

WOMEN LEADERS IN CANCER RESEARCH:

CELEBRATING
CCRA AWARDEES



Canadian Cancer
Research Alliance

Alliance canadienne
pour la recherche sur le cancer

MARCH 2026

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Suggested Citation: Canadian Cancer Research Alliance. (2026). *Women Leaders in Cancer Research: Celebrating CCRA Awardees*. Toronto: CCRA.

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ISBN 978-1-927650-82-0 (PDF)

Aussi offert en français



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FOREWORD

The Canadian Cancer Research Alliance (CCRA) introduced its awards program in 2011. Designed to recognize, on a biennial basis, the outstanding contributions of individuals who have made a remarkable impact on cancer research and the broader cancer research community, 31 individuals have received awards to date.

As we undertook the development of the 2025 awards program, the CCRA Advisory Board noted the underrepresentation of women among the nominees despite the many women scientists, scholars, and community leaders conducting innovative work of exceptional quality and high impact. Inspired by a pilot project from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Chicago, we undertook a concerted effort to increase the number of women nominees. The results were significant: the number of nominations for women more than doubled, rising from 24% in 2023 to 62% in 2025. This increase was also reflected in the adjudication process, with all selected awardees for 2025 being women.

In a separate process, the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Working Group with staff from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer's First Nations, Inuit and Métis Cancer Strategy developed the inaugural CCRA awards to recognize excellence in Indigenous cancer research and excellence in an Indigenous community project. The recipient of the former and the community representative for the latter were also both women.

In honour of the achievements of the most recent and past awardees, we have prepared this booklet on behalf of the CCRA members. It highlights the contributions of all the women recognized through the CCRA awards program and marks their achievements on this International Women's Day, March 8, 2026.

Jim Woodgett, PhD
Chair, CCRA Advisory Board

Dajan O'Donnell, PhD
Past Chair, CCRA Advisory Board

Elisabeth Baugh, MHSc, OOnt

Distinguished Service to Cancer Research, 2021

With a career spanning more than 35 years in the charitable sector nationally and internationally, Ms Elisabeth Baugh has held a variety of roles. But it was as the Chief Executive Officer of Ovarian Cancer Canada where she made her mark on the cancer research landscape. Beginning in 1997, Ms Baugh created a unified national organization to support women in Canada living with ovarian cancer, launched an award-winning awareness campaign, generated a strategic vision of research priorities, and mobilized women with ovarian cancer to successfully advocate for a first-ever targeted federal investment in ovarian cancer research.

Ms Baugh also championed ovarian cancer on the world stage, Together with her colleagues, Elisabeth initiated World Ovarian Cancer Day that subsequently led to the establishment of the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition. This group undertook the landmark “Every Women Study” and developed the Global Ovarian Cancer Charter, a call to action to improve survival and quality of life for all women with ovarian cancer.

“All women deserve the best care.”





Connie J. Eaves, OC, PhD, FRSC, FRS, CorrFRSE

Outstanding Achievements in Cancer Research, 2021

Dr. Connie Eaves left a lasting international legacy for her pioneering, cutting-edge, and paradigm-shifting scientific contributions to the study of hematopoietic, mammary and cancer stem cells. Throughout her career, she remained dedicated to the mentorship of trainees, early-career investigators, and the promotion of women in science.

Upon moving to Vancouver in 1973, Dr. Eaves was the second research scientist to be hired to the staff of the BC Cancer Institute. She later co-founded the Terry Fox Laboratory in 1981 with her husband Dr. Allen Eaves. With over 50 years of service, she was the longest-serving BC Cancer Research employee.

Over that time, Dr. Eaves became a global authority on stem cells with translational impact on bone marrow transplantation and treatments for leukemia and breast cancer. Her discoveries advanced knowledge on the origin of these cancers and her pioneering research methodologies were adopted by laboratories around the world.

“What I have found can be most rewarding is the feeling of having contributed to expanding knowledge and helping to improve society.”

Elizabeth A. Eisenhauer, OC, MD, FRCPC, FRSC

Exceptional Leadership in Cancer Research, 2017

Dr. Elizabeth Eisenhauer has not only made her mark as one of Canada's preeminent investigational drug trialist, she has been a pivotal leader at both the national and international levels, influencing changes to the clinical cancer research and cancer control policy landscape. As the longest serving chair of the CCRA, she oversaw the first pan-Canadian cancer research strategy and authored the landmark report on the state of academic clinical trials in Canada, which provided the impetus for the Canadian Clinical Cancer Trials Network (3CTN). Over her career, Dr. Eisenhauer coordinated over 170 trials which were carried out in institutions in Canada, the US and Europe. Several of these trials have led to the identification of new cancer agents now used in clinical practice.

From 2012-2017 Dr. Eisenhauer was Professor and Head of the Department of Oncology at Queen's University and Cancer Program Medical Director at Kingston Health Sciences Centre (KHSC). She is currently Professor Emerita. Her work continues...she is a founding member of the Common Sense Oncology initiative, an international collective of clinicians, academics, policymakers, and patients working to improve patient-centred care and access to cancer treatments.

“I think it's important to recognize that the spectrum of research that can be done is not just lab-based -- it's clinical research, it's public health and policy research.”





Christine M. Friedenreich, PhD, FCAHS, FRSC

Philip E. Branton Exceptional Leadership in Cancer Research Award, 2025

A trailblazing cancer epidemiologist, Dr. Christine Friedenreich has been a global pioneer in the field of physical activity and cancer. Her research has demonstrated that physical activity can reduce the risk of developing cancer and improve quality of life and survival after cancer diagnosis. She has also investigated biological mechanisms that could explain how physical activity is related to cancer. Dr. Friedenreich helped develop physical activity guidelines both nationally and internationally. As a mentor and leader, she has helped to develop and inspire a cadre of epidemiologists taking up her mantle.

Dr. Friedenreich is currently an Adjunct Professor with the Cumming School of Medicine, Departments of Oncology and Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary, and a member of the Arnie Charbonneau Cancer Institute and the O'Brien Institute for Public Health. She has had a long association with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and is one of a handful of researchers honoured as a "Friend of IARC."

"Throughout my career, I have recognized that the return on investment in research in Canada is greater than in many other countries. There is an ongoing need, however, to continue this investment..."

Nada Jabado, OC, MD, PhD

Outstanding Achievements in Cancer Research, 2025

A physician-scientist of the highest calibre, Dr. Nada Jabado's scientific achievements have had international reverberations. 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 have transformed our understanding of pediatric and young adult brain tumours and opened new avenues for diagnosis and treatment.

Dr. Jabado is a 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. She balances an ambitious research program with ongoing clinical service and remains committed to her engagement in national and international networks focused on advancing pediatric oncology.

“A lot of people speaking together, working together, trainees coming and seeing an environment that fosters collaborative initiatives—this is how we're improving care.”





Anne-Marie Mes-Masson, OC, PhD, FRSC, FCAHS

Exceptional Leadership in Cancer Research, 2019

Dr. Anne-Marie Mes-Masson's career is marked by her outstanding leadership not only in her own research in the areas of ovarian, prostate and breast cancer but for her pioneering efforts to create and promulgate model systems based on patient-derived materials. She has been stalwart in her commitment to establishing infrastructure and quality standards for biorepositories as a founding member of the Canadian Tumor Repository Network. While maintaining an active basic research program that focuses on the molecular events that contribute to cancer initiation and progression, Dr. Mes-Masson has also established a translational research program largely focused on delivering personalized medicine in oncology.

A full professor at the Université de Montréal since 2001, Dr. Mes-Masson has held various leadership roles, including serving as the Director of the Réseau de recherche sur le cancer du Fonds de recherche du Québec. In addition, she served for 15 years as lead for Terry Fox Research Institute's Quebec Node (2008-2023) and now co-leads the Marathon of Hope Cancer Centre Network's Quebec consortium.

“The desire to have an impact on human health has helped me go from a pure fundamental molecular oncologist to a translational scientist hoping to create and share knowledge that will be impactful for the cancer patient's journey.”

Judy Needham

Exceptional Leadership in Patient Involvement in Cancer Research, 2017

Ms Judy Needham is a cancer survivor who, after her personal cancer journey, chose early retirement and shifted her focus to giving back. She has been a leading light in patient engagement in Canada and within the breast cancer research community, initiated by her tenure with the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Alliance.

A large focus of her work has been leading the development and implementation of patient engagements models for the Canadian Cancer Trials Group (CCTG) and the Canadian Cancer Clinical Trials Network (3CTN). She has also supported the development of patient engagement models with the Ontario Institute of Cancer Research, University Health Network, Breast International Group (BIG), and Cancer Trials Ireland. Ms. Needham is also engaged locally in British Columbia as a member of the BC Cancer Research Leadership Committee, and in 2021, initiated the Canadian Cancer Society's Community of Practice on Patient Engagement in Cancer Research.

“Patients are at the centre of their decision-making process with their caregivers and therefore outcomes that matter to patients are important.”





Morag Park, CQ, PhD, FRSC, FCAHS

Exceptional Leadership in Cancer Research, 2015

As the Scientific Director of the CIHR Institute of Cancer Research from 2008 to 2013, Dr. Morag Park addressed significant health priorities related to cancer research, with a strategic emphasis on the role of lifestyle and the environment, personalized medicine, cancer initiation and progression, childhood cancers and survivorship. She is a staunch champion of the importance of collaboration and partnerships and committed to promoting interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary team research training and support for new cancer researchers.

A research leader in the field of receptor tyrosine kinases (RTK) and mechanisms of oncogenic activation of RTKs in human cancers, Dr. Morag Park cloned the Met RTK, which is now a key therapeutic target in oncology, and has pioneered studies of the breast tumour and immune microenvironment in triple negative breast cancer. She is a Professor in the Departments of Oncology and Biochemistry at McGill University and served as the Director of the Rosalind and Morris Goodman Cancer Institute (GCI) at McGill University from 2013 to 2025. During her tenure, the Institute underwent a transformative evolution, advancing its mission to improve cancer outcomes through research excellence and attracting significant research talent and research dollars.

“...there remains a long road ahead in the fight against cancer, and support for this research is critical.”

Sherry Parsons

Excellence in a First Nations, Inuit and Métis Community Project, 2025

The Radiant Spirits Breast Cancer Project initiative was launched in October 2024 to improve breast cancer screening access for Indigenous women in the Sitansisk Wolastoqey (St. Mary's First Nation) community. Ms Sherry Parsons, the Community Health Coordinator, played a central role in organizing the initiative, and received the award on behalf of the community.

The Radiant Spirits Breast Cancer Project represents a significant step forward in reducing health disparities among Indigenous women with the potential to prevent late-stage breast cancer diagnosis and improve long-term health outcomes. This initiative not only addresses immediate needs but also sets the stage for continued collaborations in the future, contributing to the ongoing goal of creating culturally safe and accessible care pathways for Indigenous communities. This included community-driven planning, trauma-informed education, and culturally safe outreach strategies. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with growing interest from other First Nations communities.

“Before any initiative takes root, there needs to be trust, mutual respect, and cultural humility.”





Lana Ray, PhD

Excellence in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Cancer Research, 2025

Dr. Lana Ray, Anishinaabe-Opwaaganasiniing scholar, is an Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Resurgent Methodologies for Indigenous Health, Health Disciplines, Athabasca University, Co-Director, Anishinaabe Kendaasiwin Institute (AKI), and Adjunct Faculty Member, Lakehead University. Her work addresses 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. Ray leads the Waasegiizhig Nanaandawe'iyewigamig Mino-Bimaadiziwin (WNMB) Project, which is an implementation science project working to build Indigenous health capacity related to traditional healing through medicine camps as well as through increasing access to traditional healing. It is based on Indigenous knowledge systems relating to cancer prevention and cancer treatment.

“We need more non-communicable disease research and health infrastructure that is firmly rooted within Indigenous worldviews and governed by Indigenous peoples.”

Sevtap Savas, PhD

Exceptional Leadership in Patient Involvement in Cancer Research, 2025

Dr. Sevtap Savas is a Professor, Human Genetics and Oncology, Division of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University. As a cancer researcher, her journey into patient engagement has been relatively short but highly impactful. She was instrumental in the development and growth of the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Interest Group on Cancer Research and the Atlantic Cancer Consortium Patient Advisory Committee, two initiatives that have helped to propel patient engagement in her home province and the Atlantic region. She is particularly committed to the inclusion and capacity-building of people with lived and living experience from equity-deserving communities.

Dr. Savas is very interested in integrated knowledge translation and how best to implement patient-prioritized change in oncology care and policy. She initiated the Strength in Community website (<https://strength-in-community.ca/>) to facilitate awareness of her work.

“...when I advocate for patients and public members, I am fearless. They give me this incredible strength—they transformed me, and I'm very impressed and amazed by their ability.”





Mandana Vahabi, RN, PhD, FCAN

Distinguished Service to Cancer Research, 2023

Dr. Mandana Vahabi is a champion of equitable access to reproductive health care for women, and is recognized for her pioneering, innovative, and impactful research in often underfunded areas. Her research has focused on addressing critical health disparities among structurally marginalized groups including refugees, immigrants, and sex workers. She emphasizes the importance of integrating research into practice, particularly for underserved communities in Canada and India.

Dr. Vahabi is a Professor at the University of Toronto's Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, and Women's Health Research Chair at Unity Health Toronto health care network, a jointly held position at the two institutions. For Dr. Vahabi, research alone is not enough—translating that knowledge into actionable policies is crucial for lasting change. She believes that nurses are uniquely positioned to shape public health strategies, address the structural challenges facing women's health and implement innovative care models that prioritize health equity.

“We need to ensure that evidence-based research addresses the community's specific needs and is delivered in a manner that respects their beliefs, values, and norms.”

Barbara C. Vanderhyden, PhD

Distinguished Service to Cancer Research, 2025

Dr. Barbara Vanderhyden is a 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. Not only has she made important discoveries advancing our understanding of ovarian cancer, she is Canada's pioneer in science education outreach. For more than three decades, she has been a leading champion of science education to elementary, high school and university students.

The "Let's Talk Science Outreach" in Ottawa was established in 1993 by Dr. Vanderhyden and colleague Dr. Paul Morley and has reached tens of thousands of students. Dr. Vanderhyden also initiated an Aboriginal Mentorship Program and a travel program to schools in northern Indigenous communities more than a decade ago in partnership with those communities. Her novel and inclusive approaches to science promotion have had an enormous impact.

"...we cannot hesitate to convey the passion that we have for our research. People will tend to get excited about our work when we are excited about our work.."





Linda Watson, RN, PhD

Exceptional Leadership in Patient Involvement in Cancer Research, 2021

Dr. Linda Watson's career has been marked by an extraordinary dedication to person-centred care and commitment to improving the patient experience for cancer patients in Alberta and across Canada. As an oncology nurse researcher and leader for more than three decades, she has advanced applied research on patient experience to improve the quality of life and experience of cancer patients through the collection and use of patient-reported measures to tailor improvements in care and system design. Dr. Watson has worked to provide targeted and personalized symptom management and improved integration between primary care and the cancer program across the cancer trajectory.

Dr. Watson currently serves as the Executive Director of Supportive Care Services and Patient Experience with Cancer Care Alberta and an Adjunct Assistant Professor with the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Calgary.

“Person-centred care is about integrating the patient’s life experience, as well as their symptoms and health concerns, into the care we provide.”

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