

Autumn Greetings from the Women's Giving Circle

Fall 2025

Message from the Chair

As the leaves turn and the air takes on that familiar autumn crispness, I'm reminded how this season invites us to pause — to reflect, reconnect, and realign with what truly matters. For those of us in the **University Hospitals Kingston Foundation (UHKF) Women's Giving Circle (WGC)**, it's a moment to celebrate the spirit of community and the power of women coming together in support of exceptional health care.

Fall has always felt like a season for gathering, and it was such a joy to see so many of you at our recent luncheon. Your warmth and enthusiasm continue to bring such energy and purpose to our events. A special thank-you to the **ovarian cancer survivors** who lit up the room in their teal attire in recognition of Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month. We were honoured to support **Dr. Jordan Leitch's important research** in this often underfunded area of women's health — work that is already inspiring meaningful change.

Together, we are making a tangible difference in advancing health-care research at **Kingston Health Sciences Centre (KHSC)** and **Providence Care**. Your generosity fuels innovation, empowers care teams, and touches the lives of patients and families across our community — an impact we can all take pride in.

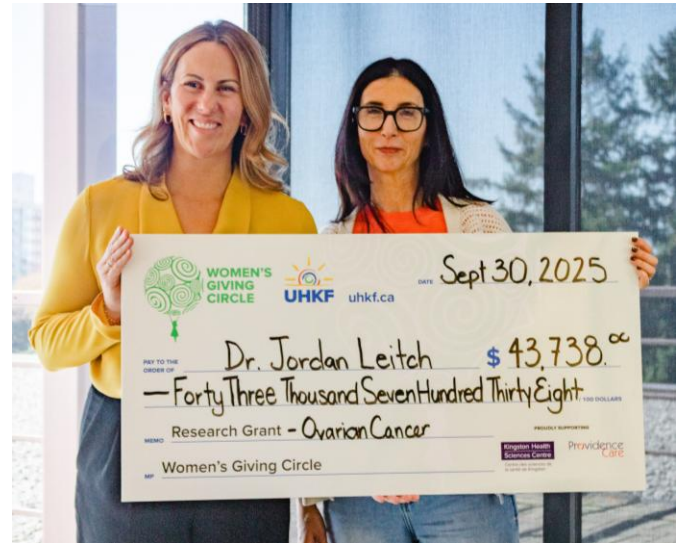
As we look ahead, I encourage you to stay engaged — by sharing ideas, attending upcoming events, or considering a role on our **WGC Executive Committee**. (We are currently seeking to fill **Member-at-Large** positions and would be delighted to welcome new voices to the table.)

Thank you for being such a vital part of this inspiring circle of women. I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events in 2026 and to all that we'll continue to accomplish together.

Rachel Koven, Chair



Fall Luncheon Recap



Following her presentation summarizing a bold new pilot project at KHSC, **Dr. Jordan Leitch (left)** accepts the WGC grant for 2025 from **Rachel Koven, Chair**.

This year's WGC grant recipient, **Dr. Jordan Leitch**, shared inspiring highlights from her research project, *"Virtual Multimodal Prehabilitation Before Surgery for Ovarian Cancer."* Her innovative work is helping women strengthen both body and mind before undergoing ovarian cancer surgery — empowering patients to take an active role in their recovery journey.

Dr. Leitch, a clinical anesthesiologist and fellowship-trained critical care physician at KHSC, has a deep passion for improving surgical recovery. She leads the **Virtual Recovery After Surgery (VRAS)** program, which helps patients transition home after surgery with confidence and support. Her research focuses on using technology to make personalized "prehab" programs more accessible and effective — particularly for women facing complex surgeries and cancer treatment.

Adding to the inspiration, Dr. Leitch was joined by her sister, **Alexandra Stewart, N.P.**, who also works on prehabilitation initiatives at KHSC. Together, the pair are advancing innovative approaches to patient care — a true family commitment to improving health outcomes for women.

Following the cheque presentation, **Dr. Steven Smith** shared an update on this year's WGC voting results. Members selected the next research focus area from three important fields: **Bleeding Disorders, Cardiovascular Health, and Pediatric Health**. The field

receiving the most votes will guide next year's granting process.

Dr. Smith, Vice-President of Health Sciences Research at KHSC and President & CEO of the Kingston Health Sciences Centre Research Institute (KHSCRI), expressed his gratitude for the continued partnership and vision of the WGC community — whose generosity helps drive meaningful research that changes lives.



The WGC was honoured to host the “teal table” – an intrepid group of ovarian cancer survivors, who were joined by Dr. Leitch (centre – yellow blouse) and her colleague (and sister), Alexandra Stewart (on her right), for greetings following the luncheon.



Kingston Health
Sciences Centre

Membership Update

The beauty of the fall season is reflected in many ways, not least in the growing membership of the **WGC**. This increase is a testament to the generosity and commitment of women who wish to support health-care initiatives in our community. Funds raised are dedicated entirely to advancing dynamic research projects, which serve as vital foundations for medical progress.

The **WGC Executive Committee** is currently seeking to fill **Member-at-Large** positions. We warmly invite anyone interested to reach out and share your areas of interest. Joining the Committee is an opportunity to bring your unique perspective to decision-making and contribute directly to shaping the future of health-care research — truly a chance to make a meaningful impact.

Our recent fall luncheon beautifully highlighted the enthusiasm within our community for women to engage with the WGC. It was inspiring to witness so many coming together, lending their voices, and celebrating the remarkable strides being made by our interdisciplinary health-care teams. As the saying goes, “Many hands make light work” — and the energy and passion of our members continue to make a difference every day.

Barbara Hammond, Membership Chair

Watch For Your Invitation:

Spring Tour -- Date TBC

**The W.J. Henderson Centre for
Patient-Oriented Research, KHSC**

A dedicated 10,000 sq ft research space where patients and families collaborate with scientists, doctors and treatment teams to improve health care.

Connell 4, KGH Campus

Research Update

Project Title: *Exploring the Impact of Social Environment on Neuroinflammation and Brain Architecture* — Recipient of the 2024 WGC Grant

Principal Investigators: Dr. Fernanda De Felice, Dr. Susan Boehnke and Dr. Jason Gallivan

We know that social isolation and loneliness are significant risk factors for a range of health problems, including dementia and depression. Our project aims to understand the neurobiological *why*—how does our social environment get "under the skin" to change our brain biology?

To investigate this, we are using a sophisticated non-human primate model at Queen's to study the direct effects of social living. We have successfully completed the first phase of the study, which involved comparing brain structure and biology during periods of rich social group living versus a period of short-term individual housing.

Our preliminary analyses of the neuroimaging (brain scan) data have already yielded exciting, novel results. We found that a short period of social deprivation is associated with a measurable decrease in cortical thickness in key areas of the primate "social brain". Strikingly, we found that these changes appear to reverse once the animals are returned to their social groups. This suggests our brains are incredibly plastic and can be rapidly affected—both negatively and positively—by our social setting.

Thanks to the vital funding from the WGC, we are now in the process of analyzing the wide-ranging neuroimmunology panel from the blood and cerebrospinal fluid samples collected during the study. This is the critical next step, allowing us to see how biomarkers of neuroinflammation and neurodegeneration change in lockstep with the brain structure changes we observed.

This work is positioning us to make a major breakthrough in identifying the specific inflammatory pathways that link social experience to brain health. This could lead to new biomarkers for tracking loneliness and developing interventions for vulnerable populations, from the elderly to those suffering from mental health disorders.

KHSC's first Rose of Hope Clinical Chair in Breast Health

Breast cancer screening, imaging, and care across southeastern Ontario is getting a major boost with the appointment of Dr. Doris Jabs as the Rose of Hope Clinical Chair in Breast Health at KHSC.

The announcement came just weeks after the 27th Annual Rose of Hope Golf Tournament raised an incredible \$285,000 — the first installment of the tournament committee's five-year, \$1 million pledge to establish this new leadership role.

A highly respected fellowship-trained Women's Imaging radiologist with more than two decades of experience, Dr. Jabs is also the long-time Regional Breast Imaging Lead for the Ontario Breast Screening Program and one of the driving forces behind the creation of KHSC's Breast Imaging Kingston (BIK), a state-of-the-art, patient-focused breast cancer screening and diagnostic facility.



*Dr. Doris Jabs
KHSC Rose of Hope Clinical Chair in Breast Health*

It's official - Successful research field chosen

As a result of the vote taken at the fall luncheon (and separately by mail to those WGC members not in attendance), the chosen field for the 2026 WGC grant in the amount of \$48,616.90 is: Cardiovascular Health. Dr. Steven Smith, Deputy Vice-Principal Research, Queen's University, and President and CEO, KHSCRI and colleagues, are currently working on the grant application process. The successful recipient will be announced at the June luncheon.

Save the date!

Spring luncheon

June 4, 2026, 11:30 am – 1 pm

Presentation by:

**Dr. Doris Jabs, Rose of Hope Clinical
Chair in Breast Health, KHSC**

Invitation will be sent in the New Year.

Join us at the Women's Giving Circle!

Membership in the WGC currently stands at 117. We welcome new members to join us in our efforts to support state-of-the-art medical research taking place right here in our local hospitals. Every dollar of our membership dues goes directly to research through our annual research grants. Please check out our webpage for more information and click 'Join'!

Our webpage:

<https://www.uhkf.ca/Ways-To-Give/Women-s-Giving-Circle>

Membership is \$42 a month for women 40 and over. The monthly membership of \$21 is for women under the age of 40. If you would prefer to pay once a year, please contact our office by email foundation@uhkf.ca or by phone 613-549-5452.

Newsletter editor: Barbara Yates, Executive Committee

Link to sign up or renew:

<https://uhkf.akaraisin.com/ui/womensgivingcircle/donations/start>

Research
today for
better
health care
tomorrow



Women's Giving Circle
In support of research at Kingston's hospitals

