

Recognizing and Celebrating Outstanding Contributions to the Canadian Cancer Research Community

The CCRA recognizes six leaders in Canadian cancer research, including two inaugural Indigenous awards recipients, at the 2025 Canadian Cancer Research Conference

TORONTO, ON, Oct. 20, 2025 – Today, the Canadian Cancer Research Alliance (CCRA) announces the recipients of its biennial awards, recognizing significant contributions to cancer research in Canada. Awardees will be honoured at the Canadian Cancer Research Conference (CCRC), which is taking place in Calgary from November 2 to 4.

Initiated in 2011, the CCRA Awards acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of individuals who have had a remarkable impact on cancer research and the cancer research community, as well as those who have shown exceptional leadership in patient involvement in cancer research.

"These awards are an opportunity to recognize those key individuals within the Canadian cancer research community who are furthering the research agenda and forging the path for others," says Dr. Dajan O'Donnell, Chair of the CCRA Advisory Board. "Each of our recipients has been nominated by their peers, recognizing their overall leadership and commitment to excellence in cancer research and patient engagement."

In collaboration with the CCRC First Nations, Inuit and Métis Working Group and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC), two new awards are being introduced in 2025 to honour outstanding contributions to Indigenous cancer research. The **Excellence in a First Nations, Inuit and Métis Community Project Award** recognizes a community-led initiative, while the **Excellence in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Cancer Research Award** celebrates an individual's leadership. Both awards highlight impactful, culturally grounded work that promote inclusion, equity and wellness across the cancer research continuum.

"It's an honour to recognize the first two recipients of the CCRA Indigenous awards," says Talia Pfefferle, Director of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Cancer Strategy at CPAC. "These awards are the result of the impactful work of CCRC's First Nations, Inuit and Métis Working Group. Their leadership brought valuable perspectives that enriched the CCRC program and a deeper understanding of cancer research in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities across Canada."

The 2025 CCRA Awards recipients are:

- **Sitansisk Wolastoqey** (St. Mary's First Nation) is the recipient of the inaugural award for **Excellence in a First Nations, Inuit and Métis Community Project** for the "Radiant Spirits: Indigenous Mammogram and Breast Health Initiative," launched in October 2024, which has improved breast screening access for Indigenous women in the Sitansisk Wolastoqey. This initiative is rooted in Indigenous leadership and community engagement, laying the foundation for future, sustainable programming focused on equity and cultural safety in cancer care.



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- **Dr. Christine M. Friedenreich**, PhD, FCAHS, FRSC, Adjunct Professor and Lead, Academic Research and Education, Preventive Oncology, Departments of Oncology, Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, is the recipient of the **Philip E. Branton Exceptional Leadership in Cancer Research Award** for the transformative and international impact of her research on the role of physical activity in the fields of cancer prevention and survivorship which has informed national and international public health guidelines, policies and initiatives, and her pivotal role in championing equity and diversity in the cancer research workforce.
- **Dr. Nada Jabado**, OC, MD, PhD, Senior Scientist in the Child Health and Human Development Program at the Centre for Translational Biology, Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre, and Professor in the Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at McGill University, has been awarded the **Outstanding Achievements in Cancer Research Award**. She is recognized for her groundbreaking discovery of regulatory histone mutations as a fundamental cancer hallmark and her paradigm-shifting finding that brain tumours arise from stalled development in embryonic neural hierarchies – work that has transformed our understanding of pediatric and young adult brain tumours and opened new avenues for diagnosis and treatment.
- **Dr. Lana Ray**, PhD, Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Resurgent Methodologies for Indigenous Health, Health Disciplines, Athabasca University, Co-Director, Anishinaabe Kendaasiwin Institute (AKI), Adjunct Faculty Member, Lakehead University, and Anishinaabe-Opwaaganasiniing scholar, is the recipient of the inaugural **Excellence in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Cancer Research Award** for her work to address significant gaps in Indigenous health research including implementation of Traditional Healing for the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, the inadequate engagement of health research with land and settler colonialism, and the urgent need for Indigenous-led governance and data management solutions.
- **Dr. Sevtap Savas**, PhD, Professor, Human Genetics and Oncology, Division of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University, is the recipient of the **Exceptional Leadership in Patient Involvement in Cancer Research Award** for the critical role she has played in the development and growth of the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Interest Group on Cancer Research and the Atlantic Cancer Consortium Patient Advisory Committee, and her commitment to the inclusion and capacity-building of people with lived and living experience from equity-deserving communities as patient partners in public engagement and cancer research.
- **Dr. Barbara C. Vanderhyden**, PhD, Senior Scientist, Cancer Research, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, Corinne Boyer Chair in Ovarian Cancer Research, University of Ottawa and Distinguished Professor, Cellular and Molecular Medicine, University of Ottawa, is the recipient of the **Distinguished Service to Cancer Research Award** for her decades-long dedication to public engagement, ensuring that scientific advancements reach patients, families and communities, and her pioneering work developing and championing novel and inclusive science promotion and education programs for elementary, high school and university students, building science literacy and inspiring Canada's next generation of scientists.



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Interviews were conducted with all awardees and these and brief videos are available at <https://www.ccra-acrc.ca/ccra-awards/>.

The **Canadian Cancer Research Alliance (CCRA)** is an alliance of organizations that collectively fund most of the cancer research conducted in Canada – research that will lead to better ways to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer, and improve outcomes for people living with and beyond cancer. Over 30 members, including federal research funding programs and agencies, provincial research agencies, provincial cancer care agencies, cancer charities, and other voluntary associations, are part of the Alliance. The Indigenous Cancer Research Network (ICRN) was the most recent addition to the CCRA in 2025. Members are motivated by the belief that through effective collaboration, Canadian cancer research funding organizations can maximize their collective impact on cancer control and accelerate discovery for the ultimate benefit of Canadians affected by cancer. The CCRA Secretariat is supported by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, an independent, not-for-profit organization funded by the federal government to accelerate action on cancer control for all Canadians. For more information, please visit: www.ccra-acrc.ca.

About the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer

As steward of the *Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control* (the Strategy), the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer works with provincial and territorial ministries of health and their cancer programs, First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments and organizations, health system leaders and experts, and people affected by cancer across Canada to implement the Strategy to improve cancer outcomes for all people in Canada. Learn more at www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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