

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

March Officially Declared Women's Health Research Month in Alberta; AWHF and WCHRI Share Gratitude for Success of First-Ever Luminaries Event

March 13th, 2025

EDMONTON, AB—The Government of Alberta officially declared March Women's Health Research Month as the Alberta Women's Health Foundation (AWHF) raised over \$500,000 (with donations still coming in!) at its inaugural Luminaries luncheon on March 7. The provincial declaration further affirms the government's commitment to supporting the AWHF and the groundbreaking women's health research it supports through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) at the University of Alberta.

"Our researchers have made extraordinary advances in women's health research," said Dr. Sandra Davidge, WCHRI executive director. "Our goal is to move discoveries from the lab and into practice, to provide women with the best quality of life — as healthy women strengthen our communities. With support like this from our provincial government and the AWHF, Alberta continues to build expertise in women's health research and is sought after internationally for the research environment we provide."

The declaration was made by the Honourable Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Health, who joined almost 400 changemakers in women's health at the JW Marriott in Edmonton's downtown to learn and discuss how research is lighting the way from lab to life, and why ongoing support for research improves the daily lives of all women. AWHF and WCHRI are grateful to the guests, donors and sponsors such as The Scotiabank Women Initiative, Accenture, Hologic, Alberta Blue Cross, Ascend Fundraising Solutions and UROSPOT, who helped make the event such a success. In particular, they are grateful to Dale Sheard, Patron and former Board Chair of the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, for her generous individual gift of \$300,000.

The AWHF released its third thought leadership paper at the event, highlighting the varied experiences of Albertans in accessing contraception. The report was made possible by financial support from Organon Canada, and announced by Sharlene Rutherford, President and CEO of the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation and its pan-Alberta fundraising and advocacy brand, Alberta Women's Health Foundation. Entitled, "*Shining the Light: The Choices, Challenges and Considerations around Contraceptives*," this latest report draws insights from over 2,000 Albertans surveyed about their challenges navigating contraception and urges for equitable access to contraceptives.

Luminaries featured several powerful speakers from different industries and areas of expertise. The keynote was delivered by Joanna Griffiths, Founder and President of the innovative intimates and leakproof underwear brand Knix. Joanna has built Knix into one of the fastest-growing intimate apparel brands worldwide and created one of the most successful and prolific mission-driven brands of the digital era.

Award-winning broadcaster Lynda Steele emceed the event; event co-chairs and Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation Board Members Renée Sookdeo (Senior Branch Manager, Scotiabank) and Dianne Balon (Senior Vice President, Government, Alberta Blue Cross) shared a welcome address; five early and mid-career researchers from WCHRI engaged directly with guests before the main program around their individual research projects; and Dr. Jane Schulz, Dr. Colleen Norris and Dr. Padma Kaul—two of whom hold AWHF endowed research chairs—made up the event's research panel presentation.

"To Minister of Health Adriana LaGrange and to all those who made Luminaries a success, we thank you," said Rutherford. "Through the Luminaries luncheon we accelerated action, and we broke down barriers. Through our latest report, we highlight the commentary by women as they give voice to contraception; what is advancing them forward, and what is holding them back. I can't think of better ways to commemorate International Women's Day and Women's Health Research Month."

Visit albertawomenshealthfoundation.org/shiningthelight to read the report and join the movement.

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Available for Comment by Request:

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2. Dr. Sofia Ahmed MD MMSc FRCPC
 - o *WCHRI Academic Lead, Women's Health Research*
 - o *Professor, Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry*
 - o *University of Alberta Chair in Sex and Gender*

To request an interview, please reach out to Lindsay for Sharlene and Yolanda for Dr. Ahmed.

About the Alberta Women's Health Foundation

The Alberta Women's Health Foundation (AWHF) is dedicated to advancing the health of women and all individuals with female anatomy through research, education, and advocacy. As an initiative of the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, the AWHF seeks to bridge the gender health gap and drive meaningful change in women's healthcare.

For more information, visit albertawomenshealthfoundation.org. Stay up to date with AWHF by following us on X [@abwomenshealth](https://twitter.com/abwomenshealth) and Instagram [@abwomenshealthfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/abwomenshealthfoundation).

About the Women and Children's Health Research Institute

The Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) is a partnership between the University of Alberta, Alberta Health Services, the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and the Alberta Women's Health Foundation that supports research excellence dedicated to improving the health and lives of women and children.