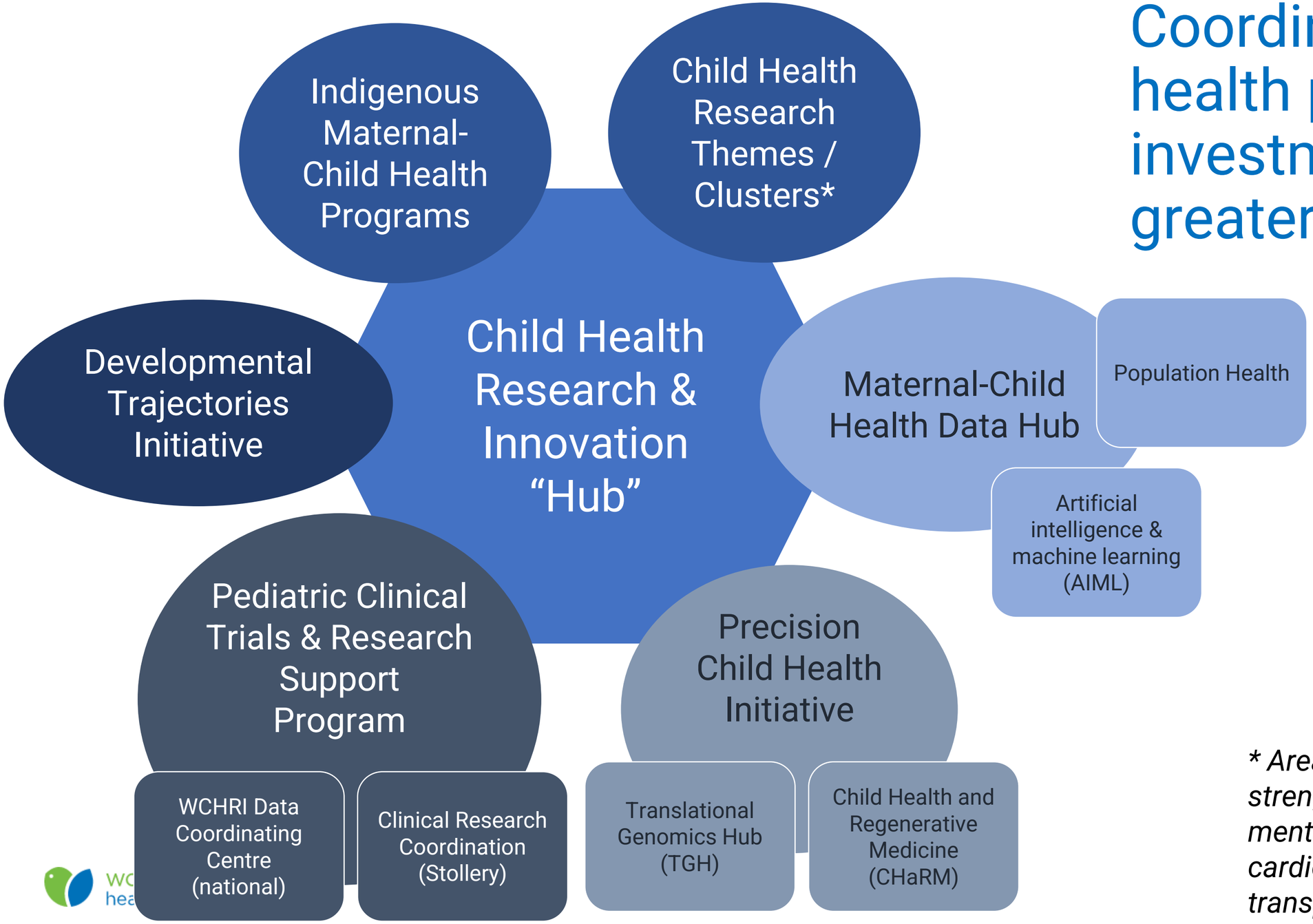


Increase academic visibility

Increased visibility, advocacy & support within University

- Advocate for children, women, lifecourse research within University
- Children, women at forefront of inter-University initiatives where WCHRI is contributing
- Initiate inter-University partnerships to promote transdisciplinary research focused on children, women
- Leverage University communications and marketing support to promote/publicize WCHRI research

Coordinate child health programs & investments for greater impact

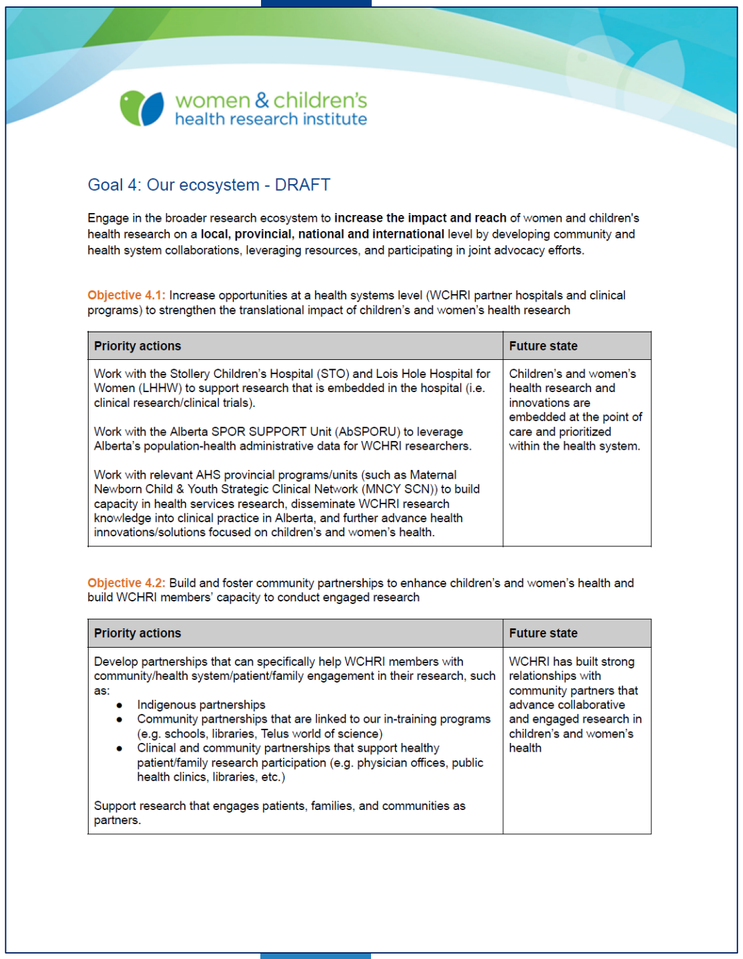


** Areas of strategic research strength/growth, such as mental health, autism, cardiovascular, solid organ transplant etc…*

Foster women's health research for future growth

Women's Health Research "Cluster"

- Leverage and connect AWHF Chairs
  - Cavarzan Chair in Mature Women's Health Research
  - Sawin-Baldwin Chair in Ovarian Cancer
  - Alberta Women's Health Foundation Chair in Women's Health Research
  - Lois Hole Hospital for Women Cross-Provincial Chair in Women's Mental Health Research
- Build clinical research capacity at LHHW
  - Dale Sheard Centre for Solutions in Women's Health
  - Indigenous women and gender diverse health program
- Build research capacity in sex, gender, intersectionality (SGBA+)
- Focus on developing local, provincial, national partnerships



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Goal 4: Our ecosystem - DRAFT

Engage in the broader research ecosystem to **increase the impact and reach** of women and children's health research on a **local, provincial, national and international** level by developing community and health system collaborations, leveraging resources, and participating in joint advocacy efforts.

Objective 4.1: Increase opportunities at a health systems level (WCHRI partner hospitals and clinical programs) to strengthen the translational impact of children's and women's health research

Priority actions	Future state
Work with the Stollery Children's Hospital (STO) and Lois Hole Hospital for Women (LHHW) to support research that is embedded in the hospital (i.e. clinical research/clinical trials). Work with the Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit (AbSPORU) to leverage Alberta's population-health administrative data for WCHRI researchers. Work with relevant AHS provincial programs/units (such as Maternal Newborn Child & Youth Strategic Clinical Network (MNCY SCN)) to build capacity in health services research, disseminate WCHRI research knowledge into clinical practice in Alberta, and further advance health innovations/solutions focused on children's and women's health.	Children's and women's health research and innovations are embedded at the point of care and prioritized within the health system.

Objective 4.2: Build and foster community partnerships to enhance children's and women's health and build WCHRI members' capacity to conduct engaged research

Priority actions	Future state
Develop partnerships that can specifically help WCHRI members with community/health system/patient/family engagement in their research, such as: • Indigenous partnerships • Community partnerships that are linked to our in-training programs (e.g. schools, libraries, Telus world of science) • Clinical and community partnerships that support healthy patient/family research participation (e.g. physician offices, public health clinics, libraries, etc.) Support research that engages patients, families, and communities as partners.	WCHRI has built strong relationships with community partners that advance collaborative and engaged research in children's and women's health

Goal 4: Our ecosystem

Engage in the broader research ecosystem to **increase the impact and reach** of women and children's health research on a **local, provincial, national and international** level by developing community and health system collaborations, leveraging resources, and participating in joint advocacy efforts.

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Goal 4: Our Ecosystem - considerations

- What role could / should WCHRI play in the broader research ecosystem – where can we best add value as a research institute?

- What are our key partnerships? How do these partnerships support WCHRI members and their research? How does WCHRI research support our partners?

Objectives: Our Ecosystem

Health System Partnerships

Focus on strengthening translation impact with hospital partners and relevant AHS / health system programs

Community Partnerships

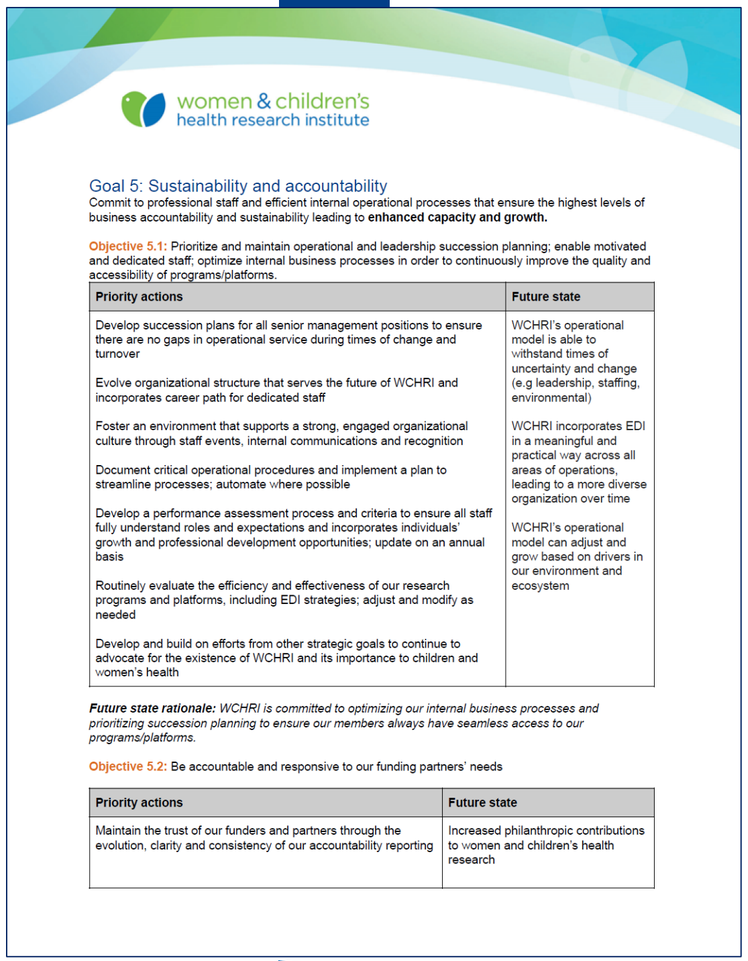
Focus on building relationships that will increase capacity to conduct engaged research

Partnership with Foundations

Focus on broadening reach and strengthening brand communications between Foundation-Hospital-Research

Provincial, National, International Partnerships

Focus on developing partnerships that bring resources, capacities, expertise to support WCHRI research



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Goal 5: Sustainability and accountability

Commit to professional staff 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 and maintain operational and leadership succession planning; enable motivated and dedicated staff; optimize internal business processes in order to continuously improve the quality and accessibility of programs/platforms.

Priority actions	Future state
Develop succession plans for all senior management positions to ensure there are no gaps in operational service during times of change and turnover Evolve organizational structure that serves the future of WCHRI and incorporates career path for dedicated staff Foster an environment that supports a strong, engaged organizational culture through staff events, internal communications and recognition Document critical operational procedures and implement a plan to streamline processes; automate where possible Develop a performance assessment process and criteria to ensure all staff fully understand roles and expectations and incorporates individuals' growth and professional development opportunities; update on an annual basis Routinely evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of our research programs and platforms, including EDI strategies; adjust and modify as needed Develop and build on efforts from other strategic goals to continue to advocate for the existence of WCHRI and its importance to children and women's health	WCHRI's operational model is able to withstand times of uncertainty and change (e.g leadership, staffing, environmental) WCHRI incorporates EDI in a meaningful and practical way across all areas of operations, leading to a more diverse organization over time WCHRI's operational model can adjust and grow based on drivers in our environment and ecosystem

Future state rationale: *WCHRI is committed to optimizing our internal business processes and prioritizing succession planning to ensure our members always have seamless access to our programs/platforms.*

Objective 5.2: Be accountable and responsive to our funding partners' needs

Priority actions	Future state
Maintain the trust of our funders and partners through the evolution, clarity and consistency of our accountability reporting	Increased philanthropic contributions to women and children's health research

Goal 5: Sustainability and accountability

Commit to professional staff and efficient internal operational processes that ensure the highest levels of business accountability and sustainability leading to **enhanced capacity and growth.**

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Objectives: Sustainability & Accountability

Stay connected!

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WCHRI@ualberta.ca

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Weekly bulletin
Quarterly eNewsletter

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Thank you to our Foundations!

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