



LOOKING BACK  
AND MOVING  
FORWARD

IMPACT REPORT 2013-2018

# Improve Your Work with Our Sex and Gender Research Support Service



Working with researchers during all stages of the research process – from proposal writing to the dissemination of research findings – Women's Xchange offers expert guidance to researchers on the integration of sex and gender considerations in their studies.

The inclusion of a sex and gender lens leads to more comprehensive, inclusive and accurate scientific outcomes.

To learn how our team can help you improve your study, visit our website: [womensxchange.womensresearch.ca](https://womensxchange.womensresearch.ca)

# WHO WE ARE

**Women's Xchange is improving the health of women and all Ontarians by changing the foundation of health research. We believe that to improve our healthcare system and in turn the health of Ontario's communities, advancements in women's health research are critical. Women's Xchange is focused on helping to create healthy, thriving communities in every area of the province.**

Driven by this belief, our team supports and builds the capacity of communities and health researchers to further research evidence that directly impacts women's health. Through our engagement with communities, Women's Xchange is able to share research findings and practices broadly – so that more citizens are able to benefit.

Women's Xchange is funded by the Government of Ontario, the Ontario Strategic Support Unit (OSSU), Diabetes Action Canada (DAC), the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement (CFHI) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Established in 2013, Women's Xchange is a centre for knowledge exchange and translation within Women's College Research Institute, focusing on capacity-building in three areas: applying a sex and gender lens in health research; funding grassroots, community-based projects on important local issues; and engaging the community in meaningful conversation on relevant women's health topics.

Building on Women's College Hospital's (WCH) groundbreaking legacy and commitment to the pursuit of excellence and equity, we are a Canadian leader in the application of this unique ground up approach to advance health outcomes. As a member of the WCH community, we are proud of our work in closing health gaps to advance health outcomes for all of Ontario's diverse communities.

An integral component of our work is furthering the integration of sex and gender into all forms of health research. We know that the inclusion of sex and gender based analysis leads to better science. Asking questions about sex, gender and equity from the inception of a project not only helps identify health inequities and barriers to care but leads to the development of better healthcare interventions to address these disparities.

Better research leads to better policy and programs, producing better care. Through our work, Women's Xchange is engaging communities and changing the conversation around women's health research in Ontario..

**Women's Xchange represents a unique opportunity to understand health conditions through a sex and gender lens, allowing for the creation of evidence-based, effective and appropriate healthcare policies for all Ontarians.**

*– Dr. Vasanthi Srinivasan, Executive Director, Ontario SPOR SUPPORT Unit*



# MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO



*Marilyn Emery,  
President & CEO,  
Women's College Hospital*

At Women's College Hospital (WCH) we know that women and men experience health, access healthcare, and respond to therapies and medications differently. For far too long women have been overlooked and underserved because healthcare has traditionally not considered the impact of sex and gender differences. In fact, it wasn't until the 1990s that the inclusion of women was made mandatory in health research studies. The implications of this omission have been far reaching and are still in many ways being felt today. Many researchers, policy makers and clinicians are seeking expert advice on how best to integrate sex and gender into their work.

As a world leader in health for women and girls, WCH is uniquely positioned to help close this research gap, so it is a natural fit that Women's Xchange found its roots at our hospital. Over the past five years Women's Xchange has made significant contributions to broadening the understanding of why research with a sex and gender lens is so vital to the future of healthcare. It has enabled scientists and students to explore theories that would have otherwise gone untested and deepened community involvement where the impact of this work is needed most.

Through its ongoing grassroots research work and community engagement Women's Xchange is advancing a sex and gender sensitive approach to improve the health and quality of life for women and girls across Ontario and Canada.

I am so proud of the contributions Women's Xchange has made to our hospital and the health of the diverse communities we serve and I congratulate the Women's Xchange team on the important impact they have had over their first five years.

# MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD OF WOMEN'S XCHANGE



*Dr. Paula Rochon,  
VP Research,  
Women's College Hospital  
& Lead, Women's Xchange*

Women's Xchange is a leader in the advancement of health for women and has elevated the importance of sex and gender considerations in research. Our scientists, community stakeholders and government partners have helped to reframe conversations about research and have supported research activities in community settings, hospitals, and universities. This work has touched the lives - and influenced the health - of thousands of individuals across both the country and province.

In our first five years, Women's Xchange has provided researchers and communities the opportunity to find answers to their questions and to put what they learn into practice. We are so proud of all that we have accomplished and look forward to building on our momentum, impacting greater change in the field of women's health research.

# SEX AND GENDER: THE IMPACT ON YOUR HEALTH

**For far too long researchers and healthcare professionals ignored the fact that health is impacted by one's sex and gender. Today, it has become apparent that incorporating a sex and gender lens in health research in order to inform healthcare practice is no longer an option, it is a necessity.**

## SEX

Physiological sex differences, like hormones, greatly impact how individuals respond to care and treatment. Some health conditions and diseases are sex-specific (prostate cancer, for example occurs only in men) or more commonly experienced by one sex (breast cancer is more common in women but can occur in men). The importance of accounting for sex during research is particularly important when developing drug therapies, as our sex influences how our bodies absorb, metabolize and eliminate medications.

A U.S. Government Accountability study found that 80 per cent of drugs withdrawn from the market were due to side effects experienced by women <sup>[1]</sup>. This was due to the fact that testing in labs was done entirely on male animals and cells while clinical trials consisted mainly of men participants with an insufficient number of women included to allow for a separate analyses. The failure to account for sex during research is costly for both the patient and the healthcare system.

## GENDER

Similarly, our gender identities and their associated roles and responsibilities also shape our quality of health, behaviours and sometimes even the care we receive.

In instances where females and males present with the same symptoms and conditions, they may be treated differently by healthcare professionals. For example, a study on total joint arthroplasty, a common surgical procedure, demonstrated that men were more likely to be provided with information and encouraged by their physicians to undergo the operation than women, even when they demonstrated identical symptoms <sup>[2]</sup>. Physicians were also more likely to attribute female patients' symptoms to emotional rather physical symptoms and referred women less often for specialty care <sup>[2]</sup>.

Sex and gender play an important role in affecting the patient's health, their risk factors, how they experience healthcare and how healthcare professionals provide care. Clearly both sex and gender need to be considered and appropriately incorporated into research.

## WHEN SEX AND GENDER AREN'T CONSIDERED

- Women are seven times more likely to be misdiagnosed mid-heart attack and sent home from emergency compared to men presenting with identical symptoms <sup>[3]</sup>.
- Men's dementia symptoms may be expressed and interpreted differently than women's and as a result, men may be underdiagnosed <sup>[4]</sup>.
- Genes associated with depression show distinctly different patterns of expression in males and females but show the same symptoms in both men and women <sup>[5]</sup>.

# OUR EXPERTISE

**BUILD THE CAPACITY OF WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCHERS**

**ENHANCE RESEARCH IN THE COMMUNITY**

**SUPPORT THE UPTAKE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH RESEARCH FINDINGS ACROSS ONTARIO**

## UNDERSTANDING SEX & GENDER TERMINOLOGY

- **Sex** refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish females from males <sup>[6]</sup>.
- **Gender** refers to the socially constructed roles, expectations, relationships and other traits societies ascribe to women, men and gender diverse people <sup>[7]</sup>.
- A person whose gender identity corresponds with what is socially expected based on their sex assigned at birth is **cisgender** <sup>[7]</sup>.
- **Transgender** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy or how one is perceived in daily life <sup>[7]</sup>.



# THE WOMEN'S XCHANGE TEAM

In order to change the landscape of women's health, our team leverages a unique set of expertise and skill sets.



**Dr. Paula Rochon** MD, MPH, FRCPC, is the lead of Women's Xchange. Dr. Rochon is a geriatrician, health services researcher and vice president of research at Women's College Hospital. She is a senior scientist at Women's College Research Institute, a University of Toronto professor in the Department of Medicine and the Institute of Health Policy Management and Evaluation and a senior scientist at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences. In 2015, she was appointed as the inaugural Retired Teachers of Ontario/ERO Chair in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Toronto.



**Robin Mason** MA, MEd, PhD, is the scientific lead for Women's Xchange, a scientist in the Women's College Research Institute and an assistant professor at University of Toronto in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health with a cross-appointment to the Department of Psychiatry. With a view to increasing research capacity across all sectors of society, she is committed to engaging with students, community members, and established researchers in activities designed to enhance understanding of and a commitment to women's health research.



**Amy Clare** MA, is the project lead for Women's Xchange. She is responsible for the coordination of Women's Xchange, which includes finances and budgeting, event organization and research. Amy works with external stakeholders and funding bodies, and assists in the execution of contractual agreements. She is a main contact for the Women's Xchange community and closely involved in the \$15K Challenge.



**Caroline Bennett-AbuAyyash** MSc, PhD, is the research lead for Women's Xchange and an assistant professor at University of Toronto in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. As research lead, she supports the development of solutions and guidelines on how to integrate sex and gender into health research, policy and clinical care. Her responsibilities include consultation, education, research and knowledge translation.



**Stephanie Reid** MSc, PhD, is the post-doctoral fellow for Women's Xchange and a diabetes epidemiologist. Stephanie offers research assistance to Women's Xchange by contributing to the Sex and Gender Research Support Service and other research activities.



**Nousin Hussain** BSc, is the research assistant for Women's Xchange. Nousin contributes to the development of tools and programming aimed at building the capacity of health researchers to apply a sex and gender lens in their work. She also assists in the coordination of research activities with external stakeholders and engages the Women's Xchange network, in order to support the uptake of women's health research findings.



**Jordan Benadiba** MA, is the communications specialist for Women's Xchange. Working with the team, Jordan oversees strategic communication planning and execution in order to effectively broadcast the team's activities and raise its profile. She regularly crafts messaging and develops communication tactics aimed at resonating with a variety of audiences.

# OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

## PRESENTATIONS AND RESOURCES



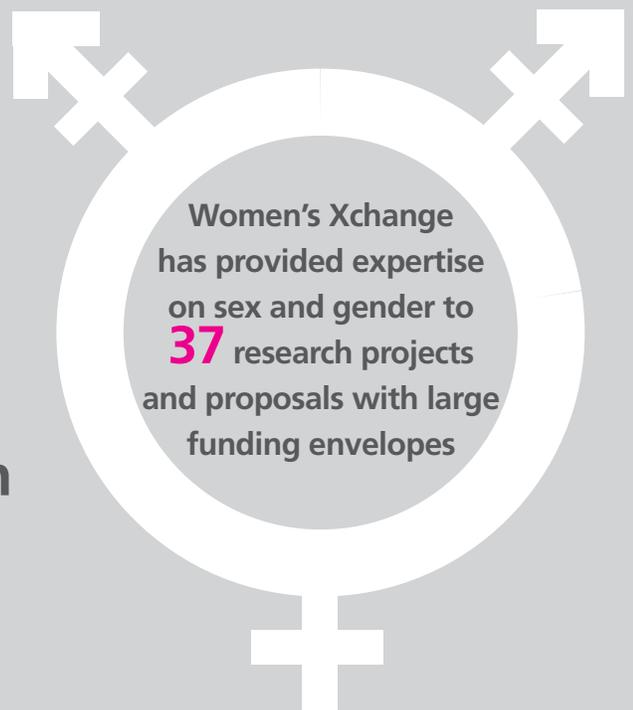
**90+**  
presentations



Creation of an  
online library with

**65+**

resources, manuals and guidelines  
on sex and gender based analysis;  
addressing issues of equity; and  
community based research



Women's Xchange  
has provided expertise  
on sex and gender to  
**37** research projects  
and proposals with large  
funding envelopes

# EVENTS

## 10 conference style events

**Event topics:** leadership in women's health; challenges and opportunities in women's health research; multimedia in research; engaging vulnerable communities in research; achieving equity; poverty; precarious and invisible labour; mental health; substance abuse; and healthy relationships and sexuality in the #metoo era



over  
**1000**  
attendees

**50+**  
guest speakers,  
panelists and  
moderators

## THE \$15K CHALLENGE

Projects in every region of the province

**500+**  
researchers from  
the community and  
academia

**148**  
viable community-based  
projects invested in



**4000**  
community members  
engaged in projects  
that matter to them



# INFLUENCING LEADERS

Without these partners Women's Xchange could not

## PARTNERSHIPS

Since our inception, we have had the privilege of leveraging our resources and partnering with some of Ontario's and Canada's top healthcare agencies and organizations, allowing Women's Xchange to play an important role in advancing health policy and research at both the community and academic level.



Since 2013, Women's Xchange has partnered with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) and their network of knowledge users. The MOHLTC supports our main objectives including; enhancing research in the community through our \$15K Challenge; supporting the uptake of women's health research findings; and building capacity of women's health researchers throughout the province. The opinions, results and conclusions in this report are those of Women's Xchange and do not reflect that of the Province. Without the Ministry's network of knowledge users, Women's Xchange would not have had the chance to impact thousands of community members, provincial researchers, students and policy makers.



With the support from the Ontario Strategic Support Unit (OSSU), Women's Xchange has had the opportunity to expand our activities promoting the inclusion of sex and gender in health research. OSSU supports our Sex and Gender Research Support Service (SGRSS), which responds to queries from the community of OSSU researchers, and others seeking to improve their inclusion of sex and gender. This contributes to our goal of establishing Ontario as the national leader on the integration of sex and gender in all health research.



Women's Xchange has worked with the SPOR Diabetes Network for the last five years and has provided insights to the national network's conceptualization through the application of a sex and gender sensitive lens. Women's Xchange works to ensure a sex and gender lens is applied to all Diabetes Action Canada (DAC) projects and activities where possible. This work will help to ensure that all of DAC's strategies and interventions for the prevention and treatment of diabetes complications are sensitive to sex and gender considerations, improving the scientific output and avoiding data waste.

have had the impact it has had on the health of people in Ontario.

Canadian Foundation for **Healthcare Improvement**

Fondation canadienne pour **l'amélioration des services de santé**

Women's Xchange worked with the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement (CFHI), a national, not-for-profit organization funded by Health Canada to accelerate healthcare improvement. Women's Xchange provided extensive support to the New Brunswick Appropriate Use of Antipsychotics Collaborative's EXecutive TRAIning (EXTRA) program through presentations, webinars and the provision of resources for CFHI staff, guest faculty/coaches and frontline providers, allowing them to understand how considering sex and gender could improve patient care in long-term care homes.



The Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) awarded funding to Women's Xchange to adapt the results of a unique workshop focused on sex and gender integration into thematic online educational modules. These e-learning modules, The Health Researcher's Toolkit: Why Sex and Gender Matter, are disseminated broadly as a tool for community members, researchers and trainees to further build their capacity and properly incorporate sex and gender into research.

## PRESENTATIONS

The Women's Xchange team has given over 90 presentations showcasing our work to a variety of audiences including healthcare providers, researchers and policy leaders at the local, national and international level. During these discussions, we highlight the importance of advancing women's health research through community collaboration and the inclusion of a sex and gender lens.

Our presentations often serve as an opportunity to explain the importance of sex and gender, specifically the reverberating impacts on patient health and the healthcare system.

"Men and women experience important differences in terms of healthcare utilization, medical treatment and health outcomes. There is currently limited evidence addressing these disparities. Incorporating sex and gender based approaches into healthcare research is key in understanding underlying mechanisms of disease occurrence and progression, as well as guiding the development of tools to better inform personalized care and disease management."

– Dr. Douglas Lee, MD cardiovascular program lead at the Toronto General Research Institute and staff cardiologist at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre

# SEEDING COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Over the course of five years, Women's Xchange has funded 148 projects across all of Ontario. Teams supported through our \$15K Challenge, devise practical solutions to local health issues to implement real and meaningful change. Through seed funding, skill development and expert insight, Women's Xchange ensures that \$15K projects are economically viable and executable.

A critical component of our work is the \$15K Challenge program - \$15,000 one-time, one-year, non-renewable grants to support projects initiated by community-based organizations addressing important women's health issues. Community organizations can partner with universities, hospitals or other academic institutions to further their projects.

As solutions rooted in local insights, \$15K projects have long-lasting ripple effects in their community and beyond. Many of our projects have spread in scope and scale to either a provincial or national level, producing tangible impacts beyond their immediate community. In addition to sharing a report at the end of the project, all \$15K Challenge projects also produce a short video describing their project and its impacts which are shared online via YouTube. The videos are a tremendous additional resource and speak to the reach and scope of completed projects.

**"One of the greatest accomplishments of Women's Xchange since its inception has been the development and implementation of the \$15K Challenge. I haven't seen another funding mechanism that comes close to achieving the same level of support for meaningful and impactful community-researcher collaboration. In this sense, the \$15K Challenge is truly a unique and much needed approach to moving women's health research forward in ways that directly engage with the all-too-often overlooked health needs and experiences of women and girls in our communities."** – Suzanne Day, PhD, former Women's Xchange post-doctoral researcher.

**"My program of research is focused on developing and systematically evaluating an integrated smartphone and web-based intervention (HEARTPA N) to improve the health and quality of life for women with cardiac pain. The support from Women's Xchange has been invaluable. As a successful recipient of the \$15K Challenge I have been able to advance sex and gender knowledge in cardiac health to other researchers, students, clinicians and community partners."** – Monica Parry, PhD, Associate Professor and Coordinator, Nurse Practitioner Programs, University of Toronto





# \$15K PROJECTS AWARDED ACROSS ONTARIO

Barrie  
Brampton  
Brantford  
Brockville  
Cornwall  
Elora  
Guelph

Hamilton  
Kingston  
Kitchener  
Little Current/  
Whitefish River  
First Nation  
London  
Markham  
Midland  
Mississauga  
Newmarket  
North Bay/Nipissing  
Oshawa  
Orillia

Ottawa  
Pembroke  
Penetanguishene  
Seaforth  
St. Catherines  
Sudbury  
Thunder Bay  
Toronto  
Wallaceberg/  
Chatham-Kent  
Waterloo  
Winchester  
Windsor



# \$15K SPOTLIGHT

Our \$15K projects have a significant impact both on the ground and within the research sector, here are five exemplary projects. To learn more about all of our \$15K Challenge projects, visit our website: [womensxchange.womensresearch.ca](https://womensxchange.womensresearch.ca)

## Identifying and Supporting Brain Injured Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

### Project Team

University of Toronto, Acquired Brain Injury Research Lab,  
Womenatthecentre, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute-UHN

**What impact did the \$15K Challenge have on your community or research?** The initial project funded by the \$15K Challenge provided the foundation for us to move forward with the development of a long-term research program looking at new ways to identify and support this underserved group of women. Our team has now expanded to include new partnerships with direct service organizations and advocacy groups across the country including those focused on serving Indigenous populations in Canada. We are now engaged in a variety of projects, generously supported by CIHR, MOHLTC and the Justice Department of Canada, addressing gaps in research and services to support brain injured women exposed to intimate partner violence. Our video from the \$15K Challenge project has become a valuable tool and will be highlighted in our new "Abused & Brain Injured Toolkit" currently in design. The team has been recognized nationally and internationally as leaders in this area and members participate in speaking engagements increasing awareness and providing up to date information to support professionals, healthcare providers, and researchers both in Canada and around the world.



## Using Maps to Tell a Story: Geographies of Sexual and Domestic Violence in the Municipality of Ottawa

### Project Team

The Ottawa Hospital & Ottawa Victim Services

**What impact did the \$15K Challenge have on your community or research?** The Women's Xchange grant was an excellent catalyst to bring together clinicians and researchers from the hospital with front line community members. This grant has supported the development of a gender-based violence research program that includes mentorship for students. Our project video received local and national media attention for identifying areas in Ottawa that were not previously known to be hot-spots for violence and was featured on CBC radio and television. Our research was recently published in the Emergency Medicine Journal where it was selected for a special feature and covered by such media sources as Reuters, CBC, CTV, Canadian Press, Toronto Star and Ottawa Citizen.



## Healthy Nail Salon Workers: Exploring Strategies to Reduce the Health Risks of Women Working at Toronto Nail Salons

### Project Team

The Parkdale-Queen West Community Health Centre, York University, The Chinese Interagency Network Labour Committee and the Canadian Partnership for Children's Healthy Environments

### What impact did the \$15K Challenge have on your community or research?

Women who work in nail salons are vulnerable to both the toxic burden from the products they use daily, as well as potential exploitation of their status as new immigrants. The \$15K Challenge program enabled our team to meaningfully collaborate and engage with women who work in nail salons in Toronto. We consulted with the women, through the leadership of peer workers, to determine their greatest health concerns and from that developed, with them, a series of health promotion workshops and resources to help reduce the harms caused by their work environments. This foundational support is enabling the creation of health promotion and policy strategies to address the needs of this group of marginalized women workers.



## The [in]visible Project: Single Women's Experiences of Chronic Homelessness in Hamilton, Ontario

### Project Team

The Women's Housing Planning Collaborative, Good Shepherd Centres, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and McMaster University

### What impact did the \$15K Challenge have on your community or research?

The stories women shared during the [in]visible research project has given our community a set of data generated from the perspectives of women and are an invaluable tool for strengthening our advocacy efforts as we move forward developing housing for single women experiencing chronic homelessness. Our research findings were showcased for the Hamilton community at an event attended by over 50 service providers, program managers and community members. The findings from our study will support the development of two permanent supportive housing programs for women in Hamilton, one initiated by the YWCA and another by Good Shepherd Centres.



Artwork: Sylvia Nickerson

## Understanding of the Experiences and Needs of Women with Dementia who Live Alone in the Community

### Project Team

Alzheimer Society of Ontario, The Centre for Education and Research on Aging & Health (CERAH) and Lakehead University

### What impact did the \$15K Challenge have on your community or research?

In terms of the impact, our end-of-project video has been particularly impactful in highlighting the strength and resilience of women living with dementia. We are continuing to explore issues related to gender and dementia in our research. This has brought greater awareness that the experiences of dementia are far from homogenous, and to be better supporters of people living with dementia, we need to recognize this. The three women featured in our video have become inspiring leaders in the dementia field, internationally, nationally and provincially. Each of them gained a lot of confidence and were affirmed by the experience.





# IMPACTING THE FUTURE OF DIABETES RESEARCH

**Women's Xchange is a member of Diabetes Action Canada, a Strategy for Patient Oriented Research (SPOR) Network in Diabetes and its Related Complications.**

By working with Diabetes Action Canada (DAC) team members, Canadian leaders in diabetes research, Women's Xchange leads the integration of sex and gender considerations throughout the network's research processes and products. Through our involvement with each of DAC's nine national research teams, we are helping to increase capacity and advance the future of diabetes research in Canada.

## Q&A WITH DIABETES ACTION CANADA

### **1. Within the broader diabetes research landscape, do you feel that sex and gender considerations are fully incorporated?**

The research projects developed by Diabetes Action Canada investigators are definitely incorporating sex and gender. We are most grateful for the outstanding collaboration with Women's Xchange and their commitment to working with our investigators on the incorporation of sex and gender considerations in the preparation and evaluation of their research proposals. As we build patient-oriented research capacity in our training programs, the collaboration with Women's Xchange experts has been most valuable in designing an inclusive curriculum.

In the broader diabetes research landscape, we are less certain about the inclusion of sex and gender considerations. More work is required to train all diabetes researchers in Canada to design their studies to be inclusive of sex and gender questions and evaluation. The education materials created by the Women's Xchange are excellent.

### **2. What are the current knowledge gaps within diabetes research related to sex and gender?**

Three key knowledge gaps within diabetes research related to sex and gender are:

- Fundamental basic science using animal models – usually male (for consistency of “physiological status”) – the outcomes of which may not apply directly to females.
- Clinical trials – require deliberate design that includes sufficient numbers related to sex and gender to analyze results (subsets) and arrive at meaningful conclusions relevant to people of different sex and gender. This is improving in Canada – but we could do better.
- Pragmatic trials – real world analysis of new models of care require design and analytics that must be inclusive of sex and gender to understand relevance of interventions and iterative change necessary to create a true “Learning Health Environment” for the most vulnerable in Canada.

## DIABETES ACTION CANADA'S MANAGEMENT TEAM

### Gary F. Lewis

Co-Academic Lead,  
Diabetes Action Canada

Professor, Department of Medicine  
and Department of Physiology,  
University of Toronto

Director, Banting and Best Diabetes  
Centre, University of Toronto

### Jean-Pierre Després

Co-Scientific Lead, Co-Academic Lead,  
Diabetes Action Canada

Professor, Department of Kinesiology,  
Faculty of Medicine, Université Laval

Director of Research in Cardiology,  
Québec Heart and Lung Institute  
Research Centre

Director of Science and Innovation,  
Alliance Santé Québec

Scientific Director, International Chair on  
Cardiometabolic Risk

### Catharine Whiteside

Executive Director,  
Diabetes Action Canada

Professor Emerita & Former Dean of  
Medicine, University of Toronto

### Tracy McQuire

Manager Research Operations,  
Diabetes Action Canada

### 3. What has your experience been with Women's Xchange? How has Women's Xchange impacted your work related to diabetes?

In our network, Women's Xchange has established a "sex and gender facilitator" model, whereby research programs designate one member of their group to be the point-person for regular communication with the Sex and Gender Program. Through this collaboration, Women's Xchange is transforming the landscape of our strategic patient-oriented research to enable all of our researchers and trainees to understand the importance of including sex and gender considerations in their projects. The major success factors include the training curriculum and hands-on consultation provided by Women's Xchange – at truly extraordinary collaborative contribution.

### 4. Can you share a bit about Women's Xchange and DAC's partnership and how Women's Xchange has become involved in DAC?

The CIHR SPOR program required the inclusion of sex and gender considerations in our original SPOR Chronic Disease Network application. We were extremely fortunate to recruit Dr. Paula Rochon as a primary investigator (PI) on our application. She and Robin Mason, worked with us from the outset on this application and subsequently joined our Operations Management Committee that meets monthly and includes all of our PIs, Research-Directed Goal Group and Enabling Program Leads – chaired by our Nominated Principle Investigator (NPI), Dr. Gary Lewis.

The Project Coordinator for Women's Xchange works closely with our Manager of Research Operations, Tracy McQuire, who meets monthly with all of our Project Coordinators. These meetings provide additional opportunities to disseminate research tools and education modules on sex and gender and to discuss collaboration and utilization of these resources. As new SPOR-related research projects are vetted by Diabetes Action Canada, Women's Xchange works with the PIs to ensure that sex and gender considerations are included in the grant proposal. Once a project is funded, Women's Xchange may continue to work as necessary with our investigators to ensure the design and analytics of the project fully incorporate sex and gender. We are extremely proud of this collaboration and have highlighted our collaboration with Women's Xchange in our annual reports to CIHR and our sponsors.

**"Women's Xchange provides support to researchers in Ontario by consulting with scientists, reviewing and strengthening grant proposals to ensure that sex and gender are well-integrated into the study design. I know that I have reviewed grants that have successfully received funding and by highlighting sex and gender we can improve health outcomes at all levels."**

– Amy Hoang-Kim, PhD, former Women's Xchange post-doctoral researcher





# CREATING A WOMEN'S XCHANGE COMMUNITY

**As a centre with a focus on community collaboration, Women's Xchange believes that research findings and practices should be shared broadly, to include not just academic researchers and healthcare professionals, but also community members and advocates, policy leaders, students, patients, and families. Health knowledge is only beneficial if it is shared.**

Each year Women's Xchange holds two conference style events – one in the spring and the other in the fall. Both events focus on a range of timely topics related to women's health research, including mental health, social media, invisible labour, healthy sexuality, substance abuse, equity and more.

The events are designed to promote women's health research, frontline health programs, profile our most recent \$15K Challenge projects and innovative student research projects taking place at Ontario's universities.

Through panel discussions with guest speakers and lively Q&As we encourage critical discussions on the topic at hand.

Our events allow attendees from across the province to engage and connect with their peers. "We believe that knowledge translation, the sharing of research information, is pivotal. The research community is moving away from its insular approach towards one that engages with communities to inform them and in turn learn from their experiences," said Robin Mason, scientific lead. Through our events, ten to date, we have created a Women's Xchange community.

**"Thank you to you and your team for putting on such an inspiring and enriching event! I came away with so much respect for all the women who do ground-breaking research that can make a positive impact in the lives of the women and girls they engage and collaborate with. "**

**"Women's Xchange program, THANK YOU! I was fortunate enough to attend today's event on women's mental health and stigma. As a 4th year undergrad student trying to figure out my next steps, I found this event informative & inspiring. "**

## WHY DO WE NEED KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION?

- Knowledge Translation is "the synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve health, health service delivery and the healthcare system." <sup>[8]</sup>
- There is consistent evidence of the failure to translate research findings into clinical practice.
  - 30-45 per cent of patients do not get treatments of proven effectiveness
  - 20-25 per cent of patients get care that is not needed or potentially harmful
- Cancer outcomes could be improved by 30 per cent with the optimum application of what is currently known. <sup>[9]</sup>

# IN FOCUS: OUR SEX AND GENDER METRICS

Driven to improve the quality of women’s health research, Women’s Xchange has developed a set of essential metrics, a tool for the research community to comprehensively integrate sex and gender into all health research proposals.

In 2017 through an iterative three-stage method, the Women’s Xchange team created a set of metrics to assess the quality of sex and gender integration in research proposals [10].

The assessment tool is designed to act as an aid for both researchers developing research proposals and reviewers when making funding decisions.

“Increasingly, research proposals are required to demonstrate comprehensive integration of sex and gender considerations throughout the entire lifespan of a project when applying for funding,” said Dr. Paula Rochon, lead of Women’s Xchange. “However, many researchers lack the skills to effectively integrate sex and gender into their work. Our metrics provide clear and measurable direction for researchers so that they can effectively integrate sex and gender, and as a result, improve the quality of their work.”

Recognizing the importance of accessibility, our metrics have been published in the open access journal PLOS ONE to ensure that they are broadly available to all. We are pleased to report that our metrics have been embraced by central funding bodies in Canada, including:

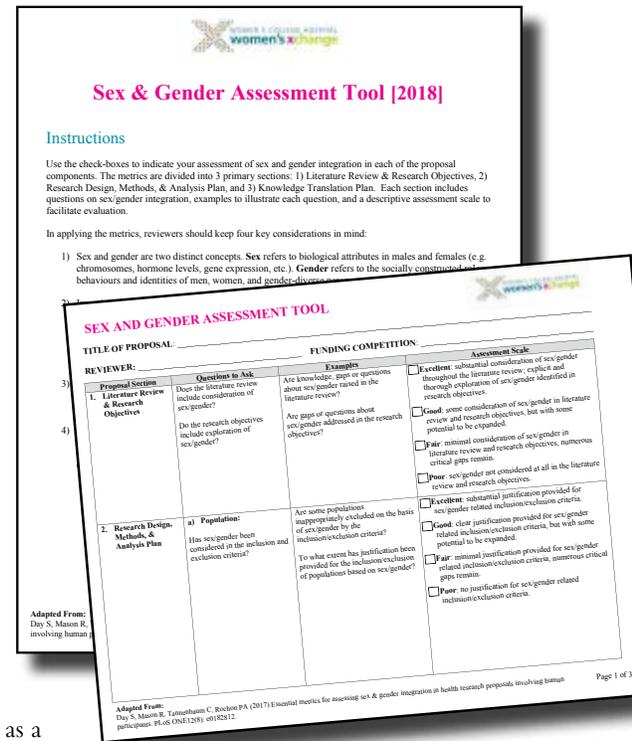
- The Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and its College of Reviewers
- The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s Health System Research Fund

As leaders in the field of sex and gender research integration, Women’s Xchange also offers a consultation service, whereby team members work directly with leading Canadian researchers to provide guidance on how to improve the quality of their research proposals.

By enhancing the quality of sex and gender integration in proposals, the metrics and our consultation service will help to foster comprehensive, meaningful integration of sex and gender throughout each stage of the research process, resulting in better quality evidence to inform healthcare. “A central focus for us as an organization is to enable researchers and provide them with the tools they need to add value to their work not just once but throughout their career in health research,” said Dr. Rochon.

**“Women’s Xchange provides critical capacity-building support to elevate the integration of sex and gender in health research. The metrics checklist and online health researcher’s toolkit are exceptional resources, widely applicable across disciplines.”**

– Cara Tannenbaum, Scientific Director, Institute of Gender and Health, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)



# GET TO KNOW: ONTARIO'S CHAIRS IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women's Xchange partners with Ontario's endowed Chairs in Women's Health to further advance the province's existing research network.



**Dr. Linda McLean** | University of Ottawa

**Area of study: Physiotherapy in Urogynaecology, Obstetrics and Gynaecology**

Some conditions have a higher prevalence in women, or present differently in women than they do in men and these differences can lead to imbalances in how we diagnose, manage or even interact with those who are affected. I study conditions, specifically urinary incontinence, sexual pain and post-partum pain and dysfunction that are based on women's anatomy and/or their biological role in childbearing. These conditions go largely unreported due to embarrassment or shame and have traditionally been overlooked in health research, healthcare delivery and health policy. Yet they are highly prevalent and have a major impact on women's health and well-being. I aim to improve our understanding of these conditions and to use this information to develop and deliver focused interventions that contribute to the empowerment of women to lead healthy, active and fulfilled lives.



**Dr. Marilyn Ford-Gilboe** | Western University

**Area of study: Women's Health Equity, Violence and Place**

Sex and gender are powerful factors that shape women's health, well-being and quality of life in profound ways. Moving beyond a focus on sex and gender to also consider how the many conditions of women's lives (such as their economic positions, identities and geographic location) shape their health and life quality adds an important dimension that is critical in understanding and addressing inequities. Women's health research is a space to examine these experiences in all their complexity and in ways that intentionally seek to understand, and celebrate, women's differences. This type of knowledge is powerful because it allows us to tailor healthcare services and policies to address the most pressing issues of particular groups of women in ways that are respectful, appropriate and fit with the realities of their lives.



**Dr. Nazilla Khanlou** | York University

**Area of study: Mental Health Promotion**

It's an exciting time to be in the mental health field. When I practiced as a psychiatric nurse the focus was only on individuals, by specific groups or by professionals. But now athletes, artists, schools, and politicians are also talking about importance of mental health for all of us. My work applies an intersectionality-informed approach to the study of mental health and wellbeing of women, their children, and their families from diverse backgrounds.



**Dr. Cindy-Lee Dennis** | University of Toronto

**Area of study: Perinatal Mental Health, Breastfeeding, Technology-Based Interventions**

If we want to create new knowledge and evidence-based solutions to transform the health and healthcare of our families we must appreciate girls and women and their often distinct physical, mental, and social needs. In my research program that focuses on improving breastfeeding outcomes, preventing and treating perinatal mental health disorders, examining the health of immigrant mothers, and including partners in perinatal interventions, I am launching studies, generating data, and driving larger investigations that have practical health benefits for women and their families. I believe I am serving as a catalyst for innovative research and providing a voice to inform public policy while also training the next generation of researchers to shape the future of women's health. I am proud to be a women's health researcher.



# OUR IMPACT: MOVING WOMEN'S HEALTH FORWARD

**We are proud of what we have accomplished and remain committed to further improving the health of women and all Ontarians – we still have work to do.**

As we look forward to the next five years, we will focus on scaling up our existing programs to ensure that we are able to engage more communities and researchers. Through an expansion of our offerings and an increase in output we intend to grow our organizational presence. Working with our partners, who have been instrumental in our success to date, Women's Xchange will continue to advance our unique ground up approach to research.

As Ontario leaders in women's health research, we look forward to collaborating with stakeholders across all sectors to advance women's health research, in order to develop better health policy and ultimately, and most importantly, produce better care for Ontario's citizens.

**“Understanding of sex and gender across the spectrum of care, including pharmaceuticals, has barely begun. That is why women are routinely offered inferior or inappropriate care compared to men, problems which are magnified for indigenous and poor women or women who are not fluent in Canada's official languages. Women's Xchange is tackling these complex issues. The discrepancies challenge our notions of fairness and equality. Women's Xchange shines a light on the unacceptable. The first five years is a first step on the long road to health justice, but that first step and those five years matter greatly.”**

*– Maureen O'Neil, Past President Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement*





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# The Health Researcher's Toolkit: Why Sex & Gender Matter

Recognizing that research takes many forms, our team has developed an interactive and accessible toolkit comprised of 7 e-learning modules focused on the incorporation of sex and gender in research

**Module 1** | Activism and Evidence: Shaping Equitable Health Policies in Canada

**Module 2** | Improving Health Knowledge: Why Do Sex and Gender Matter? + Case Study

**Module 3** | Inclusive Sex and Gender Data Collection in Survey Research

**Module 4** | Sex Specific Analyses and Reporting in Clinical Trials

**Module 5** | Integrated Mixed Methods: LGBTQ2S Home Care Access + Case Study

**Module 6** | Concept Mapping: Gendered Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence

**Module 7** | Beyond Sex and Gender: Making Research More Participatory for Vulnerable Populations

**For information and to learn more**, please see our website:

[womensxchange.womensresearch.ca](https://womensxchange.womensresearch.ca)

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU. STAY CONNECTED:



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