



# IMPACT REPORT

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WE-SPARK Health Institute acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi. We honour and respect the longstanding relationships that exist between these Indigenous Peoples and the wider community in the 100-mile Windsor-Essex Peninsula and the Straits of Detroit, also known as Les Détroits.

We express our gratitude to the keepers of this land, recognizing the deep connection and stewardship of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who have resided here for generations. We are committed to fostering an environment of respect, understanding, and collaboration, as we continue to learn from and work alongside Indigenous communities.

WE-SPARK Health Institute also acknowledges the ongoing contributions and resilience of Indigenous Peoples in our community. We strive to integrate knowledge and perspectives into our research, education, and health initiatives, aiming to create a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

# WE-SPARK HEALTH INSTITUTE

WE-SPARK Health Institute is supported by an **innovative research partnership** between Erie Shores HealthCare, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, St. Clair College, the University of Windsor, and Windsor Regional Hospital. WE-SPARK brings together research strengths, expertise, and infrastructure across the Windsor-Essex region. Since our formal launch in March 2020, we have grown to over **1,200 members**. We accelerate and strengthen collaborations and provide tools and resources needed for local health research and training to excel.

## THE MISSION

Enhancing the health, well-being, and care of people through transformative research, evidence-based interventions, and knowledge translation.

## THE VISION

A thriving and engaged research community driving innovation and advancements in health.



*Memorandum of  
Understanding  
signing  
(April 28, 2025)*

**WE-SPARK is committed to providing equity, diversity, inclusivity, and support** - all components of an environment that enhances excellence, innovation, and creativity. We aim to develop and support policies and practices that strengthen the research community, as well as the quality, social relevance, and impacts of research.

**Igniting discovery, elevating excellence, living better.**

Y6 ANNUAL

# HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights are an accumulation from the entire year.



## RESEARCH EXCELLENCE\*

\*Based on self-reported member metrics



**\$15,918,449**

New funding from all core members



**73**

New research projects initiated



**7**

Adjunct appointments facilitated



**180**

Publications



**74**

Member awards



**6**

Total studies in research registry added

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



**126,945**

Engagements  
(Social Media & Website)



**29**

Events hosted



**149**

Student volunteers



**224**

Media stories



**6,230**

Event attendees  
(outreach & hosted)



**822+**

Volunteer hours

## MEMBER SUPPORT

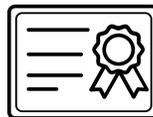


## HIGHLIGHTS



**258**

CITI Memberships



**19**

Igniting Discovery Grants awarded



**458**

Active REDCap Users



**\$374,000**

Funds raised at Cheers to Hope



**113**

Total fresh tissue samples acquired for research



**165**

Health Research Conference presentations

## Elevating Excellence

# OUR RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

Everyone in our community has a role to play in health research. WE-SPARK members are a network of people dedicated to improving the health and wellness of our region. Our research activities are driven by our Core Members, people who work in the research field and are actively engaged on a daily basis. Essential to our progress are those working behind the scenes to elevate research activities including healthcare providers, educators, students, volunteers and supporters.

41

## Core Principal\*

funded by provincial or national health projects, or lead a clinical trial

184

## Core Associate\*

actively engaged in research but do not yet hold provincially or nationally funded projects or are leading clinical trials

296

## Affiliate Researcher

associated with health research or healthcare locally or beyond; including administrative support

617

## Affiliate Students

post-secondary students in any discipline with an interest in health research

113

## Community Members

individuals or organizations interested in the health landscape in Windsor-Essex, including people with lived experience

## Ambassadors

individuals or organizations that provide a donation/support for health research

1,261  
Members



\*Researchers who have a formal affiliation with one of our five partner institutions

# CORE PRINCIPAL MEMBERS\*

Core Principal Members (CPMs) are researchers who are currently supported as a PI/Co-PI by a provincially or nationally funded health project, or an investigator initiated clinical trial. They also possess a formal affiliation with one of the five WE-SPARK partner institutions.

\*Metrics provided on behalf of our Core Principal Members are based on self-reported successes and submitted curricula vitae (CV).

180

Peer-Reviewed Journal Publications

203

Presentations  
(Posters/Oral/Other)

\$31.5M

Currently Held Funding  
for Year 6

1753

Active Collaborations  
on Research Projects

\*\*Involvement on projects and publications

21

Awards & Accolades  
Celebrated

532

Students Supervised



Core Principal Member Meeting Series

## Biomedical Sciences

Dora Cavallo-Medved  
Jeffrey Dason  
Brian DeVeale  
Phillip Karpowicz  
Lisa Porter  
Munir Rahim  
Andrew Swan

## Chemistry & Biochemistry

Drew Marquardt  
Kenneth Ng  
Simon Rondeau-Gagné  
Yufeng Tong  
John Trant  
Panayotis Vacratsis  
Nicholas Vukotic

## Computer Science

Pooya Moradian Zadeh  
Alioune Ngom  
Luis Rueda

## Education

Lindsey Jaber

## Electrical & Computer Engineering

Aerzoo Emadi  
Mitra Mirhassani

## Kinesiology

Anthony Bain  
Francesco Biondi  
Cheri McGowan  
Sara Scharoun Benson  
Kristoffer Romero  
Paula van Wyk

## Mechanical, Automotive & Materials Engineering

Jalal Ahamed  
Jill Urbanic

## Nursing

Edward Cruz  
Kathy Pfaff

## Cancer Program

Caroline Hamm  
Ming Pan

## Psychology

Alexander Daros  
Jessica Kichler  
Dana Menard  
Lance Rappaport  
Charlene Senn  
Kendall Soucie

## Social Work

Adrian Guta  
Jayashree Mohanty

## St. Clair College

Kyle Jackson

# 20 WE-SPARK GRANTS 24 PROGRAM

**Cheers to Hope** (C2H) is WE-SPARK's signature fundraising event, dedicated to advancing the Grants Program and providing meaningful support for local researchers at all stages of their careers. C2H celebrates the spirit of discovery by showcasing local research, recognizing the generosity of supporters, updating the community on progress, and raising vital funds, all while expressing heartfelt thanks to those who make it possible.



**110**  
Total Attendees



**13**  
C2H Sponsorships Received

Thank you to our sponsors!



The Tayfour and Emara Research Grant



University of Windsor | Research & Innovation | Odette School of Business | Faculty of Human Kinetics | Faculty of Nursing | Faculty of Science



**20**  
Grants Awarded

**11**  
Grants Program Sponsors

**\$412,714**  
Grant Funding Awarded

Learn more about our 2024 recipients in our [Y6 Mid-Year Report!](#)



**\$6.1 Million**

Over the course of 6 years, our local investment of \$1.8M has successfully attracted and secured additional national grant funding.

# 20 HEALTH RESEARCH 25 CONFERENCE

The WE-SPARK **Health Research Conference** is an annual event that brings together the local research community to share discoveries, build meaningful connections, and celebrate achievements. Designed to showcase the depth and diversity of health research in our region, the conference highlights student contributions, fosters collaboration, honours individuals making a local impact, and actively engages our partners and broader community.



## Participant Testimonials

*“...To learn about diverse perspectives and ongoing health-related research and programs, this is the conference for you”*

*“We are lucky to have such a high-quality scientific conference so easily accessible, affordable, and relevant.”*

*“Worth attending and inspiring to see all the young researchers”*



## Overall Rating:



4.2/5  
SD = 0.7

**330**  
Total Attendees

**\$2,000**  
Student Awards Given

**120**  
Poster Presentations

**45**  
Oral Presentations



**10**  
**L.E.A.R.N.**  
LIVED EXPERIENCE ACCELERATING RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE  
Attendees

Thank you to our sponsors!



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



**3,901**  
Followers\*



**195,012**  
Social Media  
Reach\*

\*Across all social media platforms (X, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn)

**29**

Events Hosted

**20**

Outreach Events  
Attended

**7**

WE-SPARK Interns  
Trained

In year 6, WE-SPARK **hosted 29 events** and **supported 20 outreach** events advocating for the importance of research and translating its impacts on the community. These efforts reached over **6,200 people**. On social media, **@wesparkhealth** continued to engage the community across platforms, with a combined **reach of over 195,000**. Critical to our success are the student interns who created new outreach activities, advanced knowledge translation, and worked collaboratively to establish a community newsletter.



Event photos can be found at: [wesparkhealth.com/gallery](https://wesparkhealth.com/gallery)

# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



## TRANSFORMING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CARE THROUGH OUTREACH

*A new model of intensive care supports complex mental health needs of children in Windsor-Essex*

### Research Team: Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare

Dr. DJ MacNeil	Kara Hayes	Tammy Calic
Dr. Jennifer Voth	Rame Marie	Stacy Slobodnick
Leslee Ward	Heidi Cox	Tammy Drazilov
Kyle Williamson	Kelly Massender	

The Regional Children's Centre at Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare has launched Ontario's first Assertive Community Treatment program for children (ACT-C), piloting a new model of care for youth aged 6 to 12 with complex mental health needs. This first-of-its-kind program delivers intensive, individualized support in the home or community—offering multiple weekly visits from a transdisciplinary team of therapists and child and youth workers.

ACT-C is addressing urgent local needs. With Windsor-Essex facing high waitlists for institutional care, ACT-C has already supported over 50 families and helped children re-integrate into school settings, reducing reliance on emergency services. The program aims to expand access, improve functioning, and transition families to less intensive care while keeping children connected to their homes, schools, and communities.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/windsor/article/hotel-dieu-grace-healthcare-expands-youth-mental-health-care-with-first-of-its-kind-program/>

## IMPROVING BREAST CANCER TREATMENT RESISTANCE

*Local pilot tests early intervention to boost treatment response in breast cancer*



### Research Team:

<b>Windsor Regional Hospital</b>	<b>University of Windsor</b>
Dr. Rasna Gupta	Dr. Lisa Porter
Dr. Caroline Hamm	Dr. Bre-Anne Fifield
Dr. Kristen Gyetvai	Dr. Munir Rahim
Alexandra Shoust	Dr. Elizabeth Fidalgo da Silva

Hormone receptor-positive (HR+) breast cancer represents a large share of breast cancer diagnoses. While endocrine therapies have improved outcomes, resistance remains a significant challenge. In this WE-SPARK-funded pilot project, WE-SPARK members from Windsor Regional Hospital and the University of Windsor are collaborating to test whether starting treatment with ribociclib, a CDK4/6 inhibitor typically used in advanced stages, earlier in care can enhance sensitivity to other therapies and reduce resistance.

The study involves 5–10 local patients who received ribociclib prior to surgery. Post-surgery tumour tissue and blood samples are analyzed to evaluate changes in immune cell infiltration and cellular senescence. The findings will provide crucial early data for future clinical trials and may lead to new combination therapies that improve long-term outcomes for HR+ breast cancer patients.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.wesparkhealth.com/news-633/research-partnership-aims-to-enhance-outcomes-for-breast-cancer-patients>

# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



## BRINGING CANCER CARE CLOSER TO HOME

*Rural satellite clinic improves access and reduces treatment burden for cancer patients*

**Research Team:  
Erie Shores HealthCare**

Dr. Munira Sultana  
Matt Bessey  
Alicia Lutz  
Deepa Taneja Chawla

**University of Windsor**

Huzafa Hyde  
**McMaster University**  
Nahiyah Sayeed  
**University of Limerick**  
Nusaibah Tahsin

**Transform SSO**

Kyle Shafer

To address the challenges rural patients face when traveling long distances for cancer treatment, Erie Shores HealthCare, in collaboration with the Erie St. Clair Regional Cancer Program, established a satellite systemic therapy clinic in Leamington, Ontario. This fully integrated model allows patients to receive chemotherapy and supportive care closer to home, significantly reducing travel time, psychosocial stress, and caregiver burden.

Since its launch, the clinic has provided timely treatment, enhanced patient comfort, improved quality of life, and strengthened continuity of care. Patients report high satisfaction, describing the clinic as “life-changing” for both themselves and their families. This model offers a sustainable, scalable solution for rural cancer care delivery that could be adapted to other communities facing similar geographic and resource challenges.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.fortunejournals.com/articles/cancer-care-closer-to-home-erie-shores-healthcare-experience.html>

## ADVANCING UNIVERSAL SCHOOL NUTRITION



*Local project supports Canada’s move toward national school food programs*

**Research Team:  
St. Clair College**

Dr. Kyle Jackson  
Beckie Berlasty  
Dr. Kathryn Markham-Petro

Dr. Alexandra Frabotta  
AnnaMaria Lopez

After securing a NSERC CCSIF grant, St. Clair College’s Research & Innovation team partnered with Immaculate Conception Catholic School and community organizations to pilot the Healthy and Hot School Lunch Program. Over three months, approximately 300 students received hot, nutritious lunches every Tuesday and Thursday, paired with bi-weekly food literacy lessons. Early feedback—including classroom cheers at meal delivery and family “food passports”—shows improved student engagement, cultural inclusivity, and enhanced focus in class.

As part of a broader province-wide initiative, this project provides a real-world model of multi-sectoral collaboration that supports student wellbeing, academic success, and long-term health equity. With the federal government launching consultations on a pan-Canadian school food policy, researchers hope this locally-driven model will contribute valuable evidence to inform national policy development.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.stclaircollege.ca/news/2024/healthy-and-hot-school-lunch-program-launched-st-clair-college-research-and-innovation>

# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



## HOUSING IS HEALTH CARE

*A Windsor physician brings health services directly to the shelter system*

### Research Team:

**Windsor Shelter Health**  
Dr. Jennifer Bondy  
**Erie Shores HealthCare**  
Neelu Seghal

**Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare**  
Dr. Jennifer Voth  
**St. Clair College**  
Rose Plantus  
Hali Sitarz

### University of Windsor

Dr. Adrian Guta  
Dr. Kathy Pfaff  
Dr. Debbie Sheppard-Lemoine  
**Windsor Regional Hospital**  
Jonathan Foster  
Grace Park

### Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry

Temitole Akintola  
Karen Michael  
Alex Zhou  
**AbbVie**  
David Hallett

In response to rising homelessness in Windsor-Essex, Dr. Jennifer Bondy launched a collaborative research initiative to address the intersection of housing and health. By convening local frontline workers and service providers through a WE-SPARK Think Tank, the team identified a key gap: the need for accessible, on-site healthcare in shelters.

With \$200,000 in provincial funding secured through the Canadian Mental Health Association Windsor-Essex, the team is embedding medical professionals directly into local shelters—reducing access barriers, improving continuity of care, and supporting clients with complex needs such as wound care, mental health, and harm reduction. The project is transforming how healthcare is delivered to people experiencing homelessness, emphasizing dignity, trust, and long-term impact.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.wesparkhealth.com/news-609/housing-is-healthcare-this-physician-thinks-she-has-the-key-to-solving-homelessness-in-windsor-essex>

## A SMART SENSOR THAT TREATS CANCER

*Windsor researchers are developing implantable technology to detect and treat brain cancer*



### Research Team:

**University of Windsor**  
Dr. Simon Rondeau-Gagné  
Dr. John Trant  
Dr. Balraj Jhavar

**Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare**  
Dr. Jennifer Voth  
**University of British Columbia**  
Dr. Konrad Walus

**University of Victoria**  
Stephanie Willerth

Imagine a tiny sensor that not only detects the return of brain cancer, but dissolves to release treatment right at the source. That's the future Dr. Simon Rondeau-Gagné and his team are working toward. This project received \$250,000 through the New Frontiers in Research Fund and builds on earlier WE-SPARK-funded work using polymer nanoparticles to target hard-to-reach tumour cells in glioblastoma.

The interdisciplinary team includes Dr. John Trant (UWindsor), Dr. Jennifer Voth (Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare), and Dr. Konrad Walus (UBC). Together, they aim to ensure this innovative technology not only works in the lab but can be adopted in real clinical settings—offering a new, targeted approach to one of the most aggressive forms of brain cancer.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.uwindsor.ca/dailynews/2024-06-04/project-advance-sensor-combining-cancer-detection-and-treatment>

# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

## BUILDING A STRONGER RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

*Five-year renewal amplifies WE-SPARK's impact across the region*



On April 28, 2025, WE-SPARK Health Institute renewed its partnership with Erie Shores HealthCare, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, St. Clair College, University of Windsor, and Windsor Regional Hospital through a five-year Memorandum of Understanding. Since our launch in March 2020, WE-SPARK has become a central hub for health research excellence in the region, catalyzing numerous research collaborations and supporting innovative projects across sectors.

This renewal ensures continued momentum for discovery, innovation, and enhanced patient care, strengthening the region's capacity to contribute to transformative health research that benefits both local communities and the broader Canadian health landscape.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.wesparkhealth.com/news-667/we-spark-partnership-renewal-paves-the-way-for-continued-health-research-excellence>

## YEAR IN REVIEW





March 21, 2025, 3:30 - 4:30 PM | University of Windsor



# OUR TEAM

Our team is comprised of dedicated and passionate people who are committed to working together to enhance the health, well-being, and care of people in our community.

## STAFF & RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

**Dr. Dora Cavallo-Medved**

*Interim Director*

**Karen Metcalfe**

*Assistant Director*

**Kristin Bradshaw**

*Administrative Assistant*

**Jillian Calandra**

*Translational Research Associate*

**Mohamed Farjalla**

*Research Associate - REDCap*

**Jessica Flammia**

*Health Research Associate*

**Genesis Flores**

*Knowledge Translation Research Associate*

**Dr. Danielle Gyemi**

*Research Associate - NUCLEUS*

**Cathy Mombourquette**

*Special Projects - Media Relations*

## INTERNS/STUDENTSHIPS

**Sophie Crowe**

*Community Health Research Associate*

**Selina Grado**

*Health Research & Community Engagement*

**Sarah Khan**

*Community Health Research Associate*

**Vanessa Riolo**

*Patient & Community Engagement*

**Nikita Rybkin**

*REDCap Intern*

**Muhammed Saad Anaiakar**

*Master of Applied Computing Intern*

**Norah Tracy**

*Social Media Content Developer*

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Robert Gordon**

*University of Windsor  
President & Vice-Chancellor*



**Kristin Kennedy**

*Erie Shores HealthCare  
President & CEO*



**Bill Marra**

*Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare  
President & CEO*



**Karen Riddell**

*Windsor Regional Hospital  
Acting President & CEO*



**Michael Silvaggi**

*St. Clair College  
President*



WE-SPARK Staff, Cheers to Hope (November 7, 2024)





Statistics reflect the WE-SPARK 2024/25 fiscal year ending on April 30, 2025.

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-  [@wesparkhealth](https://twitter.com/wesparkhealth)
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-  [@wesparkhealth](https://www.linkedin.com/company/wesparkhealth)