

MEDIA RELEASE

A new era of cancer research: Alberta Cancer Foundation unveils inaugural Game Changer Fund recipients

\$5 Million investment in Edmonton research teams to propel local, multidisciplinary and innovative Cancer Research in Alberta

February 5, 2024 (Edmonton, AB) – The Alberta Cancer Foundation is proud to reveal the inaugural recipients of its Game Changer Fund. This transformative initiative is aimed at accelerating local cancer research by fostering collaboration between researchers and frontline clinicians, bridging the gap between the 'bench' and the 'bedside'—a rare occurrence in the cancer ecosystem. The following four Edmonton-based research teams are set to receive a total of \$5 million, with each team granted up to \$1.25 million to propel their innovative projects toward tangible solutions for patients with cancer.

Dr. Vickie Baracos – Cancer cachexia: breaking the spiral of wasting and treatment toxicity

People diagnosed with advanced-stage cancers often experience the distressing state of cachexia, a progressive loss of weight, fat and muscle, sometimes referred to as wasting. People affected by cachexia experience weakness and fatigue and often end up with early termination of treatment due to complications, hospitalization and severely reduced quality of life. This Game Changer team, led by Dr Baracos, will advance our understanding of the effects and impacts of cachexia, seeking to use novel and innovative imaging, pharmacokinetic and data-driven approaches to customize treatment for better outcomes.

Dr. Ing Swie Goping – A patient-derived organoid platform for next-level breast cancer research

Breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer in women. Treatment decisions are based on the combination of hormone receptor and HER2 status of the tumour at diagnosis. However, there is no reliable way to determine how a patient will respond to a given treatment. This Game Changer team, led by Dr. Swie Goping, will establish a multidimensional platform for matched breast cancer tumours and avatars of these tumours called organoids. The tumours and organoids will be deeply analyzed by her team using multiple clinical and molecular parameters to begin to predict whether a patient will respond to a particular treatment. This platform will be made available to other research teams to foster additional research.

Dr. Roseline Godbout – Investigating the link between metabolism and prostate cancer progression

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in men. Sometimes, prostate cancer that hasn't spread can be treated effectively, but there is no cure for prostate cancers that have spread to other parts of the body. Much remains to be learned about why and how some prostate cancers spread and explored for new approaches for treatment. This Game Changer team, led by Dr. Godbout, will bring together a diverse team of researchers and clinicians dedicated to finding novel approaches to tackling metastatic prostate cancer, ultimately seeking a better way of diagnosing and treating the disease.

Dr. Kristi Baker – Immune resistance mechanisms in late-stage genetically unstable cancers

We know that the immune system is great at fighting cancers as illustrated by the success of checkpoint inhibitors and CAR-T therapy. However, the immune system is not always successful in fighting all cancers, particularly late-stage cancers that are genetically unstable. This Game Changer team, led by Dr. Baker, will bring a multiplex imaging platform to the University of Alberta. This instrument will allow her team to examine patient samples from early and late-stage cancers to identify the differences in the tumour immune response. This characterization will aid in the development of novel therapeutic approaches, the discovery of new biomarkers and more.

Launched in May 2023 as part of the Alberta Cancer Foundation's We Cross Cancer campaign, the Game Changer Fund quickly garnered support from donors across Alberta, resulting in a remarkable \$5 million investment dedicated to pioneering cancer research within our province. Collaborating closely with Alberta's esteemed research institutions, Cancer Care Alberta, the Cancer Research Institute of Northern Alberta (CRINA) and the University of Alberta, the Alberta Cancer Foundation launched the Game Changer Fund



research competition. This initiative serves as a leading-edge way to bolster innovation in cancer research endeavors that may not be feasible with other sources of research funding. The response to the request for proposals was outstanding with 22 submissions received, reflecting the depth of innovation within the vibrant local research community. The fund recipients were selected by a national panel of researchers and patients because the teams have identified solutions that will impact our cancer care system for generations to come. All women-lead (coincidentally), these teams are all completely diverse in their stage of career, projects and the type of cancer being researched, adding to a unique perspective and outside-the-box approach to problem-solving.

“The Game Changer Fund is an incredible opportunity for our local research community to really lean into translational research - that which requires innovative ideas that can work across many disciplines,” says Wendy Beauchesne, CEO of the Alberta Cancer Foundation. “We have such a breadth and depth of innovation here in Alberta and the number of high-caliber submissions received is a perfect example of this. I can’t wait to see the impact these talented teams have on bringing real solutions to more Albertans facing cancer.”

“We are grateful to Albertans for getting behind this cutting-edge research initiative,” says Dr. Paula Robson, Scientific Director, Cancer Research and Analytics and Steering Committee Co-Chair, Game Changer Fund. “The Game Changer Fund truly stands as a game changer itself, catalyzing conversations and sparking new ideas, leading to transformative cancer-focused research. It has created impressive momentum in our research community, bringing together experts from many disciplines to collaborate on research that will address crucial patient-focused questions and help us unlock pieces of the cancer puzzle.”

The success of the Game Changer Fund in Edmonton positions the Alberta Cancer Foundation as a pioneer in unique research investments. Plans are underway to expand the fund and its reach to other parts of the province.

About the Alberta Cancer Foundation

Creating more moments for Albertans facing cancer by inspiring our community to give to innovation in detection, treatment and care.

Albertans helping Albertans is at the core of everything the Alberta Cancer Foundation does. As the official fundraising partner for every Alberta Health Services cancer centre in Alberta, our very purpose comes from our desire to create more moments for all Albertans facing cancer, no matter where they live or the type of cancer they are facing. From the Canmore mountains to the canola fields in Lloydminster, we make life better for Albertans facing cancer by supporting world-class research and patient care, close to home.

