

Women's Health Research Cluster

Impact Report 2025

A Note from Dr. Liisa Galea

Dear Valued Members and Supporters,

Reflecting on this past year fills me with profound pride and gratitude for everything we've achieved together. Through collective efforts, we have propelled forward essential scientific discoveries and have continued to build the foundation for transformative change—advancing a vision of a healthier, more equitable future for women and girls worldwide.

A cornerstone of this progress was a significant moment for the Women's Health Research Cluster (WHRC) - the formation of a strategic partnership we've built with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (CAMH) *womenmind*TM initiative, generously supported by Manulife's visionary \$1 million investment. This collaboration has significantly expanded our reach and accelerated our ability to address longstanding sex and gender disparities in mental health. By uniting our strengths, we are creating a force multiplier—amplifying impact, fostering innovation and helping close critical gaps in women's health research, collaboration and advocacy.

Over the past year, the WHRC has experienced remarkable growth, increasing membership by 40 per cent. We welcomed a wealth of diverse voices across disciplines and geographies, reflecting the global relevance of our mission. The launch of our new website and the expansion of our team have strengthened our capacity to engage, inform, and inspire a broader community. Guided by an unwavering commitment to equity, we continue to champion research areas and methodologies that have historically been overlooked or underfunded.

Even in the face of a challenging global climate—one in which sex, gender and equity-focused research too often encounters political resistance and suppression—we remain steadfast with deepened resolve. We remain committed to rigorous, inclusive and impactful research that protects and promotes the health of women and girls everywhere.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on driving bold, evidence-based change. We will continue to prioritize women's health, elevate sex and gender-responsive research, and break down the systemic barriers that stand in the way of equity. Our mission transcends science: it is about shifting culture, amplifying underrepresented voices, and advocating fearlessly to protect and advance research on women's health.

Together, we move forward—resilient, inspired and united by a shared purpose. To our members, partners and staff: Thank you for your unwavering dedication and commitment. You are the heart of what we do, and because of you, a better future for women and girls is not just possible—it is already taking shape. Let's keep going—there is so much more we can do, and we will do it together.

Warm regards,



Dr. Liisa Galea

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Scientific Lead, *womenmind*,

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"Women" refers to a broad gender categorization that does not necessarily relate to one's sex recorded at birth. We use the term for anyone who self-identifies as such, regardless of gender expression or gender identity.

A Vibrant, Global Community

This past year, the Women's Health Research Cluster (WHRC) grew to a community of 846 members, marking a 40 per cent increase over last year. The WHRC includes 514 students and postdoctoral fellows, 180 faculty members and 152 community members, representing diverse disciplines such as social sciences, neuroscience, medicine and economics across 38 countries, an increase from 29 countries last year.

Respondents to our annual membership survey indicated that WHRC members proudly reported publishing over 300 papers and securing a combined total of \$13.98 million in research grants—that's the power of only a small portion of our worldwide research community. To support this active and growing community, the WHRC developed and launched a brand new website in late 2024, which has already amassed 12,000 website visits in four short months.



Our community includes members from internationally renowned institutions, such as:

- Harvard University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Karolinska Institute
- McGill University
- Rutgers University
- UC Berkeley
- University College London
- University of Barcelona
- University of British Columbia
- University of Cambridge
- University of Otago
- University of Oxford
- University of Toronto

Catalyst for Innovation



The impact of the WHRC's research facilitation efforts was evident in our annual membership survey.

A significant proportion of our members reported that WHRC initiatives inspired new research ideas, motivated them to pursue research specifically focused on women's health, encouraged the integration of **Sex and Gender-Based Analysis** into their studies and facilitated new collaborative partnerships. These outcomes underscore the WHRC's role as a powerful catalyst for innovation, collaboration and methodological rigor in women's health research.

Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) is a research approach that examines how sex, gender and other identity factors—like race, age or income—interact to shape health outcomes, helping ensure that science reflects the real-world experiences of diverse populations.

This year, the WHRC supported two working groups dedicated to advancing women's health research in perinatal mental health and on the impact of hormonal contraceptives on mental health. We facilitate collaboration through access to expertise, resources and funding opportunities. By connecting researchers, clinicians and advocates, we aim to close critical gaps in women's health research and advance equity in health care.



Perinatal Mental Health Working Group

Comprising 36 members, this working group aims to enhance the quality of perinatal mental health care in Canada through rigorous research, effective knowledge transfer and advocacy. The working group successfully submitted a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funding proposal to leverage existing collaborations for knowledge dissemination, partnership creation and increased awareness among health care providers, policymakers and the general public about mental health during pregnancy and postpartum. Additionally, the group is currently planning a strategic meeting at the Marcé of North America (MONA) conference in November 2025, alongside a series of blog posts for the WHRC's Women's Health Blog. These efforts aim to improve perinatal mental health outcomes and increase awareness among health care providers and policymakers in Canada and beyond.



Hormonal Contraceptives Working Group

This newly established working group of 12 members aims to explore and address crucial knowledge gaps regarding hormonal contraception (e.g., the birth control 'pill', intrauterine device (IUD), or other forms of hormonal contraceptives) use in Canada through a national survey, investigating health outcomes and decision points regarding the positive or negative symptoms of hormonal contraceptive use. This research will inform future multidisciplinary research collaborations and inform policy to improve the knowledge and experiences for people using hormonal contraceptives.

Building Capacity

We continue to invest in the next generation of women's health researchers by offering professional development opportunities. The WHRC provides access to workshops, mentorship and collaborative research projects to help trainees and early-career researchers build skills, expand their networks and grow as leaders in the field.

Trainee Research Presentation Series

The Trainee Research Presentation (TRP) Series features scientific talks by undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral researchers on their projects related to women's health or sex- and gender-based research. This series provides trainees with valuable opportunities to refine their presentation skills, gain feedback from seasoned researchers and expand their professional networks. This year, the WHRC collaborated with the Women's Health Research Institute and the Gynecological Cancer Initiative to hold a TRP event, with eight trainee speakers and 96 attendees. This session featured short and impactful presentations and facilitated meaningful networking opportunities. The Trainee Research Presentation Series for 2025/26 kicked off in April 2025 and we have revamped the series based on feedback from our members to create more engagement by creating themes for each TRP in 2025.



Student Awards

Every year, the WHRC offers two funding award opportunities for research trainees.

The Holly Ewanyshyn Women's Health Equity Graduate Research Award, worth \$2,000, recognizes outstanding research in disease pathogenesis in women or female models of disease for students at the University of British Columbia. This year, it was awarded to Bonnie Lee for her research on the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease in females.

The WHRC Trainee Travel Award offers \$250 to students and postdoctoral fellows who are attending or presenting their work on women's health, or sex and gender differences at a conference. This year, 32 travel awards were distributed, totaling \$8,000.

Some of the conferences attended by awardees included:

- **The Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting**
- **The Canadian National Perinatal Research Meeting**
- **The International Academy of Sex Research**
- **The Canadian Sex Research Conference**
- **The Organization for the Study of Sex Differences Conference**

Building Capacity



Sex and Gender Based Analysis+ (SGBA+) Competency Modules

This partnership project with CAMH aims to develop competency-based SGBA+ training to help CAMH research personnel better integrate SGBA+ principles into mental health research and practice. This year, the team conducted an environmental scan to assess existing SGBA+ training, identify gaps, and formed an advisory committee reflecting the intended audience to guide the development of these modules. The advisory committee completed a needs assessment with 65 respondents—clinicians, trainees and research staff—to understand challenges in applying SGBA+ in their work. These insights informed a training framework and learning objectives, developed in collaboration with the advisory committee and education specialists. Next, the committee will develop training content in partnership with subject matter experts, supported by CAMH's education specialists and biostatistics team. This work is a continuation of the core SGBA+ offerings provided by the WHRC, available on our YouTube page, which amassed over 7,000 views last year.



Conferences

In 2024, the WHRC strengthened its role as a convener and catalyst through strategic conference partnerships that amplified women's health research on a global stage.

We partnered with CAMH on the first-ever *womenmind* conference, which focused on the intersection of sex, gender and mental health. Held in Toronto, Canada, the conference welcomed over 450 attendees and fostered critical discussions on how biological and social differences shape mental illness risk and treatment.

In partnership with *womenmind*, the WHRC funded and led the inaugural Women's Health Research Pre-Conference titled *Beyond Bikini Medicine: A Spotlight on Women's Health Research* at the 2024 Organization for the Study of Sex Differences (OSSD) annual meeting which was held in Bergen, Norway, one of the largest conferences of its kind in the world with >400 attendees. This dedicated event brought together 14 speakers from across disciplines and continents to spotlight research spanning mental, reproductive and cardiovascular health.

These events exemplify our commitment to elevating women's health, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and building platforms where innovation, equity and policy intersect.



Knowledge Translation and Engagement

In 2024, our knowledge translation efforts helped move research into action—equipping researchers with tools to integrate SGBA+, informing public discourse and making cutting-edge findings more accessible to diverse audiences. Through public seminars, blogs and podcasts, we advanced a culture of evidence-informed dialogue and deepened understanding of the complex factors shaping women's health.



Women's Health Seminar Series

The Women's Health Seminar Series continued to showcase innovative, multidisciplinary research from leading global experts. Each monthly seminar featured a 45-minute presentation followed by an interactive Q&A session, fostering meaningful dialogue and deeper engagement. Open to all, the series is particularly valuable for trainees and faculty staying current in women's health research. Most seminars are recorded and are freely available on our YouTube channel (with >650 subscribers). This year we had 2,277 registrants and an extra 843 collective views on the YouTube channel to date. Evaluation results demonstrate the profound impact of the series: 87 per cent of attendees reported gaining valuable insights about women's health outcomes, 80 per cent felt motivated to integrate sex and/or gender considerations into their research, 70 per cent were inspired to explore careers in women's health, 53 per cent initiated new collaborative partnerships and 43 per cent developed new research questions related to women's health.



Women's Health Blog

The bi-weekly blog continued to simplify complex women's health research and spotlight diverse voices and experiences—reaching 14,811 views, a nine per cent increase from the previous year. We published 28 posts, including 11 'Behind the Science' interviews, amplifying the voices and advancing the health of equity-deserving communities who have long been excluded from research and policy decision-making. Through both our Research Blog and 'Behind the Science' series, we made women's health research more accessible, relatable and inspiring to a broad audience of change-makers.



Women's Health Interrupted Podcast

The Women's Health Interrupted podcast continues to deepen our collective understanding of women's health issues. Covering diverse topics from the impacts of income inequality on relationships to the intricate connections between menopause and brain health, each episode engages listeners with thought-provoking discussions and new perspectives on the complex factors shaping women's health.

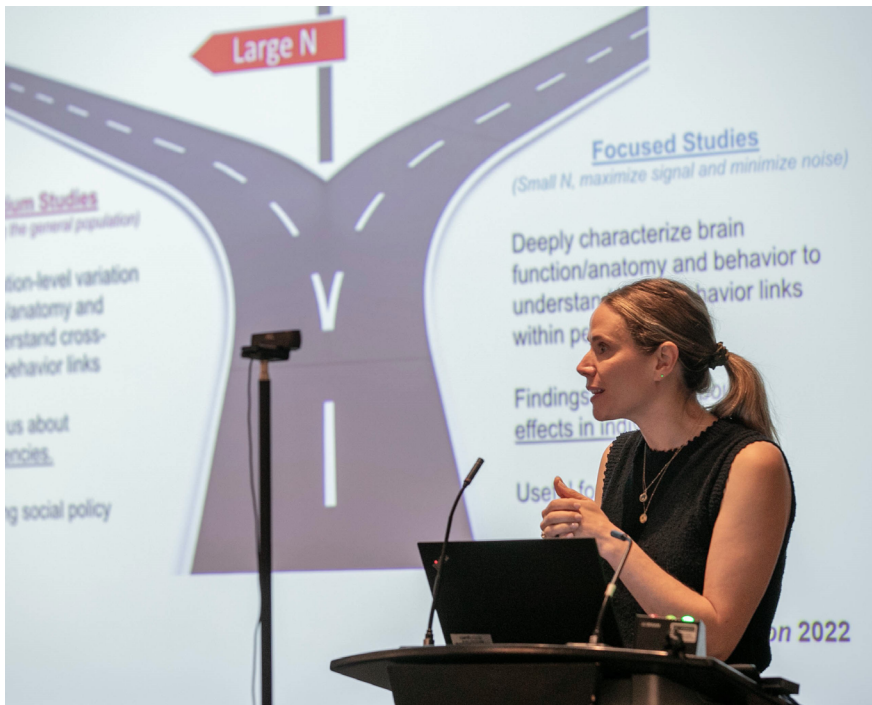
Season two featured 11 compelling episodes, highlighting insights from 14 experts across Canada, Norway, Switzerland and the USA. This year, the podcast attracted 2,459 downloads and reached 1,309 unique listeners spanning 49 countries, and was the #2 most listened to podcast on the UBC Medicine Learning Network in 2022. Feedback from our membership survey revealed that 65 per cent of listeners gained valuable insights from the podcast, and an equal percentage were satisfied with its content. We want to improve on these metrics and are launching a revamped podcast in the fall 2025. To this end, we have hired a podcast expert (Dr. Andrew McGovern, who had the #1 science podcast in Ireland) as a consultant to revamp season three of Women's Health Interrupted with new host, Dr. Liisa Galea.

Knowledge Translation and Engagement



Social Media

Our social media platforms reached 5,097 followers this year, a 22 per cent increase from the previous year, reflecting growing public interest in women's health research. Our platforms serve as a dynamic tool for public engagement, myth-busting and amplifying evidence-based insights. We shared nine publication features that distilled complex studies into clear, engaging content for a broader audience. One of our most shared posts was a spotlight on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, raising awareness of gender equity in research and celebrating the contributions of women in STEM. In 2025, we'll expand our strategy to include more interactive formats and campaign-based storytelling to deepen audience engagement.



Newsletter

The monthly newsletter reached over 1,000 subscribers, serving as a vital hub for knowledge sharing, career development and collaboration in women's health research. By promoting 26 awards and 20 job postings, we connected members—particularly trainees and early-career researchers—with essential professional opportunities. According to our membership survey, 85 per cent of readers gained valuable knowledge, and 86 per cent were satisfied with the content, confirming the newsletter's role in fostering an informed and empowered research community.

Together, our seminars, blog, podcast, social media and newsletter form an integrated knowledge mobilization strategy, ensuring that women's health research reaches diverse audiences, inspires action and shapes the future of equitable health care.

Advocacy and Impact

In 2024, the WHRC continued to challenge systemic barriers in health research, from funding disparities and publication gaps to research practices that routinely exclude women and gender-diverse populations. Our advocacy promotes evidence-based, gender-additive (uses gender-neutral and gendered language together to include all individuals) research practices to ensure sustainable funding for women and gender-diverse health. Our members reflect this commitment by accessing WHRC resources on Sex and Gender Based Analysis (SGBA+) and joining our advocacy efforts to strengthen national and international commitments to advancing women's health.

The WHRC takes a strategic, multi-pronged approach to advocacy—conducting research to identify gaps in women's health funding, influencing policy at all levels of government, and promoting systemic change in research culture. By equipping our community with practical tools and embedding SGBA+ across research practices, we're catalyzing sector-wide transformation. Our efforts include national coalition-building, federal outreach, and mobilizing the research community around urgent women's health challenges.



National Coalition for Maternal Mental Health

In 2024, the WHRC proudly joined the National Coalition for Maternal Mental Health (NCMMH), a US-based alliance dedicated to improving maternal mental health outcomes. Originally established in 2014 and relaunched in 2024 by the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, the coalition unites leading organizations to implement evidence-based interventions, enhance referral pathways, expand community-based support and promote behavioural health integration in obstetric care. By becoming a member, the WHRC aligns with a network committed to ensuring that all mothers receive the mental health support they need to thrive.



Canadian Parliament Hill

In November 2024, Dr. Liisa Galea traveled to Parliament Hill in Ottawa as part of the Canadian Association for Neuroscience's annual advocacy initiative. There, she met with four Members of Parliament to champion the importance of neuroscience research in shaping evidence-based solutions to pressing health challenges. Dr. Galea emphasized the need for greater support for women in STEM and highlighted the critical intersection of brain health and women's health. This visit reflects the WHRC's ongoing commitment to federal-level advocacy—continued in 2025 through a letter sent to more than 400 federal election candidates and campaign managers, urging them to prioritize women's health research. This advocacy work continues to advance inclusive, evidence-based science policy in Canada and ensure women's health is a priority at the highest levels of government.



Testimony at Canadian House of Commons

In April 2024, Dr. Liisa Galea provided critical testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (HESA) on Women's Health. HESA is responsible for examining and reporting on issues related to Health Canada's mandate, management and operations. During her address, Dr. Galea highlighted the systemic under-representation of women in neuroscience and psychiatry research, pointing out that only three per cent of such studies specifically focus on women's health issues. She underscored the importance of examining how female-specific life events, such as pregnancy, menopause and hormonal contraceptive use, uniquely impact mental health. She then submitted a briefing note calling for dedicated, targeted funding to close this research gap, emphasizing the urgent need to address sex and gender differences to improve mental health outcomes for women throughout their lifespan.

Advocacy and Impact



Advocating for Equity in Health Research Funding

In 2023, Dr. Liisa Galea and team published a pivotal paper in *Biology of Sex Differences* highlighting systemic gaps in funding and publication for women's health and 2SLGBTQ+ research. Analyzing Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) grants from 2009–2020, the study found minimal integration of sex and gender considerations despite longstanding mandates for their inclusion (3%). These findings reinforce our ongoing advocacy to ensure equitable funding and representation in health research, driving policy changes that lead to improved health outcomes for all populations.

A follow-up study was released in early 2024 and published in *LGBT Health* in early 2025, which probed the type of 2SLGBTQ+ research that was being funded by CIHR in Canada and found that funding patterns reflected the exclusion of women in these types of grants. This publication has had 655 downloads in 5 months.

Another follow-up study was released in pre-print form in April 2025 continuing to assess trends between 2020–2023. Results revealed that while mentions of sex, gender, and 2SLGBTQ+ health in funded research have modestly increased (to 10%), while female-specific research remains underfunded and narrowly focused (increased from 6% to 7%). With over 60 per cent of funding in women's health exclusively directed toward breast and gynecologic cancers, the gaps in other areas of women's health, such as brain and mental health, hormonal transitions and other illnesses that differently and disproportionately affect women, are grossly under-studied. Look for more analyses and follow up publications in 2025. We are committed to providing all publications from the WHRC as open access, removing paywalls for these important papers.

In 2025/26, WHRC is creating a strategy for coordinated women's health advocacy, where we can organize with like-minded partners to bring strength to collective advocacy efforts. We look forward to sharing this with our members once completed.

Love Your Brain Event



In February 2025, the WHRC proudly partnered with CAMH, ScienceUpFirst, and *womenmind* to co-host “Love Your Brain”, a public education event focused on how hormonal transitions across the lifespan affect women’s brain health. Held at the CAMH Arrell Family Auditorium in Toronto, the free hybrid event sold out in just two days, welcoming over 220 in-person attendees and 176 virtual participants. The evening featured expert panelists discussing puberty, pregnancy/postpartum, and perimenopause/menopause, moderated by CTV’s *The Social* television host Melissa Grelo. Attendees enjoyed an interactive reception with wellness-themed activities. Post-event surveys showed that 92 per cent of respondents learned something new, and 94 per cent found the information credible and evidence-based, reinforcing the value of accessible, evidence-informed public education on women’s health.



A Note from CAMH Foundation

The Women's Health Research Cluster has led a powerful year of progress. CAMH Foundation is proud to support this important work through *womenmind* thanks to the visionary investment we received from Manulife.

By advancing bold, inclusive research, the WHRC helps to close critical gaps in women's mental health and build momentum for lasting change. The results speak for themselves: new collaborations, strong community engagement and a growing global network—and this is just the beginning.

Looking ahead, the WHRC is poised to deepen its impact: expanding research partnerships, amplifying advocacy and fostering broader engagement. With every step, the Cluster brings us closer to a future where all women and gender-diverse individuals have equitable access to mental health care.

Thank you for your leadership, your courage and your unwavering commitment to equity in mental health. CAMH Foundation is proud to work with you to move this critical work forward.

With gratitude,



Anne-Marie Newton

President and CEO of CAMH Foundation





Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Foundation

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