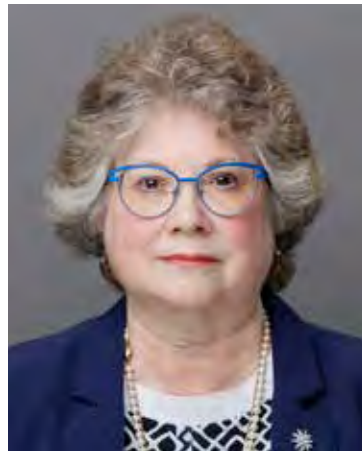




# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The University of Saskatchewan (USask) College of Nursing is committed to becoming a global leader in research by conducting studies that yield tangible, positive impacts and drive advancements in healthcare practices, both locally and globally. Our researchers are dedicated to creating equitable and sustainable solutions that enhance health experiences and outcomes for individuals, families, and communities on provincial, national, and international levels. Our highly influential nursing research is underpinned by a robust culture of exploration, innovative interdisciplinary collaboration, and dynamic knowledge exchange.



College of Nursing Associate Dean Research and Graduate Studies Dr. Louise Racine.  
 © Dave Stobbe.

“ Our researchers advance the science and scholarship of nursing with a specific emphasis on health equity, community engagement, and innovations in health systems and education research. In pursuing diverse research programs, our researchers develop, implement, and translate research findings to positively, inclusively, and equitably influence people’s health. Ultimately, our researchers aim to contribute to increasing accessibility to healthcare, improving the delivery of health services, and enhancing individual and population health outcomes in Saskatchewan, Canada, and globally. ”

– DR. LOUISE RACINE (PHD)

College of Nursing researchers are responding to 14 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and does not reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.

## SIGNATURE AREAS OF RESEARCH

In alignment with the University of Saskatchewan Plan 2025, College of Nursing strategic plan, and the College of Nursing’s philosophy statement, the College of Nursing will achieve its research mandate through three signature areas of research.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED HEALTH AND NURSING RESEARCH

HEALTH EQUITY RESEARCH

INNOVATIONS IN HEALTH SYSTEMS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

The work in these areas is highlighted on the following pages.



**SIGNATURE AREA OF RESEARCH:  
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED HEALTH AND NURSING RESEARCH**

We work with communities to achieve shared goals of addressing health needs, building capacity, and promoting improved health outcomes. Our research aims to be responsive, respectful, and inclusive.

**CURRENTLY FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS FOCUS ON:**

- Immunization services and supports for children and families
- Healthy aging-in-place, caregivers, and geriatric assessment
- Knowledge exchange and people with lived experiences
- Homelessness in Saskatchewan
- Substance use disorders and harm reduction
- Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections
- Maternal and child health
- Mental health, sexual health, and community youth wellness initiatives
- Cancer, exercise, and fall prevention
- Nursing profession, empowerment, and job retention

**RESEARCH IMPACT: MAKING A DIFFERENCE  
(2022 to 2025)**



**18%**  
Percentage of faculty articles that appeared in top ten percent of most-cited journals worldwide.

This highly impactful area of research has been recognized by the World Health Organization, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the RAND Corporation in the areas of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, opioid use, and noncommunicable disease management.

**RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS (2022 to 2025)**

**\$1,435,428** in awarded research funding

**51** successfully awarded grants

**125** peer-reviewed journal articles

**Top Published** research topics:

1. Geriatric Assessment in Cancer Treatment Optimization
2. Support Systems for Caregivers of Dementia Patients
3. Delirium Management in Elderly Postoperative Patients
4. Interprofessional Education for Enhanced Patient Care
5. Psychosocial Dynamics in Childhood Cancer Care

**36%** of publications completed with international collaborators

*(References: University of Saskatchewan; Scopus)*



**SIGNATURE AREA OF RESEARCH:  
HEALTH EQUITY RESEARCH**

We embrace the notion of fairness. Health inequities occur when this notion is challenged, leading to poor health outcomes across social, demographic, and geographic groups of people. Through our research, we strive to identify, prevent, and remove these barriers to health.

**CURRENTLY FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS FOCUS ON:**

- Built environments and climate change
- Menstrual hygiene management
- Sexual and reproductive health services in Africa
- Harm reduction and homelessness
- Indigenous communities and co-created housing initiatives
- Witchcraft
- Spirituality and healing for Indigenous people living with HIV
- Intimate partner violence
- Family mental health
- Human rights and health
- Sex and gender considerations and women's health

**RESEARCH IMPACT: MAKING A DIFFERENCE  
(2022 to 2025)**



**22%**  
Percentage of faculty articles that appeared in top ten percent of most-cited journals worldwide.

This highly impactful area of research has been recognized by the World Health Organization and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies in the areas of health system foundations, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and chronic bronchitis, and noncommunicable disease management.

**RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS (2022 to 2025)**

**\$1,435,113** in awarded research funding

**21** successfully awarded grants

**113** peer-reviewed journal articles

**Top Published** research topics:

1. Addressing Child Malnutrition and Nutritional Status
2. Enhancing Maternal Health Services and Outcomes
3. Access and Management of Antiretroviral Therapy in HIV Care
4. Innovative Approaches to HIV Care and Treatment
5. Antiretroviral Therapy for Pediatric HIV Management

**22%** of publications completed with international collaborators

*(References: University of Saskatchewan; Scopus)*



**SIGNATURE AREA OF RESEARCH:  
INNOVATIONS IN HEALTH SYSTEMS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH**

We explore how innovation can lead to new or better ways to solve problems. Through this research, we challenge existing ideas and assumptions of current health and education systems to see how new solutions can provide the best outcomes for healthcare providers, patients, educators, and students.

**CURRENTLY FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS FOCUS ON:**

- Anti-racism in nursing education
- Enhancing chronic illness and virtual care for older adults with inflammatory bowel disease
- Exploring care experiences of transgender and gender diverse individuals
- Exploring the secrets of the Florence Nightingale Medicine Chest
- Family hope and children’s life-threatening conditions
- Older adults and aging-in-place
- Improving pain care through health networks
- Relational care for older adults in long-term care
- Nursing student experiences in becoming a nurse practitioner
- Supporting academic success in nursing students
- The history of Saskatchewan’s early hospitals, 1873 – 1920
- Using simulation to support NP student clinical competency development
- Validating screening tools for dementia in custody settings

**RESEARCH IMPACT: MAKING A DIFFERENCE (2022 to 2025)**



**18%**  
Percentage of faculty articles that appeared in top ten percent of most-cited journals worldwide.

This highly impactful area of research has been recognized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Government of Canada, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the RAND Corporation in the areas of telehealth, COVID-19, rural health, end-of-life care, and peer-to-peer support interventions for healthcare providers.

**RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS (2022 to 2025)**

**\$447,716** in awarded research funding

**17** successfully awarded grants

**106** peer-reviewed journal articles

**Top Published** research topics:

1. Quality of Life in Inflammatory Bowel Disease
2. Pediatric Inflammatory Bowel Disease Trends and Impacts
3. Support Systems for Caregivers of Dementia Patients
4. Psychosocial Dynamics in Childhood Cancer Care
5. Mental Health Challenges Among Healthcare Workers During COVID-19

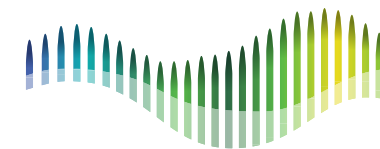
**12%** of publications completed with international collaborators

*(References: University of Saskatchewan; Scopus)*

# Thank you!

The following funders have supported our researchers during the past four years!

- Abbeyfield Canada
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Government of Canada Producer Mental Wellbeing Initiative
- Association of Commonwealth Universities
- Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology
- Centre for Aging + Brain Health Innovation
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- Crohn’s and Colitis Canada
- Dalhousie University
- Diabetes Canada
- Global Community Service Fund
- Government of Canada
- Jim Pattison Children’s Hospital Foundation
- Mental Health Research Canada
- Mitacs
- National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico)
- Saskatchewan Health Authority
- Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation
- Saskatchewan Polytechnic
- Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
- The Jane and Ron Graham Centre for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, University of Saskatchewan
- Thompson Rivers University
- University of Alberta
- University of Calgary
- University of Saskatchewan, College of Nursing
- University of Saskatchewan, Office of the Vice-President Research
- University of Saskatchewan, Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty Relations
- University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association
- Western & North-Western Region Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing
- York University



**nurse**

NURSING UNIT FOR RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP EXCELLENCE

## Supporting a Strong Research Environment

The University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing is home to the Nursing Unit for Research and Scholarship Excellence (NURSE), which provides a continuum of research development and administration support services to advance research and scholarship priorities and build success for researchers from the beginning to end of the research process.

✉ [nursing.research@usask.ca](mailto:nursing.research@usask.ca)





Research is a vital part of the University of Saskatchewan (USask) College of Nursing's work to improve health and advance nursing practice. Throughout the year, faculty, staff, and students achieved many research successes. The following highlights share a small selection of news stories that showcase the impact and reach of this work.

### NURSING RESEARCH FACILITATOR ROBIN THURMEIER RECEIVES RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION AWARD

The University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing congratulates Research Facilitator Robin Thurmeier (BA'02, MSc'11) on receiving the 2025 Innovation and Change in Research Administration Outstanding Individual Award.

Thurmeier's commitment in advancing research administration is being recognized as the inaugural recipient of this award from the Office of the Vice-President Research at USask.

"Robin's dedication to her role is unparalleled and her impact on our research community is significant," said College of Nursing Associate Dean Research and Graduate Studies Dr. Louise Racine (PhD).

Thurmeier, who has worked with the College of Nursing for over 13 years, was instrumental in establishing the Nursing Unit for Research and Scholarship Excellence (NURSE), which has been truly transformative for the College of Nursing.

"Robin is thorough, enthusiastic, and dedicated to advancing the College of Nursing research agenda, while creating a culture of research excellence in our college, within the USask community, and outside of it," said Racine.

"The number of grants submitted by principal investigators increased over 50 percent between 2024 and 2025, which is a testament to Robin's devotion to advancing nursing research, as the sole pre-award

research facilitator in the College of Nursing."

Thurmeier helps researchers from the College of Nursing obtain grants, including those from major funding partners like the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation.

"Not only has Robin worked with researchers on external grants, she has also been a major partner in creating internal grants and strategic initiatives within the College of Nursing to stimulate research," added Racine.

Thurmeier's efforts go above and beyond the College of Nursing, as she can often be found working interprofessionally with other research facilitators at USask.

"Robin has been a reviewer for the USask International Office, volunteered to review student posters in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources, and filled a research facilitator vacancy on a SSHRC committee," said Racine.

"She's reviewed new research-related software and provided feedback, delivered workshops and workshop series for the USask research community, and is often looked to as a role model for advice and leadership."

"I am deeply honoured to be recognized by my peers in this way—it is truly meaningful", said Thurmeier.

"I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of the College of Nursing, where I work alongside the remarkable NURSE team. Our efforts are continually supported by strong, visionary leadership that champions innovation, creativity, and meaningful engagement in research and scholarship. I am proud to contribute to such a vibrant and inspiring community."



College of Nursing Research Facilitator Robin Thurmeier. © Dave Stobbe.

### CELEBRATING DISCOVERY: FOURTH COLLEGE OF NURSING RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP DAY

On October 22, the Nursing Unit for Research and Scholarship Excellence hosted its fourth Research & Scholarship Day, showcasing the impactful research and scholarly work being led by faculty, students, and collaborators across USask Nursing.

The day began with a powerful keynote address titled *"Reconciliation Research Pathways: Opportunities for DEBWEWIN (Truth) and Institutional ALLYSHIP,"* delivered by Dr. Bernice Downey (PhD), associate professor (adjunct) from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Indigenous Health Learning Lodge at McMaster University.

Alongside the keynote address, the event featured faculty and student poster presentations, two dynamic panel discussions, and a pair of PechaKucha sessions (fast-paced, time-limited presentations of ideas).

The first panel, *"Two Worlds of Health: Exploring Rural and Urban Challenges,"* featured College of Nursing graduate student Nicole Edmundson (BSN'18), and faculty Drs. Schroder Sattar (PhD), Anne Hyde (BSc'01, BSN'04, MN-NP'08, PhD'25), and Michelle Pavloff (BSN'05, MN'14, PhD'22).

The second panel, *"Unequal Beginnings: How Inequities Shape Maternal and Child Health,"* featured College of Nursing graduate student Rosina Darcha, faculty

Drs. Sithokozile Maposa (PhD) and Jodie Bigalky (BSN'02, MN'21, PhD) and Dr. Maryam Mehtar (MBBCh, FRCPC) division head, Social Pediatrics, Pediatric School-Based Health from USask College of Medicine.

The two PechaKucha presentations captivated the audience with their unique and thought-provoking topics. The first, *"Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) Overcoming RN Registration Challenges in Canada – A Case Study from the Context of Pakistan,"* and the second, *"Green Care Farms: Caring in Relation,"* both sparked curiosity and left attendees eager to learn more about these emerging areas of research.

With around 85 attendees, the event provided an excellent platform to spotlight nurse scientists whose research and scholarly work are shaping the future of healthcare and nursing education.

"The Research & Scholarship Day was a wonderful opportunity to showcase the impressive work being carried out by our faculty and students, while also fostering collaboration and innovation among researchers with the aim of addressing contemporary healthcare challenges in Saskatchewan, Canada, and around the world," said Dr. Louise Racine.

"This Research & Scholarship Day demonstrates that USask College of Nursing

nurses are at the forefront of bringing solutions to improve health outcomes and healthcare delivery within a diversity of populations and from community to acute care settings."

"The insightful keynote address, relevant poster presentations, engaging panel discussions, and fast-paced PechaKucha sessions collectively left me with a deep sense of inspiration and profound admiration for the work of my colleagues. The day not only strengthened my passion for research, but also extended my enthusiasm for the future of nursing practice, research, and education. It was a powerful reminder of how innovation, collaboration, and meaningful work shape the discipline and nursing profession today and in the years ahead."

The day wrapped up with the presentation of student awards for best abstracts in the Undergraduate, Master's, and Doctoral categories. Congratulations to the following award recipients:

#### Undergraduate Student Research Award

Ava Bahrey

Project: *"Exploring Motivating Factors in Postpartum Recovery from Substance Use: Implications for Nursing Practice and Care."*

#### Master's Student Research Award

Olubunmi Okunola (BSN'22)

Project: *"Exploring the Perceived Health and Social Concerns of Older and Retired African Immigrants in Canada and Their Considerations for Re-Migration: A Narrative Review."*

#### Doctoral Research Award

Emma Addai (MN'25)

Project: *"Parents' Communication Needs in the Disclosure of Congenital Anomaly Diagnoses: A Scoping Review."*



Attendees participating both in person and virtually at the fourth College of Nursing Research & Scholarship Day. © Vanessa Ellis Colley.





## RESEARCH CONTINUES ON HISTORIC NURSING ARTIFACT AT USASK

Students at the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing generally become aware at some point during their studies that the college has an impressive artifact in its midst – a medicine chest that renowned founder of modern nursing Florence Nightingale used in her care for wounded soldiers.

While some students and alumni will drop by to spend a few minutes with the chest, imagining the instruments and medicine that may have rattled around inside, College of Nursing Professor Dr. Arlene Kent-Wilkinson (PhD'08) has spent significantly more time, verifying the chest's authenticity, tracing how it came to the university, and most recently, even connecting with the descendants of the original donors, who ensured its safety as a prized possession at USask College of Nursing.

Arriving in Saskatoon in 1912 and at the university around 1956, the Nightingale medicine chest has resided in many locations over the years, but is currently in a five-foot display case located on the fourth-floor of the USask Health Sciences Building E-Wing.

Made of dark brown wood, the case is lined with green baize and features double-opening front doors with compartments and a drawer along the bottom. There is also a secret compartment at the back, which would have been used to store hazardous medications of that time. Nightingale would have used chests like this to treat soldiers

in the Crimean War, 1854-56, when she developed a reputation not only for her nursing, but for reducing death rates among soldiers by improving hygiene.

Kent-Wilkinson said she has always been motivated by the sense of history and mystery surrounding the case, the latter of which has become much clearer thanks to her efforts.

"It's a piece of our history; it's nursing history. It really matches the trajectory of what was happening in society then and now, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, when we used all of the skills that Nightingale promoted: the hygiene, the distancing in overcrowded conditions, etc. She knew all of that and it became so important again when the pandemic happened."

By accessing genealogy databases, which contained immigration records and country census, Kent-Wilkinson was able to correct details that had been incorrectly recorded and provide additional validation for the case.

By tracing the medicine chest's movements from its origins in England to its current display case, Kent-Wilkinson has confirmed Nightingale's sister, Lady Frances Verney, gave the medicine chest to her gardener Isaac Milsom and his wife Mary Ellen. The Milsom family then immigrated to Canada in 1912 with their seven children. Isaac Milsom was hired as a landscaper for the City of

Saskatoon, where he also became friends with Dr. Hugh Dalton Weaver and his wife Alice. Milsom gifted the medicine chest to the Weavers around 1918. In the 1950s, the medicine chest was donated by the Weaver estate to the University of Saskatchewan.

For Kent-Wilkinson, a passion for history and genealogy led her not only to confirm these details, but also to add to the story. While the Weavers didn't have children, they did have a nephew, Lewis H. Thomas, who they raised as their own from the age of 14. He attended the university and eventually became the provincial archivist for Saskatchewan.

Through document searches on newspaper articles with the help of Tim Hutchinson, University Archives and Special Collection at USask, and Archivist Jeff O'Brien at the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, together they were able to show the connections with all the chest's custodians over the years. Kent-Wilkinson was also able to identify the living relatives of the last custodian of the chest, Dr. Lewis H. Thomas, through a genealogy website.

A faculty member at the College of Nursing since 2002, Kent-Wilkinson focuses her research and teaching on mental health and addiction, forensic nursing, and Indigenous health. While her busy teaching schedule had meant that the mysteries of the medicine chest had to be something she pursued in her spare time, in 2022 she received a USask Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Explore grant to finally gather some answers to the research project she titled, *Exploring the Secrets and Provenance of the Florence Nightingale Medicine Chest in Canada*.

"The question was, 'did this chest really belong to Florence Nightingale?' We had the research question for years, and no one thought of it as a research project," said Kent-Wilkinson, adding that a second question was around whether Nightingale had actually used this chest in the Crimea.

With the grant in place and questions set, Kent-Wilkinson hired history PhD student Letitia Johnson (PhD'23) as a research assistant to pursue these questions and partnered with fellow College of Nursing faculty member Dr. Helen Vandenberg (PhD), who has a focus on nursing history, to help validate what everyone thought they

knew about the chest.

Then Kent-Wilkinson took the extraordinary step of finding the living relatives of Alice Weaver and meeting them online. In 2024, with the help of a second research assistant, Leegay Jagoe (BSN'94, BA'94), they set up a meeting with the two children of Dr. Lewis H. Thomas, Jeannie and Robert.

"We had a couple of Zoom interviews with them, and it was amazing because what we found really validated the medicine chest, because it was a family story," said Kent-Wilkinson.

"The adult children recall their father bringing the chest into their house in Regina around two years after their aunt passed away and getting a plaque made to put on the top of the chest to commemorate the donation from Dr. and Mrs. Weaver. Robert remembers when he was about six years old, his father bringing the medicine chest home to their house in Regina, and it sitting

on the coffee table. He remembers opening the doors of the chest and seeing the green cubicles, and thought it was a neat old chest," said Kent-Wilkinson.

Jeannie, who was two years older than her brother when the medicine chest would have entered the house, does not remember it, but did recall lots of family conversations about Nightingale and that there was a family connection.

Kent-Wilkinson said Robert was also able to send her photographs from their family album, which were the originals of pictures from articles in the early *Saskatoon Daily Star* and *StarPhoenix*, that further validated the medicine chest and the families' whereabouts. In another serendipitous connection, Jeannie mentioned they happened to live next door to universal healthcare founder and provincial premier Tommy Douglas, who often visited their home.

While the official research project is now

complete, Kent-Wilkinson still has big plans for the chest.

She arranged for professional photographs to be taken and has created a standup banner for the project. She's planning a new display for when the chest is moved to its next place of honour in A-wing of the Health Sciences Building, something that would show its background more visually with a map and other cues.

As for future plans for the case, Kent-Wilkinson said there are many possibilities, including creating memorabilia around the artifact, student scholarships, getting the chest valued by experts and even loaning it to the Florence Nightingale Museum in London, England, where Kent-Wilkinson had noticed a smaller medicine chest that spurred her further research on the University of Saskatchewan artifact.

"I often say the medicine chest waited for us for over 100 years to do this research," concluded Kent-Wilkinson.

## FACULTY RECEIVE RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The Nursing Unit for Research and Scholarship Excellence at the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing was proud to announce the recipients of the inaugural College of Nursing Research Excellence Awards in May 2025.

### Research Excellence Award in Community-Engaged Health and Nursing Research

Dr. Roslyn Compton (PhD), Associate Professor, College of Nursing

This award recognizes a faculty member in the College of Nursing who has shown the highest level of excellence and had a significant impact in community-engaged health and nursing research.

### Research Excellence Award in Health Equity Research

Dr. Pammla Petrucka (BSN'93, MN'97, PhD), Professor, College of Nursing

This award recognizes a faculty member in the College of Nursing who has shown the highest level of excellence and had a significant impact in health equity research.

### Research Excellence Award in Innovation in Health Systems and Education Research

Dr. Wanda Martin (PhD), Associate Professor, College of Nursing

This award recognizes a faculty member in the College of Nursing who has shown the highest level of excellence and had a significant impact in innovations in health systems and education research.

"I wish to extend my congratulations to these three nurse scientists, who are doing transformative work within their signature areas of research to advance nursing knowledge, nursing practice, and healthcare policies in Saskatchewan, Canada, and internationally," said Dr. Louise Racine.



USask College of Nursing is home to Florence Nightingale's medicine chest. © Dave Stobbe.



(l to r) Dr. Louise Racine, Erin Yakiwchuk (USask College of Pharmacy and Nutrition accepting award on behalf of Dr. Roslyn Compton), Dr. Wanda Martin, Dr. Roslyn Compton (on screen from the Netherlands), Dr. Pammla Petrucka, and Dr. Solina Richter. © Raeleen Wilson.



## DR. CHARLENE THOMPSON CELEBRATED BY SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH RESEARCH FOUNDATION

In southwest Saskatchewan, families, healthcare workers, community partners, and researchers are coming together with a shared goal: to strengthen immunization programs in ways that reflect the realities of rural life. Dr. Charlene Thompson (BSN'01, MPH'16, PhD'21) and Dr. Jacob Alhassan (PhD'21) were invited by leaders in the South West Health Networks of the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) to join them in this work, seeking new ways to better understand the barriers families face and to collaborate on ways to improve care in their community.

Together, they applied for funding, and the project titled *"Improving Immunization Services for Children 0-6 Years of Age in Southwest Saskatchewan"* was co-funded by Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation (JPCHF) and Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) through the 2024-25 SHRF Child and Youth Solutions Innovation Grant. It was recognized as a top-ranked project in its category and was selected to receive a Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation Excellence Award. This honour was formally presented at the Santé Awards in January 2026.

### Answering the call

Thompson and Alhassan saw the project take shape after being contacted by leaders of the South West Health Networks to collaborate on better understanding the factors influencing childhood immunization and strengthening services in ways that meet their community's needs.

"They reached out and said, 'We see what you're doing, and we think we could really use something like this down here,'" recalls Thompson. "So, while the data indicated room for improvement, this work was truly driven by the community itself."

For Alhassan, who had primarily concentrated on international research, the invitation was an opportunity to shift his focus closer to home. "This project reminded me of the importance of finding homegrown solutions right here in Saskatchewan, while also applying what I've learned globally to strengthen health services in our own communities," he explains.

### Meeting rural communities where they are

The challenges for families in rural

Saskatchewan often differ from those in larger centres. Transportation, distance, and fewer clinic options can all make access more difficult. At the same time, communities are becoming more diverse, with families from different cultural, language, and social backgrounds whose experiences with immunization may be shaped by various factors.

"There's just less out in terms of appointments, clinics, and services [which is a common challenge in rural and remote Saskatchewan communities]," says Thompson. "And then there's the importance of creating opportunities to hear directly from families about the perspectives and experiences they bring to these conversations. We work with our partners to develop questions that really dive into what's going on, guided by their experiences." Inclusivity has been central to the approach. The research team works with the Newcomer Welcome Centre in Swift Current to offer surveys in English, Tagalog, and Spanish, and to provide interpretation support for interviews.

"Even that step of offering different languages shows families that their voices are valued," says Thompson. "It's about ensuring families feel included and that their voices help shape the conversation."

Alhassan emphasizes that no single approach will work for everyone. "We're really focused on creating a tailored suite of interventions that speak to different groups' contexts. It's about asking: what works, under what circumstances, and how can we amplify that?"

### Working alongside communities

From the beginning, Thompson and Alhassan understood the importance of being present in the community. "Being present and showing up matters," says Thompson. "In public health, there's a saying that sometimes you walk behind, sometimes you walk beside, and sometimes you walk ahead. The key is knowing when each is needed, and that comes from listening to the community."



Dr. Jacob Alhassan and Charlene Thompson. © Sarah Kasleder.



## NURSING FACULTY TRAVEL TO MALAWI FOR INTERNATIONAL OBSTETRICS RESEARCH COLLABORATION

University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing Assistant Professors Drs. Jodie Bigalky and April Mackey (BSN'13, MN'19, PhD'25) travelled to Malawi to conduct research for their project focusing on fistula repair programs and the support young women and girls receive post-surgery.

"We're working to uncover essential components of fistula repair programs worldwide, explore Malawi's unique approach and community outreach, and understand patients' needs for recovery, learning, and empowerment," said Mackey.

"During a trip to Lilongwe, Malawi in 2023, we had the privilege of meeting with patients and program director at the Fistula Care Centre. Touring the facility left us deeply humbled and inspired by the resilience of the girls and women facing the immense challenges of living with an obstetric fistula."

Obstetric fistulas are devastating conditions caused by prolonged labour, resulting in a hole between the urinary or gastrointestinal tract and the genital tract.

"In collaboration with our partners in Malawi, we recognized an urgent need to improve the quality of life for girls and young women affected by obstetric fistulas. Through understanding global programs and the existing efforts in Malawi, an

opportunity exists to identify specific needs of adolescents and young women as they reintegrate into their communities after fistula repair."

"By far our favourite memory from our trip to Malawi was while working with women at the Fistula Care Centre we attended a cooking class – which is one of the skills provided by the centre to help women reintegrate back into the community. We stood outside and watched the women make Mandasi, a delicious, deep-fried bread, while the women sang to us about how joyful they were to learn this new skill. Both of us were smiling ear to ear, inspired by their strength and humbled to have been a part of it."

Bigalky and Mackey hope their research helps them in the international mission to tackle global health challenges.

"As researchers from the global north, we are committed to building partnerships with our counterparts and community collaborators in the global south, in line with Sustainable Development Goal #17. Our aim is to tackle global health challenges, including obstetric fistula, through collaborative international efforts and shared expertise."

This project was funded through the USask Office of the Vice-President Research International Global Community Service Fund.

That approach has shaped how they connect with families and healthcare providers. Rather than leading from the outside, the project is guided by local voices. "Healthcare workers, in particular, are eager to have these conversations," adds Alhassan. "When someone shows up to ask, 'What else might work? What are you seeing?' That kind of knowledge sharing is a gift."

### Support that makes it possible

Both researchers credit SHRF and JPCHF with making this work possible.

"Opportunities like SHRF's Solutions Grant are life-changing, career-changing, and community-changing," says Thompson. "We would not be able to do this without SHRF and JPCHF support." Alhassan adds, "The Excellence Award is a recognition of what's possible when community partners, healthcare workers, and researchers come together. Having local funding that allows us to address local problems makes a real difference not just for our careers, but for the communities we serve."

### Looking ahead

While the study is still underway, Thompson and Alhassan are already seeing the power of community-driven research. "This type of research reinforces the value of community-based approaches to improving health outcomes," says Alhassan. "It's about preventing problems before they happen, by creating awareness and opportunities for families to access care." For Thompson, the project has been transformative. "I've discovered a real love for rural communities that I didn't know I had," she reflects. "There's a sense of connectivity, of people knowing each other, that makes the work especially meaningful."

As the project continues, one thing is certain: the solutions that emerge will be shaped not by outside experts, but by the voices of families, healthcare workers, and community partners who call rural Saskatchewan home.

*This story was adapted from a piece written by Sarah Kasleder and originally published on the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation website.*



(l to r) Dr. April Mackey, Fistula Care Centre Director Margaret Moyo, Research Collaborator Dr. Annie Namathanga, and Dr. Jodie Bigalky. © Submitted.



## USASK-LED INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT UNITES WATER WITH MATERNAL HEALTH

An international research collaboration led by a University of Saskatchewan water researcher is exploring the intersection of water, environment, social, and cultural systems with health for women and mothers in communities around the world.

Dr. Corinne Schuster-Wallace (PhD), a professor in USask's Department of Geography and Planning and the executive director of the Global Institute for Water Security (GIWS), is the principal investigator (PI) on a project exploring the connections between physical and social environments and maternal well-being in communities in Africa and at home in Saskatchewan.

The five-year project received more than \$1.3 million from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and aims to create a tool which can be used to evaluate the maternal well-being of Indigenous women in rural communities.

"Livelihood, housing, food security, safety—you can't get there without thinking about water and local water security," Schuster-Wallace said.

The research team will develop a measurement tool that will include a series of indicators and criteria developed over the course of the research project. The indicators of that measurement tool will be focused on areas of maternal well-being in communities, including water security, food security, social networks, agency, and healthcare.

The goal is that the tool can be used universally by communities or by local governments and organizations to assess maternal well-being. By using indicators developed within communities, Schuster-Wallace and her team hope their tool can help show communities where there are needs affecting maternal well-being that can be filled to improve community health and well-being, especially for women, girls, and their babies.

Schuster-Wallace highlighted the importance of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for human health, as highlighted by the World Health Organization (WHO). By focusing the idea of WASH from a maternal health perspective, Schuster-Wallace said issues



The team in Uganda visiting the Benet community that is participating in the study. Submitted.

around community water security become much more evident.

As an example, Schuster-Wallace pointed to the idea of women and girls having to fetch water for their households. If that water is further away, or if there are conflicts over accessing fresh water, that is a detriment to their health that can be measured. Limited access to water can also mean less food can be cooked safely, which is another indicator for health and well-being.

"It's about water and nutrition, water and sanitation, water and livelihoods," she said. "We started looking at maternal health outside of the healthcare system and realized there's a broader context of maternal well-being."

The research will be undertaken with Indigenous communities in both East Africa and Canada. Schuster-Wallace said the researchers wanted to make sure they were "nesting (the research) from the inside out," by centering the experiences and knowledge from women and mothers in their target communities and using those to build the framework for this tool.

"It's about the social and environmental determinants of health, but it's about those

determinants from women's perspectives, and then from men's perspectives, the community perspective and then from the health professional perspective," she said. "We're hoping that we'll be able to find core similarities to create a flexible tool others can use."

Schuster-Wallace's Saskatchewan collaborators on the project include co-PI Dr. Pammla Petrucka and Dr. Jodie Bigalky with USask's College of Nursing, Beverly Wise, the health director for Mistawasis Nêhiyawak First Nation, and RESOLVE SK. Schuster-Wallace is also working with the Health Sciences North Research Institute and co-PIs throughout eastern Africa from Moi University in Kenya, Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University in Tanzania, Makerere University in Uganda, and Uganda Christian University.

"It's an international team effort," Schuster-Wallace said. "We'll be able to not only identify if women and girls in each community have good maternal well-being, but if it isn't good, where are the priority places for intervention?"

*This article is adapted from a piece written by Matt Olson, USask Research Profile and Impact.*



## CELEBRATING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT FUND RECIPIENTS

The University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing congratulates seven research teams, who were awarded 2024 College of Nursing Global Engagement Fund awards in January 2025.

"These awards were established to give nurse researchers the opportunity to build international research connections," said College of Nursing Director of Globalization Ana Carolina Maldonado (MPA'15).

"Their projects promise to be of impact to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the College of Nursing Signature Areas of Research."

### Dr. Sithokozile Maposa

Project: "A Nursing Vision of Hope: Strengthening & Developing A North-South Academic and Research Community of Practice to Support People in Complex Life Situations."

Co-Investigators: Jose Diego Marques Santos

Partner Institution and Country: Federal University of Piauí, Brazil

### Dr. Schroder Sattar

Project: "Bridging Borders to Advance Geriatric Oncology Research on Falls and Frailty in Older Cancer Patients: A Franco-Canadian Research Partnership"

Partner Institution and Country: OncoNormandie University Hospital, France

### Dr. Roslyn Compton

Project: "Growing Green Care Farms for Persons Living with Dementia in Saskatchewan."

Co-Investigators: Hadiya Huijer, Mariana dos Santos Ribeiro

Partner Institution and Country: Maastricht University, The Netherlands

### Dr. Charlene Thompson

Project: "Innovative Rural-Driven Solutions to Improve Immunization Programs in South West Saskatchewan."

Co-Investigators: Drs. Jacob Alhassan, Wanda Martin, Christine Huel (PhD), Shelley Kirychuk (BSN'90, MBA'01, PhD'08), and Alejandra Fonseca (MPH'20)

Partner Institution and Country: Saskatchewan South West Health Network, Canada

**Drs. Jill Bally (BSN'90, BA'93, MN'06, PhD'13) and Shelley Spurr (BSN'95, MBA'01, PhD'09)**

Project: "Keeping Hope Possible: An International Collaboration to Develop Relationships and International Hope Research."

Partner Institutions and Countries: University of Brasilia, Brazil; University of Sao Carlos, Brazil; Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal

### Dr. Geoffrey Maina (PhD)

Project: "Understanding and Responding to the Impact of Addiction on Families in Cape Town, South Africa: An Art-based Pilot Study."

Co-Investigators: Dr. Abukari Kwame (PhD'23) (Postdoctoral Fellow), Thea Herzog (BSN'15, BSKI'11, MN'19)

Partner Institution and Country: University of Western Cape, South Africa

### Dr. Jodie Bigalky

Project: "Unveiling Menstrual Experiences: A Collaborative Study to Address and Advocate for Menstrual Equity in Sao Paulo, Brazil."

Co-Investigators: Drs. April Mackey and Pammla Petrucka

Partner Institution and Country: University of Sao Paulo at Ribeirao Preto, Brazil



(top l to r) Drs. Sithokozile Maposa, Schroder Sattar, Roslyn Compton, and Charlene Thompson. (bottom l to r) Drs. Jill Bally, Shelley Spurr, Geoffrey Maina, and Jodie Bigalky. Dave Stobbe.