



O'Brien Institute  
for Public Health



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY



# Advancing public health through research excellence:

Metrics report 2023

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## Message from the directors

Like the peaks of the Rockies to the plateau of the prairies, and like the extremes in Calgary weather, 2023 was a year of notable highs and lows for the O'Brien Institute for Public Health.

Losing Scientific Director Tom Stelfox to Deputy Deanship at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, and Associate Scientific Director, Population Health Katrina Milaney to Associate Vice Presidency (Research) here at the University of Calgary was a mixed blessing, as they have earned prestigious placements in areas of important partnerships for the Institute. Tom Noseworthy ended his role as inaugural Academic Director of the Centre for Health Policy on a high note, after the Centre's impressive year of cementing important partnerships and producing impactful outputs.

Finally, after a year of job postings, interviews, and recruitments, we're beginning an exciting era for the Institute: at the time of publishing this report, all directorship positions have now been filled!

We start 2024 on a high, knowing that we can continue to *advance public health through research excellence* with an amazing cohort of leaders.

While we spend an increasing amount of time working toward the Institute's financial sustainability, our Strategic Advisory Board has been dedicated in supporting our efforts to secure additional philanthropy. And while 2023 saw less research funding application pressure and success than usual, this is likely a natural valley between alternating peaks of nationally-competitive levels.

Within these pages we offer just a glimpse into the remarkable achievements of O'Brien Institute members throughout 2023. The breadth of their work is so extensive and outstanding that capturing it all would require a full-length novel. As you peruse these highlights, we trust you will find inspiration in the impactful contributions made by Institute members, each playing a vital role in reaching our goals of healthier populations, better health care, and thought leadership.



**Kirsten Fiest, PhD**  
Scientific Director



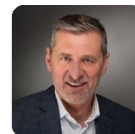
**Jamie Day, PhD**  
Administrative Director



**Pamela Roach, PhD**  
Associate Scientific  
Director – Population  
Health



**Paul Ronksley, PhD**  
Associate Scientific  
Director –  
Health Systems



**Stephen Samis**  
Associate Scientific  
Director –  
Policy & Partnerships

## Improving health equity and the conditions that determine health

Story of success: population health

### Health Equity HUB

In 2023, the O'Brien Institute marked the official launch of its Health Equity HUB — a collaborative platform for University of Calgary researchers, government entities, and community agencies to leverage health equity research for innovative changes in policy and practice.

One notable initiative spearheaded by HUB researchers focuses on addressing youth homelessness. Initially funded by the Government of Canada and an anonymous donation to the O'Brien Institute, the initiative showcased remarkable outcomes for youth with complex needs experiencing homelessness. In 2023, the HUB, in collaboration with the Trellis Society, secured \$3 million in funding to sustain the program, furthering their commitment to combatting youth homelessness in the community.



*Dr. Katrina Milaney moderates a panel discussion at the O'Brien Institute Health Equity HUB launch on Nov. 22, 2023.*

### **Stopping violence before it starts**

The O'Brien Institute provided catalyst funding to many impactful projects in 2023 including a collaboration that involved working with Indigenous communities and individuals to prevent domestic and sexual violence. The aim of the project is to support Alberta's prevention framework for violence against Indigenous people by mapping root causes and identifying policy recommendations to stop violence before it starts.

Throughout 2023, the project, guided by First Nations and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers living in Alberta, along with Indigenous researchers and advocates, disseminated its findings and recommendations. The initiative identified policy reforms for the Government of Alberta to consider and presented recommendations across ministries to enhance the socio-economic outcomes and safety of Indigenous populations.

### **FoodRx – a healthy food prescription program**

In 2023, O'Brien Institute researchers investigated ways to mitigate the effects of rising food prices on a healthy diet for people with chronic health conditions.

FoodRx is a prescription program designed to help people with Type II diabetes who are experiencing food insecurity. Participants are given a healthy food prescription and a weekly financial subsidy to purchase healthy foods. The aim of the pilot study is to address the root cause for so many people with diabetes — not having access to enough healthy food to manage their blood sugars.

From combating youth homelessness to supporting the well-being of Indigenous communities, O'Brien Institute member initiatives stand as beacons of positive change. As we reflect on these impactful endeavors, it is clear that the O'Brien Institute continues to be led by communities to co-develop solutions that address the complex intersections of health, equity, and well-being.



## A year of achievement and recognition

In 2023, O'Brien Institute members continued to be recognized nationally and internationally for advancing public health through research excellence. Some of the notable awards from 2023 include:

### Royal Society of Canada fellows and College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists members



**Dr. Gina  
Dimitropoulos**



**Dr. Carolyn  
Emery**



**Dr. Kirsten  
Fiest**



**Dr. Nicole  
Letourneau**



**Dr. Marcello  
Tonelli**

### Killam Annual Professorships



**Dr. Nicole  
Culos-Reed**



**Dr.  
Marcello  
Tonelli**

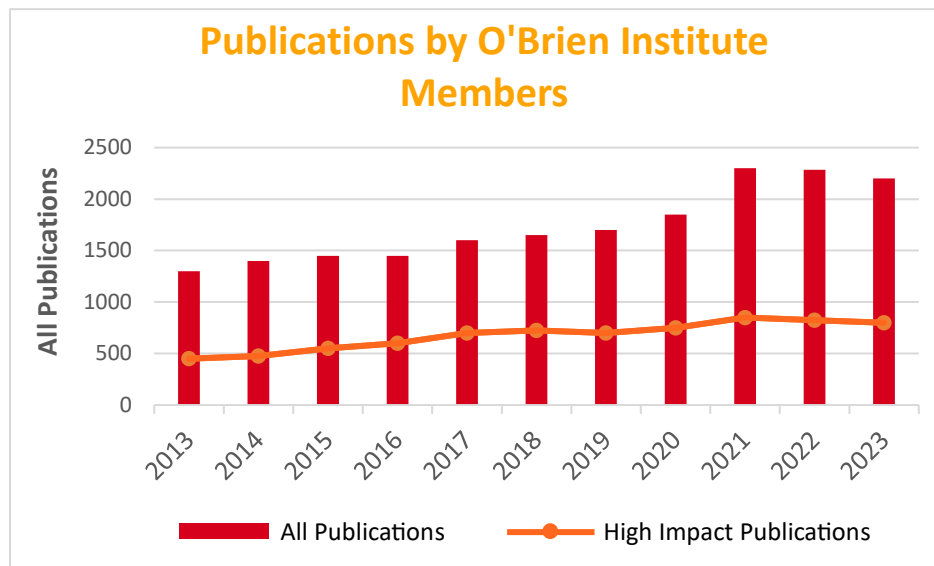
## Other awards

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Dr. Jennifer Zwicker</b>       | 100 Most Powerful Women, WXN  |
| <b>Dr. Caley Shukalek</b>         | Business Leadership Award, Canadian Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce   |
| <b>Dr. Turin Tanvir Chowdhury</b> | Community Impact Award, Foundation for the Voice of Immigrants in Canada for Empowerment  |
| <b>Dr. Oluwabukola Salami</b>     | Diversity & Equity Research Award, Health Research Foundation of Innovative Medicines Canada                                    |
| <b>Dr. Sumantra 'Monty' Ghosh</b> | Early Adopter of Innovation, ASTech   |
| <b>Dr. Kathryn Birnie</b>         | Inclusive Research Excellence Prize, Canadian Institutes for Health Research Institute for Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis |
| <b>Dr. Sandra Dumanski</b>        | Early Career Investigator Award, Canadian Women's Heart Health Alliance   |
| <b>Dr. Oluwabukola Salami</b>     | Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Leaders Award, Women's Executive Network  |
| <b>Dr. Doreen M. Rabi</b>         | Inclusive Leadership Award, Immigrant Champions of Canada   |
| <b>Dr. Kathryn Birnie</b>         | Early Career Award, International Association for the Study of Pain, Childhood Pain Special Interest Group                      |
| <b>Dr. Oluwabukola Salami</b>     | Inductee, American Academy of Nursing   |
| <b>Dr. Sumantra 'Monty' Ghosh</b> | Making a Difference Award, The Medical Post   |
| <b>Dr. Kannin Osei-Tutu</b>       | National Leadership Award, Black Physicians of Canada   |
| <b>Dr. Maria Jose Santana</b>     | President's Award, International Society for Quality of Life Research   |
| <b>Dr. Chris Eagle</b>            | Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, Government of Alberta  |
| <b>Dr. Doreen M. Rabi</b>         | Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, Government of Alberta  |
| <b>Dr. Ann Toohey</b>             | Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, Government of Alberta  |
| <b>Dr. Tracy Wasylak</b>          | Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, Government of Alberta  |
| <b>Dr. Alan Martino</b>           | Sociology of Sexualities Early Career Award, American Sociological Association  |
| <b>Dr. Prism Schneider</b>        | Wilder Penfield Gold Medal Award, Canadian League Against Epilepsy  |
| <b>Dr. Kathryn Birnie</b>         | Women In Innovation (Research) Award, ASTech  |

## Research excellence

O'Brien Institute members continued to have high quality research outputs, as indicated by peer-reviewed research publications and external research funding.

*36 per cent of Institute member publications were published in the top 10 per cent of journals, as defined by Elsevier's SciVal.*



*Institute members brought in more than 60 million in research funding.*



### Member recognition

The 2023 O'Brien Institute Awards were presented to members who are advancing public health through research excellence at various stages of their careers.

The winners are:



**Dr. Pamela Roach,**  
O'Brien Institute  
Emerging Research  
Leader Award



**Dr. Turin Tanvir  
Chowdhury,**  
O'Brien Institute  
Mid-Career Research  
Leader Award



**Dr. Andrew McRae,**  
O'Brien Institute  
Research Excellence  
Award



**Dr. Alan Martino,**  
O'Brien Institute  
Societal Impact  
Award



**Dr. David Campbell,**  
Lynn McIntyre  
Outstanding  
Service Award

## Digital health innovations and learning health systems

### Story of success: better health care

In an ongoing pursuit of better health care, O'Brien Institute for Public Health members continue to drive impactful change.

#### Firstline – Clinical Decisions app

In collaboration with Canadian and international partners, including the World Health Organization, O'Brien Institute members developed the ground-breaking mobile app, Firstline – Clinical Decisions. The free app, which results from a decade of research, addresses the global public health threat of antimicrobial resistance. As of 2023, the app has been successfully deployed in over 400 hospitals across 13 countries.



*Drs. Herman Barkema and John Conly helped facilitate the development of the Firstline – Clinical Decisions app.*

#### Health Everywhere

Another promising digital health innovation, Health Everywhere, secured funding from the Alberta Major Innovation Fund in 2023. Co-developed by the O'Brien Institute W21C Research and Innovation Centre, along with community, industry, and academic partners, Health Everywhere aims to become a provincial hub of digital health excellence by fostering innovation, economic growth, and global impact in an already dynamic eHealth and mHealth ecosystem in Alberta.

#### Refugee Health YYC

The O'Brien Institute welcomed Refugee Health YYC as an official research interest group in 2023. In July, Refugee Health YYC co-hosted a Refugee Health Policy workshop that resulted in the development of a roadmap to collectively enhance national healthcare systems for refugees. This comprehensive methodology, the result of engaging stakeholders from healthcare, academia, refugee community leadership, and policymakers, marks a significant milestone in North American refugee healthcare.

Subsequently, after giving an impactful presentation at the World Health Organization Refugee and Migrant Health Programme in Geneva, Refugee Health YYC pledged, on behalf of the University, to align with the program's activities, marking the first commitment from a Canadian university. This establishes a comprehensive framework prioritizing evidence-based practices and measurable outcomes to support refugees' health and integration into health systems.

### Improving acute care for long-term care residents

In 2023, researchers at the O'Brien Institute's Brenda Strafford Centre on Aging addressed a critical challenge in long-term care by optimizing acute care for residents without the need for transfer to an emergency department. The established pathway, now part of the standard of care in Calgary, has significantly reduced transfers from long-term care to emergency departments and subsequent hospitalizations, aligning with the Centre on Aging's commitment to improving the quality of care for long-term care residents while alleviating strain on healthcare resources.

### FICare

Alberta Health Services successfully scaled and spread Family Integrated Care (FICare), a model that integrates families as partners in the neonatal intensive care team, across all 14 neonatal intensive care units (NICU in Alberta). Co-developed by O'Brien Institute members, FICare reduced the average NICU stay by half a day, resulting in estimated savings of approximately \$1.9 million from 2020-2022.



As evidenced by their groundbreaking digital health innovations and transformative research endeavors, O'Brien Institute members continue to spearhead initiatives that ensure sustainable, high-quality healthcare is accessible to all.



*Drs. Karen Benzies and Deborah McNeil discuss FICare in a video created by the Health Quality Council of Alberta.*

## Optimizing member programs and services

### Internal peer review

Internal peer review (IPR) programs continue to be the Institute's most valued support system for members developing research programs, planning projects, and preparing external funding applications. In 2023, 34 members used one or more of the IPR programs, and 81 members shared their expertise as peer reviewers.

### Post-doctoral awards

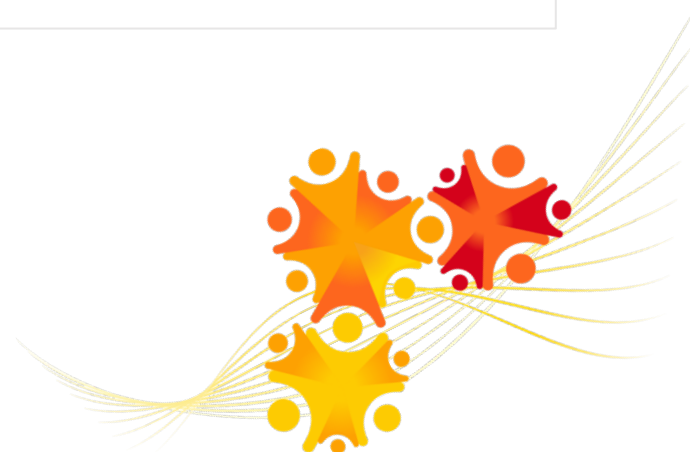
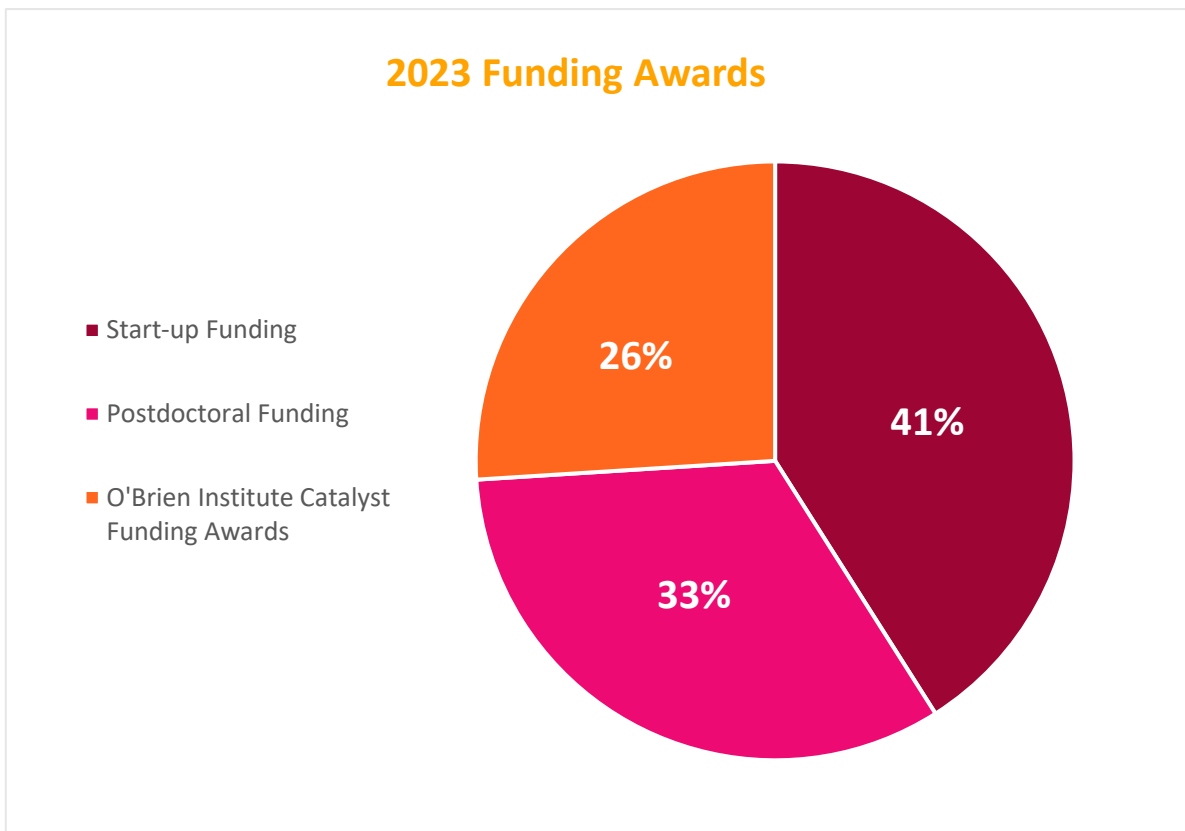
The O'Brien Institute is dedicated to building research capacity for members by providing a source of support for their post-doctoral scholars. In 2023, the Institute awarded three post-doctoral awards valued at \$25,000 each, spanning a breadth of topics. These trainees have since earned competitive awards including a CIHR Health System Impact Fellowship and University of Calgary *Eyes High* funding, leveraging over \$170,000 in salary support.

### Catalyst funding

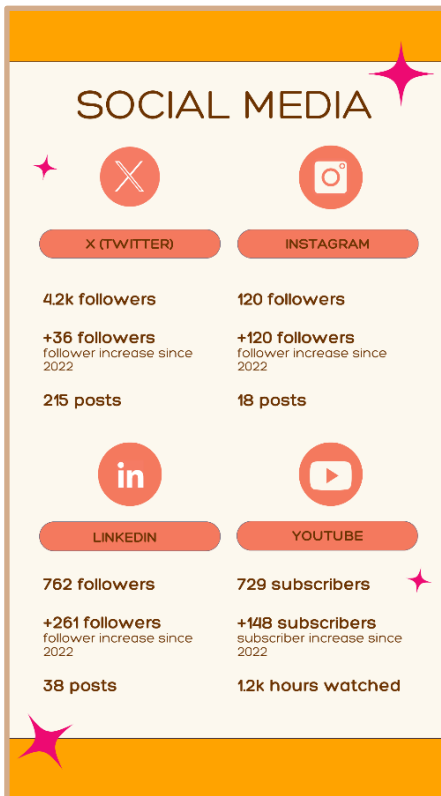
The O'Brien Institute continued to administer its highly successful catalytic funding programs. Small financial awards are made to catalyze early stages of research projects and platforms that will launch promising new programs or strategic capacity within the membership. In 2023, \$60,000 was allocated to help members catalyze research projects.

Similarly, start-up awards are offered to newly recruited, often early-career investigators, to help launch their programs of research. In 2023, the O'Brien institute partnered with departments and \$95,000 was allocated to start-up awards for 2 new faculty members.





## Engagement, outreach, and events



### Social media, website, and news media

At the heart of our mission to advance public health through research excellence lies a commitment to fostering informed discussions and driving positive change on critical public health issues. In this section, we highlight the invaluable contributions of our esteemed members who have lent their expertise to various media platforms, shedding light on pressing public health concerns.

2023 saw a multitude of public health issues in the news. Throughout the past year, our members have engaged in enlightening discussions through news articles, interviews, and opinion pieces, offering evidence-based insights into topics ranging from infectious diseases to mental health, and beyond.

O'Brien Institute members also helped the Institute publish a record number of informed public statements, actively contributing to the public discourse on important issues such as a tragic *E. coli* outbreak in Calgary daycares, and the restructuring of Alberta Health Services. Their dedication to disseminating knowledge and advocating for evidence-based solutions has been instrumental in shaping public discourse and driving awareness on issues that impact us all.

In addition to media engagements, we are thrilled to report a significant increase in our social media presence, with growing numbers of followers and heightened engagement across platforms. This growth underscores our commitment to fostering meaningful connections, sharing impactful research findings, and amplifying the voices of those dedicated to advancing public health.



@OBrien\_IPH



obrieniph.ucalgary.ca

In 2023, O'Brien Institute members appeared in more than **800 news stories**, amplifying the impact of their work and informing public discourse on critical public health issues.

**X-ray, CT, MRI results to be shared directly with Albertans through online health records tool.**

— *CBC Calgary*

Dr. Rabi has been studying the patient experience with electronic records in the province for several years. Her work helped design the province's online portal.



Dr. Doreen Rabi

Dr. Lang says that Albertans' easy access to their health information shifts the system from a "paternalistic model" to a "more collaborative, shared decision-making approach" allowing patients to "have a better awareness of their health."



Dr. Eddy Lang

**Let's talk about sex: Calgary research lab providing information for disabled.**

— *Toronto Star*

"Talking about sexuality empowers people. People deserve to have a romantic life, deserve to be loved."



Dr. Alan Martino

**Province-wide strategy needed to address urgent mental health struggles in youth: report**

— *Calgary Herald*

"Too many kids are falling through the cracks because Alberta lacks a unified strategy."



Dr. Jennifer Zwicker



### Events and seminars

In 2023, the O'Brien Institute continued to foster connections and opportunities for knowledge exchange through events and seminars. In April, the Institute hosted the 2023 Gairdner Symposium, themed 'Advancing health and health care through citizen engagement.'

In July, the Institute supported Refugee Health YYC in bringing the largest refugee resettlement conference, the 'North American Refugee Health Conference', to Calgary for the first time.

Our collaboration with the Department of Community Health Sciences extended to various events and seminars, including our jointly organized seminar series.

In April, we partnered with Community Health Sciences to present an interdisciplinary student research showcase. Additionally, in August, our collaboration with the Libin Cardiovascular Institute resulted in the event 'From cells to clinic to community: A showcase of summer student work.'

We continued to increase student and trainee involvement in our member-focused events by incorporating post-doctoral fellow presentations and student poster presentations. We also supported the Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program, which came to Calgary for the first time in the summer of 2023.

In a bid to increase community and business leader engagement, the Institute hosted two thought leaders events. These sessions aimed to connect Calgary's influential figures with the important work being done at the O'Brien Institute, fostering a deeper understanding and support for initiatives dedicated to enhancing public health through outstanding research.



From left: Drs. Tom Stelfox, Verna Yiu, Deborah Cook, and Kirsten Fiest at the 2023 Gairdner Symposium: 'Advancing health and healthcare through citizen engagement' on April 4.



## Charting a path to sustainable healthcare

### Story of success: thought leadership

#### Health System Sustainability Initiative

In pursuit of a more sustainable future for Canada's health system, the O'Brien Institute for Public Health's Centre for Health Policy has demonstrated its commitment to thought leadership through the Health System Sustainability Initiative (HSSI). This initiative, led by the Centre, aimed to gather, produce, and disseminate evidence-informed recommendations to enhance the value for money in Canada's healthcare systems and improve overall health system sustainability.

In 2023, having successfully wrapped up the HSSI, the Centre published a series of policy briefs presenting their findings. These briefs not only underscored the depth of the research conducted but also laid the foundation for informed discussions on reshaping the landscape of healthcare sustainability in Canada.

#### Alberta 2023

In 2023, the Centre for Health Policy also published a series of issue briefs to inform Albertans about major health policy challenges facing the province ahead of the provincial election.

In conjunction with the release of the briefs, the Centre hosted two town halls — one rural, and one urban. Hosted in Pincher Creek, the rural town hall provided a platform for diverse voices, including residents, town councillors, a riding candidate, and local healthcare providers, to engage in a multifaceted dialogue regarding rural healthcare.



*Attendees at the Pincher Creek town hall: Health system challenges and opportunities on April 28, 2023.*

Inspired by the town hall, a united effort emerged among residents, healthcare providers, and decision-makers to confront the rural healthcare challenge. Several audience members volunteered for the community's 'physician attraction and retention committee,' and a new initiative was proposed to create a scholarship for local high school students interested in careers in the healthcare workforce.

#### Social determinants of diabetes outcomes

In June, O'Brien Institute members met with the Federal All-Party Diabetes Caucus to discuss the social determinants of diabetes outcomes, forging a lasting relationship with policy-makers who are working to improve health equity and the conditions that determine health.

# Values

The O'Brien Institute is proud to showcase members whose work exemplifies our six core values: Collaboration, courage, engagement, innovation, integrity and plurality.

## Research reveals doctors' bias against indigenous patients in Alberta

Drs. Pamela Roach and Shannon Ruzycki sent a survey to every licensed doctor in Alberta to determine anti-indigenous bias among physicians.



Unacceptably high levels of anti-indigenous bias exacerbate the pre-existing power imbalance in the doctor-patient relationship. This can pose a dangerous environment for indigenous patients when accessing health care across the province.



Courage

## Tackling the cholesterol knowledge gap with interactive website

A team led by Dr. Sonia Butalia and made up of patient partners, family doctors, physician specialists and human-centered design experts, developed a website to help people understand how cholesterol affects them and what kind of treatment is best for them.



Collaboration

## An innovative approach to support kids and families in staying active during cancer care

The IMPACT (Implementation of Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents in Treatment) program is an individualized exercise program for any child or adolescent affected by cancer or blood disease.



Innovation

## Community impact drives award-winning health researcher

Dr. Turin Chowdhury has spent his career connecting community needs with resources.



Engagement

## UCalgary Pluralism Initiative continues to bridge divides and promote social innovation

"Pluralism acknowledges that we have different histories, perspectives and experiences; we each see the world differently," says Dr. Aleem Bharwani, co-founder of UCalgary's Pluralism Initiative.



Plurality

## Prof explores the importance of healthy relationships for community wellness

When working with local initiatives, Dr. Deiner Exner-Cortens wants to make sure that "youth are always at the centre of what we're doing and that their voice is really what's guiding the work."



Integrity

## Financial statement

| STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS  | April 2023 –<br>December 2023 |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Revenue</b>   |                               |
| O'Brien Institute Endowment Interest                           | \$229,900                     |
| Giving Day Donations   | \$36,831                      |
| Other Donations  | \$1,996,049                   |
| Salary Recovery  |                               |
| Other  |                               |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>   | <b>\$2,262,779</b>            |
| <b>Expenses</b>  |                               |
| Research allocations   | \$187,949                     |
| Catalyst awards  | \$57,097                      |
| Start-up awards  | \$90,000                      |
| Fellowships  | \$17,905                      |
| Knowledge engagement events and sponsorships                   | \$8,959                       |
| Support team salaries and stipends, general operating expenses | \$323,663                     |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>  | <b>\$520,571</b>              |

*This statement represents the first three quarters of the 2023 fiscal year.*



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