



The Canadian **Donation and Transplantation** Research Program

Programme de recherche en **don et transplantation** du Canada

APRIL 2024 — MARCH 2025

ANNUAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Canadian Donation and Transplantation Research Program (CDTRP) was founded with the goal of bringing together our country's diverse donation and transplantation research communities, integrating expertise in the health, natural, and social sciences. Now in its 12th year, the CDTRP continues its commitment to increasing access to organ, tissue, and cell transplants while focusing on long-term solutions for Canadian transplant recipients. Prioritizing the development of new knowledge and the mobilization of knowledge from research to action, the CDTRP works collaboratively with over 400 investigators, trainees, collaborators, patient, family, donor (PFD) partners, and knowledge users from 37 different sites across Canada. The CDTRP proudly fosters a community that inspires the research needed to ensure every donation opportunity is fulfilled and to enhance the survival and quality of life of Canadians in need of or living with a transplant.

2024-2025 marked another successful year for the CDTRP, with extensive research support, impactful collaborations, and a growing range of initiatives offered to our expanding community. This year's achievements spanned major events, new grants, collaborative projects, and strengthened partnerships across the network, reflecting both the scale of our work and the momentum behind it. With the Research Services Platform's implementation of a new cost-sharing model for research support requests, the CDTRP prioritizes its sustainability. At the same time, the network continues to support tangible progress driven by its members. For example, focusing on systemic equity challenges, Resolution 2024 was passed by the Union of British Columbia Chiefs calling for increased access to organ and tissue donation and transplantation for First Nations communities in BC. The concept for this resolution arose at a CDTRP-supported Café Scientifique event hosted by Dr. Caroline Tait. In December 2024, the CDTRP was pleased to host its 11th Annual Scientific Meeting in Calgary, AB (see page 15). This hybrid event welcomed 111 in-person registrants, 139 virtual registrants, and 30 speakers. The meeting proves time and time again to inspire community building, collaboration, new ideas, and change which are necessary to advance our organization's goals. In the 2024 Research Innovation Grant competition, the CDTRP and supporting partners were thrilled to fund eight new Research Innovation Grant projects led by dedicated and visionary investigators. While these were standout moments, our community achieved much more, as detailed in this report. As the CDTRP enters its 13th year in spring 2025, we are excited to continue supporting the research community by building equitable infrastructure that benefits researchers, partners, and patients alike.



2024-2025 AT A GLANCE

13 New investigators
from 11 institutions

234
Total investigators

18 New trainees

115
Total trainees

15 New patient, family,
donor (PFD) partners

106
Total PFD partners

23 **New projects supported**
36 active research projects with PFD involvement
101 total active projects

60 **Letters of support provided for grant applications**
\$407,394 in CDTRP support linked to successful grants of **\$26,619,111**



37 Universities &
Research Institutes



>100 Partner
Organizations

FIVE RESEARCH THEMES: HIGHLIGHTS & IMPACT

<p>1</p>	<p>Improve a Culture of Donation</p> <p>Theme 1 focuses on methods in our hospitals, government, and society for a culture where the benefits of organ, tissue and cell donation are valued by stakeholders across the donation process.</p>	<p>6 Letters of Support</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Inform Universal Practices for Donation</p> <p>Theme 2 focuses on research in donation sciences, to increase the benefits of transplant created from individuals, living or deceased, who are able to donate.</p>	<p>1 Innovation Grants 2 Newly Funded Projects 7 Letters of Support</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Engineer and Allocate Better Grafts</p> <p>Theme 3 focuses on research to modify and manipulate the graft as well as the recipient before transplant to improve short- and long-term outcomes.</p>	<p>2 Innovation Grants 4 Newly Funded Projects 10 Letters of Support</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Tailor an Optimal Immune System for Each Patient</p> <p>Theme 4 works to address the inadequacy of medications and their toxic side-effects.</p>	<p>1 Innovation Grants 4 Newly Funded Projects 16 Letters of Support</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Restore Long-Term Health</p> <p>Theme 5 to improve a return to expected levels of function and fulfillment.</p>	<p>4 Innovation Grants 3 Newly Funded Projects 10 Letters of Support</p>

FOUR PLATFORMS: GUIDANCE AND TOOLS TO SUPPORT PROJECTS

Research Services Platform

The CDTRP Research Services Platform supports the advancement of high-quality research in donation and transplantation by maximizing the effectiveness of research teams. 2024-2025, CDTRP led grants had a success rate of 42% by value, significantly higher than the average success rate of most grant competitions. This reflects the outstanding science and innovation of our researchers, whose work continues to raise the bar in the field. CDTRP's collaborative framework further strengthens these applications, with peer reviewers increasingly recognizing the added value of being part of the network. We increasingly see peer reviewers highlighting CDTRP support as a strength of applications. By collaborating with investigators nationwide, the CDTRP delivers high-value support including in grant development, Patient, Family, and Donor Partnerships, Data Safety Monitoring Board, research management, knowledge mobilization, communications, and research-related event management.

In 2024-2025 the CDTRP Research Services Platform provided 49 letters of support for investigators. The platform is actively seeking feedback from researchers about the support they find most helpful and how the new model is working.

Indigenous Health Equity Platform

In its second year, the Indigenous Health Equity Platform made substantial progress under the leadership of Dr. Caroline Tait, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health Equity and Inclusion. With a focus on improving transplant medicine and deepening community engagement, Dr. Tait, supported by the Platform, submitted two CIHR Planning and Dissemination Grants, one Project Grant, and collaboratively contributed to numerous other applications from CDTRP members. A key milestone was the passing of Resolution 2024 by the Union of British Columbia Chiefs in June. This resolution, which calls for increased access to treatment for end-stage organ failure and transplantation for First Nations in B.C., was influenced by Indigenous engagement efforts and the Café Scientifique event that CDTRP and Dr. Tait hosted in February 2024. The International Indigenous ODT Consortium also expanded its work, with the Platform organizing five additional meetings that brought together researchers, clinicians, health professionals, and PFD partners from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Another major achievement was the launch of Sacred Gift, an animation and educational resource designed to initiate conversations about living donation in Indigenous communities. Released at the 2024 CDTRP Annual Scientific Meeting, the resource has now been translated into Cree, thanks to funding from Canadian Blood Services.

Education Platform

In 2024-2025, the CDTRP Education and Career Development Platform, co-led by Dr. Jonathan Choy, Dr. Francis Migneault, and Ms. Ke Fan Bei, expanded its programming to enhance training and engagement opportunities across the network. At the Annual Scientific Meeting, the Platform organized and hosted a well-received poster session highlighting trainee research. It also delivered the final session of the Cross-talking: Disseminating and Co-Creating Research in Transplantation series, designed to build knowledge translation skills among participants. Five Rising Star Awards, each valued at \$1,000, were presented to trainees in recognition of their abstract excellence, showcasing outstanding contributions across CDTRP's themes. Looking ahead, the Education Platform will continue to improve the structure and accessibility of training opportunities, enhance clarity around available resources, and deepen collaboration with partner organizations to expand support for trainees and programming.

PFD Partnership Platform

As a key resource for the research community, the CDTRP PFD Partnership Platform continues to serve as a central hub for strategic guidance to principal investigators and the meaningful integration of patient, family, and donor (PFD) voices into research. In 2024–2025, the Platform supported 36 research projects seeking PFD engagement. In response to growing demand, the Platform expanded its leadership team, welcoming Sandra Holdsworth (Theme 5 co-lead and liver transplant recipient), Lindsay Thompson (Theme 4 co-lead and stem cell transplant recipient), and Dr. Shaifali Sandal (Associate Professor and transplant nephrologist). Their unique perspectives and insights will inform new strategies, guidance, and tools to support the research community. A key milestone this year was hosting the 5th Annual PFD Research Forum, a space to spotlight collaborative projects and build community. Additionally, 15 new PFD partners joined CDTRP, reflecting the Platform's continued growth and impact across the network.



At CDTRP, meaningful patient engagement has meant being involved as an equal partner from the moment I joined, and most recently throughout the life of the TREAT-COVID project. On the project as a patient partner, I have contributed my lived experience to help shape how the therapeutic, mental health, and macro- and micro-economic impacts of COVID-19 on transplant recipients and their caregivers should be understood and studied. My role most recently has included informing recruitment approaches, and serving on the data quality committee during the data collection process. In this role, I have helped to adjust data collection and data-set re-prioritizing strategies in response to recruitment challenges, and engaged with local research coordinators, ensuring the research remains grounded in what truly matters to transplant recipients and their caregivers. In addition, I have co-authored an integrated knowledge translation paper to be submitted for publication called ***'Co-Design in Action: Lessons Learned from Patient and Public Involvement in a National Integrated Knowledge Translation Strategy for Transplant Recipients During the COVID-19 Pandemic.'***

– Rienk de Vries

FIVE CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES: HIGHLIGHTS & IMPACT

1	Sex and gender, anti-racism, and anti-ableism	3	Newly Funded Projects
		19	Letters of Support
2	Pediatric, adolescent, and elderly populations	3	Newly Funded Projects
		15	Letters of Support
3	Indigenous Populations	1	Newly Funded Project
		4	Letters of Support
4	Policy, commercialization, and knowledge transfer	5	Newly Funded Projects
		28	Letters of Support
5	Patient, family, and donor partnership	7	Newly Funded Projects
		29	Letters of Support

*Active projects can fall under multiple cross-cutting priorities.
Not all active projects fall under a cross-cutting priority.

ADVANCES TOWARDS OUR GOALS

CDTRP Clinical Trials Group

In partnership with Accelerating Clinical Trials (ACT), the CDTRP Clinical Trials Group is now in its second year of activities. The group is a segment of the CDTRP dedicated to clinical trials that drives supportive collaborations among early to senior-career investigators, trainees, research coordinators, and PFDs to optimize and increase the number of randomized clinical trials (RCTs) in donation and transplantation. Our ultimate goal is to generate high-quality scientific evidence for donation and transplantation practices in Canada while upholding national standards for clinical trial research networks. Currently, we have 43 members (32 principal investigators, 5 research coordinators, 1 postdoc, 1 trainee, 4 PFDs) from six provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, and Nova Scotia). We are currently exploring potential collaborations with the US and UK.

The first two years of the CDTRP Clinical Trials Group has garnered active engagement with clinical trialists across Canada. This year, we completed a needs assessment from clinical trialists, 3 virtual meetings with discussions about RCTs, developed our preliminary vision and mission, and developed materials related to grant opportunities and ongoing RCTs in Canada. During the 11th Annual Scientific Meeting, the group planned and executed a dedicated session which included six speakers (5 clinical trialists and 1 lawyer expert in contract regulation), 30 attendees (16 in person), and partnership with RCT Training Platforms (CANTRAIN, CANSTAT, CAN-Tap-Talent, CBITN, Health Data Research Network (HDRN), Canada Pragmatic Trials Training Program, and Impact).

In 2025, the group will continue prioritizing the development of evidence-based documents as well as the planning and execution of virtual meetings for collaboration. We are also establishing a peer-review group to support the development of high-impact RCT proposals in donation and transplantation.



TREAT-COVID STUDY: HIGHLIGHTS & PROGRESS

In 2023, the CDTRP launched the patient-centered study entitled **TREAT-COVID** (Addressing critical issues and **TheRapeutics Emerging in trAnsplanTation for COVID-19**). Four years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, transplant recipients continue to face a high risk of severe outcomes. For transplant recipients surviving COVID-19 and experiencing the extreme stress associated with the pandemic; little is known about effective strategies to support recovery of quality of life. Transplant recipients typically do not respond well to vaccination, preventing severe disease in this population requires alternate strategies.

The TREAT-COVID study focuses on three key areas: (1) evaluate how safe and effective COVID-19 prevention and treatment methods are for transplant patients, (2) assess the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on immunocompromised patient and families, and (3) analyze the economic burden and value of emerging and existing pre-prophylaxis and therapeutic options for COVID-19 in transplant patients. Collaborating with 11 transplant centers across the country, the study aims to develop a national health emergency plan that will inform improved policies and enhance patient health outcomes.

Now in its second year, the TREAT-COVID study has accomplished several key objectives. With participant well-being as the top priority, all 11 sites successfully opened for recruitment, reaching a total enrollment of 805 participants (662 transplant recipients and 143 family members or caregivers). In addition, three manuscripts have been submitted, one of which is now published, each addressing a distinct aspect of the project: (1) implementing a national knowledge translation strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) assessing mental health before and after the onset of the pandemic among transplant patients (Fadlallah et al., 2025), and (3) evaluating the value of emerging and existing pre-exposure prophylaxis and therapeutic options for COVID-19. Lastly, in December 2024, the CDTRP hosted its third TREAT-COVID National Prioritization Forum in Calgary, Alberta, to engage the transplant community and identify their top priorities, informing the direction of the research for all involved.



Fadlallah, J., Shah, V., Samudio, A., Blydt-Hansen, T., Mucsi, I., & Canadian Donation and Transplantation Research Program (2025). Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Onset in Solid Organ Transplant Recipients: Canadian Repeated Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of clinical medicine*, 14(14), 4920. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm14144920>

SACRED GIFT

2025 International Society of Nephrology Film Community Best Film Winner!

This year, we were pleased to announce that Sacred Gift was the 2025 International Society of Nephrology Film Community Best Film winner!

Produced, conceptualized, and funded by Dr. Caroline Tait, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health Equity and Inclusion and Professor in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, and animated by Sean Muir (First Nations, Indigenous Story Studio, Canada), this film brings to life the remarkable journey of two First Nations brothers, Kevin and Craig Settee, and their journey with kidney disease and living organ donation.

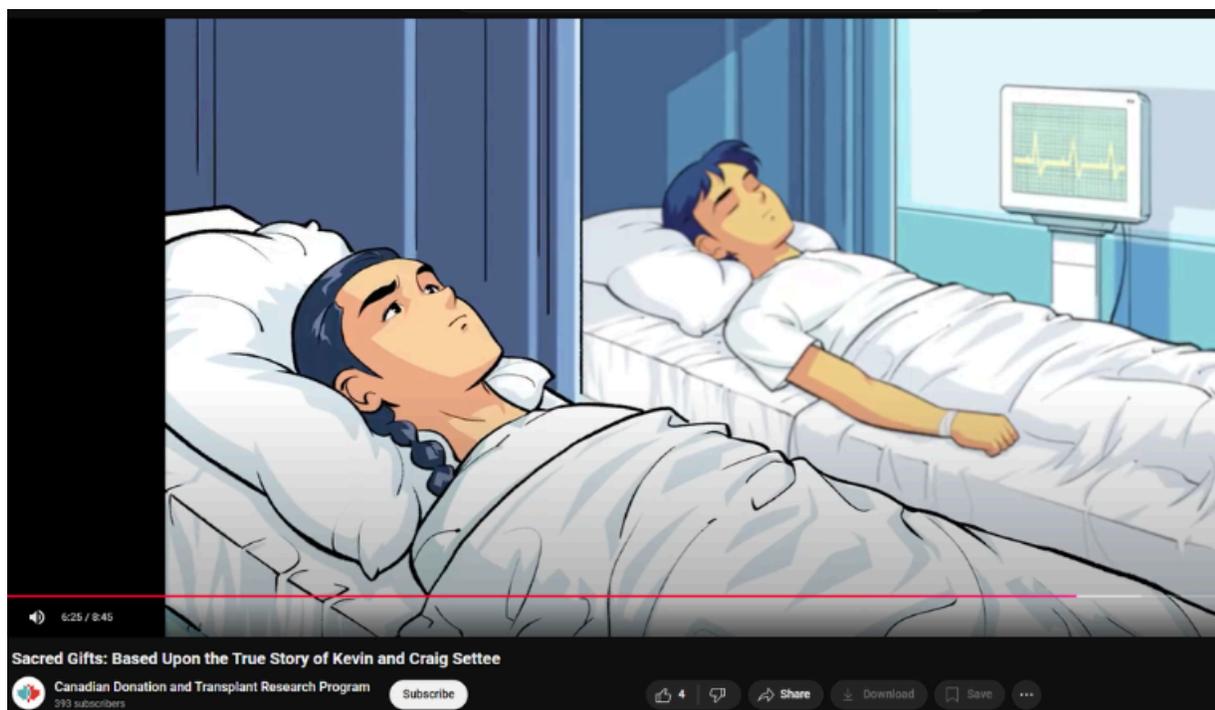
While the animation does not directly address the systemic equity challenges many Indigenous patient, families, or caregivers experience, it represents a step toward greater inclusion in the conversation. It was submitted for the WCN award to encourage conversations about the need for Indigenous representation in international conferences like the World Congress of Nephrology (WCN).

Through funding provided by Canadian Blood Services, the animation is being translated into Cree. Dr. Tait remains committed to securing funding to translate the animation into additional Indigenous languages.

For Kevin and Craig Settee, Sacred Gift was not just a story, it was a journey that allowed reflection and healing, highlighting the importance of culture and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in healthcare. Their experience underscores the need for deeper understanding, respect, and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in research and care.

“It was a combination of western medicine and our traditional culture I think that really helped keep me alive”
– Kevin Settee

“[...] we worked with our traditional healers... it was very important for our physical, emotional, and mental wellness... was an important part of their journey...”
– Craig Settee



CDTRP COMMUNITY FUNDING SPOTLIGHT

Two grants awarded under CIHR team grant opportunity:
Intervention Trial in Inflammation for Chronic Conditions



Dr. Patricia Gongal | CDTRP Executive Director
"A Knowledge Mobilization Hub for the Canadian Inflammation Research Community – Knowledge Mobilization Hub Grant"



Dr. Megan Levings | BC Children's Hospital RI
"Allogeneic Regulatory T Cell Therapy to Prevent Graft-versus-Host Disease (GVHD) – Research Team Grant"

As part of the competition, Dr. Megan Levings and her team were awarded a team grant for the groundbreaking project ***Allogeneic Regulatory T Cell Therapy to Prevent Graft-versus-Host Disease (GVHD)***. The project will conduct a clinical trial in humans to determine if thymus T cells are a safe and effective way to prevent chronic inflammation after bone marrow transplantation. The launch of this trial represents an exciting milestone for CDTRP, as the project originated during the early days of the network with a focus on basic immunology and methods development. Now, it has progressed to a clinical trial in humans—a step toward a potential new therapy for GVHD.

A process called immune tolerance allows the immune system to fend off dangerous foreign substances yet leave the body's own tissues untouched. When immune tolerance fails, the resulting chronic inflammation can lead to many different diseases including cardiovascular and autoimmune diseases as well as transplant rejection. As there are no medications that promote or replicate immune tolerance, many patients are on long-term immune suppressants that do not cure and have toxic side-effects. The goal of the Levings team is to move beyond symptom management for inflammatory disease and find safe, long-term solutions. They have been working towards this goal by developing a therapy that takes advantage of a specialized type of white blood cell, called regulatory T cells, or Tregs, which suppress undesired immune responses, promote tissue healing and help re-establish a balanced immune system. They now aim to conduct a clinical trial to determine if thymus Tregs are a safe and effective way to prevent chronic inflammation after bone marrow (immune system) transplantation, when the donor immune system has the potential to attack healthy tissue in the recipient. Once the safety and effectiveness of thymic Tregs in the context of transplantation are established, off-the-shelf Treg therapy could be extended to many other inflammatory diseases.

In 2024 the CDTRP team, led by Executive Director, Dr. Patricia Gongal, was the recipient of a Knowledge Mobilization Hub grant for the project ***A Knowledge Mobilization Hub for the Canadian Inflammation Research Community***. Building on CDTRP's expertise and infrastructure in Knowledge Mobilization, the KM Hub is supporting the four funded project teams to improve the quality and relevance of results for knowledge users and accelerate improving care for patients.

The KM Hub will offer a broad scope of services such as KM planning, event planning, graphic design and communication, PFD engagement planning and coordination, partnership building, and support to engage specialists in regulatory affairs, media, and arts. Its mandate is to support the translation of the four intervention trials (including one led by the Levings team, below) for better prevention and care policies, practices, and services to address inflammation across Canada.



MAJOR EVENTS IN 2024-2025

2024 Patient, Family, and Donor Research Forum

The Canadian Donation and Transplantation Research Program (CDTRP) hosted the 5th edition of the Patient, Family and Donor Research Forum on June 13 & 14, 2024. The Forum serves as a space for building capacity in patient engagement, bringing together researchers, patients, families, donor (PFD) partners, and trainees. Through a combination of presentations, workshops, and priority-setting discussions, it fosters collaboration and shared learning.

This year's forum invited 22 speakers to present 11 topics covering two key blocks over the two-day event. The speakers included researchers or professionals with expertise in patient engagement and patient-orientated research. Speakers also included patient partners from across Canada with a variety of experiences in patient-oriented research.

Learning Outcomes

- Advance multi-disciplinary collaborations in donation and transplantation research, with a focus on innovative clinical trials.
- Support investigators, trainees, and PFD partners in understanding and embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in their patient engagement strategy and research methods.
- Enhance understanding of cultural safety and employ effective patient engagement strategies tailored to underrepresented communities.



Block 1:
Implementing Patient, Family,
and Donor Research Partnerships
to Shape Clinical Trials



Block 2:
Advancing Equity, Diversity,
and Inclusion in Donation
and Transplantation





Events like the PFD Forum provide a vehicle to engage and support all stakeholders - researchers, medical staff, patients, donors, caregivers, and others, in the research process. It's critical that research in transplantation, among other disciplines, includes the patient/family/donor voice, especially from underrepresented groups. It's just too easy to conduct research in a bubble, without including those for whom the outcome of that research most greatly impacts in the design and execution of the research. I expect that researchers participating in the forum will benefit from the knowledge and experiences of the presenters who have either already included PFD partners in their research, or who can offer practical solutions to doing so.

— Leonard Hodder,
PFD Partner and Forum Co-Chair



The PFD forum is a valuable opportunity to bridge the perspectives, wants and needs of patients, families and donors with those of researchers, clinicians, trainees, and policy makers. By unifying the voices of pertinent partners, we can ensure that scientific inquiries and clinical initiatives are more likely to result in improved patient outcomes and experiences.

— Dr. Ruth Sapir-Pichhadze, Co-Chair

The 2024 PFD Forum was supported and promoted by:



11th ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING

The Canadian Donation and Transplantation Research Program (CDTRP) was pleased to host its 11th Annual Scientific Meeting in a hybrid format on December 3-4, 2024, in Calgary, Alberta. The hybrid event brought together the national research community for two days of vibrant discussions and collaborative learning focused on advancing donation and transplantation research. This year's ASM welcomed 111 in-person registrants, 139 virtual registrants, and 30 speakers.

The meeting began with an overview of the CDTRP network's accomplishments and work over the past year presented by Dr. Patricia Gongal, Executive Director, and Dr. Lori West, Scientific Director. Three concurrent sessions followed highlighting advances in basic science within the donation and transplantation field, Indigenous data sovereignty and distinctions among Indigenous communities, and the need to foster a collaborative community to advance randomized clinical trials in donation and transplantation.

The remainder of day one continued with hybrid blocks exploring Theme 1: Improve a Culture of Donation and Theme 2: Inform Universal Practices in Donation. These sessions included a panel discussion addressing the controversies in deceased donation with Drs. Andreas Kramer, Marat Slessarev, and Mypinder Sekhon. Day one ended with poster presentations where attendees discussed new results and insights with 17 emerging and established researchers.

Day two opened with "*Sacred Gift: Based on the True Story of Craig and Kevin Settee.*" The session, named after a poignant video of the same name, gave the stage to brothers Kevin and Craig Settee to share their experiences as kidney transplant recipients and donors, respectively, emphasizing Indigenous cultural integration in organ donation and transplantation. This session emphasized a need for understanding, respect, and inclusion of Indigenous cultures and knowledge in research to ensure care is culturally safe and appropriate for all patients.

CDTRP hosted its recurring national COVID-19 Prioritization Session which explored COVID-19's continuing impact on transplant communities. Dr. Dima Kabbani presented TREAT-COVID study progress, and Mr. Jad Fadlallah (supervisor Dr. Istvan Mucsi) presented "Emotional distress & physical function post-COVID-19 pandemic onset in solid organ transplant recipients", while Dr. Kednapa Thavorn discussed health economics modelling for COVID-19 therapies. Day two concluded with the Rising Star Trainee Awards funded by CDTRP, CIHR, and Simon Fraser University. The awards recognized the highest-ranked abstracts submitted the Annual Scientific Meeting by providing five \$1,000 trainee travel awards.





The CDTRP's 11th Annual Scientific Meeting was supported by:



CROSS-TALKING SERIES

Disseminating and Co-Creating Research in Transplantation

The Cross-Talking Series, which concluded at the 2024 Annual Scientific Meeting, had the primary goal to enable CDTRP's trainees to communicate complex immunology research findings in language that is clear, accessible, and impactful for the lay audience. The series brought together trainees with patient, family, and donor (PFD) partners, to bridge the gap between technical research and plain language understanding. Participants learned the foundational principles of immunology and the significance of tailoring their messages to resonate with diverse audiences.

The series began with two training webinars designed to equip participants with the tools and knowledge to craft effective lay summaries:

- Immunology 101: Principles of Immune Detection and Activation presented by Dr. Jonathan Choy, Professor of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry at Simon Fraser University, and Ms. Ke Fan Bei, a 4th-year Immunology PhD student at the University of Toronto.
- How to Write a Lay Summary That People Can Understand led by Ms. Sherrie Logan, a public health professional, PFD partner, and consultant with CDTRP, and Ms. Elaine Yong, PFD partner and Manager of Communications and Community Engagement at BC Transplant.

The training culminated in a collaborative, in-person session. Nine teams, composed of trainees and PFD partners, worked together to co-create lay summaries of trainee abstracts, ensuring they were engaging and easy to understand, and highlighted the importance of having PFDs in mind. The event provided a platform for participants to showcase their updated abstracts, demonstrating the transformative potential of co-creation and effective communication. It also provided an opportunity for researchers and PFDs to engage with each other and build meaningful relationships.

The Cross-Talking Series showcased the strength of collaboration within our community. By fostering synergy between trainees and PFD partners, the series emphasized the importance of co-creation in producing scientifically rigorous yet widely accessible communication.

This series was made possible through funding provided by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Planning and Dissemination Grant.

A special thanks goes to our leaders, Ms. Ke Fan Bei, Dr. Jonathan Choy, Ms. Sherrie Logan, and Ms. Elaine Yong, whose guidance and expertise were instrumental in making this initiative successful. Your dedication has set a new benchmark for knowledge-sharing and inclusive communication.

“This session was the most memorable part of my ASM experience. I look forward to more PFD-trainee collaborative sessions in the future.”

— Trainee

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

Since its inception, the CDTRP has valued diversity, equity, and inclusion from both an organizational (e.g. membership) and a research lens (e.g. supporting health equity). We strive to integrate equity considerations into all of the work we do. CDTRP strives to be an organization where everyone with something to contribute to donation and transplantation research feels they belong.

Our ability to monitor diversity in our membership continues to evolve and the data quality continues to improve. Several years ago, we implemented standard demographic questions for new members and Research Innovation Grant applicants. Our membership is over 500 individuals, and we have demographic information on approximately half.

- Our membership is composed of 62% women, 37% men, and 1% minority genders (agender, bigender/multigender, non-binary, and other genders).
- 8% of all CDTRP members identify as having a disability. Most individuals with disabilities are PFD partners; only 3% of researchers/trainees identify as having a disability.
- The CDTRP membership is very diverse in terms of race: 45% of CDTRP members are members of racialized groups, compared to approximately 25% of the general Canadian population.

Having a diverse membership means the potential is there to draw on a mosaic of experiences, perspectives, and ideas. In terms of translating this potential into organizational effectiveness and research impact, however, diversity is necessary but not sufficient. We need community-grounded leadership, aligned teams of researchers and PFD partners, and resources.

In 2024-2025, we continued our focus on community partnerships, leveraging and supporting the efforts of individuals and groups that have been working to advance health equity for decades. A number of these partnerships are evident in this report, such as CDTRP's collaboration with the Caribbean African Regenerative Medicine initiative (see page 19) and the work of the Indigenous Health Equity Platform (see page 6). Our vision is to steward and sustain these partnerships in the long-term, which will support the development of research projects that better serve the needs priorities of all diverse Canadian donation and transplant communities.



PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering with Industry

Since 2013, Astellas has been a champion in advancing donation and transplant research through its generous support of the CDTRP. Their foundational funding enabled the 2013 launch of the Canadian National Transplant Research Program (CNTRP). In 2018, Astellas partnered with CIHR to transition the CNTRP into the Canadian Donation and Transplantation Research Program (CDTRP), ensuring long-term sustainability. Their ongoing investment has fueled key initiatives, including the Patient, Family, and Donor Partnership Platform, the launch of the CDTRP Patient Portal, and innovative training and research grants. Support from Astellas has also enabled national collaboration through events such as the Annual Scientific Meeting and the Patient and Family Donor Forum. Astellas has invested over \$2 million into the CDTRP building research capacity, empowering patients, and driving innovation. This longstanding partnership continues to help CDTRP deliver meaningful impact to our community.

Partnering with the CST

Since 2013, CDTRP has partnered with the Canadian Society of Transplantation (CST) on numerous initiatives to support research and innovation that addresses barriers in donation and transplantation. In 2023, CDTRP collaborated with CST to continue offering joint awards for researchers with the best lay summaries of their work at the CST Annual Scientific Meeting. The adjudication process, led by a committee that included 11 CDTRP PFD reviewers, involved 44 hours of PFD partner review time to assess 125 abstracts. The 2024 awardees were Sarjana Alam for "Defining optimal cryopreservation conditions to develop an improved regulatory T cell cryopreservation protocol for tolerogenic cell therapy in transplantation," Olivia Ganescu for "Liver transplantation outcomes within the practice of medical assistance in dying (MAiD): a retrospective cohort study," and Seychelle Yohanna for "Consensus Conference to Define a High-Quality Living Kidney Donor Evaluation." The awards were announced at the 2024 CST Annual Scientific Meeting in October in Montréal, Québec.

Partnership Development with CARM

CDTRP is partnering with the Caribbean African Regenerative Medicine (CARM) group to develop a strategy aimed at addressing health inequities in donation and transplantation medicine and research among African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) communities. This collaboration resulted in the award of a CIHR Planning and Dissemination Grant, which will support the co-development of an ACB specific framework and the establishment of a PFD advisory group. The goal is to strengthen partnerships, enhance understanding, and create meaningful opportunities for ACB PFDs to shape and prioritize research. As part of this initiative, CDTRP and CARM will co-host a four-part webinar series in 2025–2026 titled *Conversations about Health in Black Communities*. Each webinar will be collaboratively planned and delivered, focusing on issues relevant to ACB health and transplant equity. This work reflects CDTRP's commitment to inclusive and community-driven research partnerships.

Conclusion of the Organ Donation and Transplantation Collaborative

After five years of work to address pan-Canadian issues in the donation and transplantation, the Organ Donation and Transplantation Collaborative has come to an end. Numerous CDTRP leaders were engaged across the suite of working groups, tackling for example, governance, patient advocacy, and the new national data system whose development is underway. As part of its work, the Collaborative enabled funding through Health Canada of several priority projects, including a research and innovation ecosystem map and vision, and the TREAT-COVID research project, both led by CDTRP. With a transition to the new pan-Canadian governance model, CDTRP is looking forward to ensuring that research, innovation, and quality remain at the heart of a high-performing, learning national organ donation and transplantation system.

THE NEXT TEN YEARS OF TRANSFORMING LIVES

In early 2024, the CDTRP, in collaboration with Ontario Health (Trillium Gift of Life Network) and The Kidney Foundation of Canada, launched The Next Ten Years of Transforming Lives Program. This program aims to empower research teams to secure large-scale funding for transformative projects that significantly impact patients, families, and donors, and to leverage and continue investing in the CDTRP's infrastructure. This initiative presents a major opportunity to catalyze innovative research by leveraging collective resources, ensuring researchers are equipped with the support needed to develop competitive, patient-centered funding applications.

The first success for the program came in spring 2025, when the first large-scale application supported through the Transforming Lives Program was awarded a CIHR Team Grant. The application, led by Dr. Mamatha Bhat, included a 200-page package with 29 applicants, 5 Knowledge Users, 24 collaborators, 5 patient partners, 3 grant partners and \$546,830 in matched funding. The proposal ranked 3rd in its pool and was awarded \$2M over five years.

The Next Ten Years of Transforming Lives Grant Development Program provides applicants pursuing large-scale grant funding opportunities (>\$2M) with matched funding and CDTRP's Research Services to support the development of their applications. This includes:

- Up to \$50,000 in matching funds for the project budget to be used for the direct costs of research (equipment, supplies, salaries, travel, etc.). These funds are described as committed match funding in the submitted project budget and will be provided only if the large grant proposal is successful.
- Up to \$15,000 in CDTRP staff time to support development of the project and grant application, including brokering partnerships and collaboration, strategic planning, writing support, and coordination of administrative elements (e.g., CVs, support letters, and signatures).
- CDTRP staff can assist in applying for a planning grant to increase the funding available for proposal development.
- Up to 20 hours (\$1,000) of Patient, Family, Donor partner compensation to apply to the development of the grant application.
- Support to work with CDTRP's partners (foundations, institutions) to assess their interest in pledging additional match funding.



"The Next ten years of Transforming Lives program was instrumental in helping in our successful CIHR Team grant application, given the critical resource it provided for grant development and strategic planning. My sincere thanks to CDTRP for your support - I will be glad to continue our important work to reduce disparities and optimize outcomes for liver transplant recipients!"

— Dr. Mamatha Bhat

CDTRP is proud to partner with the following organizations to provide funding for this program!



Trillium
Gift of Life
Network

RESEARCH INNOVATION GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

The CDTRP and partners were thrilled to announce eight new projects as part of the 2024 Research Innovation Grant competition. These projects, led by inspiring and visionary investigators had a total funding value of \$240,000. The program supports both early-career and established researchers through a peer-review and partnership-based selection process.



Dr. Caroline Lamarche | Université de Montréal
*“Tacrolimus-resistant regulatory T cells
for adoptive immunotherapy”*

Funding Partner: Université de Montréal (UdeM)
Theme: 4 – Tailor an Optimal Immune System for Each Patient

Transplantation save lives. However, patients need to take anti-rejection drugs. Those drugs come with many side effects. For example, they increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, infection and cancer. In the last decade, an alternative to those anti-rejection drugs has emerge. It is the injection of regulatory T cells (Tregs), the good cells of the immune system. We collect white blood cells (immune cells) from a transplant recipient. Then, we isolate the good guys (Tregs) and grow them in a laboratory. Finally, the cells are re-infused to the same patient. This was shown to be safe and doable. It allows to decrease the number of anti-rejection drugs. However, most patients still need to take tacrolimus, one of the anti-rejection drugs. Unfortunately, this drug also affects the good cells (Tregs) we injected. Our goal here is to modify Tregs to make them resistant to tacrolimus. Our study will have to main aims.

First, we will study in detail the impact of tacrolimus on Tregs, the good cells. Then, we will modify the Tregs genetically, making them tacrolimus-resistant. We will show that it is possible and study the impact on the cells. The ultimate goal would be to develop this technique and bring it to a clinical trial. If Tregs are resistant to tacrolimus, it could make them more effective. Indeed, they might survive longer or grow more in patients after injection.

The Transplantation Program of the Université de Montréal would like to congratulate Dr. Caroline Lamarche on winning the CDTRP innovation grant in the 2024 competition for her project entitled “Tacrolimus-resistant regulatory T cells for adoptive immunotherapy”. The Transplantation Program of the Université de Montréal is proud to contribute to the CDTRP grant competitions and thus participate in transplantation and organ donation research in Canada.



Dr. Shaifali Sandal | McGill University Health Centre (MUHC)

“Digital storytelling as a relational health intervention for young adult kidney transplant recipients: A pilot project ”

Funding Partner: Takeda

Theme: 5 – Restore Long-Term Health

Many kidney transplant recipients experience graft loss and adolescents and young adult kidney transplant recipients (AYA-KTRs) between the ages of 17 and 25 are particularly at risk. This may be because they experience greater challenges managing their physical and mental health as they become more independent from their families and learn to navigate various social-cultural pressures associated with adolescence and young adulthood. Difficulty following medication regimens and the lack of follow-ups with healthcare professionals are also recognized issues. Interventions to address this have generally focused on patient education and self-management and little work has been done to improve patient and provider relationship to facilitate transitions and optimize care provided by the healthcare professionals. The objective of this pilot study is to assess the role an intervention called digital storytelling can play as AYA-KTRs transition from pediatric to adult care. AYA-KTRs who have experienced graft failure will be invited to participate and create 2–3-minute videos about the challenges of their experience, transitions of care, and/or graft failure. They will be trained and provided with the tools and support to tell their own stories on their own terms through digital storytelling. These digital stories will then be screened in focus groups to their healthcare providers for reflection, particularly on how it may have changed their care focus and delivery. This pilot project will lay the foundation for a larger, multicenter prospective study where we will examine if digital storytelling can be used as an intervention to prevent graft failure in this highly vulnerable group of patients.



“We’re proud to support the Canadian Donation and Transplantation Research Program’s efforts to further medical research initiatives in organ or tissue donation and transplantation. The pilot study that will be undertaken by Dr. Sandal in digital storytelling is an innovative approach and we look forward to learning about its impact on adolescents and young adult kidney transplant recipients.”

— Dr. Jefferson Tea, Vice President,
Medical and Scientific Affairs,
Takeda Canada Inc.

2024 CDTRP RESEARCH INNOVATION GRANT RECIPIENTS

Funding Partner	Recipient Name	Project Title
CDTRP UdeM Research Innovation Grant	Caroline Lamarche	Tacrolimus-resistant regulatory T cells for adoptive immunotherapy
CDTRP UdeM Research Innovation Grant	Michaël Chassé	From routinely collected medical data to donors: Canadian dOnation Monitoring & Alert SyStem Network (COMPASS) 2.0 University of British Columbia
CDTRP ATI/Paladin Research Innovation Grant	Darren Freed	Endothelial glycocalyx integrity during heart procurement: impact of crystalloid solutions
CDTRP KFOC Research Innovation Grant	William Beaubien-Souigny	Second-generation tissue oximetry using Near-infrared spectroscopy for post-operative kidney transplant monitoring in adult recipients
CDTRP KFOC Research Innovation Grant	Diana Mager	Food Insecurity in Canadian households with children and youth who have undergone organ transplantation
Transplant Research Foundation of BC/CDTRP Venture Grant	Kathryn Armstrong	A Family-Centered Initiative to Encourage Physical Activity in Children/Youth Living with Solid Organ Transplantation
Transplant Research Foundation of BC/CDTRP Venture Grant	Tom Blydt-Hansen	Cytokine and metabolomic urinary diagnostics to predict and monitor treatment responsiveness of acute rejection in kidney transplantation
CDTRP Research Innovation Grant sponsored by Takeda	Shaifali Sandal	Digital storytelling as a relational health intervention for young adult kidney transplant recipients: A pilot project

Thank you to our funding partners!



RESEARCH CONNECT

In the 2024-2025 year, CDTRP hosted 18 webinars covering a range of topics across the five research themes (see page 4). These sessions, led by trainees and PFDs, provided valuable insights into current research findings across the CDTRP network, keeping the community informed about the latest advances. Webinars attracted over 359 participants (around 19% PFDs) and more than 6,295 views on YouTube.

- April 2, 2024** **Randomized Trial of Routine Versus On-demand Intraoperative Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation in Lung Transplantation: A Feasibility Study**
Dr. Basil Nasir
- April 16, 2024** **A Living Systematic Review and Rapid Recommendations of the Effect of COVID-19 Vaccination Strategies on Outcomes in Solid Organ Transplant Recipients**
Dr. Natasha Aleksova
- April 30, 2024** **Organ Donation After Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest in Canada: a Missed Opportunity for uDCD**
Chelsea Lanos
- May 14, 2024** **Vaccine Chronicles: Characterizing Immune Responses in Transplant Recipients Through the COVID-19 Pandemic**
Dr. Victor Ferreira
- May 28, 2024** **EMPOWER – An Online Mind-Body Wellness Program for People Across the Transplant Continuum**
Dr. Puneeta Tandon & Ms. Emily Johnson
- June 11, 2024** **Making Every Pancreatic Islet Count – Engineering Vascularized Encapsulation Devices to Treat Type 1 Diabetes**
Dr. Corinne Hoesli
- June 25, 2024** **When is Dead, Really Dead? Findings of the Death Physiology and Prediction after Removal of Therapy (DePPaRT) Study**
Dr. Sonny Dhanani
- September 24, 2024** **A Brief History of Time: A Personal Journey into Family History, Cultural Identity, and the Way Colonialism and Legislation Have Created Health Barriers For Māori**
Mrs. Merryn Jones

- October 8, 2024** **Immunology 101: Principles of immune detection and activation**
Dr. Jonathan Choy & Ms. Ke Fan Bei
- October 22, 2024** **Advancing the Scientific Basis for Determining Death in Controlled Organ Donation After Circulatory Determination of Death**
Dr. Nicholas Murphy
- November 5, 2024** **Optimizing post-liver transplantation outcomes: targeting the muscle**
Dr. Chantal Bémour & Ms. Amal Trigui
- November 12, 2024** **How to Write a Lay Summary That People Can Actually Understand**
Mrs. Sherrie Logan & Ms. Elaine Young
- November 19, 2024** **Feasibility of a Home-Based Exercise Program in Liver and Lung Transplant Recipients for Management of Post-Transplant Metabolic Syndrome: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial**
Dr. Dmitry Rozenberg
- January 30, 2025** **Weight-Adjusted Rabbit Anti-Thymocyte Globulin Induction and Outcomes in Heart Transplantation**
Dr. Emmanuel Bebawi
- February 13, 2025** **Compassion Fatigue, Moral Distress, and Burnout Among Organ Donation Coordinators in Canada: Next steps from a National Study**
Dr. Emmanuel Bebawi
- February 27, 2025** **Feasibility, safety, and effectiveness of prehabilitation programs in patients awaiting liver transplantation: a systematic review and meta-analysis**
Dr. Amine Benmassaoud
- March 13, 2025** **Influence of blood transfusions on post operative pulmonary complications in liver transplant: a single-center cohort study**
Éva Amzallag
- March 27, 2025** **Social Media as a Tool to Explore Mental Health in Children Living with a Solid Organ Transplant and Their Families**
Ms. Irene Chen

CDTRP TEAM



Lori West, MD, PhD
 Scientific Director
 Executive Committee
 University of Alberta



Patricia Gongal, PhD
 Executive Director
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Sonny Dhanani, MD
 Associate Director
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Katie Bain, BAT, CAPM®
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Manuel Escoto, MPH
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 Partnership Platform &
 Knowledge Mobilization



Julie Turgeon, PhD
 Program Manager



**Manoela de Paula
 Ferreira, PhD**
 Research Services
 Manager



Erika Kathe Croft, MSc
 Program Coordinator



Diana Tertzakian, BA
 Administrative & Finance
 Coordinator

New Additions to the CDTRP Management Team!



Marie-Claire Kapesa, BHSc
Program Coordinator

We welcome Marie-Claire Kapesa as a Program Coordinator, Communications and Knowledge Mobilization! She holds an honours Bachelor of Health Sciences Degree from McMaster University. She completed her thesis under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Archie, investigating the impact of race and ethnicity on perspectives of Cannabis-Induced Psychosis within racialize youth in Canada. She has many years of project coordination experience through her involvements with multiple community organizations. Previously, she worked at Physicians for Human Rights as an intern in their Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones Program, and Sisters In Sync. She is a passionate advocate for equitable healthcare and community empowerment.

We also welcome Geetha Sanmugalingham as a Research Manager! Geetha holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto and a Master's degree from the University of Montreal, where her research focused on implementing patient-based funding systems in cancer screening at Cancer Care Ontario. With 15 years of experience, she is a valuable asset to the CDTRP team. She began her research career at Toronto General Hospital in the multi-organ transplant clinic and most recently served as a Research Manager in diabetes transition care at the Hospital for Sick Children. Additionally, Geetha is passionate about working with families and driving impactful changes in health policy.



Geetha Sanmugalingham, MSc
Research Manager



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



Dr. Mamatha Bhat
University Health
Network Toronto
Theme 4 Co-Lead



Dr. Matthew Weiss
Centre Hospitalier
Universitaire de Québec
Theme 2 Co-Lead



Dr. Jonathan Choy
Simon Fraser University
Theme 4 Co-Lead
Education Platform
Co-Lead



Dr. Ana Konvalinka
University Health
Network Toronto
Theme 3 Co-Lead



Sandra Holdsworth
PFD Partner
Theme 5 Co-Lead
PFD Platform Co-Lead



Shilpa Raju
Patient Partner
Theme 3 Co-Lead



Lindsay Thompson
PFD Partner
PFD Platform Co-Lead



Dr. Lorraine Hamiwka
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Dr. Siba Haykal
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Jennifer Woolfsmith
Patient Partner
Theme 2 Co-Lead



Ke Fan Bei
PFD Partner & Trainee
Education Platform
Co-Lead

*Patient, Family, Donor (PFD)

CURRENT FUNDERS & CONTRIBUTORS

We extend our heartfelt thanks to CDTRP's current funders for their invaluable support in advancing donation and transplantation research.



A special thank you to CDTRP members whose attendance at the Annual Scientific Meeting and utilization of the Research Services Platform directly support our organization's sustainability!

CDTRP SNAPSHOTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our gratitude to the dedicated individuals whose unwavering commitment and hard work made the projects mentioned in this report a success.

This report was prepared by Amanda Chwelos and Patricia Gongal with input from members of the CDTRP management team.

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